

1: INTRODUCTORY PAGES OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

Interesting Points about the Text, Structure, and Messages of the Title Page

Welcome to your renewed study of the Book of Mormon. May this be the most rich and rewarding experience you have ever had while studying this sacred text. And, most importantly, may it help you build and strengthen enduring faith in Jesus Christ.

Take a few minutes to meet the Title Page of the Book of Mormon. It will give you a helpful and impressive overview of the contents and purposes of the Book of Mormon. The Title Page has been printed, with slight modifications, as the opening page of every full edition of the Book of Mormon since it first came off the press in March, 1830.

When was the Title Page translated?

While it is the first page that readers generally encounter in the Book of Mormon, it was not the first page translated by Joseph Smith. In fact, Joseph Smith once remarked that “the Title Page of the Book of Mormon is a literal translation, taken from the *very last leaf*, on the left hand side” of the plates of Mormon.¹ Because the Small Plates of Nephi (1 Nephi–Words of Mormon) were translated during the month of June, 1829, at the Peter Whitmer home, in Fayette, New York, and the plates of Mormon (containing Mosiah–Moroni) had been translated beforehand during April–May 1829, in Harmony, Pennsylvania, Joseph’s statement means that the Title Page was translated right after he had completed translating the book of Moroni, and just before he commenced translating the book of 1 Nephi.

¹ [“History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 \[23 December 1805–30 August 1834\],” p. 34, *The Joseph Smith Papers*](#), accessed December 30, 2019, online at josephsmithpapers.org.

Who wrote the Title Page?

The Title Page is really more Moroni's Title Page than Mormon's. The Title Page states that the Book of Mormon was being "sealed up and hid up unto the Lord ... sealed by the hand of Moroni." It also mentions that it includes Moroni's abridgment of the book of Ether, about the people of Jared. So the Title Page most probably was written, or at least given its final form, after Moroni had finished his work on the book of Ether, sometime between AD 400 and 421 (see Mormon 8:6 and Moroni 10:1). Indeed, the presentation of the Title Page found in the third edition of the Book of Mormon, printed in 1840 under the direction of Joseph Smith, ends with an explicit attribution of this text to Moroni. See Figure 1.

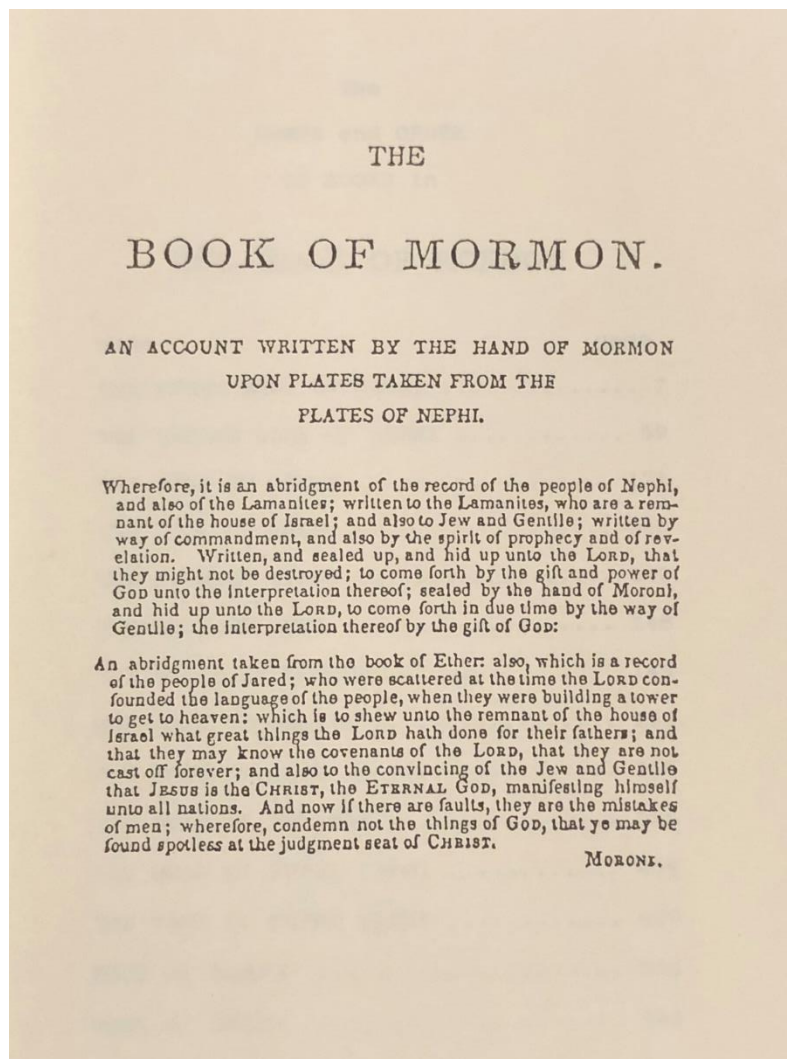


Figure 1 Title Page of the 1840 Edition of the Book of Mormon.

Of course, Mormon's abridging hand and purposes are still clearly reflected in the Title Page, as Moroni had no doubt worked closely with his father on this massive research project, as well as the extensive source-selection process that it surely required. Perhaps the two of them had even discussed how the record should be finished and what declarations the sealing inscription of the Title Page should include. Readers may recall, for example, that Mormon had promised to later include the story of the Jaredites in his book (see Mosiah 28:17–19). It is quite possible that Mormon eventually charged Moroni with the duty of abridging and including the book of Ether because he knew that he would not be able to get around to finishing that part of the project.

While Moroni mentions himself by name in the Title Page as the one who would seal the record so that it could come forth in the Lord's time and way, it is impressive how much more Moroni honors his noble father, who had died courageously in about AD 385. After all, while Moroni *could* have called the book "The Book of Mormon and Moroni," he names it simply "The Book of Mormon." Furthermore, drawing no attention to his own significant contributions to the volume, Moroni credits his father exclusively, saying that the account was "written by the hand of Mormon."

[Click on this link for a beautiful and engaging video.](#) Its narration substantially draws from the wording of the Title Page to provide an overview of the Book of Mormon and the circumstances out of which the Title Page arose.

Where is the earliest copy of the Title Page to be found?

The earliest copy of the Title Page would have been written by Oliver Cowdery at the very end of May, 1829, as Joseph finished dictating the translation of the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God. Unfortunately, that original transcription of the Title Page—along with three-quarters of the Book of Mormon's Original Manuscript—were either destroyed by water or mold in a time capsule in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House or have gone missing. Fortunately, the wording of the Title Page is triple-attested, thanks to an official legal document filed on June 11, 1829.

In 2005, a fantastic discovery was made in the Library of Congress, as people there were preparing to celebrate the bicentennial of Joseph Smith's birth in 1805. What they discovered was the application filed by Joseph Smith in a federal court in the northern district of New York to secure his copyright of the Book of Mormon. Attached to that copyright application was a printed version of the Title Page. (See Figure 2, made available by the Library of Congress. The front side of this printed page can be found, together with added notes, on www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/title-page-of-book-of-mormon-circa-early-june-1829/1.) It is the earliest printed page from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints! It was folded long-ways (as legal papers

were folded and filed in that day), and it was dated with Joseph Smith's name on the back, making it officially certain that this application was completed and filed on June 11, 1829. That page would have been typeset only a few days earlier from the Original Manuscript, which had been translated by Joseph Smith and transcribed by Oliver Cowdery only about a week before that.

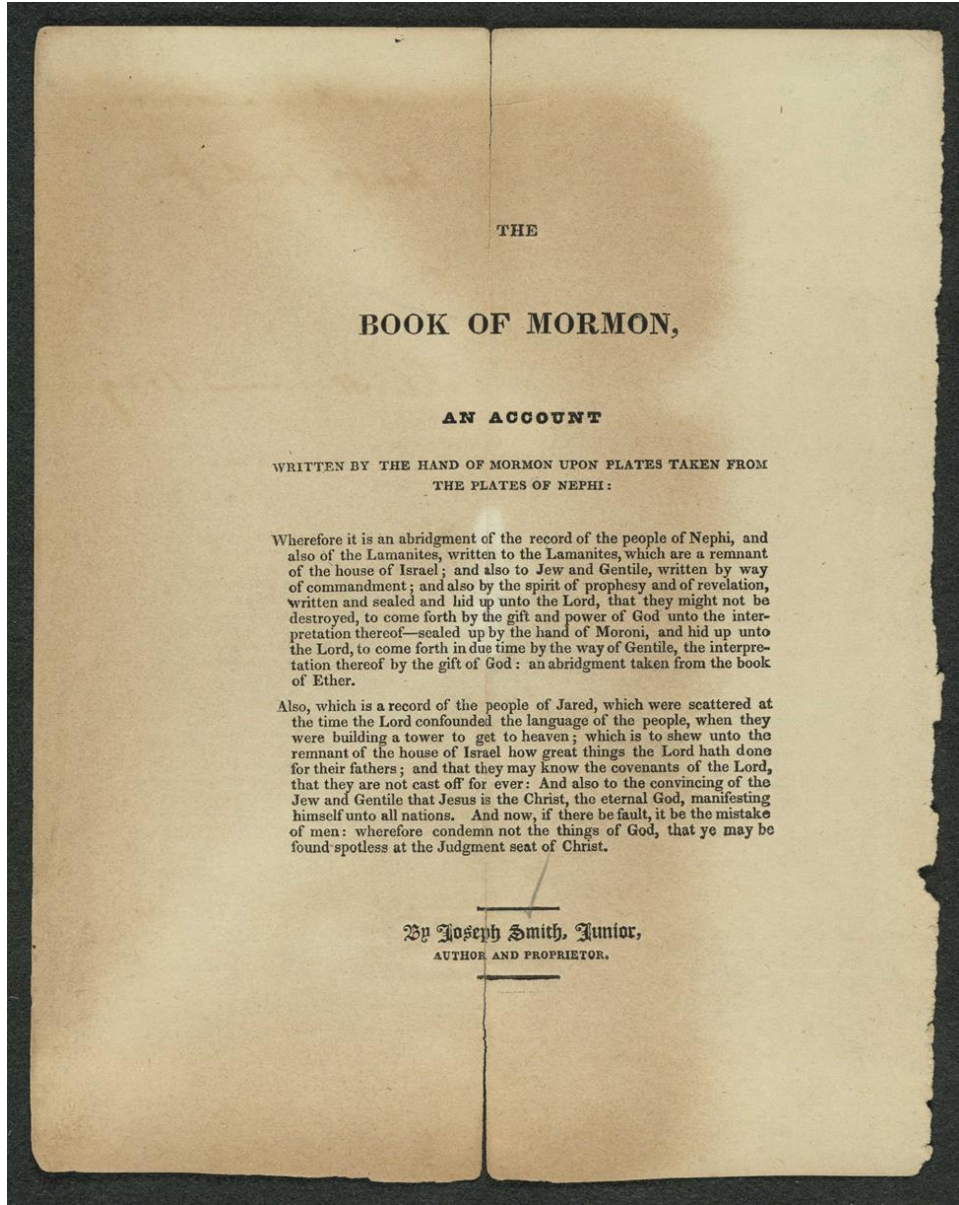


Figure 2 First printing of the Title Page, about June 8, 1829, front

This filed application form (Figure 4, in the Library of Congress) also includes a handwritten description of the Book of Mormon, which reproduces the full language of

the Title Page. That handwritten description would have been copied from the printed sheet onto the form to which the single printed sheet was attached (Figure 3: <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/title-page-of-book-of-mormon-circa-early-june-1829/2>).

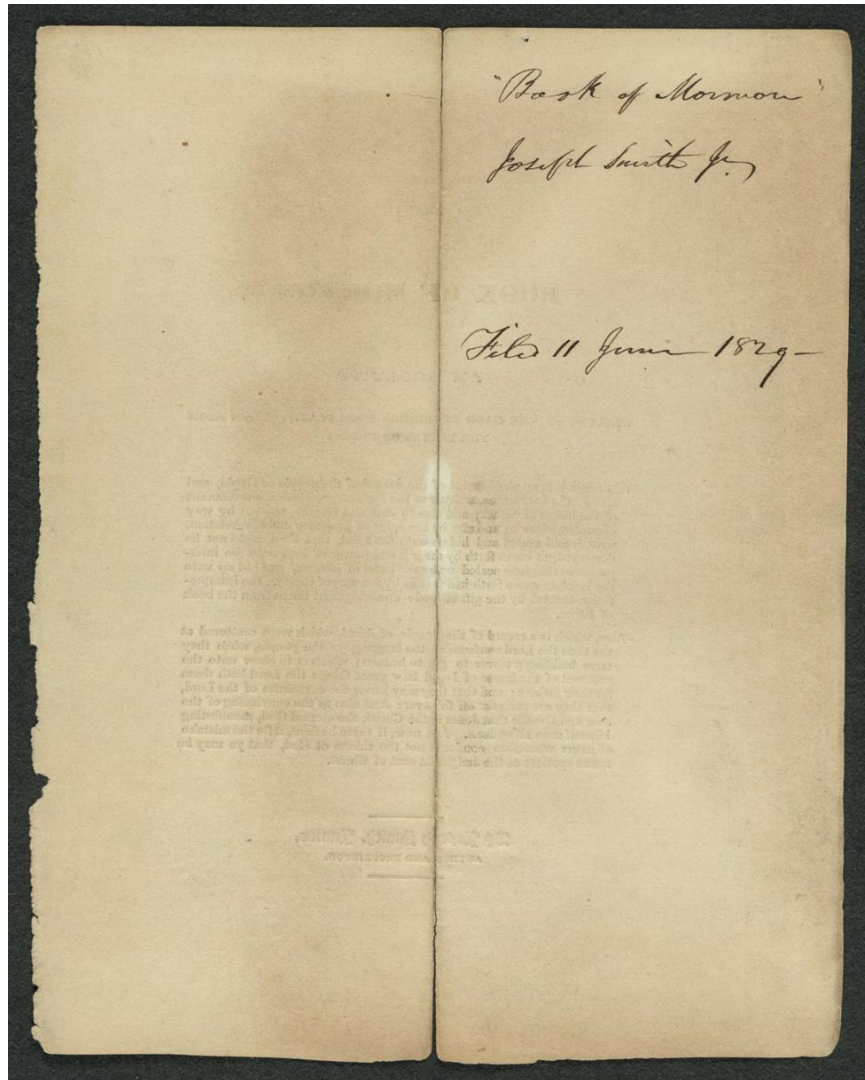


Figure 3 First printing of the Title Page, about June 8, 1829, back.

Finally, a second copyright application form (See Figure 5 available at <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/copyright-for-book-of-mormon-11-june-1829/1>) was completed and signed by R. R. Lansing, the clerk of the court. That duplicate form also contains the full text of the Title Page, filled in by hand and likewise copied from the attached single printed sheet. Joseph Smith retained this copy of the copyright application, which he used in January 1830 in successfully demanding that

Abner Cole cease and desist from publishing in his newspaper parts of the Book of Mormon as it was being typeset in the Grandin print shop.

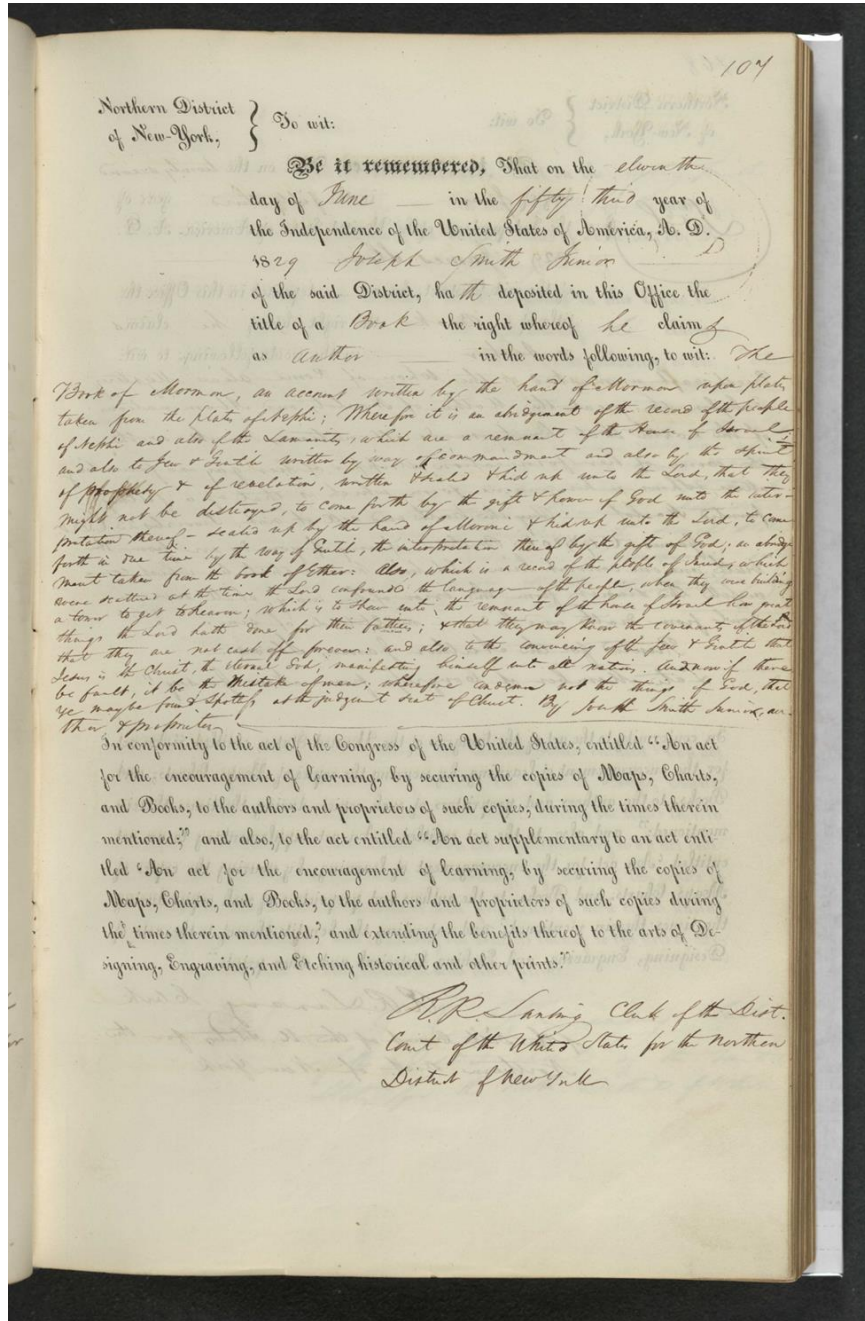


Figure 4 Copyright application for the Book of Mormon, filed June 11, 1829, containing a handwritten copy of the complete Title Page used as the legal description of the publication.

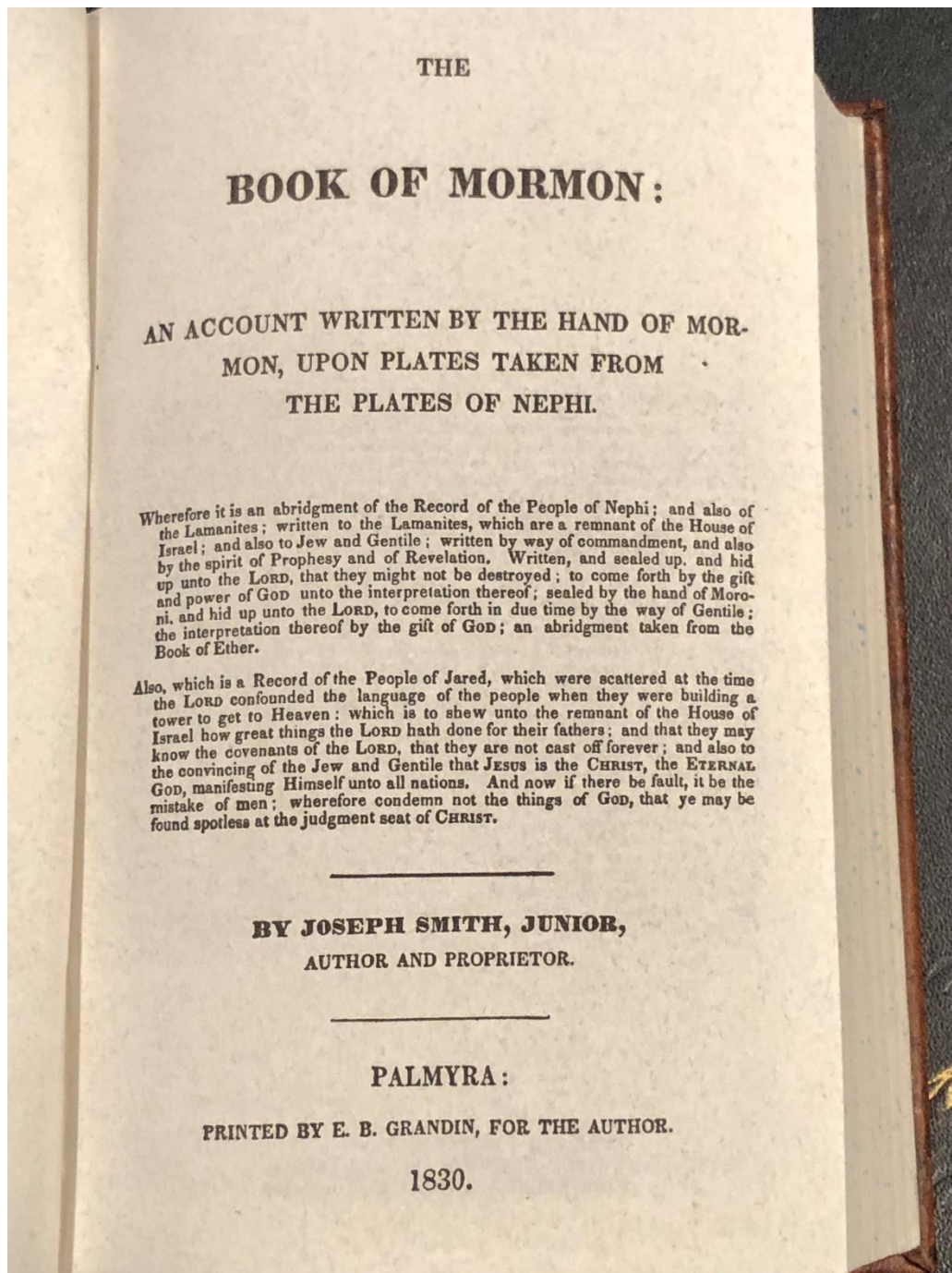


Figure 6 Title page from the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

Does the Title Page refer to any words previously written by Mormon?

Yes, it does. Mormon promised in Mosiah 28:17–19 that a record of the Jaredites (now known as the book of Ether) would be given “hereafter.” Thus, when Moroni added the book of Ether to the plates of Mormon, he was fulfilling his father’s prior editorial plan

and promise. Interestingly, Moroni's specific wording of the Title Page clearly draws attention to that fact. When discussing the book of Ether, the Title Page describes it as a record of the people of Jared

- 1 "who were **scattered**
- 2 at the time the Lord **confounded the language of the people,**
- 3 when they were **building a tower** to get to heaven" (Title Page).

Moroni appears to be quoting here, in reverse order, from the statements made by Mormon in Mosiah 28:17–19. These passages discuss King Mosiah's translation of a record that was discovered among a people whose history stretches

- 3 "back to the **building of the great tower,**
- 2 at the time the **Lord confounded the language of the people**
- 1 and they were **scattered** abroad" (Mosiah 28:17).

Reversing the order of a previous statement in this fashion was an ancient scribal practice often used to signal to the reader that the writer was intentionally quoting from or alluding back to that earlier text. Thus, the similarities between the title page and Mosiah 28:17 do not appear to be accidental. Such intertextual connections (several more of which will be discussed below) demonstrate that the wording of the Title Page itself deserves to be studied and admired.

How are the parts and words of the Title Page organized and structured?

While many points can be—and several have previously been—raised about this interesting document, little attention has been paid to its intricate, balanced structures. The Title Page readily divides into two halves. The first half of the Title Page focuses on Mormon's main work in abridging the record of the people of Nephi (which was recorded on what is now known as the Large Plates of Nephi). Moroni's key work, mentioned in the second half, mainly deals with the record of the Jaredites. Perhaps this two-part structure was Moroni's way of signaling to his readers that he and his father Mormon had labored closely together on this massive archival publication project.

The two halves of the Title Page are constructed with four parallel parts. In each half,

- part 1 identifies the final written record as "an abridgment" of the "record" of certain people,
- part 2 announces the audiences to whom the final record was addressed and the purposes for which it was written,

- part 3 affirms the divine role involved in the record's production,
- and part 4 certifies that the work is of the Lord and sealed by authority, with the implications and consequences that follow therefrom.

Below, a proposed structure for the first half of the Title page is given (separated into parts A1, A2, A3, and A4), which is then followed by a structuring of the second half (separated into parts B1, B2, B3 and B4). After that, a detailed description of the proposed structure, along with an explanation of its particular elements or symbols (for example, p1-p2-p3, a1-a2-a3, a-b-c, i-ii-iii) will be given.

After the heading, "The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon Taken from the Plates of Nephi," the Title Page reads as follows:

A1 Wherefore it is an abridgment

- p1 of the record of the people Nephi,
- p2 and also of the Lamanites,

A2 Written to [audiences]

- a1 the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the House of Israel,
- a2 and also to Jew
- a3 and Gentile,

A3 Written

- by way of commandment; and also
- by the spirit of prophecy
- and of revelation,

A4 Written and [certifying that this is of the Lord]

- a sealed up and hid up unto the Lord, that they not be destroyed,
- b to come forth
- c by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof—
- a Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord,
- b to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile,
- c the interpretation thereof by the gift of God.

B1 An abridgment [an additional abridgment]

- p3 from the book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared

w1 who were scattered at the time
w2 when the Lord confounded the language of the people,
w3 when they were building a tower to get to heaven [not a good thing]

B2 which is to show the remnant of the House of Israel [i.e., the Lamanites, audience a1]
w3 what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and
w2 that they may know the covenants of the Lord,
w1 that they are not cast off forever [i.e., not scattered], and

B3 [Written] also to the convincing of the [a2] Jew and [a3] Gentile that
Jesus is the [i] Christ,
the eternal [ii] God,
manifesting himself [iii] to all nations.

B4 [Implications of this being written of the Lord] And now
if there are faults, they are the mistakes [iii] of men;
wherefore condemn not the things of [ii] God,
that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of [i] Christ.

How do the four main parts of each half related to each other?

Looked at together, part A1 in the first half and B1 in the second half both introduce the texts of the Book of Mormon as abridgments, coming from underlying records that had been kept by or about three different groups of peoples: p1, p2, and p3, namely Nephites, Lamanites, and Jaredites.

In part A2, the first half of the Title Page then identifies the three audiences to whom the Book of Mormon was written, namely the Lamanite remnant of the House of Israel (a1), Jews (a2), and Gentiles (a3), while parts B2 and B3 in the second half state the lessons that these same three audiences should learn from the abridgement of those records.

Part A3 in the first half testifies that the writing of this record was influenced by divine involvement in three ways, namely by way of God's commandments, also by the spirit of prophecy, and by the spirit of revelation. In turn, parts B2 and B3 in the second half set forth two sets of three eternal roles of the Lord, namely (in B2) His great interventions into human affairs in ancient times, His covenants, and His corrections; and (in B3) that the record is ultimately intended to convince both Jewish and Gentile readers of the divine truths that Jesus is still today the Christ, the eternal God, manifesting Himself unto all nations.

Finally, the concluding lines in part A4 in the first half speak twice of the book being sealed, twice invoking the name of “the Lord,” twice mentioning the book “coming forth,” twice speaking of its “interpretation,” twice referring to the “gift of God,” and twice referring to the involvement of human agents, namely Moroni and the as-yet-unnamed Gentile or Gentiles. And ultimately, the concluding lines in part B4 in the second half link to elements in its immediately preceding part B3. Here are found, with their elements in reverse order, two final sets of three items: Jesus manifesting Himself to all nations of men [B3iii], even through possible faults attributable to the mistakes of men [B4iii]; accepting Jesus, the eternal God [B3ii] by not condemning the things of God [B4ii]; and being found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ [B4i], who is Jesus the Christ [B3i].

Does the Title Page refer to any words previously written by Moroni?

On top of all that, in two places the verbal expressions in the Title Page are particularly characteristic of statements and concerns made previously by Moroni. As he began his first farewell in Mormon 8:9–20, Moroni used many terms that reoccur in the Title Page, including references to the solely remaining Lamanites (v. 9), knowing the true God (v. 10), condemning not the record because of imperfections (v. 12), hiding up the record by commandment of the Lord (v. 14), the power of God to bring it forth (v. 15), covenant people (v. 15), faults of man (v. 16), and the judgment of the Lord (v. 20).

In addition, four elements in the very last line in the Title Page at the close of part B4 (to be found “spotless” at the “judgment” “seat” of “Christ”) allude to words found at the very end of Moroni’s closing farewell in Moroni 10:33–34 (to be perfected and sanctified in “Christ,” “without spot,” before the “bar” of the eternal “judge”).

Moroni accomplishes all of this while concisely using—although in a different order—words from his father Mormon regarding the Jaredite record found in Mosiah 28:17: “an account of *the people* who were destroyed, from the time that they were destroyed back to the *building* of the great *tower*, at the time *the Lord confounded the language of the people* and they were *scattered* abroad upon the face of all the earth.”

How many triads are found within the structure of the Title Page?

While much can still be observed about this interesting document, it is clear that the Title Page is a complicated text. While drawing on earlier passages, it is a masterwork of clarity and efficiency. It is also intricately structured and elegantly and meticulously balanced. Simultaneously operating within its overall balanced two-half structure, its subsections often manifest a strong preference for triadic (three-part) structures, which appear nine times: Three of which at first are simple three-element lists (p1, p2, p3; a1, a2, a3; and A3); the next two of which are directly parallel statements (a-b-c, a-b-c in A4);

while the final four parts crescendo as two chiasmic sets (B1 X B2 and B3 X B4), each of which is composed of two triplets, all culminating before the final judgment bar of Christ. Perhaps a tenth triad stanza is found in the three personal proper names standing at the very beginning of the Title Page: The Book of *Mormon*, An Account Written by the Hand of *Mormon*, Taken from the Plates of *Nephi*.

Why did Moroni write the Title Page?

Obviously, the words and phrases of the Title Page have been carefully chosen and arranged. The Title Page clearly articulates the essentials of the Book of Mormon. It states the who, the what, the when, the why, the whence, and the wherefore of the sacred volume that it now introduces, or—as one may also state—that it was written to conclude. Certainly, producing this concluding summation took considerable time, keen deliberation, and intimate familiarity with the entire volume.

Moroni likely pondered and prayed over this text, especially as he wandered widely and kept himself out of harm's way during the twenty-one years after he had finished his work on the book of Ether. With this final one-page text in place, Moroni could rest assured that he had honorably completed the sacred assignment that his father Mormon had entrusted to him. As a result of his opening line in the Title Page which prominently mentions "the hand of Mormon," Moroni could well have foreseen that his father's name would become widely known among every nation, tongue, and people, and that Mormon would be seen as a prophet of God, a righteous leader of his people, and as a witness of Jesus Christ to all the world.

Moroni could also confidently place the Title Page as his protective and authoritative seal of approval upon this masterful book of scripture. Fortunately, solid documentary evidence of the Title Page has survived from the earliest stage in the publication of the Book of Mormon. Having this clearly inspired statement of purpose in front of them, readers can know, of a surety, the unambiguously good intent of the Book of Mormon, which was written unto the convincing of all people that Jesus is the Christ, the eternal God, manifesting himself to all nations, so that people may know the mercies and covenants of the Lord, who desires all to come unto Him. This year, may the Title Page help readers everywhere better understand, enjoy, and embrace the truths of the Book of Mormon.

Further Resources Listed Chronologically, with appreciation to Bryan Kerr

Ludlow, Daniel H. "The Title Page." In *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., 19–33. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988.

This article compares all major publications of the Book of Mormon Title Page before 1988 with the handwritten copyright application and the June 26, 1829 publication of the Title Page found in the *Wayne Sentinel*. Differences include punctuation, capitalization, and division into two or three paragraphs. Ludlow shows that in the 1837 publication of the Book of Mormon the clause, "An abridgement taken from the book of Ether" has been moved "from the last part of the first paragraph to the beginning of the second paragraph, bringing the two elements about the book of Ether together" (26). This adjustment may, potentially, avoid misreading the Book of Mormon's purpose as referring only to the book of Ether. In addition to minor changes in the English additions, Ludlow also states that "Some of the non-English editions of the title page have paragraphing different from that of the English editions" (27).

Rust, Richard Dilworth, "The Book of Mormon, Designed for Our Day: Annual FARMS Lecture." *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 2*, no. 1 (1990): 1–23.

This is a brilliantly written article. While not directly explaining the Title Page of the Book of Mormon, Rust nevertheless uses it as a prompt to discuss other topics. He focuses on five main literary techniques: *heroes*, *setting*, *action*, *supernatural beings*, and *ceremonial performance*.

Skousen, Royal, "The Original Book of Mormon Transcript." In *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, edited by John W. Welch, 9–12. Provo/Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS/Deseret Book, 1992.

Relevant to the Title Page, this brief piece notes: "Typical of the minor changes made in the Book of Mormon through its various printings, Joseph Smith in the 1837 edition changed this statement to read, 'If there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God.'"

Sperry, Sidney B., "Moroni the Lonely: The Story of the Writing of the Title Page to the Book of Mormon." *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 4*, no. 1 (1995): 255–259.

Sperry argues that Moroni wrote the Title Page on two separate occasions. Basing his ideas on the 1981 edition of paragraph separation, Sperry says, "It is quite likely that at this point Moroni wrote the first paragraph (as we now have it) of the page of the Book of Mormon" (257). He then goes on to suggest that Moroni "did not write the second paragraph of the title page at this time for the very good and sufficient reason that he had not yet abridged the book of Ether which is mentioned herein" (257). He even suggests that Moroni may have deposited the Book of Mormon in the Hill Cumorah after writing the first paragraph (as contained in the current edition of the Book of Mormon) and then went to retrieve it between 401 AD and 421 AD to write the second paragraph (258).

Tvedtnes, John A., "Who are the 'Gentiles'?" In *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar*, 29–36. Redding, CA: Cornerstone Publishing, 1999.

This article argues that the term *Gentile(s)* in the title page of the Book of Mormon does not carry the modern connotation of non-Israelite, but instead refers to non-Ephraimites.

Williams, Clyde J., "More Light on Who Wrote the Title Page." *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 28–29, 70.

This short study advances evidence that Moroni wrote the entire Title Page of the Book of Mormon, based on the idea the redundancies were a way to "further illuminate the divine destiny of this important record." This study focuses on "two unusual words or word combinations that appear infrequently in the Book of Mormon" (29), namely *interpretation* and *sealed up*, as used by Moroni.

Nathaniel Hinckley Wadsworth, "Copyright Law and the 1830 Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (2006): 77–99. Reprinted and updated as "Securing the Book of Mormon Copyright in 1829." In *Sustaining the Law: Joseph Smith's Legal Encounters*, edited by Gordon A. Madsen, et al., 71–92. Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2014).

John W. Welch, "Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon: 'Days [and Hours] Never to Be Forgotten'," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2018): 10–50, esp. 26–29, 47–48.

2: 1 NEPHI 1–7

John W. Welch Notes

The book of 1 Nephi is quite an amazing book. It can be profitably studied in numerous ways. I began working on this text over 60 years ago when I was encouraged by my angel mother to read Hugh Nibley's *Lehi in the Desert*, and as one thing has then led to another, I still don't feel like I'm anywhere close to noticing, appreciating, comprehending, extracting, organizing, or putting into spiritual practice, let alone exhausting everything this unique text has to offer.

Nephi was for real. Nephi came to know what matters most in his personal life, in his family life, in his Israelite world, in his various circumstances and cultural settings, and ultimately in the history and plan of God for all the people of this world. Nephi learned this by dedication, hardship, revelation, and obedience, by having Jesus Christ personally invite him to repent with real intent (2 Nephi 31:13), and by having the Father lovingly confirm that the words of His Beloved were true and faithful (2 Nephi 31:15). Nephi is really good to get to know. And when your understanding begins to be enlightened and your mind begins to expand, as Alma has said, "O then, is not this real?" (Alma 32:35). Gladly we can add our "Yes" to Alma's "Yea."

1 Nephi 1

1 Nephi 1:1 – 3 Nephi's Personal Colophon

Nephi often speaks in the first person in 1 Nephi. He uses the pronoun "I" throughout 1 Nephi—16 times in 1 Nephi 1 alone; 64 times in giving his account of obtaining the plates of brass in chapters 3-4; and a massive 147 times in telling what he saw in his great vision at told at the center of 1 Nephi in chapters 11-14. He says "I, Nephi," over 60 times in this book. Listen for his personal voice and personal testimony.

Indeed, for many reasons, the ancients valued eye-witness testimonies, in court, and in recordkeeping. Ancient authors, especially in Egypt, would often begin or end with what is called a colophon. This is a kind of written verification of authorship, saying, "I am the one who has written this. I saw these things. My record is true. I'm giving you my verification," and it's often a first-person statement.

As you read through the Book of Mormon, notice that its books begin with “I Nephi,” or “I Jacob.” The pattern continues with “I Enos,” “I Mormon,” and others. This pattern of Book of Mormon witnessing continues all the way to the end when Moroni ends his final statement in Moroni 10 saying, when you get these things, ask God, and he will tell you that I have not lied. You will see me at the judgment bar, and you will know that I have told you the truth (Moroni 10:4–5, 27, 34). These are credible, personal, urgent testimonies.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Does Nephi Begin by Saying “I, Nephi . . .”?](#) (1 Nephi 1:1),” *KnoWhy* 476 (October 16, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Book of Mormon Authors Use Colophons?](#) (1 Nephi 1:3),” *KnoWhy* 443 (June 21, 2018).

1 Nephi 1:1 The Learning of My Father

Nephi knew the scriptures. He knows and uses Isaiah very effectively. When we get to the story of the slaying of Laban, you will also see that it is heavily influenced by scriptural references and allusions, especially to Exodus 21:13–14. As readers, we can expect that when Nephi wrote something containing an allusion to his set of scriptures, he was making that textual connection intentionally. Nephi, like his father Lehi, was a record keeper and also a record reader. This explains why obtaining the brass plates was so crucial to Nephi in laying the religious, legal, and ethical foundations of his people.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Is It Good to Seek Both Spiritual and Secular Learning?](#) (1 Nephi 1:1),” *KnoWhy* 324 (June 9, 2017).

1 Nephi 1:1 How Old Were Lehi and His Sons?

When was Lehi born? We know that Lehi left Jerusalem in 600 BC. How old were his children? We do not know for sure, but we know that Nephi was “large in stature” and yet “exceedingly young” when they left Jerusalem (1 Nephi 2:16). Perhaps he was sixteen or seventeen years old when Lehi had his vision. It makes sense that Laman and Lemuel would be twenty-two to twenty-four years old. Sam, then, would be around twenty-years-old. It seems they had sisters, as well. These sisters (along with others) fled with Nephi after he and Laman and Lemuel had a falling out (2 Nephi 5:6). So, Nephi may have been the fifth or even the sixth child.

How old was Lehi when he got married? Typically, ancient Israelite men would not marry until they were about twenty-five. In those days, you had to establish yourself as a young man—usually, you had a military duty when you were about twenty and then you had to establish a living and a household. You did not have to have a house, but the alternative was living with your wife’s family. It might well have taken Lehi a couple of

years to start his family. If Lehi married when he was twenty-five and Laman was twenty-two to twenty-four when 1 Nephi begins, then Lehi would have been about fifty years old when they left Jerusalem, meaning he would have been born about 650–655 BC.

1 Nephi 1:1 Why Did Nephi Call His Parents “Goodly?”

The English word "goodly," or the Hebrew word Nephi used that stands behind it, indicated more than Nephi's parents' generosity, excellence, or grace. It could also mean honorable, fair, or attractive. In other words, they had good social standing, and they likely looked reputable. In fact, Lehi was probably a member of the ruling class, due to having inherited land. In other words, there was no reason why the people in Jerusalem should have discounted Lehi's testimony.

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Is So Good about Nephi's Name?](#) (1 Nephi 1:1)," *KnoWhy* 445 (June 28, 2018).

1 Nephi 1:1 When Did Nephi Write 1 Nephi?

Nephi wrote this record thirty years after the events of 1 Nephi, after Lehi died, and after Laman and Lemuel rejected Nephi. Nephi wrote his personal record in 1 Nephi after he moved up into the Land of Nephi (2 Nephi 5). He was separated from Laman and Lemuel and had tried to reconcile with them, but that did not work. Nephi now needed to tell this story for the benefit of his posterity so that they would know the history and principles upon which the Nephite nation was founded. That was after Lehi and Sariah had died. Nephi and his followers had built a temple, and Nephi had agreed to be the king. At that point, the Lord commanded Nephi to create another record, in addition to the Book of Lehi and Nephi's Large Plates. So, at the point when Nephi wrote of his parents being "goodly," there may also have been a subtext relevant to Laman and Lemuel in his use of the word "goodly." Nephi knew what had happened with Laman and Lemuel after arriving in the New World. It is possible that he had Laman and Lemuel in mind when he wrote these words. He must have wished that things had worked out better in the family and that Laman and Lemuel could have honored their deceased parents better. Nephi would have wanted everyone to know that they were goodly people. They were not to blame for anything that had gone wrong.

Welch, John W. "When Did Nephi Write the Small Plates." In *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, edited by John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, 75–77. Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999.

1 Nephi 1:2 — Language of the Egyptians

We don't know precisely what Nephi meant by "the language of the Egyptians," but quite a bit has been written on this topic. We have lots of archaeological evidence of the presence of Egyptian culture and influence in Israel.

Jerusalem has always been a borderland between the two big river valleys of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Nebuchadnezzar would try to push his power farther south. Other times, the Egyptians would drive things farther north. People living in Jerusalem always had to keep a lookout in both directions. For strategic reasons and for other purposes, we know that Israelites had contact, trade and alliances with these super powers on both sides.

A case in point here is that the Lord called multiple prophets to stand in the streets and prophesy that Jerusalem would be destroyed. Urijah was one of these prophets. When he was chased out of the city, where did he run? To Egypt. This is evidence of contact between people in Egypt and people in Israel. Jewish people must have had a community in Egypt where Urijah thought he could flee and find refuge. But what happened to Urijah? As further evidence of an even higher level of relationship between Egypt and Israel, rulers in Jerusalem sent a delegation to Egypt, extradited Urijah, brought him back to stand sentencing and ignominious execution (see Jeremiah 26).

More evidence of Egyptian influence in Israelite culture is a papyrus that was found in Egypt called the Amherst Papyrus, which is actually a Hebrew Psalm that is written in demotic Egyptian characters. So, in this case, one has the learning of the Hebrews (the literature of the Hebrews) written in Egyptian characters, and that is an eighth-century B.C. text. So, some of these people were bilingual, and they could use different scripts to write down the sounds and the words of other languages. Today, that would be a bit like taking a Japanese word and spelling it with Roman letters. If you don't know both languages, you can't make much sense of it.

What was the nature of record-keeping in Lehi's world? Did the Egyptians write? Absolutely, all the time! Every mummy, every tomb, every temple wall, every palace had writing all over it. Now, we do not find that kind or volume of writing in the archaeological remains of the Israelites, but it is not hard to believe that Israelites knew plenty about writing. They encountered it. People traveled through Jerusalem. They had merchants coming and going. Lehi may well have traveled to Egypt himself, where he learned how to read and write Egyptian. Lehi was a reasonably sophisticated person. As a caravan owning merchant, he must have been literate and able to keep records and communicate with people in different lands.

Of course, writing was not just used for business records. Most of what was written in Egyptian were sacred religious texts, like the Book of the Dead. If you were wealthy, you had the whole Book of the Dead buried with you or parts of it copied onto the walls of your tomb. But even the poor had some portion of the Book of the Dead written out for them. Why? The Book of the Dead gave the road map of the next life. To pass the tests one would encounter in the next life, you needed that information. It contained the passwords, the keys and the language they needed to use in order to express eternal loyalty and much more.

In Israel, what did they mostly write? Archaeologists have found a few little messages scrawled on potsherds saying, "help! Our city is being over-run, send soldiers." Recently, they discovered one of the earliest Hebrew writings, and it turns out it appears to be a shopping list. Go to the market and get this, this, and this. That tells us something about who could write: an ordinary person writing ordinary words. And that tells us that writing was more common than many have previously thought.

Even so, the main things the Israelites captured in writing were the teachings of the prophets and the words of the law. They needed the law, especially in the temple, so that the priests would know the order of sacrifice, the rules of purity and other things that they had to do. One of the jobs of the Levites was to maintain the records—to copy them. The records had to be copied over and over again because they wore out. Papyrus wears out about every 30 years in regular use. So, scribes were needed and were trained to do this writing.

Other recently found Hebrew texts that have survived are two small silver scrolls. They are each about an inch long and have archaic Hebrew letters, written on very thin silver and rolled up. One was worn as a necklace by a young girl who was buried around 610 BC—the time of Lehi. The text on the scroll includes part of the priestly blessing found in Numbers 6:24–26, "The Lord bless and keep thee. The Lord make his face shine upon thee...and give thee peace." Coming from Numbers and dating to Lehi's day, this was a real shock to a lot of biblical scholars when it was found. Here was evidence of people writing religious texts, writing on metal, and drawing upon scriptures at that early date, well before the time when the Jews were taken to Babylon.

This was a part of Lehi's world, and Lehi was a scribe who could read the plates of brass and wrote his own book of Lehi. Additionally, Nephi would have spent his days as the youngest son often did, not out farming and not out learning military tactics, but in learning language, writing records and reading scriptures.

Book of Mormon Central, "[Did Ancient Israelites Write in Egyptian?](#) (1 Nephi 1:2)," *KnoWhy* 4 (January 5, 2016).

Pike, Dana M. "[Israelite Inscriptions from the Time of Jeremiah and Lehi.](#)" In *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, edited by John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, 193–244. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004.

Welch, John W. "[The Trial of Jeremiah: A Legal Legacy from Lehi's Jerusalem.](#)" In *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, edited by John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, 337–356. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004.

1 Nephi 1:4 — Many Prophets in Jerusalem

When an author writes a book, he tries to put the thesis statement clearly toward the beginning. First Nephi, Chapter One, is foundational. It establishes the foundational doctrine that the Lord speaks to His people through prophets. It is clear that, for Nephi, this doctrine must be understood upfront.

Nephi explained that in the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, there came many prophets prophesying to the people that they must repent. Many prophets were called and acted as prophets at the same time. Lehi was not a lone voice crying in the wilderness like John the Baptist. Who were the prophets at this particular time? The Book of Mormon names a few of them—Zenos, Zenock and Nahum. We do not know exactly when those prophets lived, but maybe about this time. What prophets from this period of time are mentioned in the Bible Dictionary? If you look under "Chronology," you will see that Nahum prophesied in about 642 BC. In 640 BC, Huldah was preaching as a prophetess. In 627, in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (Jeremiah 1:1), Jeremiah began prophesying, and that was about the same time that Josiah found the Book of Deuteronomy and totally changed the direction of worship in Israel.

The changes that Josiah brought about were popular with some people. However, anytime you have a major reform of a civilization or a society, you are going to make some people very happy and other people very angry. As Josiah changed the way the old sacrificial system had worked, he put a lot of people out of business, so to speak. So, this was not a particularly popular reform in some circles. Some of those opposing Josiah's reform were prophets who were speaking against the way things had been mishandled. Zephaniah was one of those. Then there was Urijah, who prophesied in 609. The chief prophet of this time, however, was Jeremiah and then there was, of

course, Lehi, who was about the same age as Jeremiah. Nephi's record makes special note of Jeremiah (1 Nephi 5:13; 7:14).

Obadiah's ministry was right around 605. In 606, the prophet Daniel was carried captive into Babylon. If you consider Daniel's age, you'll see it was possible that Nephi and Daniel knew each other, being peers. In 598, Habakkuk began prophesying. Ezekiel, likely a contemporary of Laman and Lemuel, was taken captive into Babylon in 598 and began prophesying there. That was right about the time Lehi was leaving Jerusalem. It is possible that Ezekiel knew that a group of people from the branch of Joseph (Lehi's family) had gone out into the wilderness. Lehi was not the only prophet to leave. The Narrative of Zosimus recalls a tradition about a group that followed Rachab into the wilderness.

There were indeed many prophets in Lehi's day. We also have many prophets in our day—15, to be exact. We have prophets and apostles working together to lead and guide the children of God. Is there strength in numbers? There is, especially in crucial times. Does the Lord send a lot of prophets? If we listen to all of them, we can learn. In Lehi's world, they did not have correlation committees, and they did not have ways of regulating the scriptures and clarifying the doctrine the way we do. But, if you have many prophets saying the same thing, that is something to pay attention to. The Lord gave fair warning to Israel—fair warning to the people in Jerusalem. "You must repent, and if you do not, you are going to be destroyed." Lehi was just one of many taking the same message to the streets. We can learn a lesson—not just about listening to the prophets, but also that the Lord will not abandon us.

Book of Mormon Central, "[Who Were the “Many Prophets” in Jerusalem During Lehi’s Time?](#) (1 Nephi 1:4)," *KnoWhy* 441 (June 14, 2018).

Seely, David Rolph, and Jo Ann H. Seely. "[Lehi and Jeremiah: Prophets, Priests, and Patriarchs.](#)" In *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, edited by John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, 357–380. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004.

Seely, David Rolph. "[Sacred History, Covenants, and the Messiah: The Religious Background of the World of Lehi.](#)" In *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, edited by John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, 381–420. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004.

Might Lehi Have Been Present at Urijah's or Jeremiah's Trials?

When Urijah was extradited from Egypt and was publicly executed and refused a burial, Lehi may well have been present. The killing of this prophet, who spoke out against the

unrepentant leaders in Jerusalem, would have stood as a sober warning to any other prophets who dared to defy the ruling authorities. Likewise, Jeremiah was arrested and was brought to the gates of the temple. The officials were about to kill him too. Fortunately, some of the princes heard what was going on and they rushed over from the palace to come to Jeremiah's defense. Jeremiah had friends in high places and managed to escape the death penalty. Lehi would have known Jeremiah. If Lehi was not out on a caravan trip to Egypt or somewhere else at the time, he might have been there to witness Jeremiah's trial and near conviction. When God then called Lehi to deliver essentially the same prophetic warning that Urijah and Jeremiah had been delivering, he must have been chilled to the bone. But he courageously answered the call and went forth and soon found himself fleeing for his life.

Welch, John W. "[The Trial of Jeremiah: A Legal Legacy from Lehi's Jerusalem](#)." In *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, edited by John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, 337–356. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004.

Babylonian Rule and Jewish Rebellion

At the time of Lehi's ministry, Jerusalem had already been conquered. Babylon had taken the first wave of people into captivity. Those left in Jerusalem were allowed to stay on the condition that if they behaved themselves, they would be made into a vassal state, and if they paid taxes and were good to the Babylonian overlords, they would be allowed to continue doing what they wanted. But the elders, rulers and aristocrats in Jerusalem retorted, "We cannot tolerate this. We are not going to be subject to these foreign rulers." And so, they started agitating, and pressed for a rebellion.

Zedekiah had been on the throne by the Babylonians after that first conquest. There was plenty of evidence that the Jewish leaders should have behaved themselves. They were given a second chance politically, if you will, and maybe a second chance by the Lord too. But they still pushed the envelope. Why would they do that? They now had a puppet king. He was weak and young. He did not know what he was doing. After Zedekiah was put on the throne, there was a formal coronation. The coronation ritual was a rather elaborate traditional one. Most importantly, there would be prophecies connected with the coronation. People did not do important things in the ancient world without getting a reading from the gods—augury or something that told whether this was an auspicious time or not. The coronation of a king was often a time when many prophets came forth. Typically, the king would want favorable prophecies. Of course, a prophet who wanted to survive to give another prophecy usually spoke favorably of the king. At the time of a coronation, if prophets came forward saying bad things, the

reaction would be hostile because they were threatening a king. It was blasphemy or treason to be questioning the legitimacy or success of the regime. But, in the alternative, if they prophesied falsely, how would they face their God? This was a very trying time to be a prophet.

Schade, Aaron P. "[The Kingdom of Judah: Politics, Prophets, and Scribes in the Late Preexilic Period](#)." In *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, edited by John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, 299–336. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004.

1 Nephi 1:4 — In What Ways Was Jerusalem a “Great” City?

The idea of the great City of Jerusalem being destroyed was an extraordinary thought. The estimated population for all of Jerusalem in Lehi's day was maybe 10,000 people. Most people did not live in the city but were living on farms in their local villages. Jerusalem was “great”—not so much in the sense that there were lots of people residing there. It was “great” because it was holy and the temple was there. It was the Holy Place mentioned several times in Deuteronomy 12. It was the home of God. For many reasons, the idea that God's holy place could be destroyed seemed sacrilegious, ridiculous, even impossible.

Seely, David Rolph, and Fred E. Woods. "[How Could Jerusalem, “That Great City,” Be Destroyed?](#)" In *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, edited by John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, 595–610. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004.

1 Nephi 1:5 — Lehi's Intercessory Prayer

With the stage set for how vital Jerusalem was and how indestructible it seemed to most people, even at that point, most had turned toward wickedness. Few responded positively to the prophets' warnings. But Lehi did not discount these warnings. He believed. Against great odds, he trusted.

But first, Lehi went out and prayed on behalf of his people. This prayer has been called an intercessory prayer, and it was a prevalent part of Israelite worship in those days. Prophets prayed for the people. They prayed that God would be with them and bless them. Their prayers came with pleas for blessings for righteous obedience as well as curses for disobedience and wickedness. Even as they invoked curses upon the wicked, they were praying on behalf of the people and hoping that they would turn back and repent (see Deuteronomy 11:26–28; 29:18–28).

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Did God Call His Prophets in Ancient Times?](#) (1 Nephi 15:8)," *KnoWhy* 17 (January 22, 2016).

Welch, John W. "[The Calling of Lehi as a Prophet in the World of Jerusalem](#)." In *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, edited by John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, 421–448. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004.

1 Nephi 1:6–7 — Lehi's First Visions

As Lehi prayed fervently for Jerusalem and for his family, there came a pillar of fire. This opened his eyes to a vision of the Heavenly Counsel, where he was given a book.

The pillar of fire was an important symbol. In the exodus of Israel, they were led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The scriptural record stated that this pillar came and dwelt upon a rock. There was a rock that was especially important in Lehi's neighborhood: the rock the temple was built on. The pillar of fire was a manifestation of the glorious presence of God coming down. Wickedness could not abide the presence of the power of righteousness. And here, the pillar of fire came down and dwelt upon the temple. The people of Jerusalem believed that nothing could happen to their temple. What would Lehi go out and prophecy would happen? He prophesied that the temple, the Temple of Solomon, would not survive for more than a few years.

At the end of his vision, "[Lehi did] quake and trembled exceedingly," such was his experience with the Spirit.

The pillar of fire must signify something. Where else in scripture do we see a pillar of fire? Moses saw a burning or fiery bush. Jehovah's presence led the children of Israel in a pillar of fire by night. In Lehi's vision, the Lord may have been saying with the symbol of fire, "Lehi, like Moses, you have prayed, you are pleading for your people, but it is too late." Indeed, the pillar of fire that Lehi now saw coming down upon "the rock" may now have come to symbolize the consuming power of divine holocaust settling upon the temple, built in Jerusalem upon the primordial rock on the temple mount. Lehi was overwhelmed, but the Lord assured him, "I am with you. Follow me in the pillar of fire out into the wilderness just as Moses did."

Lehi went back to his house and cast himself down onto the bed, being overcome with the spirit and the things which he had seen. And while he was overcome, he received a second vision. And this is when he says he saw the heavens open and "God sitting upon his throne surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God" (1 Nephi 1:8). This is called a throne theophany. In such a vision, the prophet was admitted into the heavenly council. The purpose of the divine counsel is usually to dispense the judgment of God, and accordingly Lehi was then

shown a book. And what does he read on that book or scroll? He reads the fate of Jerusalem: "Woe, woe unto Jerusalem for I have seen thine abominations!"

Is there a pattern here that you have seen in the scriptures where a prophet has a vision, rests, and then the vision continues, turning into something even greater? Joseph Smith and Moroni come to mind. Moroni came back again and again and said the same thing over and over. Similarly, Moses had a significant spiritual manifestation in which he saw and heard much, and then, it took him several hours before he regained his strength and said, "For this reason, I know that man is nothing" (Moses 1:10). Then he experienced another divine vision. He saw this extraordinary vision where he saw the entire earth, and there was not a particle of it which he did not behold. In these monumental visions, we see that Lehi was part of a great tradition of seers who were called to the work and speak in the name of the Lord.

Lehi was not alone in experiencing exhaustion following a great spiritual experience. Joseph found himself on his back in the grove after the First Vision. He also fell by the fence after his visit from Moroni. A significant spiritual experience exhausts you. After Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon had the vision that is recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 76, Sidney was utterly exhausted. Smith instructed Rigdon that this is how a great out-pouring of the Spirit hits you at first.

1 Nephi 1:8 — Lehi's Call to Preach

Emphatically, in this very first chapter, Nephi states the purpose of his record: to teach the doctrine of Christ. And significantly, in this very first chapter, Nephi also records the vision in which Lehi learns of the coming of the Messiah (as Lehi repeatedly calls Him, 1 Nephi 1:19, 10:4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 17) and the Twelve.

What did the Twelve do? They went forth and followed the Messiah. As Nephi explained that "[T]he twelve came down and went forth upon the face of the earth, and the first came and stood before my father." The Twelve were sent throughout the whole earth. What do the Quorum of the Twelve do today? They oversee all the affairs of the world. But *the One* came down and spoke directly to Lehi. This was no small thing.

There is one preposition that needs to be pointed out in these passages. Lehi "thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded *with* numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God." Surrounded *with*. What is the difference between "with" and "by"? It is significant, because it may signal that God is *with* them. Most people would say "surrounded by," but Lehi says surrounded "with" numberless concourses of angels. "With" may mean a lot more than "by." This small, unusual word choice depicts something about *who* God is. He is not surrounded *by* concourses because

He needs to show off. He is surrounded *with* them because He is an invested partner in every one of those individual's salvation. I think that's a beautiful revelation.

Next, this glorious being, whose brightness was above that of the sun at noonday, even the Lord Jesus Christ, came down. What did He do? He gave Lehi a book. What was the importance and significance of the book? What is the significance of the Book of Mormon? If you look at the establishments of the major religions in the world, they all begin with a book. Books are essential in establishing doctrine and religion. There are books on earth and books in heaven, and as is seen here in Lehi's vision, heavenly decrees will be announced in books, our deeds will be recorded in books of life, and by the words given to us by God we will be judged (Mosiah 3:24; Moroni 10:27).

Welch, John W.. "[The Calling of Lehi as a Prophet in the World of Jerusalem.](#)" In *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, edited by John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, 421–448. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004.

1 Nephi 1:13–14 — Redemption despite Affliction

While in this vision, Lehi sees the abominations of Jerusalem and that the city and its inhabitants should be destroyed and led away into captivity. After watching all this destruction, he then exclaimed unto the Lord, "Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!" (1 Nephi 1:14). You would think Lehi would have been traumatized and perhaps horrified at the destruction the Lord was announcing against Lehi's people. But no, Lehi's response was that of reverence and worship. This becomes a theme throughout the Book of Mormon, especially throughout 1 and 2 Nephi. Lehi's son, Nephi, recorded his father's experience through this frame of mind decades later. Nephi, by that point, had seen many afflictions, had himself been shown visions of the future destruction of his own people, and had lost many family members to death and wickedness. Still, always for Nephi, the glory of God was the central focus. Especially in times of trial, Nephi, like Lehi, could see the power of redemption transcending above the affliction.

1 Nephi 1:8, 14–15 — Grace in the Destruction: "Singing and Praising God"

Lehi saw the destruction and woe that would come upon his people if they did not repent. He also saw angels singing praises to their God. At the end of his vision, Lehi was overwhelmed with gratitude and reverence for the goodness of God. How? Where is the goodness in destruction? The key thing here, in the end, is that God is merciful because He will not allow those who come to Him to perish. Lehi not only saw the woe

and the consequences of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their leaders continuing as they were in disobedience, but he saw the grand promise given to those who would repent and turn from wickedness. After Lehi saw destruction and terrible things, he exclaimed, "Great and marvelous are thy works." First of all, he completely accepted what the Lord was doing. "Thy throne is high in the heavens; thy power and goodness and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth." Lehi's focus from this point forth seemed to be on mercy. That is what his spirit saw in that vision—the mercy of God.

Book of Mormon Central, "[What is it to Speak with the Tongue of Angels?](#) (2 Nephi 32:2)," *KnoWhy* 60 (March 23, 2016).

1 Nephi 1:18 – Lehi Prophecies to Jerusalem Concerning its Destruction

In 605 BC, as Lehi began prophesying, the Assyrians had conquered Egypt. They may have over-stretched themselves, spreading their forces thin all the way down to Egypt. The Assyrians were now vulnerable on their east flank, and Babylon decided to move in and take over. These circumstances then allowed Babylon the staging area to move south, down into Jerusalem. For good reason, Lehi and many other prophets warned, "we are next."

The fall of Jerusalem is generally thought to have happened in 597. What eventually happened to Babylon? The victorious Babylonians soon got fat and lazy with all of their conquests, and another group, the Persians (up in the mountains in Iran), decided they wanted to live down where the water flowed nice and easy in the Euphrates Valley. The Persians entered the Mesopotamian area from the east and destroyed the Babylonians. Then, they kept advancing. Within the following ten years, the Persians went all the way into Egypt. Alexander the Great (the Greeks) would eventually come in from the west, conquer the Persians and finish it all off, conquering everything.

Can you imagine what the international political climate was like at this time, with whole civilizations vanishing, great cities being destroyed, and Lehi experiencing it? Is there anything we can learn from understanding Lehi's prophecy in retrospect? For one thing, we can learn lessons about the vulnerability of civilizations that think they are secure, mighty, and protected when, in reality, the more secure you feel, you may be overlooking essential things that will lead to your own demise.

In *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, Bruce Satterfield wrote an excellent chapter asking the question, "Why was Jerusalem destroyed?" What can we learn from the ancient writings of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel? What were the problems of their world? Their problems were not exactly the same as our problems, but our problems are often the same types as theirs. Brother Satterfield challenges us to look at the progression of what

went wrong in Jerusalem in Lehi's day and in the world that rejected him, because they are the problems we must watch out for today:

First, Jeremiah complained that the people repeatedly sinned. They would sin and repent and then sin again—doing the same thing over and over again, continually returning to their old problems and wrongdoing. As you do this, Jeremiah says, it becomes harder and harder each time to repent. So, lesson number one is: repent completely and turn away from wrongdoing.

Second, you can read in these texts that as it became harder for the people in Jerusalem to repent, they began rationalizing their sins, explaining that it was not such a big problem after all, for “God certainly would not destroy them—they were His people.” Rationalizing, making excuses, over-confidence—does that sound like something that might be happening in the world today as well? It is a pattern. The more things change, the more the world really stays the same, does it not?

Third, rationalization eventually led the people to a rebellious and stubborn approach toward righteousness. We have, in the Book of Mormon, plenty of places where people like King Benjamin talk about those who come out in open rebellion against God. This is the third step in this process of decline. This type of rebellion leads to what Brother Satterfield calls a “seared conscience,” where you become so calloused to what is going on, that even in your rebellion, you lose the feeling that you are rebelling. You become hard and insensitive. In this state, if a previous version of you looked at your now-calloused self, that past version would recognize the change for the worse. In this process, you become so calloused that you lose a sense of conscience and, as a part of that, you are no longer ashamed. Shame becomes something that is not tolerated in your life or in your world. But once all shame or regret is gone, how can you possibly turn yourself around? This is when the prophets enter. Their ministry is to tell the people that it is urgent and that they must reverse their course.

Fourth, the final step that happened over and over again in Jerusalem was the rejection of the prophets. Final warnings were given over and over again, and not only were the messages rejected, but the prophets themselves were killed or were driven out, as was Lehi. Having rejected the prophets, people continued in their sinful ways and the consequences followed.

This was Lehi's world—a world he lived in and understood from revelation and dreams. He saw up close how this downward spiral of pride and wrongdoing was the undoing of a great city of promise, a place that had been the home of righteous prophets and people of God. Can we learn something from that?

In this world setting, Lehi went out among the people, preaching repentance. How was his message received? With anger. The Jews were furious with Lehi because he was not saying, “All is well.” He was saying, “Jerusalem is going to get destroyed. I have seen it. You are a wicked people.” Just like the people did with Jeremiah, the people raged against Lehi. So much so that his life was at risk.

Satterfield, Bruce. [“The Divine Justification for the Babylonian Destruction of Jerusalem.”](#) In *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, edited by John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, 561–594. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004.

1 Nephi 1:20 – The Tender Mercies of the Lord

As Nephi concludes this first section in 1 Nephi, he announces that he will “show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.” Not only will the mercies of God be a major theme for Nephi, clear to the end of the final chapter in the Book of Mormon Moroni will identify remembering God’s mercifulness as a key step in preparing one’s heart and soul to receive inspiration and revelation through the power of the Holy Ghost (Moroni 10:3–4).

Book of Mormon Central, [“How Can We Be Delivered through the Lord’s Tender Mercies?”](#) (1 Nephi 1:20),” *KnoWhy* 447 (July 5, 2018).

1 Nephi 2

1 Nephi 2:4 – What Did Lehi’s House Look Like?

Nephi tells us that Lehi had “his own house at Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 1:7). He left that house and also “the land of his inheritance” (1 Nephi 2:4) which would have been outside the holy city, presumably in the lands of Manasseh north of Jerusalem, for Lehi was “a descendant of Manasseh” (Alma 10:3). Archaeologists have found the remains of free-standing houses in Jerusalem in Lehi’s day, so we at least have some idea of what his Jerusalem house might have looked like.

If he lived in a typical three-parallel room house, the rooms would have been only about ten feet wide. So, they were living in pretty cramped quarters. Even if they had a larger four-room house, Lehi and Sariah—along with all of their children (four sons and potentially a couple daughters), and probably some of their relatives—all lived in fairly close quarters, where privacy would have been scarce. Thus, Lehi had gone out onto a

hillside somewhere to pray. But, as Jeff Chadwick has especially discussed, that was how domestic life was in those days.

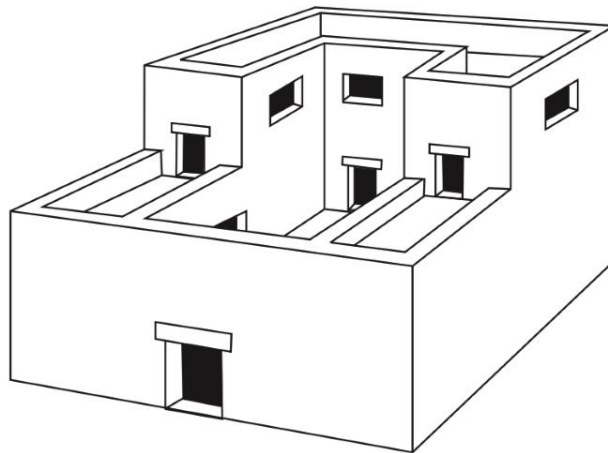


Figure 13. Typical four-room house from the period of Lehi.

Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "[Lehi's House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance](#)," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, 81–130.

1 Nephi 2:5 — Why Did Lehi Head toward the Red Sea?

The reaction of some of the leading people in Jerusalem to Lehi's message may seem to us like an overreaction. Why were they going to kill him? Was that justifiable? Actually, in Deuteronomy 18, there is a law against false prophecy, and the punishment is death. Urijah, Jeremiah and others ran into this problem. When Lehi was called to deliver essentially the same message that had gotten others in trouble, one can easily imagine Lehi thinking, "Wait a minute, Lord, haven't we tried this already? And it didn't work out too well last time." But, of course, he went and did it as he was commanded. And then, of course, in a dream, he was told that it was time for him to take his family and depart (2 Nephi 2:2). He woke up in the middle of the night, packed up his family, and was gone.

But where would he go? Lehi needed to flee. He may have wanted to go to Egypt, being familiar with the language and customs there. But he knew what happened with Urijah's extrication. He was not going to go there and have that happen to him. Of course, Lehi would not have wanted to go to Babylon, because Babylon had just conquered Jerusalem, so that would have been going into enemy territory. So, what was left? Only heading south, to the Red Sea and from there on down the frankincense route.

Aston, Warren P. "[Into Arabia: Lehi and Sariah's Escape from Jerusalem.](#)" *BYU Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2019): 99–126.

1 Nephi 2:9–10 – Lehi's Exhortation to Laman and Lemuel

When Lehi saw a stream emptied into the Red Sea, he said to Laman, "O that thou mightiest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness." He also spoke unto Lemuel, "O that thou mightiest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord." This is a beautiful little couplet. You have two sons; you have the walls of this valley, firm and steadfast, with the stream coming through. Hugh Nibley spent a lot of time talking about how ancient travelers in the desert would break out into poems like this, relating the circumstances around them to the moral situation in which they found themselves. Lehi's spontaneous lyric builds on Isaiah 48:18 (which will be quoted in 1 Nephi 20), "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments—then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."

Traveling in the Middle East, you will hear it said over and over again, "Water is life." Indeed, nothing can live in the desert without water. Lehi may have been trying to teach Laman here to see himself as a river of life, always giving to others, nothing done in selfishness. We too might benefit from seeing ourselves like the river, always giving to the world around us.

And consider Lehi's teaching to Lemuel about becoming firm, steadfast and immovable. Why those three words? This seems redundant. Firm speaks to inner strength, firmness. Steadfast speaks to one's position, standing steadily fastened. Immoveable speaks to not being swayed or moved by outside influences. I love how Lehi says, immovable "like unto this valley." When we think of a valley in our western culture, "firm and immovable" are not words we normally use to describe a valley. That seems more Middle Eastern. In western culture, I think we tend to think, and even sing, of mountains as being firm.

Lehi gave them words and imagery that could stay with them and their posterity forever. Indeed, the words "steadfast and immovable" were reused used by Benjamin in his closing words in Mosiah 5:15 and also by Alma in Alma 1:25. And Mormon used Lehi's wording in 3 Nephi 6:14, speaking of the Lamanites (descendants of Laman and Lemuel) who remained converted unto the true faith and would not depart from it, "for they were firm, and steadfast, and immovable, willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord." Even though Laman and Lemuel did not respond to Lehi, we see that these blessings were nonetheless extended to some of their faithful descendants and these examples were noted specifically by Mormon.

Lehi could have said to them, “Laman and Lemuel, why don’t you guys just get with the program?” But instead he eloquently spoke to them, hoping the poetry would touch their hearts. He did not want to command them in all things. He let them think, and work out for themselves what this could mean for them. Perhaps, as we provide instruction and encouragement to our loved ones, we will do it, like Lehi, in a way that allows a person more of their own agency. Teaching principles with images allows those taught to riddle things out for themselves, to see in these images something new. When left to peel back the layers of metaphor in imagery, like Lehi’s use of the river and valley, each person can decide for themselves, over and over again, new, worthy goals to accomplish.

1 Nephi 2:12 — Why Did Laman and Lemuel Murmur so Much?

Laman and Lemuel had lived a very nice, very comfortable life up until their father was called to be a prophet and commanded to flee Jerusalem. They were not ready—they were still mourning all they had been asked to give up. How many of us likewise hold onto past things, obsessing over what could have been or should have been? We struggle to let go and move on. It’s understandable. On top of what they were asked to abandon, their father clearly favored Nephi. They knew that. He freely admitted it to them. So, it would be a challenging situation—unless you have the eternal viewpoint, and they did not have that.

That lack of eternal perspective, of faith in God, greatly factored into their fear and frustration when it came to retrieving the plates of brass from Laban. When we have our moments of questioning, moments when we say, “I’m just not so sure that the Lord can do this,” that’s when Satan and his hosts answer back, “You’re right, He can’t. And even if He could, why would He do it for you? You’re alone. You will fail.”

We all know that Satan jumps in the second that we open the door just a little bit; he just blows right through it. That’s what happened with Laman and Lemuel. But that moment of weakness was compounded by their spiritual ignorance. It’s so incomprehensible to me that they could actually rationally think that Laban and fifty men were stronger than the Lord who parted the Red Sea. Put those things up next to each other, and it’s just ridiculous. But, from their limited view and understanding of God, they couldn’t see. As Nephi explained, they knew not the dealings of the Lord. And in that is the lesson. We must come to know the dealings of the Lord.

1 Nephi 2:16–19 — Nephi’s Heart is Softened

One of the great doctrines that we find in 1 Nephi 2 is a road map on how to gain great faith. Nephi’s testimony goes along with the directive we get out of Section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, “draw near to me, and I will draw near unto you.” Nephi

explained, in 1 Nephi 2:16, "having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, therefore I did cry unto the Lord and behold, he did visit me and did soften my heart." The Lord said, "Blessed art thou Nephi because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently with lowliness of heart." Here are the requirements for obtaining answers from the Lord: we need great faith resulting from "diligently seeking" and with "lowliness of heart."

We learn from Nephi's words that his own heart also needed "softening." Why? He looked like a true believer from the beginning. He believed what his father was telling him. He wanted to understand the mysteries too. But it would seem, there was still some further refining necessary for him—as there is for all of us, wherever we may be on the journey of faith.

Additionally, we learn from Nephi's words that it doesn't work to be a "cafeteria believer" and just pick and choose certain doctrines and principles that you'd prefer to believe. Nephi says, "The Lord did soften my heart that I did believe *all* the words which had been spoken by my father," not just some of the words which he had spoken, but all of his words. Once you truly believe in God, you believe all of his words. At this point Nephi became a full-fledged believer.

Nephi's words were chosen carefully. He did not have to admit that his heart needed to be softened, that he had had that humbling experience. But I think he mentioned this for a reason. I love it, that from the very beginning, he also mentioned the afflictions, pains, and hardships that he suffered, but quickly moved right on to the blessings and tender mercies he had received, as his focus was always based on his testimony that God delivers His children "because of their faith" (1 Nephi 1:20).

There are troubled times ahead. We're warned over and over that we can't coast along. Every one of us is going to be challenged in one way or another. Not in the extreme ways that our friends in the scriptures have been, hopefully; but we have their examples for a reason. Nephi was inspired to start us off with his experience because his pattern is essential for us to follow. He testified that he knew that he would be blessed, no matter what lay ahead, because God is faithful to those who keep their covenants with Him. It's a beautiful testimony, and it's a good starting point for faith, as we see what's going to happen because his testimony is true.

1 Nephi 2:20–24 — Nephi to Become a Ruler and Teacher over His Brothers

Very early in Nephi's record, he records that the Lord told him that he would become "a ruler and a teacher" over his elder brothers if they rebelled against him (2:21). One may wonder if this blessing was kept confidential by Nephi, at least as first. While this

promise certainly gave Nephi confidence and reassurance, it would not have pleased Laman and Lemuel. Being their “teacher” would be one thing. But being a “ruler” would have been something altogether different.

Examples may be found where younger brothers emerged as chosen spiritual leaders within Israel. Jacob was younger than Esau. Joseph was younger than many of his brothers. Ephraim was younger than Manasseh. David, a youngest brother, became king of all Israel. So, there was precedent for this unusual order of things. Normally the rights of primogeniture gave the firstborn son precedence. But in the law of the Lord, righteousness and calling prevailed over birth order, although understandably not without awkward relations and hard feelings.

In our times, the goodness of Hyrum Smith provides extraordinary exception to the normal problems often generated by this age differential. Hyrum was uncompromisingly loyal to his brother Joseph. Hyrum’s love for Joseph was profound, and his sacrifices were complete. Yet Hyrum was six years older than the Prophet Joseph, his brother and leader. “In life they were not divided, and in death they were not separated!” (D&C 135:3).

1 Nephi 3

How Does Nephi Set the Stage for his Account of the Slaying of Laban?

While the death of Laban is well-known as the outcome at the end of 1 Nephi 4, many important factors in Nephi’s account lead up to that unfortunate but required outcome. However told or explained, any killing is awful. Even packaged in beautifully crafted literature, any killing is disruptive to the fabric of human life. It instills anxieties, horror, and chaos. It throws the normal boundaries of human powers into turmoil, metaphysical uncertainty, and cosmic imbalance. Nephi realizes this. He does not tell his story of the slaying of Laban triumphantly, but as an account of tremendous restraint, repeated warnings, divine interventions, miraculous deliverances, and unimagined developments. The heart of this story is told in 1 Nephi 3–4, but it actually begins in the opening chapters of 1 Nephi, just as its lessons will continue to reverberate throughout Nephite history thereafter.

For example, Nephi was highly favored of the Lord. As Nephi begins his account, he casts his character in a positive light. He was “highly favored of the Lord in all my days,” and was given “a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God” (1 Nephi 1:1). One of those mysteries was that God would destroy the wicked leaders in

Jerusalem, one way or another, which may presage the slaying of Laban among many others. Nephi was the son of the prophet, Lehi, who was “filled with the Spirit of the Lord” (1:12). That was the same Spirit that spoke on important occasions to Nephi (2:19; 4:11).

As the fourth son in this family, Nephi can also be identified with biblical characters such as David, a beloved younger son of Jesse, whom Samuel called “a man after [the Lord’s] own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14). And just as David beheaded Goliath with his own sword and rose to powerful positions ahead of his elder brothers, Nephi would do likewise. Lehi prophesied that many inhabitants of Jerusalem “should perish by the sword” (1:13). His mention of the generic use of the sword as the principal mode of execution for apostate cities in biblical law (Deut. 13:15) sets the stage for the slaying of Laban to be carried out by the sword, and indeed, by Laban’s own sword (1 Nephi 4:18).

Nephi’s account had quickly turned its attention to Lehi’s domestic situation. When Laman and Lemuel rejected the idea that the great city of Jerusalem could be destroyed, Lehi spoke to them with power, shaking them to the core, and silencing them (2:13-14). Their rejection of Lehi’s patriarchal authority stands in stark contrast to Nephi’s believing “all the words” of Lehi. Nephi’s goodness is then rewarded, and he was promised that if he will keep God’s commandments he will prosper and be led to a land of promise (1 Nephi 2:20). The crucial need to keep God’s commandments will surface again in one of Nephi’s culminating ruminations before slaying Laban, when he remembers that his people “could not keep the commandments” unless they have the plates on which the law was written (4:15-16).

1 Nephi 3:2 — Why Did Lehi’s Sons Have to Return to Jerusalem?

The story continues as Lehi indeed informs Nephi that, in a dream, the Lord had commanded Nephi and his brothers to return from their base camp in the wilderness and go to Jerusalem to obtain the plates of brass (1 Nephi 3:2-3). Lehi specifically directs Nephi to go to the house of Laban (3:4), implying that he and his sons were familiar with Laban and his house, making the task seem at least feasible. Of course, Lehi could not go back himself. He was a wanted man and would have been apprehended and probably executed immediately.

Hearing the word of the Lord, Nephi responds to his father without hesitation and with a solemn promise: “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that 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” (3:7). Nephi’s unwavering confidence that the Lord would make a way for this to happen clearly sets the stage for the events that then will unfold. Nephi’s oath certifies

that, come what may, the hand of the Lord would control the crucial steps in accomplishing this “mission: impossible” assigned by God.

1 Nephi 3:3 — Who Was Laban?

Laban was of the tribe of Joseph. After acquiring the Plates of Laban (1 Nephi 5), Lehi and his family studied the record. They looked over the genealogy and Nephi noted that not only Lehi’s family, but also Laban, was of the tribe of Joseph. Laban was their kinsman. Perhaps this changed how Nephi felt about killing Laban. We do not know if this family connection made it easier or harder on Nephi.

Laban was a prominent person in his community. There are several possible positions that Laban could have held in ancient Jerusalem society. His position would have then determined what, exactly, he was in charge of. Laban could have been a commander of the armies of the Kingdom of Judea. At the time of Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem, the northern Kingdom no longer existed—it had been conquered by Assyria and the Ten Tribes were scattered out of the land. Jerusalem was now a city that was teetering on extinction. Poor political choices were made aligning the Kingdom of Judea with Egypt. Egypt and Babylon were at war with each other and Babylon had already conquered Jerusalem. Although it is unknown whether Laban was part of the crowd that had attempted to kill Lehi, he may well be implicated among those who charge Lehi with the crime of false prophecy, as Urijah and Jeremiah had been charged a few years earlier (Jeremiah 26).

Perhaps in this time of turmoil, Laban was a military commander. 1 Nephi 4:22 says that Laban had been away from his home talking to the elders of the Jews. He may have been meeting to discuss what to do about defending Jerusalem—how they planned on dealing with the political, social and economic problems they were facing. That is possible. Nephi’s narrative states that Laban was able to command a garrison of fifty within the walls of Jerusalem. This is a clue that he may have held the archaeologically known title of “commander of the citadel.”

Laban had distinctive armor of some kind. Every man in the community was responsible to serve in the military and be ready to go to war. There was no armory in the city where weapons and armor were issued. Everyone had to own their own armor and weapons. The rich people in the community personally owned better weapons and armor, while the poor people went without proper protection.

1 Nephi 3:3 — What Was on the Brass Plates and why were they in Laban’s Possession?

It appears that the record being kept by Laban was not finished or complete. It was a work in progress. It was being added to as part of an ongoing process. Unlike our Old Testament, the brass plates were not a treasured narrative of events that took place thousands of years before. They contained current words of Jeremiah, a contemporary of Lehi.

This set of plates was likely a sacred temple or royal record. Since this collection contained all five books of Moses, it must have included the book of Deuteronomy. Most scholars believe that the book of Deuteronomy had gone missing for a long period of time and that it was King Josiah who found the Book of the Law when they were cleaning the temple in 628 BC. This resulted in the major reform by King Josiah in 625 B.C., which consolidated all of the worship of Jehovah in the temple of Jerusalem. Lehi would have been well aware of this reformation. We do not know whether Lehi agreed with all of Josiah’s changes. There were things about the Josiah reform that the prophets in Jerusalem did not like. However, there were other parts of the reform that were accepted by all.

Soon after the finding the lost record of Deuteronomy and in conjunction with implementing his reforms, it is likely that King Josiah would have made considerable resources available to make a more permanent set of metal plates with the now complete scriptural record (including the newly-found book of Deuteronomy) so that it would not go missing again. He also would have wanted to be sure that the book of Deuteronomy was firmly established as authoritative.

Regarding ancient records in general, modern people must consider that ancient Israel was a very different world than ours today. Anciently, how could a person even get a copy of the scriptures? You could not simply go to a store and buy it. There were no printing presses at the time. Even if you only wanted a hand-written copy of the scriptures, how would you go about getting or producing it? Acquiring writing materials would have been difficult. One Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah is 26 feet long. That is a lot of leather. How many ibex hides would it take to make that much parchment? You would then need a master copy. Acquiring a scriptural record would have been an expensive item. Finally, in the ancient world, only a few individuals knew how to read and write. Someone would have to copy the scriptural record word by word. It would have been tedious and labor-intensive to hand-write the entire record. You could pay someone to copy a set of scriptures for you, but it would have been a big job. It would be

costly. You get the picture. These plates of brass would have been very rare and very expensive.

1 Nephi 3:13–14 — Laman Escapes from the House of Laban

In the first attempt of the brothers to obtain the plates, Laman was selected by the casting of lots to go into the house of Laban and talk with him in his house (3:11). Although chosen by divination, Laman was inept in his attempt. At the same time, it is amazing that he got as far as he did.

But turning attention to Laban’s blameworthiness, Nephi’s narrative tells that Laban soon grew angry. He threatened Laman with a serious indictment: “Behold thou art a robber, and I will slay thee” (3:13). Anger was a strong factor in assigning culpability in homicide cases under biblical law (see Num. 35:20, 22; Deut. 19:4, 6). Samson became angry about the men cheating to get the answer to his riddle and unjustly killed thirty Philistines (Judges 14:19), leading to Samson’s own death. Saul threatened Jonathan in anger, wrongly demanding that David be slain (1 Sam. 20:30–33), and Saul in turn died.

Notice that Laban called Laman a “robber.” Lehi and his four sons had left Jerusalem and gone out into the wilderness, and at a superficial level that is the kind of thing that bands of robbers did. So, when Laban accused Laman of being a robber, perhaps Laban was hoping that the charge would stick. No wonder Laman was scared. Because robbers were outlaws or bandits, they could be put to death summarily through military channels without a trial. Bandits and brigands, as public enemies who themselves rejected the validity of the central government, could not expect to be given a trial of any kind within the established system. Therefore, Laban’s threat was not an idle gesture. Vehemently calling him a robber is, of course, an unfair characterization of Laman. However, he had come with a band of brothers and so he could plausibly be characterized as a robber. At least, he would be terrified by such a threat, and he fled for his life from Laban’s house (1 Nephi 3:14).

As a result, the brothers were about to abandon the cause, but Nephi bound himself with another unbreakable oath: “As the Lord liveth and as we live, we will not go down unto our father in the wilderness until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord hath commanded us” (3:15). Making himself subject to a vow of this nature, Nephi in effect pledged his life (“as we live”) to obtain the plates of brass. In committing himself and his brothers in this way, he was well aware of the difficulties they would face. He swore that they would succeed, God willing, or die trying, for the plates were needed in order to “preserve unto our children the language of our fathers, and also the words spoken by all holy prophets from the beginning of the world even down to the present” (3:19–20).

Nephi recognized the hand of the Lord in his life. Nephi had great faith when he went forward thinking, “I don’t know what will happen, but I know the Lord can make it work.” A huge part of faith is to recognize the Lord’s hand in your life, acknowledge it and then seek it. Laban had a prominent house. There would be other people as part of the household. And yet, Laman was able to flee and get away when his life was threatened by Laban. Did Nephi and maybe even Laman recognize that the Lord had protected him in helping him get away?

1 Nephi 3:22–24 — Nephi and His Brothers Offer Their Treasure to Laban

So, the brothers tried again. After going from Jerusalem into the land of their inheritance (apparently somewhere in the lands of Manasseh), they collected their father’s wealth and returned with it to Laban’s house (3:22-23). They attempted not to “purchase” the plates, but rather to “give” their gold, silver, and precious gems to Laban hoping that he would then “give” them the plates. The sons of Lehi may have had a deeper motive than a simple trade for the plates. They could have reasoned with Laban, “We will give all of this treasure, we will consecrate everything we have, if you will just let us have that one item—the Brass Plates.” Notice that they did not offer to buy the plates or ask the price. In the ancient world, ordinary people did not buy and sell sacred things. They were trying in righteousness to obtain the plates, but it did not work.

1 Nephi 3:25–26 — Why Wasn’t Laban Punishable for Trying to Kill Nephi and His Brothers?

Under modern law, Laban may have been involved with what we would call an attempted homicide by ordering his guards to kill them. But under ancient Hebrew law, there was no such thing as an attempted crime. In Laban’s world, the only crimes a person could be convicted and punished for was a completed crime. To determine Laban’s culpability, the elders or judges would look to familiar facts and precedents. Here they would find the case of Joseph and his brothers. Initially, Joseph’s brothers threw him in a pit with the intent to kill him. A caravan came by and so they changed plans to make money by selling Joseph. They put blood on Joseph’s garment and returned home to tell their father, Jacob, that his favorite son, Joseph, was dead. Under modern law, these brothers have committed two crimes—first an attempted murder and second a kidnapping or selling of their brother. However, the Bible does not refer to Joseph’s brothers as murderers for their *attempted* murder. So, lawyers of Laban’s time would not have punished Laban since there was no actual murder.

Similarly, in 1 Nephi 7, when Lehi’s sons returned to Jerusalem to get Ishmael and his daughters, Laman and Lemuel, bound their brother Nephi with intent to kill. They left Nephi to die but Nephi was able to break the bands and get away. That also would

appear to be an attempted homicide. Later, in 1 Nephi 17, they will again attempt to kill Nephi and also their father.

But attempted crimes were not the same as completed crimes in Laban's world. Even though Laban sent his servants to kill Nephi and his brothers, they failed and no murder was committed. Laban did not do anything that would be seriously considered criminal in his world. Still, Laban was not a good guy. He broke a commandment by being envious. He coveted. The last of the Ten Commandments says, "Thou shalt not covet."

But thus, the brothers were thus forced to abandon all their property and run for their lives (3:26). The servants of Laban, one of whom may have been Zoram (who will soon figure again in the story), chased the brothers out of the city, where they hid themselves "in the cavity of a rock" (3:27).

1 Nephi 3:28–29 — Believing the Angel

And now it was Laman's turn to become angry, not only with Nephi but also with Lehi (3:28). Lemuel was in league with Laman, and they began to beat Nephi and Sam with a "rod," asserting authority over him. But an angel, with higher authority, rebuked them and importantly announced "that the Lord hath chosen [Nephi] to be a ruler over you, and this because of your iniquities" (3:29), developing yet another incident in the story line of Nephi's ascendance as the legitimate ruler over his brothers. The angel also assured all four of them that "ye shall go up to Jerusalem again, and the Lord will deliver Laban into your hands" (3:29). And what do the four of them do? They go to Jerusalem. They go up to the walls, and maybe Laman and Lemuel said, "The angel just said go to Jerusalem; he didn't he didn't say go into Jerusalem." But to be a good commandment keeper you need to keep the spirit and not just the letter of the law. Still, in this case, if all four went in as a gang, they were all more likely to get caught. So Nephi volunteered to go alone.

Reading about Nephi's experience with the angel invites us to think again of our own "reference experiences"—spiritual experiences that we have had that we can go back to throughout our lives. President Henry B. Eyring has spoken about the value of keeping a record of those times when we have been touched by the Spirit and have received personal revelation and help from the Lord—our "tender mercies." It is important to anchor ourselves to a time when we *knew*. This is a pattern that Nephi shows us—remembering those times when he *knew*. When the angel of the Lord delivered the message that He would deliver Laban into their hands, Nephi believed and *knew* that this would happen. In contrast, Laman and Lemuel questioned the words of the angel, "How is it possible for the Lord to deliver Laban? He is a mighty man." Nor had they latched onto the scriptural reality of the Lord's deliverance of Moses.

But why would Nephi record this troubling experience, of his brothers beating him with a rod and the message delivered by an angel? Nephi, himself, had already been told that he would become a ruler and a teacher of his older brothers. But now the angel stated this message in the hearing of Laman and Lemuel and Sam. Nephi then records in detail in 1 Nephi two instances that demonstrate that Nephi deserved to be leader. First, Nephi succeeded in getting the Brass Plates when his older brothers failed and said it could not be done. Second, Nephi's success in building a ship when his brothers, again, said it could not be done. Nephi did not record these stories for political purposes, because he was never running for election as king. Instead, he wrote these stories to reinforce the solidarity of the people who followed him, showing that they could trust that Nephi had indeed heard the word of the Lord, heard the Spirit, seen the visions, and was the righteous leader, chosen of the Lord.

1 Nephi 3:31 – Laban and His Fifty

Of even greater significance, the angel had promised the brothers: “Ye shall go up to Jerusalem again, and the Lord will deliver Laban into your hands” (3:29). Here, the legal language of “deliverance” enters the narrative. In biblical narratives, enemies are said to be “delivered”: Goliath was delivered, and accounts of accidental and unintentional slayings speak of victims being delivered into the hands of the killer. However, it is always unpredictable how and when such a divine deliverance will occur.

But Laman and Lemuel immediately raise the question: “How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands? Behold, he is a mighty man, and he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty; then why not us?” (3:31). In the book of Isaiah, it talks about commanders of fifty (Isaiah 3:3). This would have been the title of a military unit. So, when Laman and Lemuel continue to murmur that Laban could command fifty, they are not using some arbitrary number. They are referring to Laban's actual position as an officer of an unusually sizeable force of soldiers, stationed within the walls of Jerusalem.

Although understandable, this rationalizing, murmuring, and doubting the ability of God to carry out the promise that had just been delivered by his angel now put Laman and Lemuel in the position of rebelling against God. Dishonoring their father had been serious enough (3:28), but dismissing the power of God, who was powerful enough to deliver the Israelites from the hands of the Egyptians, was next to blasphemy.

1 Nephi 4

1 Nephi 4:1–3 — Let Us Be Faithful

When Lehi had given Nephi his assignment from the Lord, Nephi immediately said that he would go and do it, and as soon as they had found out that it wasn't going to be as easy as they thought, Nephi said again with a powerful oath, "As the Lord liveth and as we live, we will not go down to our father in the wilderness until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord hath commanded us" (3:15–16). As he said before, he remained convinced that the Lord would provide a way, and so he said to his brothers, "Let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord."

And interestingly, whom does Nephi think of as the grand example of obedience and the Lord's deliveries? Moses. I love how connected Nephi feels to Moses. "Let us be strong like unto Moses, for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither and our fathers came through out of captivity onto dry ground and the armies of pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea" (4:2). And I love what he said to Laman and Lemuel. "Now behold, ye know that that is true" (4:3). You know that happened. "You also know that an angel has spoken to you. Wherefore can ye doubt? Let us go up. The Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban" (4:3). Little does he know that shortly that's going to be fulfilled in a way that he did not anticipate.

1 Nephi 4:5–18 — Nephi Enters Jerusalem Alone, Stumbles onto Laban, and Slays Him

As the three brothers stayed outside the walls, Nephi crept alone into the city, at night, going back towards the house of Laban (4:5). Perhaps Moses was again on Nephi's mind and should be on the reader's mind here, not only in Nephi's immediate outburst of confidence as the armies of Pharaoh had been justifiably killed in the Sea, but also as Moses himself had not been punished for earlier having killed a brutal Egyptian overlord (Exodus 2:12). By mentioning Moses, Nephi's story is already hinting that someone might likewise justifiably die in the unfolding of Nephi's account.

If a death somehow would occur in Nephi's attempt to get the plates, one of the main legal issues that would have arisen would concern the state of his mind as he slew Laban. Anticipating that issue, Nephi expressly affirmed that he was "led by the spirit, *not knowing beforehand* the things which [he] should do" (4:6). Almost as Moses led the children of Israel through the wilderness by the pillar of fire at night, Nephi becomes an embodiment of the children of Israel as they too had faced mortal dangers themselves. Nephi's testimony that he was led solely by the spirit of God substantiates a lack of pre-

planning, pre-meditation, lying in wait, coming presumptuously, or desiring revenge, or any wish to harm Laban. He had not schemed to find Laban by guile or by positioning himself somewhere around Laban's house hoping to be able to ambush him.

Apparently being completely unarmed, Nephi had hoped somehow to gain access to Laban's treasury and to persuade someone who controlled access to the plates to cooperate with him. But how on earth this was going to happen was still a total mystery to him. When he sat down much later to write his story, Nephi began by saying, "I've been taught by my father. I know of the mysteries of God, nevertheless I have suffered a lot of afflictions in my day" (1 Nephi 1:1). What happened there in the dark corners of Jerusalem that night may well have been one of those mysteries that Nephi must have looked back on and asked himself, how on earth did all that happen?

I think it's really important that Nephi went alone for two reasons. One is, strategically, they didn't want to enter the city like a gang of robbers and have whatever could happen under those circumstances, and if they went in as a group that was a real possibility. Secondly, I think for the purpose of faith and for the legal thing, it wasn't a mob that set about Laban; it wasn't a group of four. It was one person alone. The Lord delivered Laban into Nephi's hand.

As Nephi approached the house of Laban, the narrative tells, he "beheld a man," that "he had fallen to the earth" right on Nephi's path, and that he was "drunken with wine," and finally that Nephi "came to him." It seems that Nephi was still just wondering what he might learn or perhaps even how he might help this fallen person. But he only then discovered "that it was Laban" (4:7-8). No one could have been more surprised than Nephi.

Nephi immediately noticed Laban's personal sword and took it out of its sheath, admired its hilt of pure gold and its blade of precious steel. He may have seen this sword before, but probably had never held it. Considerable irony looms in the fact that Laban would be killed not only by his own sword, after having threatened to kill Nephi and his brothers, but also in the fact that the sword was extremely valuable. The instrument of Laban's death represents Laban's lust for gold and precious things, which was a cause of his own undoing.

At this point, Nephi reports that he "was constrained by the spirit that [he] should kill Laban" (4:10). Nevertheless, he resisted and reflected: "Never at any time have I shed the blood of man. And I shrunk and would that I might not slay him" (4:10). With these words, Nephi certifies that he was "constrained" by some urge (4:10) to do this deed. He was constrained. It was not of his own planning or volition. For several wise reasons, his

preferences surely would have been to somehow take advantage of the situation he had stumbled into but without having to kill Laban. Nephi was inexperienced, not bloodthirsty. Nephi's statements take his ensuing actions out of the legal domain of culpable voluntary homicides.

Hearing words quoted to him from Exodus 21:13, saying, "Slay him, for 'the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands'" (4:11), Nephi paused and reflected further. He debated with himself on three grounds, but none of these reasons were persuasive: (1) Laban had sought to take away Nephi's own life (and the life of his brothers)—but that attempt by Laban was unsuccessful and thus was not legally culpable; (2) Laban would not obey the commandment of God—but Laban had no obligation to consider a demand made by Lehi's sons as tantamount to a divine command; and (3) Laban had taken away their property—but stealing property was not a crime worthy of capital punishment. Although Nephi's situation—being alone, unarmed, and out of options—was different from David's situation as David and his soldier Abishai deliberated and decided not to kill Saul, Nephi and David both agonized over the seriousness of taking such an irreversible action.

To make it unmistakably clear that only one other reason ultimately justified Nephi's action, Nephi then tells that the Spirit repeated the injunction a second time, quoting again from Exodus 21, "Slay him, for the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands" (4:12). These words of the Spirit certify that the Lord had brought together the facts and circumstances, together with the means and methods, necessary for Nephi to slay Laban, and thus it was not so much Nephi, but "the Lord, [who] slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes" (4:13). This motivation was similar to that of divine intervention in military combat. Laban, after all, was carrying weapons of war and was wearing armor.

And finally, the word of the Lord explained: "It is better that one man should perish than a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief" (4:13). This expression resonates with another rule of biblical law found in the story of Sheba, a rebel who was guilty of treason against David (2 Samuel 20). When Sheba ran to the city of Abel seeking protection, one of David's commanders named Joab demanded that Sheba be released to him, otherwise Joab would kill everyone in the city. When the people of Abel beheaded Sheba, they set an important legal precedent. It was subsequently invoked over the years under Jewish law to justify, under certain rare circumstances, the killing of one person in order to preserve an entire innocent group. This has been called "the one for many" principle. This rationale was reputedly involved again, when King Jehoiakim was turned over to the Babylonians in order to prevent the city of Jerusalem from being

punished (2 Chron. 36:6). Jehoiakim was then, presumably, to be executed by the Babylonians, and that had happened only a few months before the point at which the account in 1 Nephi begins.

Hearing that twice-repeated command and legal justification from the Spirit of the Lord, Nephi cut off Laban’s head. He took him “by the hair of the head” (4:18), as Judith reportedly also did. She cut off the head of Holofernes, whose armies had surrounded Jerusalem. No one witnessed either of these beheadings. Like Phinehas in Numbers 25, Nephi and Judith are portrayed as righteously and justifiably taking the law into their own hands, acting under extreme circumstances solely for the benefit of their entire people.

1 Nephi 4:9 — What Did Laban’s Sword Look Like?

People often wonder what Laban’s sword looked like. Several studies have dealt with this question.

One thing we know is that this sword had to have been very sharp, because it could, with probably just one swipe, decapitate Laban. They did have swords or knives like that, used for making sacrifices. How did one sacrifice a lamb, a goat, a bull? By slitting its throat, and they knew how to do that. For Passover, for example, men would kill the lamb that would then be blessed, prepared, and the blood properly removed.

Nephi was a metallurgist; he knew how to make plates. He marveled at the workmanship of the Liahona. He also recognized the qualities of Laban’s sword, its steel blade, gold hilt. It reminds me of a dagger from King Tut’s tomb. I imagine it was a ceremonial sword or sacrificial dagger. There are ancient depictions of soldiers slitting the throat of captives. They knew how to do this.

Book of Mormon Central, “[What was the Sword of Laban Like?](#) (1 Nephi 4:9),” KnoWhy 401 (January 23, 2018).

1 Nephi 4:15–16 — Why Did Nephi Need these Plates?

The turning point of this story and the reason Nephi tells this whole story is so that we can know how important it is to have and read the scriptures, to know the commandments and be better commandment keepers.

When Nephi was trying to convince his brothers to go back, he says, “We need these records, otherwise, how can we preserve our language for our children?” That was one important reason. And if Nephi had said, “We need these plates so we can obey the law of the Lord,” that would probably not be something that Laman and Lemuel would be very excited about. But preserving the language was one of the main reasons Nephi

gives. Language is important. Especially authoritative religious and legal language. The loss of language by the Mulekites offers a case in point. There are plenty of reasons why having the scriptures is vitally important, for them and for us. And it was especially important for Lehi, as he journeyed, to have a set of scriptures on durable metal. This is extremely expensive and very unusual, but it would not have done Lehi any good to have scrolls written on parchment with water-soluble ink. They would not have survived.

1 Nephi 4:18 — Was Nephi Justified in Killing Laban?

For forty years, I have written and taught in the BYU Law School about the technicalities of the laws of homicide in the Bible and in the ancient Near East. It is a complicated and technical legal subject. Here are a few brief comments that may be relevant to how the slaying of Laban may have been understood 2700 years ago.

When the Spirit quoted to Nephi words from Exodus 21:13–14, Nephi certainly would have recognized those words as coming from the Code of the Covenant in Exodus 21–23. Those words formed the basic requirements of the Law of Moses in Lehi’s day. Exodus 21:13–14 provided a three-pronged exception to the general law against homicide, if: (1) “a man lie not in wait,” and (2) come not upon him “with guile,” and (3) “the Lord delivers him into his hand” (Exodus 21:13–14). The expression, *to be delivered into your hands*, does not occur very often in the Old Testament, so it would have been rather distinctive. Obviously, Nephi had not been lying in wait, planning what to do. He had not been stalking Laban like a hunter who’s trying to kill an antelope. The details of the homicide law were further developed in Numbers 35, where hatred was a crucial element in finding someone guilty of homicide. Nephi would have been taught these words. He probably could recite these passages by memory. He had probably heard this text read at public gatherings, as required by Deuteronomy 31. His parents must teach their children the law, morning and evening.

In addition, a lot of homicide stories were found in the Hebrew traditions behind the Old Testament. Nephi would have known them, especially the story (found at the beginning of the book of Exodus) of Moses killing an Egyptian, that led to Moses fleeing into the wilderness in Midian for forty years. It will be Moses who almost uniquely in ancient law will provide an exception that differentiated an excusable accidental or unplanned slaying from a culpable presumptuous murder. These stories also were important and memorable. Interestingly, the Bible begins with a homicide, with Cain killing Abel, and the Book of Mormon begins with Nephi killing Laban. Both of these stories tell us something fundamental about God directing the affairs of what’s happening; on the one hand, God protects Cain when he has to be driven out, and on the

other hand, that God values the scriptures enough that blood had to be shed in order that these scriptures could be taken on plates that would endure.

Ultimately, whatever the legal reasoning of the day, Nephi did what he did for one and only one reason, and that was because the Spirit constrained him and said, *the Lord has delivered him into thy hands*.

Welch, John W. "[Legal Perspectives on the Slaying of Laban](#)." *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 119–141.

1 Nephi 4:18 — Laban’s Death

Maybe Laban should also be seen as a “type” of the wicked people in Jerusalem. Maybe his death was a final warning. It may have helped the people in Jerusalem to be less confident and to repent. The next morning they would have found Laban with his head chopped off. The only punishment under the Law of Moses that was enacted by a sword was in the destruction of an apostate city (Deuteronomy 13:15). Maybe it was a last-ditch warning to say to Jerusalem, the prophecies about the destruction of Jerusalem are really going to happen.

1 Nephi 4:20 — Was Laban’s Treasury the Treasury of the Temple?

There was a treasury of the temple. And what is in the treasury? Gold, silver and all the donations, all the tithing. The safest place in every city was in their main temple. The Temple of Saturn in Rome was the treasury of the Roman Empire, and the walls of the temple of Herod were plated with gold. Laban, as the commander of the city guard, might have had charge over the treasury, which would also have contained the sacred records. Laban’s house would have been right near the temple.

1 Nephi 4:33–36 — Nephi Swears an Oath to Zoram

Outside the walls, the brothers waited. Remember how scared they were when they saw Zoram coming, with Nephi now dressed in the armor of Laban. They had already been told that Laban was going to come and try to kill them, and as robbers they could be executed on the spot. Their fears, however, were soon settled, when they swore an oath with Zoram. They could not let him go. To keep him from trying to run away, they swore an oath with him, giving a place in the family, having an inheritance right. Indeed, because of this oath there would be Zoramites in the Nephite world. Zoram was treated as if he were a son of Lehi. When Nephi swears, “As the Lord liveth and as I live,” he puts his life on this. “If this oath is not fulfilled, then I will die.”

When the people in Jerusalem woke up the next morning and saw that the plates were gone, and also that Zoram is gone, they might have now wondered if Zoram had taken the plates, and maybe even Zoram killed Laban. But they have no idea where the plates

have gone. Because there were no witnesses at all, and not even Laman or Lemuel or Sam could stand as witnesses against Nephi, no legal action could be brought against either Nephi or Zoram.

We do not know anything about Zoram's background. If he was a slave, he would not have been an Israelite. At least he was under some conditions of servitude. Nephi's promise not only of family membership, but also freedom and standing within the family was obviously an attractive motivator for Zoram, especially considering the lack of any other viable option. The terms of Nephi's oath were that he would spare Zoram's life if he will "hearken unto our words" (4:32), then he would be "a free man like unto us if he would go down in the wilderness with us" (4:33) and that he shall "have place with us" (4:34), and "that he would tarry with [Nephi and his family] from that time forth" (4:35). This was a good thing. The brothers could scarcely have let Zoram go. He would have immediately sounded the hue and cry.

1 Nephi 4:37–38 — Nephi and the Group Flee into the Wilderness

Nephi's narrative ends as the five of them flee ("our flight," 4:36) to Lehi's tent (or tabernacle) in the wilderness. Having shed blood, Nephi and his accomplices may have faced the legal need to flee to a place of refuge in order find protection and to purge any guilty blood taint. Indeed, in the case of any "unpremeditated" killing, Exodus 21:13 provides that the slayer must take refuge in "a place" which God will appoint. There the slayer was protected from avengers and was to be given a fair trial to determine whether, indeed, he had acted culpably by lying in wait or not.

In times and places where the laws of these cities of refuge were in effect, the "place" of refuge was generally understood to be an altar or place in one of six designated Levitical cities. But the term "place" is ambiguous. It can sometimes refer to the wilderness (as in Deuteronomy 1:33; 9:7; 11:5; 29:6). Thus, it may have been legally sufficient, in such cases of unpremeditated or unplanned slayings, for a killer such as Nephi to go into the wilderness, as was prefigured in the precedents of Cain's banishment and of Moses's fleeing into Midian. Of course, Nephi was prepared, in any event, to leave the land of Israel and never return.

1 Nephi 4 — Chiastic Structure of 1 Nephi 4

This story is clearly structured chiastically. It starts "without the walls" and finishes up "outside the walls." Nephi is in the dark, not knowing what's happening at the beginning, and Zoram is confused and doesn't know what's happening at the end. The sword mentioned twice. The Spirit constrains twice, and so on. The main thing to realize is the central turning point, which is the recognition that decided the matter for Nephi, and this has to do with commandments in general, "Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise," but "they cannot keep the

commandments according to the law save they have the law.” To emphasize this crucial middle turning-point, Nephi structured this entire chapter as an extended chiasm.

A *Without the Walls of Jerusalem*

They [my brethren] did follow me up until we came without the walls of Jerusalem (4)
I caused that they should hide themselves without the walls (5)

B *Laban and his House*

I . . . went forth towards the house of Laban (5),
not knowing beforehand the things I should do (6)
near unto the house of Laban was a drunk man (7): it was Laban (8)

C *The Sword*

I beheld his sword, . . . and the hilt was of pure gold
. . . the blade thereof was of the most precious steel (9)

D *Spirit*

I was constrained by the Spirit that I should kill Laban (10)
And the Spirit said unto me again (11)

E *Delivered into thy hands*

Slay him for the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands (12)

F *Perishing*

The Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes;
it is better that one man should perish than a nation should dwindle
and perish in unbelief (13)

G *The Law and Commandments*

Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise (14)
I also thought they could not keep the commandments of the
Lord according to the law, . . . save they should have the law (15)

F' *Imperishable*

I also knew that the law was engraven upon the plates of brass (16)

E' *Delivered into my hands*

And again, I knew that the Lord had delivered Laban into my hands (17)

D' *The Spirit*

Therefore, I did obey the voice of the Spirit (18)

C' *The Sword*

I . . . took Laban by the hair of the head and
I smote off his head with his own sword (19)

B' *Laban's House—his treasury, his servant, his voice*

I went forth unto the treasury of Laban. . . .

I saw the servant of Laban,
I commanded him in the voice of Laban (20)
He supposed me to be his master, Laban (21),
I spake unto him as if it had been Laban (23)

A' *Without the Walls of Jerusalem*

To my elder brethren who were without the walls (24)
[Zoram] did follow me, as I went forth unto my brethren who were without the walls (26–27)

As this case shows, chiasmus was used in literature to serve several purposes. In Nephi's account of the slaying of Laban, the chiastic structure may serve to doubly emphasize the seriousness of its subject matter, to imbue its outcome with an aura of authoritativeness, and to clarify the logical relationships between the parts of this text. Chiasmus also helps to point and propel Nephi's narrative to its focal conclusion. The balanced format of chiasmus also conveys here implicit sense of balance, justice, orderliness, and retributive justice. It also conveniently enhances the audience's capacities for memorization, which promotes oral retellings and uses of this text in legal context and in public instruction. Ultimately chiasmus adds to a judicial verdict any often needed sense of restoration, peace, closure, and finality.

All of these reasons explain why chiasmus works so well here. Nephi used chiasmus in a lot of other places, but this is one of his prime examples. This is one of his most important stories, and he presented it in the most articulate, persuasive way that he knew how. Jonathan Burnside, a biblical scholar, has said, "The use of chiasmus is important in showing completion when divine intervention is involved because God never does anything that is imperfect or incomplete. This literary form completes it." We have here, particularly, more than in any other story, repeated instances of divine intervention.

What Can We Learn from Nephi's Example in These Chapters?

There are many lessons that we can learn from this foundational story. It's very difficult to read the whole Book of Mormon and everything that happens afterwards without the story of Laban in the background. It tells us the importance of records, of language, of revelation, of obeying the word of the Lord, of following the Spirit, of doing whatever needs to be done to promote the building of the Kingdom, that God will provide, lessons about making oaths and promises. Nephi at one point even says, "As the Lord liveth and as we live, we shall not return to our Father Lehi until we have done this." He is swearing an oath, making a covenant, and what is he saying here? We put our lives on the line, we will die if necessary, we will do everything we can, to make this happen. Lessons of covenant making and oath keeping are told and presumed over and over again throughout the Book of Mormon.

Mormon knows this story. He probably grew up hearing this story. But he did not originally begin with 1 Nephi. He began with the Book of Lehi. Would we not love to know what Lehi wrote about this episode? He was not there, of course. But what did he think about this when Nephi came back and said, "well dad, here are the plates, but oh by the way, we are kind of in trouble in Jerusalem." There was now no going back there

anymore, if there was ever a question in Lehi’s mind. Lehi may have had some mixed feelings about this, especially knowing the next thing he was going to do is say, was to ask his sons to go back and get Ishmael and his family. And the sons may have wondered, what if we run into any of Laban’s relatives in the process? Still, they went forward with courage. If readers keep this story in mind, they will see its influence throughout the whole Book of Mormon and will ultimately know that if we will go and do the things that the Lord has commanded, he will provide a way that we may accomplish those things, no matter how challenging those commandments may be.

1 Nephi 5

1 Nephi 5:1–2 — Sariah Complains in the Wilderness

I personally think Sariah was amazing. The modern-day pioneers who traveled to Utah endured with courage but their journey didn’t last eight whole years in the wilderness—what a difficult thing that must have been for Sariah. When the text mentions that Sariah *complained*, I don’t fault her for that. This was a terrible trial—not knowing whether her sons were coming back, whether they’d been killed or whether they’d done the right thing leaving Jerusalem. As the absence of her sons stretched on and as she envisioned the task they had been given, it was only natural that her fears would begin to mount. The round trip might have been well over 500 miles and through terrible terrain with dangers lurking in many places in addition to the formidable odds within Jerusalem itself. When she finally says, “Now with a surety I know,” that’s the voice of someone who believed and desperately wanted to absolutely know. There is no question that the most important possession for a woman in the ancient world was her sons. Her sons were her social security. They were her status. It was understandable for Sariah to be worried about the loss of her sons—that was really going to the core of who she was. Nephi shows us an unforgettable tender mercy for Sariah that will be an anchor experience for her and her descendants.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Were Any Ancient Israelite Women Named Sariah? \(1 Nephi 5:1\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 8 (January 11, 2016).

1 Nephi 5:4–6 — Lehi Bears His Testimony to Comfort Sariah

The Holy Ghost is called “The Comforter.” If you are a bishop or in any other position of confidence and people come to you who are facing difficult circumstances, people who are agonizing and in need of comfort—they don’t want sympathy as much as they want to hear testimony and feel the Holy Ghost.

1 Nephi 5:8 — Sariah Rejoices as Her Sons Return

Sariah's words to Lehi reflect the same poetic effect of Lehi's exhortations to Laman and Lemuel, "Oh, that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast and immoveable," and "oh that thou mightest be like unto this river." We can only guess what her poem might have looked like in the original language: "Now I know of a surety the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness." Break. "Yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons." It's a nice couplet, both beginning with, "Yea I know," and "Know of a surety." And moreover, "He has delivered them out of the hands of Laban," Break. "And given them power by which they can accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them," echoing, of course, Nephi's own words, "For I will go and do the things which I am commanded." This makes a beautiful little four-part poem. It begins with "knowing that the Lord has commanded my husband" and it ends "knowing that the Lord has given them power they might accomplish the thing that he has *commanded* them." We might call it *The Song of Sariah*. In Exodus 15:21, there is a short but poetic expression by the sister of Moses which biblical scholars rave about as being a wonderful statement of joy and success, given as the Children of Israel reach the other side of the Red Sea. It's called the *Song of Miriam* and I think with Sariah we have the same theme of deliverance by the hand of the Lord with a similar, beautiful testimony of gratitude, faith and love.

1 Nephi 5:14–28 — The Brass Plates

We do not know the precise content of the Brass Plates. We know that they included quotations from prophets that are not in our Bible, for example, Zenos, Zenock, Neum, and Ezias, where we see that these prophets testified plainly and specifically about the coming mission and atonement of Jesus Christ and about important elements of the Plan of Salvation, including the nature of the creation and the fall as well as the nature of the Godhead.

In addition to these four prophets the Brass Plates likely contained some version of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, likely some version of the history of Israel from the time of Joshua down to Zedekiah (as in Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings), books of prophets such as Isaiah, and maybe Hosea, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, Jeremiah, some of the Psalms, as well as some lost texts, and others. Certain parts of our Old Testament, such as the books of Daniel and Ezekiel, had not been written at the time of Lehi, so they would not have been on the brass plates.

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Parts of the Old Testament Were on the Plates of Brass? \(1 Nephi 5:10\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 410 (February 22, 2018).

Millet, Robert L. "[The Plates of Brass: A Witness of Christ](#)." *Ensign* 18, no. 1 (1988): 26-29.

1 Nephi 6

1 Nephi 6:1–3 — How Lehi’s Lineage May Explain His Location

Even though Nephi doesn’t give a full genealogy of his fathers, we learn of his tribe in the House of Israel: “For it sufficeth me to say that we are descendants of Joseph” (v. 2). Later on, readers learn that Lehi was specifically “a descendant of Manasseh,” who was one of Joseph’s sons (Alma 10:3). It is possible that Lehi, based on his lineage, was a descendent of refugees from the Northern Kingdom of Israel (where Manasseh’s tribal grounds were situated). When the Assyrians invaded Israel around 732–722 BC, Lehi’s ancestors likely fled to Judah and settled in a precinct of Jerusalem called the “Mishneh.” Familiarity with this historical backdrop can help explain why Lehi was living in Jerusalem around 600 BC, instead of in the tribal grounds allotted to Lehi’s ancestor Manasseh. As refugees they may not have been able to bring records with them, even if they had once had them. They may have had a general knowledge of their northern ancestry through oral tradition, but may have been unable to prove this or know it in full detail running all the way back to Joseph, about ten centuries earlier. After Lehi and his sons obtained the plates of brass, they had proof of what they had previously only believed from oral tradition, hence Lehi then “knew that he was a descendant of Joseph” through Manasseh and could prove his important status as such (1 Nephi 6:2; Alma 10:3).

Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “[Lehi’s House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance](#),” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 81–130.

1 Nephi 6:3 — Lehi’s Words in Nephi’s Record

Nephi’s explanation that he didn’t give a “full account” of his father’s record may leave readers wondering how much of Lehi’s record Nephi *did* record. Careful studies on this matter have been conducted, and they suggest that there is probably quite a bit that Nephi either quoted or paraphrased from his father’s underlying record. Thus, while Nephi’s books may bear his own name, they give readers a window into the personality, teachings, and prophecies of Lehi. Together, as father and son, their teachings and prophecies support, strengthen, and inform one another, working together to persuade readers to come unto Christ.

John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, “[Writings of Lehi Quoted or Paraphrased by Nephi and Jacob](#),” in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 49–53.

- John A. Tvedtnes, "[Contents of the 116 Lost Pages and the Large Plates](#)," in *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City, UT: Cornerstone Publishing, 1999), 37–52.
- S. Kent Brown, "[Recovering the Missing Record of Lehi](#)," in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 28–54.
- S. Kent Brown, "[Nephi's Use of Lehi's Record](#)," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 3–14.

1 Nephi 6:4 — Nephi's Larger Thesis

Have you ever learned about thesis statements in an English class? They are statements, usually given at the beginning of an essay or article (and often in longer works as well) that summarize an author's main point or purpose in writing. Nephi gives us two important thesis statements. As expected, he gives one of them very close to the beginning of his record, in the very first chapter: "But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance" (1 Nephi 1:20). Thus, one of Nephi's main points is to show his readers that God is merciful and that if we are faithful, He will deliver us in our trials. Nephi's stories emphasize this theme over and over.

Yet, in 1 Nephi 6:4, Nephi gives another purpose for his record, and this one is even larger in its scope. He declares that the "fullness" of his intent is to help men (and women) come unto God and be saved. We might ask ourselves what Nephi may have meant when he talked about *coming* unto God. For Nephi, this was surely a spiritual concept, indicating that if men will keep God's commandments, they will become spiritually closer and eventually unified in purpose with Him.

However, there is a very physical component as well. Remember, Nephi is writing this many years afterward, so he has already made the arduous journey to the New World, removing himself from the wickedness of the unbelieving people of Jerusalem. He and Lehi have already had their visions of the Tree of Life, where they saw concourses of people pressing forward toward the Tree of Life. Those who are righteous in this life will eventually be resurrected, and be granted the privilege of physically dwelling in the presence of God for eternity. They are saved from the perils of mortal life and literally *have come* to where God is. It is hard to imagine that Nephi, considering his personal experiences with traveling to divinely prepared locations, didn't intend his thesis statement to share with readers the results of both his spiritual and his temporal journeys.

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Can We Be Delivered through the Lord's Tender Mercies?](#) (1 Nephi 1:20)," *KnoWhy* 447 (July 5, 2018).

1 Nephi 6:6 — A Pattern in the Small Plates

In this verse, Nephi speaks in the future tense: "I *shall* give commandment" (1 Nephi 6:6). Evidence that Nephi did indeed pass on this commandment can be found in Jacob 1:1–4, where Jacob gives more details about Nephi's instructions and the sacred nature of the Small Plates. If you carefully read the rest of the writings on the Small Plates, you will see that Nephi's instructions were followed by Jacob's posterity. They passed the record down through their posterity, focused on things of spiritual significance, and only lightly covered the history of their people. These plates give a brief spiritual history that, by divine design, compensates for the loss of the beginning portion of Mormon's record (which was recorded on the 116 pages that were lost by Martin Harris).

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Do the Authors on the Small Plates Follow a Pattern?](#) (Jacob 7:27)," *KnoWhy* 74 (April 8, 2016).

John W. Welch, "[The Father's Command to Keep Records in the Small Plates of Nephi](#)," *FARMS Preliminary Report* (September 1984), 1–12.

1 Nephi 7

Lehi's Sons Return to Get Ishmael and His Family. Could Laman and Lemuel and the Sons of Ishmael Have Ever Gone Back?

In the heading for Chapter Seven, it says that Nephi and his brothers "return to Jerusalem." However, Nephi specifically wrote that they returned to "the *land* of Jerusalem." It would have been unwise, if not unsafe, for them to go into the city itself. Like Lehi, it is unlikely that Ishmael lived in downtown Jerusalem. So, what was the "land of Jerusalem?" This might reference the entire Judah tribal area, which extended well beyond Jerusalem's city walls.

Why was Ishmael's family chosen to join Lehi and his family in the wilderness? When did one marry in Lehi's culture? Often when the children were very young, fathers put a contract together for the marriage of their children. In the case of Lehi's children marrying Ishmael's children, there may have been a previously established understanding. If not, Ishmael may have supported or had an interest in Lehi's calling as a prophet and trusted Lehi's sons when they came for his family. When Nephi and his brothers went back to get Ishmael's daughters, Ishmael seemed to know that something important had transpired, because they were all willing to go—the whole family.

Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael didn't make it far outside of the land of Jerusalem before they wanted to go back to the lives they had left behind. Nephi argued with them, "How could you forget? After all you have seen and experienced, you still lack faith?" And then, in his final argument he says,

"Now behold, I say unto you that if ye will return unto Jerusalem ye shall also perish with them. And now, *if ye have choice*, go up to the land, and remember the words which I speak unto you, that if ye go ye will also perish; for thus the Spirit of the Lord constraineth me that I should speak." (1 Nephi 7:15)

Did they have a choice? Even if they went back to Ishmael's estate, which is probably where the sons of Ishmael would have wanted to go, it wouldn't have been very safe. Jerusalem was becoming more and more dangerous. The people had animosity toward Laman and Lemuel's father, not to mention the fact that they were connected to Laban's death. Nephi essentially said, if you think you have a choice, then go. And they didn't go, so they must not have thought it was much of a choice either.

1 Nephi 7:22 — The Meaning Behind the Sacrifice Offered Upon the Safe Return of Lehi's Sons with Ishmael's Family

We see over and over again, every time they get back to the camp, they make sacrifices, Lehi and his family gives thanks unto the God of Israel. It's the first thing they do: acknowledge God in keeping them safe. What happens to a person who gives thanks immediately and genuinely?

There are often two focuses when we give thanks to God for a gift. One is to focus on how happy we are for the thing itself. "Thanks for giving *that* to me. I'm glad that you—God—were so kind as to do that for me." The other is in an attitude of praise, an acknowledgment of the kindness behind the gift. "You were wonderful to do that, thank you, I reverence you for that." Where, instead of saying, I'm so glad I got *it*, you are saying, *you* are so wonderful to *do* it. They are two sides of the same coin, but interestingly, in Greek and in Hebrew, the word to praise and the word to thank is the same. But in English, there is a difference, thanks and praise are not one and the same. We must pause and remember to worship, to revere God for our blessings, as we see Lehi and Sariah exemplify here.

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Could Lehi Offer Sacrifices Outside of Jerusalem? \(1 Nephi 7:22\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 9 (January 12, 2016).

1 NEPHI 8–10

John W. Welch Notes



1 Nephi 8

1 Nephi 8:1 — The Families Gather Seeds

Nephi reports that they gathered “all manner of seeds of every kind, both of grain of every kind, and also of the seeds of fruit of every kind.” (1 Nephi 8:1). In a way, as they are starting out on their own new beginning, these words hearken back to the beginnings in Genesis, where in the creation God provides every herb-bearing or fruit-yielding seed (see Genesis 1:29).

Lehi’s and Ishmael’s families knew that they were leaving their homeland and expected to be traveling for a long time. Wisely, they started putting together something of a seed bank, knowing that wherever they eventually settled, they would need to be able to plant seeds and harvest food to stay alive. This important endeavor likely occupied much of their time. How did they know where to find seed? Perhaps, they talked to caravanners passing by.

What kinds of seeds might there have been? From archaeobotany, it is possible to know a bit about what would grow in the area where they most likely camped (a river valley known as Wadi Tayyib al-Isim). Such foods as barley, dates, and olives were available there. They didn’t have a lot of food options compared to all that we have today. And they did not know yet where they would eventually end up. But, at a minimum, these seeds no doubt came in very handy for them as they continued to travel and camp for about a dozen years in various regions of the Arabian Peninsula.

I find it interesting that Nephi began this chapter about Lehi's vision of the Tree of Life by mentioning seeds. In the previous chapter, Lehi's party was rightly focused on ensuring their own posterity—or, in other words, their *seed*. And next they gather seed crop. You never know what will trigger a dream or a vision. The group had been caravanning now for several months. They would have been thinking a lot about seeds and about how each little seed, when planted and cared for, would grow into some kind of useful plant. Some seeds they gathered would eventually grow into wonderful trees that could bear fruit to keep them alive. At this time when the families were focused on seeds, plants, and trees, Lehi received a prophetic vision and was inspired with a deep understanding of the Tree of Life, the mission of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and eternal life.

We may also want to remember here Alma's discussion of the seed of faith in Alma 32. You plant the seed, you get faith as it grows, and you can know that it's a good seed, and so on. If you plant a mustard seed, you get a mustard tree. If you plant an olive seed, you get an olive tree. But if you plant the seed of faith in Christ and then nurture it as Alma describes in Alma 32, what does he say will grow up in you? "[I]t shall be a tree springing up unto eternal life" (v. 41)—in other words, a Tree of Life within you, bearing fruit "which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure" (v. 42). This is a reference to Lehi's vision, which evidently became a well-known revelation or religious symbol that endured throughout Nephite history (see 1 Nephi 8:11; 11:8; cf. 3 Nephi 19:25).

The symbolism of the Tree of Life in Lehi's dream is very powerful and attractive in our culture as well, inspiring artists from all over the world to capture its vivid imagery in paintings, sculptures, and other media. It is the most painted or sculpted single symbol and scene in the Book of Mormon.

Book of Mormon Central, "[Have the Valley of Lemuel and the River Laman Been Found?](#) (1 Nephi 2:6)," *KnoWhy* 286 (March 13, 2017).

"Fruits and grains are found growing naturally at Wadi Tayyib al-Isim (see 1 Nephi 8:1), and the wadi's sheer granite walls rising about 2000 ft. are among the most impressive in the region, easily invoking Lehi's description, 'firm and steadfast, and immovable' (1 Nephi 2:10). Most significantly, there was a small stream running through the wadi, and return visits made at various times of the year confirmed that water flowed in the stream throughout the year."



Figure 1 Tree of Life by Hannah Butler.

1 Nephi 8:6–7 — Lehi Follows the Angel

The greatest lesson we can learn from Lehi’s interaction with the angel is to trust the Lord. We need to acknowledge the Lord and trust in what He says. That’s all part of the greatest commandment—to love the Lord and trust in Him.

How many times do the words “invitation” or “invite” show up in the Book of Mormon? When Lehi stated that the Spirit *bade* me to follow him, it was an invitation. We don’t use the words “bade,” “bid,” or “beckon” very often. Was this beckoning of the Spirit a commandment? I believe that, in essence, it was. I think, in Lehi’s mind, he understood it as a commandment and

that he obediently followed. It helps to know that the Lord presents us with options and requests. However, the invitation may be the kind of option that you don’t want to turn down (truly an offer you can’t refuse).

To say that the Lord *commands* carries a lot of weight in the English language. However, I am not sure that in Lehi and in Nephi’s language they would have understood it quite that way. They had the word *mitzvah*. A *mitzvah* is a commandment, but when it says “thou shalt not kill,” the Hebrew reads more like “don’t kill,” “no killing.” The meaning is almost, “please don’t kill.” Yes, the words of the Lord are couched in an imperative form, but it is a negative. Similarly, in German, the expressions “nicht rauchen,” or “rauchen Sie nicht” mean “do not smoke, you had better not,” and you always need to look at the context of such statements to see how these invitations are being extended, what is immediately happening, and how will things move forward. In Lehi’s case, the Spirit “bade” him to follow. Lehi realized that there must be a choice in such matters, and that there was something more going on here than an order or command and the assumption that everybody *must* blindly follow.

Remember that the texture of the relationship between God and Lehi was very warm. Even though there would be undesirable consequences if Lehi didn’t follow the bidding

of the Lord, His gentle commands were all grounded in a loving relationship. After all, the tree that the Spirit is bidding Lehi to approach is a representation of the Love of God.

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Were Lehi and Nephi Guided by Angelic Escorts in Their Visions?](#) (1 Nephi 11:11)," *KnoWhy* 492 (December 11, 2018).

"One feature common to [apocalyptic visions], both Jewish and Christian, is the presence of a heavenly being who guides the recipient of a revelation through a visionary experience and interprets or clarifies what is being revealed. ... Angelic escorts appear in the visions of Lehi, Nephi, and their contemporaries because in those days the subjects of these revelations were not already familiar and self-evidently recognized even by the prophet"

1 Nephi 8:10 — World Views of the Tree of Life

Just about every culture and every religion recognizes, in some way, the importance of the Tree of Life. One of the best sources on this topic is a book called [The Tree of Life: From Eden to Eternity](#). The widespread presence of Tree of Life imagery may be the result of a distant collective memory of the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve's choice to partake of the fruit of knowledge of good and evil and their subsequent banishment from Eden and from the Tree of Life.

It also seems to be a universal cultural phenomenon that people create and recognize life-giving metaphors in relation to trees and the fruit of trees. The Tree of Life is a pervasive symbol of permanence, growth, fruitfulness, shade, and shelter. Furthermore, many trees lose their leaves in winter but come back to life again in the spring, which has led to them being seen as a symbol of death and resurrection.

In the Nag Hammadi Gnostic literature, in a text called [On the Origin of the World](#), we run across a description of the Tree of Life. Margaret Barker, a Methodist scholar of ancient temple symbolism and ceremony, was excited to read this early Gnostic Christian text, which says that the Tree of Life was of "immense height, coloured like the sun, with beautiful branches, leaves like a cypress and fruit like bunches of white grapes" (Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2003), 244; citing CG II.5.110). Early Christians believed that people could obtain purity, light, and powers over evil beings and destruction by approaching and eating the fruit of the Tree of Life.

The Ways of Life and Death

The Visionary Perception of Lehi and Nephi (1 Nephi 8; 11–15; 2 Nephi 31:17–32:5)

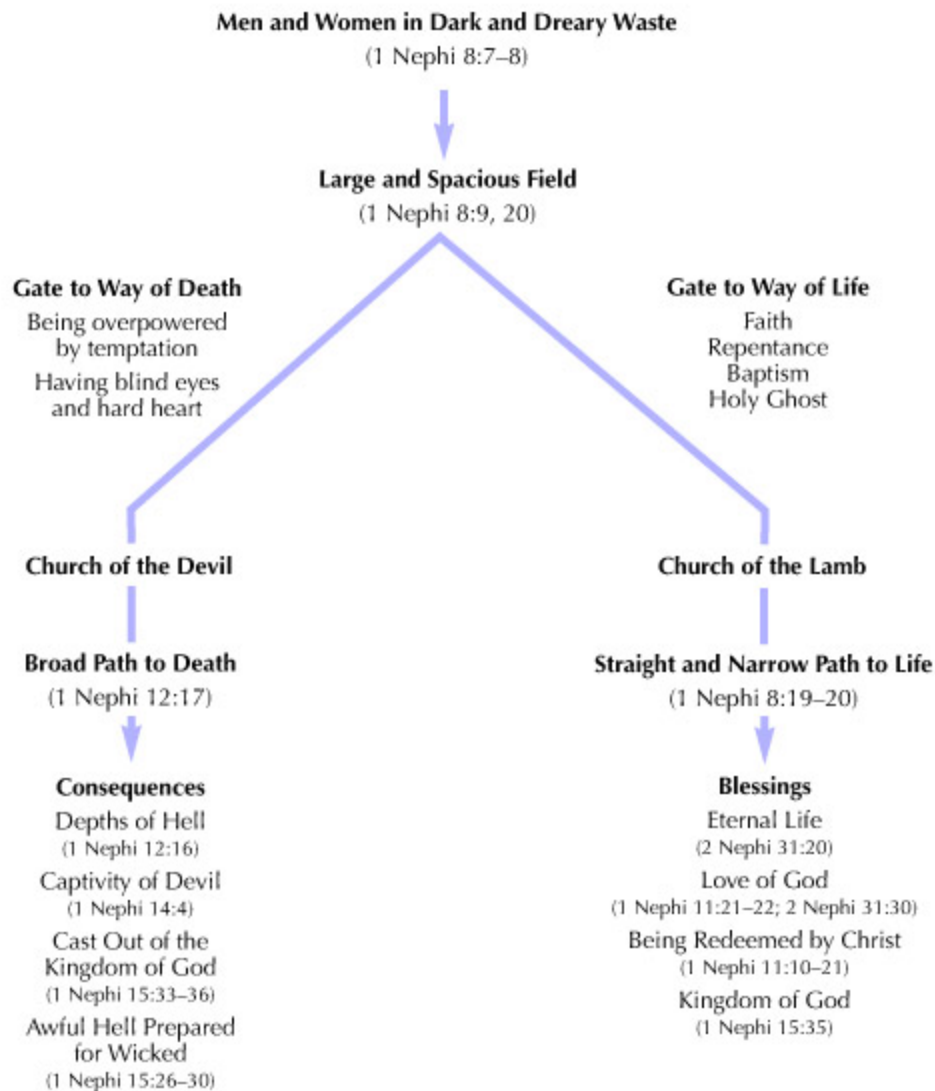


Figure 2 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *The Ways of Life and Death: The Visionary Perception of Lehi and Nephi*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999.

In the very first psalm in the book of Psalms an interesting polarity is found. Psalm 1:1–3 states, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water *For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.*” Here in the Psalms, we find one of the strongest early representations of what can be called “The Doctrine of the Two Ways,” or “The Ways of Life and Death.” (See Noel B. Reynolds, “[The Ancient Doctrine of the Two Ways](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2017): 49–78.)

Lehi’s dream, which also emphasizes this theme of divergent paths, can be seen as a spiritual fountainhead that influences later Book of Mormon thought. In succession, prophets such as Jacob, Abinadi, Alma the Elder and the Younger, and Mormon, draw heavily upon the imagery of living waters, which as Nephi explains (1 Nephi 11:25), is connected to the symbolism of the Tree of Life. (See Mack C. Stirling, “[The Way of Life and the Way of Death in the Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6 no. 2 (1997): 180–186). Lehi emphasized how blessed people are who will keep the law and the commandments, following the straight and narrow path to eternal life (See Figure 2). Seeing in his dream a complex scene of a tree planted in a garden next to a river, Lehi would have been reminded of powerful images coming from several religious and cultural directions.

Interestingly, when Alma the Younger uses the image of the “seed” in Alma 32, he assumes that his poor Zoramite audience is familiar with the basic concept of a tree being planted by a river of water. Notice that Alma explains that when you plant the seed which he wants you to plant in your heart, you’re not supposed to plant just any random seed. You must plant the seed of a basic belief in Christ—that He will be the Son of God, that He will come to redeem His people, that He will suffer and die to atone for their sins, that there will be a resurrection, and that you will be judged according to your works (Alma 33:22). Alma calls this set of beliefs “the word” or the seed, that if “ye shall plant” in your heart (Alma 33:23), it will grow in you unto “a tree springing up in you unto everlasting life,” becoming a tree in you bearing precious fruit that is white above all that is white and sweet above all that is sweet (Alma 32:42).

Thus, the message of Alma 32, which is talking all about faith and the seed of faith, builds upon Lehi’s dream of the Tree of Life. Alma’s message involves going forward with keeping the commandments, doing God’s bidding, and being diligent in cultivating, caring for, and protecting this tender plant of faith so that you yourself will become, in effect, a Tree of eternal Life in the garden of God’s paradisiacal glory.

Three Trees

in the Book of Mormon

Zenos's Olive Tree

The tame olive tree symbolizes the house of Israel as a whole. Groups or individuals are branches or leaves on this tree.

Collectively speaking, the Lord does all he can to save his vineyard and will redeem the house of Israel after grafting, or gathering, the branches of Israel together in the last days.

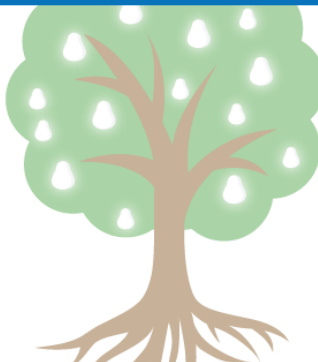


Jacob 5
The House of Israel
Collective Salvation

Lehi's Tree of Life

When Lehi was physically separated from the house of Israel, and knowing that salvation was not to be found in Jerusalem in his day, the focus of his view of salvation shifted.

Instead of focusing on collective salvation, he invited individuals to the Tree of Life. The fruit of the Tree of Life is Christ's Atonement, which leads to individual salvation.

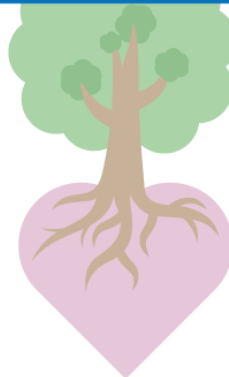


1 Nephi 8, 11
The Love of God
Blessedness

Alma's Tree of Righteousness

In Alma's pluralistic society, salvation was portrayed even more as a matter of individual choice.

Alma's tree symbolizes the personal righteousness that grows inside each individual who plants Christ's Atonement and God's Love in his or her heart.



Alma 5, 32
Personal
Righteousness
And Testimony

Figure 3 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Three Trees in the Book of Mormon* In *Charting the Book of Mormon*. Provo, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 1999.

Thus, the symbolic meaning of the great cosmic tree has migrated from being a national symbol in Zenos’s allegory in Jacob 5, to becoming a symbol of choice here in Lehi’s dream as he and his family face an either-or choice, and finally to being a representation of inward fruitful righteousness and personal testimony in Alma 32. The image of the tree of life bears a lot of weight and yields fruit in many ways (See Figure 3).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why We Still Have to Cling to the Iron Rod Even Though the Path is Strait](#) (1 Nephi 8:13–14),” *KnoWhy* 402 (January 25, 2018).

“The image of the people struggling uphill towards the tree of life is a fitting symbol for life on earth. At times, life may feel like an uphill climb, a desperate attempt to overcome the effects of the Fall and return to the Eden from which we have been cast out.”

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Fruit is White?](#) (1 Nephi 8:11),” *KnoWhy* 10 (January 13, 2016).

“The Book of Mormon’s description of white fruit adorning the Tree of Life may ... be seen as a symbol of something holy and sacred that should be freely picked and gladly eaten by all people who seek righteousness and eternal life.”

1 Nephi 8:11 – What Does it Mean to Partake of Something?

Lehi partook of the fruit of the tree. Linguistically, what does the word “partake” mean? If you *partake*, you become a participant, not just a taker of some kind. The word “partake” comes from the Latin *particeps*, meaning “participant,” and thus has a stronger meaning than just eating or taking a piece or a part of something. When you *partake* of something—as when you partake of the sacrament—you become a participant. It becomes part of you, and you become part of it yourself.

Mark D. Ogletree, “[‘That My Family Should Partake’](#),” *Religious Educator* 17, no. 1 (2016).

“Remember Lehi’s encounter with the tree of life? As soon as he partook of the fruit, his deepest desire was that his ‘family should partake of it also’ (1 Nephi 8:12). Lehi’s desire wasn’t to share his initial joy with neighbors or friends, or even fellow Saints. Foremost on his mind was his family; his desires were riveted on sharing his gospel knowledge with those he loved the most.” (p. 95)

1 Nephi 8:11 – Other Tree of Life Imagery

What other imagery could be likened to the brilliant whiteness of the fruit that Lehi saw in his vision? Lights, of course, are often white and bright. In the Holy Place of the tabernacle of Moses and later in the temple of Jerusalem stood a seven-branched candelabra or lampstand. It was lit not by wax candles but by oil lamps. It was the main

source of light in the tabernacle tent and the temple edifice. By standing back and looking at that seven-branched menorah or candelabra all lit up, one could make out the image of a tree—the world tree—with light that was bright, white, and beautiful. Margaret Barker (the Methodist scholar of ancient temple symbolism and ceremony, mentioned in the discussion under 1 Nephi 8:10, above) writes about the candelabra representing the Tree of Life. It is through the oil of sacred lamps that we can let our light shine in such a way that when people see our good works they will glorify, not us, but our Father who is in Heaven.

Kevin Christensen, "[The Temple, the Monarchy, and Wisdom: Lehi's World and the Scholarship of Margaret Barker](#)," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 449–522.

1 Nephi 8:13–18 — Lehi Beckons His Family to Partake of the Fruit of the Tree of Life

In his dream, Lehi looked around and saw his family. What were they doing? They were searching. Lehi observed that it looked like they were lost. As a good father, what did Lehi instinctively do? He beckoned them by calling out with a loud voice. Notice that Lehi did not go and get them. Even though they were confused and lost, he still required them to come to him and the tree. He beckoned; he did not force them to come. Sariah, Sam, and Nephi chose to follow the path and partake of the tree. He could not make Laman and Lemuel come to the tree, and they chose not to do so. But Lehi was there. He invited, and he did it with a loud, clear voice so they would not miss it.

If you or someone you love is lost, it is not the end of the story. Even those who have wandered off will be brought to the tree or given opportunities in the next life. The Lord continues to work with people as they exercise their agency, and He continues to beckon and do all He possibly can to try to lead them back on the righteous path of happiness. Brigham Young once said, "How long will this missionary work go on?" His answer was, "It will go on in the next life and it will continue and it will go on and on until every soul that possibly can be saved has been saved, and we are not going to be finished until we have reached that point."

Noel B. Reynolds, "[How 'Come unto Me' Fits into the Nephite Gospel](#)," *Religious Educator* 18, no. 2 (2017): 14–29.

"Returning to the metaphor of the gospel as the path or the way that leads to eternal life, with repentance and baptism providing the gate into that path, the invitation to *come unto me* appears to be addressed to those who have entered the path already as encouragement to stay on it or return to it—to follow the Spirit

that leads them back to the Lord, day by day, sanctifying them in the process.”
(p. 28)

1 Nephi 8:19 — What is Significant about an Iron Rod?

I was with Margaret Barker in Washington, DC for the commemoration at the Library of Congress of the bicentennial of the birth of Joseph Smith. The night before she was going to give her [talk](#), she was rereading 1 Nephi 8, and when she noticed the reference there to “an iron rod,” she thought of the Septuagint Greek translation of Psalm 2:9. The King James Version of Psalm 2:9, following the Hebrew, states that the king will *beat* or break his people with a rod of iron. But, one might well wonder, is this really what a good king would do to his people? Maybe, if he wanted to punish or reprimand them. But in this instance, the ancient Greek version of Psalm 2:9 reads, “He will *lead* his people with a *rod of iron*.” In the revelation given to Lehi, it is the iron rod that will lead us to the Tree of Life, which symbolizes the begotten Son, the King, and the Anointed One, mentioned in Psalm 2:2, 7. Indeed, for Lehi, the rod leads us to Him.

It is good that the narrow path has a rod of iron that can lead us, step by step, in the right direction. Along the way, we get rewards—we receive benefits. As you’re holding onto the rod, with the mist of darkness and the confusion all around, you can feel the stability of the rod. That’s a reward that helps you know that you are still on the right path. That kind of reinforcement applies not only to first-time investigators, but it still applies in my life and I assume it does so in yours as well.

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Are Rod and Sword Connected to the Word of God?](#) (1 Nephi 11:25),” *KnoWhy* 427 (April 24, 2018).

“In Nephi’s vision, the iron rod seems to function much like a shepherd’s staff—leading people to the Tree of Life just as a shepherd would use a ‘rod’ (Psalm 23:4) to lead his sheep to ‘green pastures’ and ‘still waters’ (v. 2). However, Nephi later quoted Isaiah’s prophecy that the Lord ‘shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked’ (2 Nephi 30:9; cf. Isaiah 11:4). Thus, the rod is used both as a symbol of loving guidance and of divine punishment in the Book of Mormon.”

Harold B. Lee, “[The Iron Rod](#),” *Ensign*, June 1971, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

“If there is any one thing most needed in this time of tumult and frustration, when men and women and youth and young adults are desperately seeking for answers to the problems which afflict mankind, it is an ‘iron rod’ as a safe guide along the straight path on the way to eternal life, amidst the strange and devious

roadways that would eventually lead to destruction and to the ruin of all that is ‘virtuous, lovely, or of good report’.”

1 Nephi 8:21 — Lehi Sees Multitudes of People Making Different Choices

The type of vision Lehi saw can be classified as an *archetypal vision*. The vision touches some of the basic principles that tell us who we are in this world, what kind of conditions we live in, and the choices we have to make. Sometimes we make mistakes. Nevertheless, the Lord is there for us, and He knows us inside and out. He has gone through everything that we ever will have to go through, and so He understands what we have done and why we chose to do wrong. In the process of repentance, when we make our commitment to Him that we are so, so sorry for what we have done, He helps us get over it, so that we can go forward and become whole again. I think Lehi understood that change is always possible and that is why he was so willing, to the very end of his life, to hold out hope that Laman and Lemuel would repent.

1 Nephi 8:24 — What Does it Mean to “Press” Forward?

The people who hold onto the iron rod don’t just amble along the path. They are *pressing forward*. Think of the hymn “Press Forward, Saints.” We kind of let that phrase glide past us. It’s got a nice, lyrical ring to it. However, in order to “press” forward, there must be something pushing back against you, while you are *pressing* with determination and strength against it—whatever it may be that is holding or keeping you back.

1 Nephi 8:30 — Those Who Partake of the Fruit and Stay

In verse 30, we learn of a third group of people who were not ashamed. They were the only ones who managed to stay at the tree and continue to partake of the fruit. What did they do that was different from the others? “They did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron.” They did not let go of the rod. I suppose that they were moving along by putting one hand over the other, not letting go for a minute—continually holding to the rod.

Moreover, when they finally made it to the tree, these people fell down. Why? Out of gratitude. That’s why. They actually fell down before they had even eaten the fruit. And so, there may be several other reasons why someone in this situation would fall down. They could be humbling themselves. “To fall down” in the ancient world meant literally “to bow down.” When someone came into the presence of a powerful person, he would prostrate himself on the ground in front of greatness. You see this in the Egyptian depictions of a person entering into the presence of pharaoh or one of the gods. In bowing down, the person did not just bow his head; he bowed his whole body and fell to the ground.

In the Beatitudes, when it says “blessed are the poor in spirit,” the phrasing can be understood as saying, “blessed are they who bow down themselves to the earth.” They are brought down and humbled. Maybe the people reaching the tree fell down for reasons of paying tribute or giving honor. Maybe they fell down out of exhaustion. They had completed a hard, long journey. Perhaps, they were overwhelmed by the entire experience at the tree and fell down for that reason.

Whatever the reason, their gratitude and humility made them different from the others who simply partook and then wandered off. These were the people who did not let it affect them when they looked around and saw other people mocking, ridiculing and scorning them. They did not pay any attention to the comments of other people in the great and spacious building. They had their testimonies. They were firm. And they were grateful to God.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did the People Fall Down at the Feet of Jesus?](#) (3 Nephi 11:17),” *KnoWhy* 202 (October 5, 2016).

“Thus by falling to the ground, those who worshiped Christ at Bountiful ritually signified that their bodies were created from the dust of the earth, that they were mortal and fallen, and that they were willingly humbling themselves in the presence of their Creator.”

1 Nephi 8:37–38 — Lehi Pleads with Laman and Lemuel

In the vision, Lehi pleads with Laman and Lemuel to keep the commandments. What does it mean to “keep” the commandments? One obvious definition would be to “obey.” But, what do you *do* when you *keep* something? You hold onto it. You treasure it. You can keep something when you protect it. You have to protect the commandments. In all these senses, we have to *keep* the commandments.

In ancient languages, the word “keep” often means to protect or to guard. You have to *guard* the commandments. You have to guard them for your own good, but you also have to guard them so that they do not slip into some kind of misunderstanding or errors in the way they are applied. I think after Nephi had done what he did to get the plates, he wanted to keep them. He did not want to lose those plates. And so, keeping the commandments means not only obeying them, but keeping them and preserving them and passing them on to the next generation.

Now what about our phrase “keeping at it?” Lehi’s dream helps you see that he was *keeping at* the commandments. This is not something you do once in your life. And, what about that iron rod? There was one group—the third group—that managed to get all the way to the tree. But what did they do? They did *cling* to the rod. I suppose they were

going hand over hand as they gripped the rod. They didn't let go with one hand in order to keep moving ahead. They kept in direct and constant contact with it.

There were some who were wandering in the darkness and, somehow, they bumped into the iron rod. They continued on the path and they got to the tree—this is the second group. We all pray and hope that we will cross the straight and narrow path as often as possible. Well, this second group looked around and felt ashamed. So, off they went. They did not keep clinging to the rod. They did not *keep* holding to it. *Tenacity* is an important part of our *keeping* the commandments.

Lehi clearly believed with all his heart that Laman and Lemuel had the opportunity to repent. Even though, at this point, Laman and Lemuel had rejected the tree and had rejected the path, Lehi did not believe that this was their fate. He still, with the tender pleadings of a loving father, continued to entreat them to come to the tree.

Finally, at a certain point, Lehi stopped talking. Maybe they had heard enough. That is a good parenting lesson as well.

Louis Midgley, "[To Remember and Keep: On the Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book](#)," in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 95–137.

“The Book of Mormon links remembrance with covenants and their renewals. Remembering means to keep the terms of the covenant between God and his people; it is faithful response to God’s commandments. At the same time, strictly keeping the commandments leads to remembering. Thus ... [l]ike the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Mormon uses the expressions *keep* and *remember* interchangeably.”

1 Nephi 9

1 Nephi 9:3–6 — For a Wise Purpose (see also Words of Mormon 1:6–7)

To fully understand the impact of these passages, one must be acquainted with how the Book of Mormon was translated by Joseph Smith. At what point in the translation process were the Small Plates of Nephi translated? At the end, the very end. After Joseph Smith completed the translation of the rest of the Book of Mormon, he found these plates (the Small Plates of Nephi) and translated them (See Figure 4).

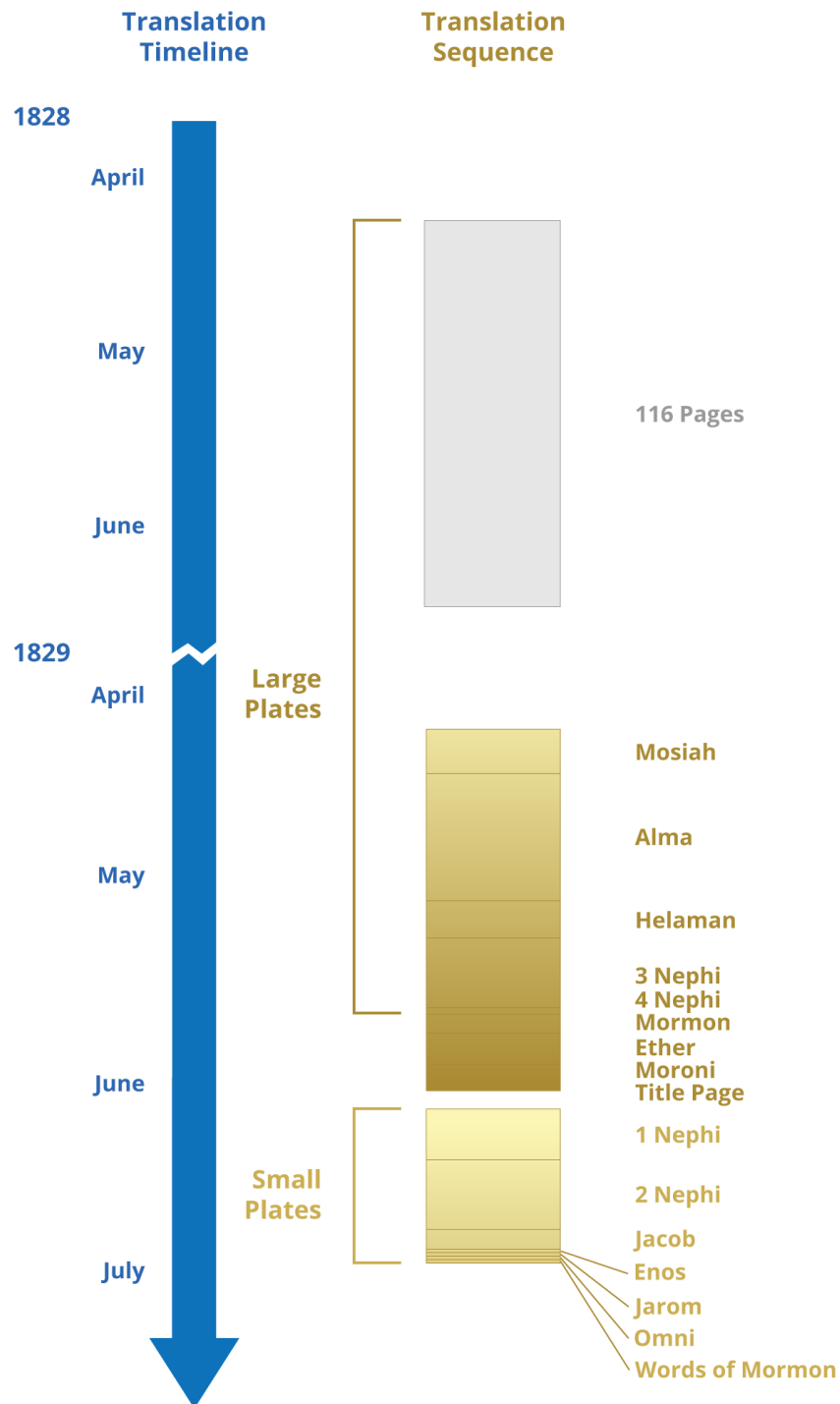


Figure 4 This chart depicts how after the 116 pages were lost, Joseph Smith translated from Mosiah to Moroni before returning to translate the small plates. Image by Book of Mormon Central.

Put yourself in the position of Joseph Smith. The first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon were lost and Joseph was devastated that he allowed that to happen. For a period of time, his gift to translate was taken away from him. Finally, Joseph was forgiven, but he was instructed to not go back and retranslate the 116 pages that had been lost. He was to start translating where he had left off when the translation process had been disrupted—which was early in the book of Mosiah. That is where Joseph Smith resumed the translation process. So, think about this: the whole time Joseph Smith was translating from Mosiah to Moroni, he was probably thinking about all the effort that Mormon had put into abridging the book of Lehi in the first part of the record and regretting that those who would read the Book of Mormon in modern times would not have those words of Lehi.

Imagine the joy that Joseph Smith felt when he finally got to the end of the plates and he read Mormon's words saying: "Hey, I am appending this record here. I do not know quite why, but the Spirit is whispering for me to do it."

We talk about God, His omniscience and all His knowledge. This very statement is made in Words of Mormon 1:6–7. God knew fourteen hundred years in advance that those 116 pages of manuscript would be lost. Maybe cutting his editorial teeth on that part of the record had served as a means for Mormon to perfect his editing style. Perhaps by the time he got to Mosiah, Mormon was doing really well with this task.

By having Nephi's own words, Mormon knew that we would have the benefit of hearing Nephi's voice at the beginning of the Small Plates, as what would have been a second witness to the words of Lehi. Nephi's words are beautiful. As we read the record of Nephi, we become aware that this was not a one-time journal that he was keeping. Nephi was writing other records and was instructed by the Lord to rewrite things. What we have in 1 Nephi is his final revision of several records. The record we have is something that Nephi labored over, and he got things beautifully and wonderfully correct. I am grateful to him for that, and in the end, it is a blessing from the Lord that we have it this way.

What about Mormon himself? Are you grateful to Mormon for what he did? Here was a young, 16-year-old general who was called to lead his people. He was able to look back on a civilization that he was very proud of. He was a long inheritor of a great tradition which he knew was going down. He was well aware of the prophecies as well as the spirit of the time and yet, in spite of everything he could do, he did not throw in the towel. He gave it his best shot. Mormon tells us that the people living in his time would not listen, but that he was going to leave a record that would influence the world

hundreds and thousands of years hence. What a courageous spirit it took for him to respond to challenges in that way.

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Does the 'Mosiah-First' Translation Sequence Strengthen Faith?](#) (Words of Mormon 1:5)," *KnoWhy* 503 (February 22, 2019).

"Besides making clear sense of the manuscript and historical data, this understanding of the translation sequence [Mosiah–Words of Mormon] also provides fascinating and somewhat unexpected evidence for the Book of Mormon's authenticity. This is because many passages from Mormon's abridgment of the Large Plates, as well as from the books of Mormon, Ether and Moroni, refer *back* to content from the Small Plates, even though the Small Plates hadn't even been translated yet!"

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Was on the Lost 116 Pages?](#) (1 Nephi 9:5)," *KnoWhy* 452 (July 24, 2018).

"Whatever challenges or setbacks we may suffer in our personal lives, we can ... trust that the Lord can compensate for our weaknesses and limitations. Sometimes, like Joseph Smith and Martin Harris, we may feel that 'all is lost.' Yet through the infinite power of Christ's Atonement, all that seems lost can be ultimately and miraculously restored."

1 Nephi 10

1 Nephi 10:4–10 — Lehi Prophecies of a Messiah

There is a prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:18 that the Lord would send another prophet like unto Moses, and to him shall ye listen. The book of Deuteronomy had been rediscovered and had become very influential when Lehi was a young man, probably still in his twenties. Lehi's own visions and prophecies about the coming of a divine figure even greater than Moses was corroborated by, and perhaps influenced by, this earlier writing in Deuteronomy. Lehi explained that a great number of prophets had testified that the Lord had promised to send a Messiah, and as they and Lehi had testified, that Messiah would be the Savior whom Lehi had seen in vision.

For insights regarding Lehi speaking of Jesus being baptized at Bethabara (1 Nephi 10:9–10), see:

Book of Mormon Central, "[Video: The special symbolism behind the place where Jesus Christ was baptized](#)," online at bookofmormoncentral.org.

On Nephi's desire to see, hear, and know the meaning of his father's visions (1 Nephi 10:17), watch for the upcoming discussion of the interpretive relationship between 1 Nephi 11–14 and 1 Nephi 8. In this regard, see:

Jared M. Halverson, "[Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision as Apocalyptic Literature](#)," in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision* (2011 Sperry Symposium), ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 53–69.

"A tree and a river, a building and a rod, mists of darkness and wandering multitudes—each element leaves inquisitive readers with a desire that echoes Nephi's—to 'know the interpretation thereof' (1 Nephi 11:11)."

1 NEPHI 11–15

John W. Welch Notes



1 Nephi 11

1 Nephi 11–14 — Overview: The Four Stages of Nephi's Prophetic Worldview

Nephi's vision, which stands at the center of the book of 1 Nephi, is four chapters long. It is a powerful and unforgettable prophetic statement. It clearly sees the future of the world, commencing from Nephi's moment in time, in four major stages:

Stage 1 foresees the coming to earth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God (Found in 1 Nephi 11).

Stage 2 laments the rejection of Christ by most of the people He lived with, visited, and taught, resulting in their being scattered (Found in 1 Nephi 12).

Stage 3 anticipates the role of the Gentiles in preserving parts of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and bringing the word of God to the remnant of scattered Israel (Found in 1 Nephi 13).

Stage 4 speaks of the restoration of the house of Israel and Christ's ultimate victory over the forces of evil (Found in 1 Nephi 14).

Nephi introduced these four stages in 1 Nephi 11–14. This same sequence will be repeated by Nephi in 1 Nephi 19–22 (See Figure 1).

Four Stages of the Nephite Prophetic View





Number	Stage	1 Nephi 11-14	1 Nephi 19-22
1	 Christ's Coming	1 Nephi 11	1 Nephi 19
2	 His rejection by the Jews and their scattering	1 Nephi 12	1 Nephi 20 (Isaiah 48)
3	 The day of the Gentiles	1 Nephi 13	1 Nephi 21 (Isaiah 49)
4	 The restoration of Israel and the ultimate victory of good over evil	1 Nephi 14	1 Nephi 22

Figure 1 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. “[Four Stages of the Nephite Prophetic View](#).” In *Charting the Book of Mormon*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999.

Indeed, Nephi will again use this same prophetic worldview as the underlying structure behind his teachings in 2 Nephi 25–30, and it will become the foundational framework within which Jacob, Abinadi, and several other Nephite writers will subsequently see the future of their world. I call this “the Nephite prophetic worldview.” Knowing this framework can help all readers in many ways. For example, it helps readers get through

the Isaiah chapters in the Book of Mormon, understanding why the Nephite writers used the particular chapters from Isaiah that they did.

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Vision Guides Nephi's Choice of Isaiah Chapters?](#) (2 Nephi 11:2)," *KnoWhy* 38 (February 22, 2016).

John W. Welch, "[Getting through Isaiah with the Help of the Nephite Prophetic View](#)," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 19–45.

1 Nephi 11–14 — Like Father, Like Son: Aspects of Lehi's Vision Repeated in Nephi's Vision

One of the most interesting things about Nephi's vision in 1 Nephi 11–14 is how subtly and how fully it relates to other prophecies given a few years earlier by his father Lehi. Nephi's vision closely builds on his father's visions in 1 Nephi 1 and also his father's dream of the Tree of Life in 1 Nephi 8, as one should expect it to. And why? Nephi's vision occurred because he wanted to know the meaning of all the things that his father had seen and taught. And consequently, Nephi's vision unfolds precisely that. Nephi saw, learned, and explained what his father had seen, revealed, and boldly testified. An attentive reader will see how aspects of Lehi's vision are repeated and amplified in Nephi's vision.

Indeed, in 1 Nephi 10:17, Nephi tells us that when he heard his father Lehi speaking about the things he had seen in his visions in 1 Nephi 1 and 8, Nephi wanted to "see, and hear, and know of these things" for himself. As he pondered these things, he was "caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain" (1 Nephi 11:1). Nephi later bore record that he indeed "saw the things which [his] father saw" (1 Nephi 14:29).

Astute readers can draw these connections. For example, in 1 Nephi 1:9, Lehi saw "One descending out of the midst of heaven," and in 1 Nephi 11:15–28 Nephi learns about the "condescension of [the Son of] God" (1 Nephi 11:16, 26). In 1 Nephi 8:10, Lehi sees a tree whose fruit is "*desirable*." Nephi similarly describes the Tree of Life as a representation of 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" (1 Nephi 11:22).

At least twenty-five elements in Lehi's vision will show up in Nephi's vision. They are fun to find. For example, there is a *great and spacious* building in Lehi's vision (1 Nephi 8:26, 31); this relates to the "*great and abominable* church" repeatedly mentioned in Nephi's vision (see 1 Nephi 13–14). There is a man dressed in a white robe leading Lehi (1 Nephi 8:5); for Nephi, this is the Spirit of the Lord who guides him (1 Nephi 11:11).

Lehi is taken to a “dark and dreary waste” (1 Nephi 8:7); Nephi first sees Jerusalem, and he knows that it is a dark and dreary place.

Lehi goes on to see the head of a river. Nephi will see a fountain of living waters—that fountain being Jesus Christ. Lehi will call out with a loud voice. At that point in Nephi’s vision, Nephi sees Christ with John, the apostle, crying out with a loud voice proclaiming the gospel. Later, Lehi sees that Laman and Lemuel will not come to partake of the fruit. Nephi similarly sees that people reject Christ. Lehi then sees numberless concourses of people, while Nephi sees multitudes like the sands of the sea (See Figure 2).

While reading the Book of Mormon, one is always looking for ways to know that it is true. One of the ways that we can know that this text is true is by noticing and appreciating the overall complexity of Nephi’s account. His vision works beautifully as an interpretive, deeper understanding of what Lehi saw, giving us confidence that there are two witnesses of this great story, justifying that we should be commandment keepers who hold steadfastly to the iron rod.

1 Nephi 11:1 — Desiring Knowledge, Nephi Is Carried Away into a Mountain

One may wonder: Did Nephi go up to an actual mountain or was he just taken there in spirit? Perhaps both. It may well be that as he pondered on his father’s visions and dreams, Nephi wanted to get away from the group’s base camp, and so he went into a nearby mountain or high place. It was common for Jesus to go to the mountains and there to pray and receive transfiguring manifestations.

Back in chapter 2, the Lord told Nephi that he would be a ruler and a teacher over his brothers (1 Nephi 2:22), and that word from the Lord was confirmed by the angel speaking to Nephi and his three brothers (1 Nephi 3:29). That calling would have weighed heavily on Nephi’s mind. So when he wanted to see what his father saw in vision, it was likely because Nephi knew that the Lord had called him to do something meaningful. Nephi testified, “I know that 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). How could Nephi accomplish the task of correctly ruling over his elder brothers without seeing what his father saw — without understanding that vision and prophetic perspective?

Nephi puts his account of this vision at the very center of his first book written on his small plates. There are twenty-two chapters in 1 Nephi, and the entire book appears to have been arranged as a chiasm, where elements in the first part of the book are reversed and then repeated in the second part (See Figure 3).

A Comparison of Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision



Lehi's Dream 1 Nephi 8	Reference	Nephi's Vision 1 Nephi 11-14	Reference
Dark and dreary wilderness	8:4	High mountain	11:1
Man dressed in white robe	8:5	Spirit speaks	11:2, 11
Man leads the way	8:6	Spirit's introductory questions	11:2
Man leaves (implied)	8:7-8	Spirit departs	11:12
Dark and dreary waste	8:7-8	Jerusalem	11:13
Prayer for mercy	8:8		
Large and spacious field	8:9		
Tree	8:10	Tree	11:7, 13-18, 20-25
Fruit desirable to make happy	8:10	Love of God most desirable	11:22
Fruit sweet and white above all	8:11	Virgin most beautiful and fair	11:15
Soul filled with joy	8:12	Carried away in the spirit	11:19
Desire to share with family	8:12		
Head of river near the tree	8:14	Fountain of living waters	11:25

(Continued on Next Page)

Call with loud voice	8:15	Christ, John, apostles preach	11:24–31
Come partake of fruit	8:15–16		
Laman, Lemuel do not partake	8:17–18	People reject Christ	11:32–33
Rod of iron	8:19	Rod of iron	11:25
Strait and narrow path	8:20	The apostles preach	11:34
Large and spacious field	8:20	Large and spacious building	11:35
Numberless concourses coming	8:21	Multitudes like sand	12:1
Mist of darkness	8:23	Mists of darkness	12:17
Lose their way and are lost	8:23	Broad roads and are lost	12:17
Others come to tree and partake	8:24	Four generations	12:10–12
River is a divider	8:26	Great gulf divideth them	12:18
Great and spacious building	8:26	Large and spacious building	12:18
Fine dress, mocking	8:27	Pride and vain imaginations	12:18
They fell away	8:28	The good are overpowered	12:19
[Break in Nephi's recitation]	8:29	War between seed	12:20–23
Other multitudes partake	8:30	Gentile nations	13:3
Great and spacious building	8:31	Great and abominable church	13:4–9
		Restoration of Lehi's seed through a great and marvelous work	13:10–14:7
Many drowned in the depths	8:32	Whore upon the waters	14:11
Many are lost in strange roads	8:32	Wars and chaos	14:16

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Figure 2 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "A Comparison of Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision." In *Charting the Book of Mormon*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999.

- A Lehi prophesies warnings of destruction to the Jews and foresees the mercy of God (Chapter 1)
- B Lehi's group departs from Jerusalem (2:2–15)
- C Nephi establishes himself over his brothers by obtaining the Plates of Brass (2:16–4:38)
 - D The sword of fine steel (4:9)
 - E Sariah's concern (5:1–9)
 - F The Plates of Brass as a guide (5:10–6:6)
 - G The sons of Lehi get the daughters of Ishmael and Ishmael joins the group (7:1–5, 22)
 - H Nephi bound with cords in the wilderness (7:6–21)
 - I Lehi's vision of the Tree of Life (8:1–38)
 - J Lehi prophesies about the Old World and about the coming of the Lamb (10:1–22)
 - K Nephi and the Spirit of the Lord (11:1–36)
 - J Nephi prophesies about the New World and the coming of the Lamb (12:1–14:30)
 - I Lehi's vision of the Tree of Life interpreted (15:1–36)
 - G The sons of Lehi marry the daughters of Ishmael and Ishmael dies (16:1–8, 34–35)
 - F The Brass Ball as a guide (16:9–17, 26–33)
 - D The bow of fine steel (16:18)
- C Nephi establishes himself over his brothers by building a ship (17:1–18:4) (3:7; cf. 17:3)
 - H Nephi bound with cords on the ship (18:11–16, 20–21)
 - E Sariah's afflictions (18:17–19)
- B Lehi's group arrives at the Promised Land (18:23–25)
- A Nephi prophesies concerning the fate of the Jews and concerning the mercy of the Lord unto the afflicted (chapters 19–22)

Figure 3 Chiastic Structure of 1 Nephi.

The central point of a chiasm usually contains its most important or pivotal concept. It is thus significant that chapter 11—the center point of First Nephi and its chiastic structure—contains Nephi's vision of the coming of the Lord, of the tree of life, of the iron rod, and the relation of various groups to the Tree of Life, which Nephi understands is a representation of the love of God as manifested by Jesus.

For Nephi, this was likely the most critical vision he ever received, and it proved foundational for him. It can be seen as a kind of Sacred Grove or Sacred Mountain experience for him. That kind of magnitude, allowing Nephi to understand things of the Spirit more fully and in a way that he had never experienced before, made this vision the focus of his first book.

1 Nephi 11:2 — The Spirit Questions Nephi about What He Desires

“What desirest thou?” Have you ever noticed in the New Testament, when the Lord is about to heal someone, He will ask them first what it is that they want from Him? The question “What desirest thou?” precedes the miracle, in Jesus’s day and still today. Nephi was specific in what he asked for. There is a lot to be learned just from how this vision unfolds. Not only was Nephi’s specific question answered, but much more was given, things that likely surprised him, which he had not previously even imagined. Also worth pondering is the possibility that if Nephi had not asked, we and the whole world might never have received the important interpretation and expansion of Lehi’s vision. Asking is important. But be prepared to give an answer to the question: What do you desire? What do you really desire?

1 Nephi 11:16 — The Condescension of God

To “descend” means to “come down.” “Condescend” means to come down “*with* or to a level *with* another.” Nephi saw the condescension of the Messiah on several different levels:

1. Jesus was born as a baby, just like everyone else.
2. He was also born into a lowly social station. Jesus could have been born into an aristocratic or royal family, with wealth and status. But no, He was born as lowly as possible.
3. Nephi saw the baptism of Jesus. What did Jesus condescend to by participating in the ordinance of baptism? He condescended to the Father’s will. He condescended to say, “I will be obedient, and I will submit myself to the will of the Father.” Baptism is a symbol of death followed by being raised to a new life. So, Jesus’ participation in the ordinance of baptism symbolized His willingness to submit to the will of the Father, even unto the point of death.
4. Nephi saw Jesus casting out evil spirits. Is that condescension? He was doing the dirty work, interacting with some pretty nasty folks. Jesus was even willing to deal with wicked, evil spirits. That’s condescension.
5. Following that, Nephi saw Jesus suffer, condescending to experience not just some pain, but pain to the fullest extent.
6. Next, Nephi was shown that Christ would die. That also is a type of condescension, going into the world of the dead, those who have died.
7. And finally, even after Christ was exalted, what did Nephi see Him do? Christ *came down* among the Nephites as a glorified being. What does that say? Even after Christ has overcome, when He could sit on His cloud of glory forever, He is still willing to descend again, and again, to care for those who will come unto Him.

1 Nephi 11:17 — “I Know That He Loveth His Children...”

In 1 Nephi 11:16, the Spirit asked, “Knowest thou the condescension of God?” Nephi answered, “I know that [God] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things” (v. 17). This was one of Elder Maxwell’s favorite verses. Isn’t that the crucial recognition—knowing that God loves His children? Everything else can wait. Even though we do not know the meaning of all things, as long as we know that the Lord loves us and is going to see that things will turn out right, we know what really matters. That is what will sustain us.

How do you deal with the fact that you do not know as much as you would like to know? Can you still be obedient even though you do not know everything? Did Nephi know everything after he had been taught by the Spirit of the Lord? No. Even after all that, revelations will yet continue in Nephi’s life, and so will it be with you.

1 Nephi 11:22 — How is the Tree of Life the Love of God?

Does the Book of Mormon answer the question, “What is the Tree of Life that Lehi saw?” What is this tree that the people are all pressing toward? In 1 Nephi 11:22, Nephi learns that it is a representation of the love of God. Not just the love of God in an abstract way, but the love of God who condescended and came down into this world that He might die for us. That love—that is what the Tree of Life represents.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Didn’t Nephi Mention Mary’s Name?](#) (1 Nephi 11:22),” *KnoWhy* 542 (December 24, 2019).

“What better way to emphasize God’s love than by drawing attention to Christ’s mother, who by the very meaning of her name was love personified and who brought forth the most desirable gift of God? It appears that by using the root meanings of Mary’s name, instead of the name itself, Nephi subtly drew attention to her divinely appointed role to bring forth and raise the Christ Child.”

1 Nephi 12

1 Nephi 12:17 — The Mists of Darkness

Is it important to have a testimony of the reality of Satan? Nephi was shown the doings of Satan many times throughout his vision. I think that it was important for Nephi to know the enemy that he was dealing with and would be dealing with. Nephi will later articulate the many devious ways of the Devil. In reading 2 Nephi 28, look back to what Nephi learned in 1 Nephi 12–14 about Satan’s tactics. Nephi knew the Enemy of all Righteous both by his vision and by his own experiences in life (See Figure 4).

The Ways of the Devil

2 Nephi 28:3–30

Tactic	Quotation	Verse
Misappropriation	"built up, and not unto the Lord"	3
Exclusivism	"I am the Lord's"	3
Disputation	"contend one with another"	4
Sophism	"teach with their learning"	4
Cynicism	"deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance"	4
Secularism	"deny the power of God"	5
Historicism	"the Redeemer hath done his work"	5
Empowerment	"he hath given his power unto men"	5
Skepticism	"believe it not"	6
Naturalism	"he is not a God of miracles"	6
Hedonism	"eat, drink, and be merry"	7
Fatalism	"tomorrow we die"	7
Cavalierism	"it shall be well with us"	7
Popularism	"many . . . shall say"	8
Appearances	"nevertheless, fear God"	8
Rationalizing	"justify in committing a little sin"	8
Criticism	"take the advantage of one because of his words"	8
Entrapment	"dig a pit for thy neighbor"	8
Legalism	"no harm in this"	8
Permissivism	"do all these things"	8
Leniency	"God will beat us with a few stripes"	8
Faddism	"many . . . shall teach after this manner"	9

Sensationalism	*false*	9
Egotism	*vain*	9
Imprudence	*foolish*	9
Arrogance	*puffed up in their hearts*	9
Self-Deception	*hide their counsels from the Lord*	9
Persecutionism	*blood of the saints shall cry*	10
Corruptionism	*they have become corrupted*	11
Oppressionism	*rob the poor*	13
Ostentationism	*because of their fine sanctuaries*	13
Narcissism	*their fine clothing*	13
Supremism	*persecute the meek and poor in heart*	13
Elitism	*stiff necks and high heads*	13
Immorality	*abominations and whoredoms*	14
Distortionism	*pervert the right way of the Lord*	15
Trivialism	*turn aside the just for a thing of naught*	16
Meanness	*revile against that which is good*	16
Dismissivism	*say that is of no worth*	16
Tantrumism	*rage in the hearts of the children*	20
Emotionalism	*anger against that which is good*	20
Mollifying Pacifism	*others will he pacify*	21
Materialism	*into carnal security*	21
Toadyism	*others he flattereth*	22
Relativism	*there is no hell*	22
Complacency	*wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion*	24
Secularism	*we need no more of the word of God*	29
Faithless Humanism	*putteth his trust in man*	30

Figure 4 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "The Ways of the Devil." In *Charting the Book of Mormon*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999.

1 Nephi 13

1 Nephi 13:7–8 — The Desires of the Great and Abominable Church

The church of the devil, in the apocalyptic view, is filled with those who are interested in money, power, prestige, and status. That was what Nephi saw and described. To an extent, we are all guilty of being influenced by that great and abominable church and must take heed.

1 Nephi 13:12 — Columbus Sails to the New World

We now know that Columbus described himself as being the one whose main mission was not to find gold and silver but, as we know because he quoted John 10 in his journal, he saw his main mission as to find "lost sheep somewhere." Columbus attributed his success to the Lord.

Grant Hardy, "[Columbus: By Faith or Reason?](#)" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 32–35.

Arnold K. Garr, [Christopher Columbus A Latter-Day Saint Perspective](#), ed. Arnold K. Garr (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992).

1 Nephi 13:26–28 — Plain and Precious Truths Would Be Taken from the Bible

How would this happen? In what order were things lost? Reading these verses carefully we learn what was lost first. The *gospel*—the basic principles of the gospel were lost first: "they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious" (1 Nephi 13:26). And once a basic knowledge of the Atonement and repentance was lost, what else was consequently lost? The Plan of Salvation.

And second, once a knowledge of the Plan of Salvation was lost, then "many covenants of the Lord" were lost (1 Nephi 13:26). The covenantal nature of baptism, the covenantal renewal in the sacrament, the covenant of marriage, and all other temple covenants were lost. With the understanding of covenants lost, so too was the oath and covenant of the priesthood. It is not as if a few, small, unimportant truths were lost. The very foundation of the gospel was somehow taken or fell away.

Third, once the very foundation of the gospel and its covenantal nature had disappeared, what was lost next? Only then were things "taken away from the book" (1

Nephi 13:28). With the foundation missing, the text and doctrine that was left needed to be justified and explained. Because of this, certain writings (like some texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls) were no longer seen as necessary, or became an embarrassment. For example, the Gospel of Barnabas (a very early Christian text) talks a lot about the physical resurrection of the Lord. That was standard doctrine until about the 3rd century, and then it became a point of contention. Why? Well it became a snag in the gospel fabric already made of tatters. If you believe that God is without a body and is now dwelling in the heavens, then you cannot have scripture that conflicts with that. You must take it out and remove it from the Bible. Things were removed and then even more was taken out to account for the holes. But often, the words of the Bible remained, but their meanings were shifted. Things can be taking out of an ancient text simply because their meanings are not preserved and become lost due to lack of memory when no one remembers what they originally meant.

Book of Mormon Central, "[Were Plain and Precious Doctrines Lost?](#) (1 Nephi 13:26)," *KnoWhy* 15 (January 20, 2016).

1 Nephi 13:35–36 — Nephi Sees Latter-day Scripture Come Forth

Do you feel Nephi's heart when you read these verses? Do you feel his compassion, his empathy and his grief in all the things that he sees? How do you think Nephi must have felt when he was then shown these records coming forth? He probably had many emotions—tremendous excitement, hope and joy. Perhaps, he felt relief. Nephi may have also felt a burden.

When Nephi began his record, he knew he was inspired to write for "a wise purpose," but he did not know the details. Now, in the midst of this grand vision, he learned a little more about the reasons for keeping a record of sacred things. There was so much at stake. There was a tender mercy for Nephi in this experience, for him to see what would be lost and to understand the scope of what he and his posterity must do.

In all of this, we see the love and omniscience of God. Remember that Nephi was shown this vision hundreds of years before Christ was born, before the events of the New Testament, and certainly before those plain and precious things would be lost over the centuries after Christ's death.

1 Nephi 13:38–39 — Other Books Will Come Forth

When Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, there had been no significant discoveries of ancient manuscripts. Joseph Smith was killed in June of 1844. In August of 1844, just two months after the Prophet's death, another young man, Constantin von Tischendorf, wandered out into the Sinai Peninsula and found his way to St. Catherine's

Monastery. There, Tischendorf discovered a full 4th Century Greek Bible which contained texts like the Gospel of Barnabas, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermas, as well as other texts that had not been seen for a long, long time. Subsequently, there came over the next years, an outpouring of ancient texts. Archaeologists went into Iraq and into Egypt and they started finding old records. People started looking in the Vatican and found manuscripts. It became a cottage industry, everybody looking to find ancient texts.

One British archeologist who was digging in Egypt in 1905, looking for gold and mummies, found a mummified crocodile (the Egyptians buried crocodiles) and then another crocodile, and another crocodile. He kept searching, expecting to find a human mummy. In disgust, as the leader of the expedition, picked up one of the crocodiles and threw it down on the ground, and it split open, revealing that someone had stuffed the crocodile full of wadded-up old papyri. To their surprise and joy, the archaeological expedition had discovered a whole trove of early manuscripts, some of which were Christian—for example, a fragment of the Gospel of John from the 2nd Century AD.

Later, other ancient manuscripts were discovered—The Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi Library, the texts from Ebla, and the texts from Ugarit. Hugh Nibley once called this unusual outpouring of ancient records “the peculiar blessing of our generation.”

Let me share a personal story to illustrate this point. During my time in law school at Duke University, I attended a class in the Duke Divinity School from James Charlesworth. He was a very prominent Dead Sea Scrolls scholar working at that time on a translation of Jewish and Christian texts from around the time of Christ that had never been translated and published in English. In this class, we were charged with reading a certain text. Charlesworth presented it as one of the most puzzling texts he had ever run across. His question was: Is it Christian or Jewish? He had no idea where it might have originated, because it was quite unlike anything else that he had ever seen. He explained to this seminar that it tells a story about a man named Zosimus who leaves Jerusalem. He goes out into the desert, wanders and gets lost in a big mist of darkness. He then arrives at the banks of a big ocean or river. He cannot move. He is afraid because he wants to know the way to a life of righteousness. He prays earnestly, and out of the mist he sees the branch of a tree emerging. He holds onto that branch firmly and the tree transports him across the ocean and sets him down in a lovely, beautiful place beneath a tree. He then notices that this tree has white fruit on it that is delicious, and out of the root of the tree is coming a sweet river of fluid. He drinks this and he feels like he has found a life of joy in paradise.

Then, a man walks up to him and says, “Zosimus, what are you doing here? How did you get here?” Zosimus answers, “I prayed and the Lord brought me here.” The man says, “Well, then it must be okay for me to tell you a little bit about who we are. We left Jerusalem at the time it was about to be destroyed by the Babylonians. The Lord brought us over here to this part of the world where we have preserved the way of righteousness. We have been keeping our records, and we have been told that someday these records will go back to Jerusalem. If you have been brought here by the Lord, then I can show these to you.” The text then has about six or seven paragraphs of what was read and what Zosimus was taught.

Zosimus is exuberant and joyous that he now has accomplished his mission. He is then taken back across the ocean and he goes back to Jerusalem. Zosimus’ dream finishes with him building a monument of covenant where he takes the texts and the things that he has learned.

Now you can just imagine: there I was in Charlesworth’s class as he was talking about this recently discovered record from around the time of Christ. Later, he said, “Jack, I thought you were levitating.” I replied, “Well, this may sound strange to you, but it sounded very familiar to me.” I quickly mentioned just a few of the ways the *Narrative of Zosimus* seemed to be a cousin to 1 Nephi. There were many striking similarities.

I was assigned to come back the next class period with a more extensive comparison, which was easy to do. I had mentioned the Book of Mormon on several occasions before in this class which had always been received with mocking and scorn. But when I finished, the class was silent and Charlesworth said, “Well class, as you are thinking about what to make of the *Narrative of Zosimus*, you might want to think about what to make of the Book of Mormon.” Then somebody asked, “Well, when was the Book of Mormon written?” And I answered, “it was translated in 1829 and published in 1830.” They then asked, “When was the narrative of Zosimus first found?” Charlesworth answered, “It was found in an old Slavonic text in Yugoslavia in 1880 and was first translated and published in Volume 10 of the Ante-Nicene Fathers in 1890. There is no way the Zosimus text was known to anyone before then.”

The class was now in an uproar. One of them joked, “Maybe Joseph Smith was a reincarnated Jewish Monk.” To which I answered, “I find it easier to believe the Moroni story than that.” But one smart-aleck classmate, who had always given me the most grief about the Book of Mormon, was the one who came up to me and asked, “Can I get a copy of that book?” I gave him one.

Later, when I met with Charlesworth in his office, he said, “I am beginning to understand why you are so drawn to these texts that I am interested in.” I replied, “Yes, and also because we have a prophecy in the Book of Mormon that says that other books would come forth.” “Really? Where?” he asked. I explained that the prophecy could be found in 1 Nephi, Chapter 13. Charlesworth jumped up and retrieved his copy of the Book of Mormon which was high on a high shelf, blew off the dust, and opened it up. I said, “Look in Verse 39.”

And after it had come forth unto them I beheld *other books*, which came forth by the power of the Lamb, from the Gentiles unto them, unto the convincing of the Gentiles and the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the Jews who were scattered upon all the face of the earth, that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true. (1 Nephi 13:39)

Charlesworth looked at that and asked, “When was *this* written?” I said, “Let’s see, that would have been about 550–540 BC.” He said, “No, no, remind me, when was this published? When did this appear in English?” I said, “This verse was probably translated in June of 1829 and published in March of 1830.” “That’s impossible! No one could have known—none of these books had been found at that time.” At that point Charlesworth stated, “You Mormons, you cannot believe that anymore. You have to *know* that it is true. You have seen it come to pass in your lifetime.”

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Were the ‘Other Records’ Nephi Saw in Vision?](#) (1 Nephi 13:39),” *KnoWhy* 376 (October 26, 2017).

John W. Welch, “[The Narrative of Zosimus and the Book of Mormon](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (1982): 311–332; revised and updated as “[The Narrative of Zosimus \(History of the Rechabites\) and the Book of Mormon](#),” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 323–374.

1 Nephi 14

1 Nephi 14:10 — What Are the Two Churches?

The use of the word “church,” in this context, can easily trip-up modern readers. The word “church” in ancient languages meant “assembly,” “company,” or “congregation.” Thus, in Greek, the word *ecclesia* (often translated as “church”) simply implied a gathering.

In Nephi's vision, we learn that there are two gatherings and that there are *only* two. You are either in the Church of the Lamb of God—the assemblage of the Lamb of God—or in the church/company of those aligned with Satan. We can't always tell who's on the Lord's side, who? It will ultimately be the justice of God that will finally separate all people into one of two groups in that last day. So it is not for us to say who will ultimately be in one group or the other. Nephi wrote chapter 14 with an apocalyptic view, which pertains to the end times and shows how things are going to *conclude*. In the end, there will be only two choices. You either are with the Lord or you are not.

What did Lehi see as the great and abominable church? Lehi called it the great and spacious building. Anybody in the great and spacious building who points fingers at and mocks those who are righteous is in the great and abominable building or church. The word "great" means "very." So, it is *very* abominable and *very* spacious. It is a big building filled with a large crowd.

In contrast, what did Nephi say about the gathering of the righteous? "And I saw that they were few." This is true. There may be more than 16 million people who are members of the Church today, and we are happy for it. But 16 million is a drop in the bucket when compared to the entire world population. That is not to say that a little leaven cannot leaven the entire loaf, or a little salt cannot season an entire pot of stew. But the word few still tells us something about the demographics of righteousness.

Book of Mormon Central, "[Are There Really Only Two Churches?](#) (1 Nephi 14:10)," *KnoWhy* 16 (January 21, 2016).

1 Nephi 14:13–14 — Persecuted Saints Receive Power through Christ

Verse 13 speaks of multitudes fighting against the Lamb of God. Have we not seen Christians and others horrifically massacred throughout history? Yet I believe that verse 14 is the most hopeful verse from Nephi's vision. It shows that the power of God is something that the Saints can count on. This must have been a comfort to Nephi. After he saw this horrible evil and wickedness, Nephi saw little pockets of saints—people who were trying to follow Christ and were blessed with power.

1 Nephi 14:25–28 — John the Apostle Will Write the Rest of the Vision

Finally, there is a lesson in the fact that Nephi was commanded not to write everything that he had seen in his vision. There were things left for John the Apostle to explain centuries later. The Lord directed Nephi to record the vision up to a point. Then, it became someone else's responsibility. It is interesting to think that we each have specific responsibilities, duties, or callings. We should not overstep our bounds. We are allotted

a particular responsibility, and then we must trust that the Lord will call another to finish the task.

Jasmin Gimenez Rappleye, "[How Nephi and the Tree of Life can help you make sense of the Book of Revelation](#)," Book of Mormon Central (Blog), December 10, 2019.



Figure 5 *The Apocalypse of Saint John the Evangelist on the Island of Patmos* by Jan Matsys, 1563. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

1 Nephi 15

1 Nephi 15:1–10 — Have Ye Inquired of the Lord?

At the opening of 1 Nephi 15, after Nephi returned from having his vision, he found his brothers “disputing one with another” about what Lehi had told them. Nephi was exhausted. He had just seen the destruction of his people, and was overwhelmed at the great Plan of Redemption that he had just witnessed. And now he returned to see his brothers arguing.

Remember what he asked them? “Have ye inquired of the Lord?” (v. 8). And what was their response? “We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us” (v. 9). This answer probably left Nephi utterly flabbergasted. How could they possibly not understand that they could ask the Lord and receive the information they needed? Of course the Lord would talk to Laman and Lemuel! But they were not obedient. They were hard-hearted, quick to anger, and filled with doubt. Their wickedness was like a degenerative disease that became worse and worse until there was nothing but emptiness and cynicism left in their hearts. But Nephi saw that this could have been a turning point for them, so he encouraged them to pray and learn for themselves.

As human beings, we all know the general result we want. Most of us want good outcomes as often as possible. What we lack, more often than not, is the understanding of how to get from where we are now to where we want to be. Because the path is unclear, we end up disagreeing about the means and methods to employ to get where we want to go. We disagree on what the consequences might be if we employ “Method A” or “Method B.” Laman and Lemuel likely wanted a similar outcome as Nephi and Lehi—to inherit a good land, to have security in their families, and to live successful lives. However, I do not think they were on board with exactly what needed to be done along the way and what the end results should specifically look like. They certainly had their disagreements about the methods that they would use, some of which were founded in their cultural experience. When they said, “the Lord does not reveal those things to us,” it’s not that they necessarily thought He wouldn’t reveal those things to them at all, but maybe they did not see themselves as recipients of revelation. Within the cultural context of Laman and Lemuel’s world, the high priest of the temple or certain prophets like Moses or Isaiah received revelation. Perhaps they were saying, “the high priest can go into the Holy of Holies and receive revelation, but that’s not our job.” What they were missing, of course, was the reality and importance of individual, personal revelation.

Now, what about you? When was the last time in your prayers you said, “Heavenly Father, teach me something?” We spend a lot of time with the Lord saying, “please bless...,” “thank you for...,” “I’m worried about my children...,” or “help me find a job.” All these things are completely fine in prayers. However, Nephi was a great example. He prayed for his people, for his family, and for his own grace. He prayed for all of those same things we do, *but* he also said, “Heavenly Father, please teach me something. Please help me understand something better.” I think the Lord expects us to do that. He is very generous with answers to those kinds of questions. As we develop that attitude—the attitude of “please help me understand something about the gospel better”—we will have more light to live by, more light to help us understand pros and

cons. The Lord wants and needs us to have more light. He needs us to shine brighter than ever before.

Book of Mormon Central, "[Acquiring Spiritual Knowledge: Act in Faith](#) (1 Nephi 2:16)," *KnoWhy* 260 (January 11, 2017).

1 Nephi 15:30 – The Justice of God

Nephi said that his father Lehi saw the "justice of God." When did Lehi see the justice of God? It is never mentioned specifically in any text from Lehi that we have. But perhaps all that Lehi saw in vision or in dream was a depiction of God's justice— the way in which God will separate the righteous from the wicked. In the dream there was a gulf and there were mists of darkness. People were either under the tree or they were heading to or living it up in the great and spacious building. Such a *division* is, in essence, the way in which ancient people thought of justice.

What symbol do we often use to depict justice? Two pans on a scale. When the scales are balanced, with compensation given to offset damages, we see justice as having been achieved. Somehow, the scales end in equilibrium. In the modern world, we also see justice as being blind. That is why we put a blindfold on Lady Justice.

But in the ancient world, there were no blindfolds associated with the idea of justice. Justice stood with eyes wide open. Justice was a respecter of persons. One's character mattered. Indeed, the symbol of justice in the Book of Mormon and in the Bible is not the scales, but the sword. What does a sword do? The sword divides, it cuts asunder. Justice divides the sheep from the goats. It divides the righteous from the wicked. Even though the sword is not mentioned anywhere in accounts of Lehi's visions (maybe it was present in the lost Book of Lehi on the 116 pages), the sword, in any event, would surely have been there in Lehi's understanding of God's justice.

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Are Rod and Sword Connected to the Word of God?](#) (1 Nephi 11:25)," *KnoWhy* 427 (April 24, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, "[What was the Great and Terrible Gulf in Lehi's Dream?](#) (1 Nephi 12:18)," *KnoWhy* 14 (January 19, 2016).

1 Nephi 15:33–36 – The Wicked Will Be Cast into Hell

There's a wonderful concluding section at the end of chapter 15, in which Nephi wrote about justice and how we will all stand to be judged according to our works and be rewarded with eternal blessings. That is when he said,

... and if their works have been filthiness they must needs be filthy; and if they be filthy it must needs be that they cannot dwell in the kingdom of God; if so, the

kingdom of God must be filthy also. But behold, I say unto you, the kingdom of God is not filthy, and there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God; wherefore there must needs be a place of filthiness prepared for that which is filthy. (vv. 33–34)

This is not to say that a human being can be considered trash. But filthiness (or impurity) are consequences of choices made, and were of great concern to the Israelites. Nephi, who lived under and respected the Law of Moses, would have been particularly concerned about what would be done to purify or deal with the impurities that are natural consequences of sinful behavior or even unconsciously coming into contact with anything that was impure.

Nephi explained that impurity will be discarded and put into what he called “hell,” behind which word may have been *Gehenna* (the Hebrew word often translated as “hell”). *Gehenna* was the valley just south of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and that *Gehenna* was the city garbage dump. At that time, there were a lot of animals in Jerusalem, and *Gehenna*, being the lowest part of the Jerusalem area, was where the people would sweep out all the dung, manure and garbage. That was *Gehenna*, and so, understandably, *Gehenna* was hell. Moreover, there were a lot of things burned in the dump. So, *Gehenna* was a place of trash and burning fires. It was a place of unpleasantness—the flaming fires of justice. That was the image of the burning and purification of filthiness which may well have stood behind what Nephi was describing. Here, again, we have an example of Lehi providing us the principle and Nephi going into greater detail in giving us the explanation.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Do the Scriptures Compare Hell to an Unquenchable Fire?](#) (Mosiah 2:38),” *KnoWhy* 81 (April 19, 2016).

1 NEPHI 16–22

John W. Welch Notes



1 Nephi 16

1 Nephi 16:2–5 — How to Keep the Commandments

Nephi's brothers, unwilling to listen to what he has told them, complained that he had "declared unto us hard things, more than we are able to bear" (1 Nephi 16:1). In essence, Nephi said back to them, "Well, the guilty take the truth to be hard, so it is not surprising that you think these are hard to bear." It cut them to the very center. But then Nephi got more positive. Obviously, he had diagnosed their problem, which is that most people who are in some kind of spiritual duress already know that they are in that state, and do not want to be told how hard-hearted they are.

Nephi gave them three very helpful steps. He began, "Now my brethren..." Nephi was shifting his tone away from a warning and condemning tone. "Now my brethren, if ye were righteous and were willing to hearken to the truth, and give heed unto it, that ye might walk uprightly before God, then ye would not murmur because of the truth" (1 Nephi 16:3). This statement can be broken down into the following three components:

1. **Hearken to the Truth:** To hearken means more than just to listen. It also means "to obey."
2. **Give Heed to the Truth:** To heed something is to give diligent and meticulous attention to it. Perhaps it involves the semantic notion of heeding instructions because there are consequences if you do not. A servant *heeds* the master.
3. **Walk Uprightly:** When we are obedient, we are confident and walk uprightly, knowing that we are righteous and that the Lord knows we are righteous. We have confidence that we are in good standing. The footnote points to "walking

with God” in the Topical Guide. There is the idea of the “daily walk” (see D&C 19:32), meaning letting our daily walk be righteous. The Psalms often talk about how we may walk with the Lord that He may be our constant companion (see, for example, Psalms 84:11; 86:11; 89:15; 119:1). Wherever we go, He can go with us. Our daily walk should be righteous, should be good. Thus, it is not only a matter of knowing the truth, but of doing, and of adhering to a pattern or habit in which we characteristically walk in this way. We do not wander around; we *walk with God*.

Nephi gave us all here a formula for success, a way in which we can help ourselves and others to avoid ending up where Laman and Lemuel did.

Further Reading

Matthew L. Bowen, “‘If Ye Will Hearken’: Lehi’s Rhetorical Wordplay on Ishmael in 2 Nephi 1:28–29 and Its Implications,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 25 (2017): 157–189.

1 Nephi 16:7–8 — Lehi’s Sons Marry Ishmael’s Daughters

Nephi mentioned himself first, which is appropriate: “It came to pass that I, Nephi, took one of the daughters of Ishmael to wife” (1 Nephi 16:7). It sounds as though he chose one of them. More likely though, is that Lehi and Ishmael had already figured out who was going to go with whom, and Nephi married the daughter that he was told to take. Recall that in 1 Nephi 7:19 there was one of the daughters of Ishmael who objected when Nephi was tied up. We may hope that this daughter was the one that Nephi deserved. We do not know that, though. It would have been nice if Nephi and his wife had some say in the matter and if Nephi had said more about it.

Nephi explained that his “brethren took of the daughters of Ishmael to wife; and Zoram took the eldest daughter of Ishmael to wife” (1 Nephi 16:7). Zoram is probably the oldest, so it makes some sense that he would marry Ishmael’s eldest daughter. But think about verse 8: “and thus my father had fulfilled all the commandments of the Lord which had been given unto him.” What commandment was Nephi referring to? This surely refers, at least in part, to 1 Nephi 7:1, where the Lord commanded Lehi’s sons to “take daughters to wife, that they might raise up seed unto the Lord in the land of promise.” In addition, it was a general responsibility of fathers in the ancient world to see that their children were married.

How might this story pertain to us today? Do we as parents or grandparents have any kind of obligation to help our children get married? Or can we just sit back and say, “Well, we have this 32-year-old son who likes playing his video games, and that is

okay.” What does the Doctrine and Covenants say about baptism? What does it say that parents need to do regarding that ordinance? It says that our children should all be baptized (see D&C 18:42; 68:27–28). And what happens if parents fail to teach that doctrine? “The sin be upon the head of the parents” (see D&C 68:25; cf. 93:40, 50).

Obviously, helping children keep *any* of the commandments, especially those involving entering into covenants, is part of a parent’s obligation. Parental responsibility involves helping our children choose good companions. To the best of our ability, we should see that they are raised around other children whose values are the same; hopefully that is what they will look for in a mate.

In our day, it has to be our children’s choice. We have responsibility to see that children are baptized, but they still have the choice. They must have “arrived at the years of accountability” (D&C 68:42), indicating that we ought not to take away their agency. The same principle even more strongly applies to the decision of whom they will marry and when.

In his conclusion of this segment, at the end of verse 8, Nephi says, “And also, I Nephi had been blessed of the Lord exceedingly.” That was his comment about his state of marriage. He saw it as a state of great blessedness. I think it is important for us to be a good example, and to talk positively about marriage and the blessings it can bring.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can the Book of Mormon Strengthen Marriages and Families?](#) (Jacob 3:7),” *KnoWhy* 302 (April 19, 2017).

John L. Sorenson, “[The Composition of Lehi’s Family](#),” in *Nephite Culture and Society: Collected Papers* (Salt Lake City, UT: New Sage Books, 1997), 1–24.

1 Nephi 16:12–13 — Lehi Knows How to Travel in the Wilderness

We do not know exactly what sort of caravanning Lehi might have done. He seems to have known how to get around in the wilderness. When he packed up his tents, it does not say that he had to first go and obtain tents, so he apparently had tents. Why would he own tents if he was not somehow involved in the caravan trade? He understands Egyptian too. Probably, at least some of the time, he went back and forth between Egypt and Judea. What might he have taken back and forth? Usually merchants took whatever was produced in one area to another location to sell it. They would then bring back something that was not available at home and sell it there

There is good reason to believe, as we have seen recent scholarship information about the mines of Timna, that Lehi might have picked up metal ore, and then carried it up to

blacksmiths who would have used it for making things like tools, weapons, or cooking tripods. He might have even been in the blacksmith's business himself. There was a very close connection in the ancient world between caravanners and blacksmiths because not only would someone have to travel to places where ore was available, but that person would have to have known which ore would have been most useful to him. Was that how Nephi knew how to make the plates? He had to be shown by the Lord how to build a ship, but he did not have to be told how to make tools, suggesting he already had some knowledge of blacksmithing.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Did Ancient Israelites Write in Egyptian?](#) (1 Nephi 1:2)," *KnoWhy* 4 (January 5, 2016).

Neal Rappleye, "[Lehi the Smelter: New Light on Lehi's Profession](#)," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scripture* 14 (2015): 223–225.

John A. Tvedtnes, "[Was Lehi a Caravaneer?](#)" in *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar*, 1st ed. (Salt Lake City, UT: Cornerstone Publishing, 1999), 76–98.

1 Nephi 16:23 — Nephi Asks His Father Where to Hunt

At the end of verse 20, Nephi mentioned how his father—even his father!—began to “murmur against the Lord his God,” and shortly afterwards Nephi made a new bow. Nephi did not sit and complain; he just went to work. However, he first went to his father, even though his father had murmured against the Lord. Nephi asked Lehi—it being the proper order of things in families then for children to honor their parents—where he should go to obtain food (v. 23). Nephi could have sought for such a revelation himself, and he may have known perfectly well where to go. But he showed respect to his father, giving him a chance to lead again in righteousness. What a great lesson this is for all of us of all ages.

There is always some subtext involved in Nephi's selection of subject matter in 1 Nephi, as he consistently strove to establish that he was the proper successor to his father's priesthood, prophetic stature, and paternal authority over the family. Nephi always succeeded where his brothers failed, and of course, his brothers liked to rub that in any time Nephi appeared to be falling short. It should be remembered that Nephi was writing all of this after his people had separated from Laman and Lemuel and their followers. The Nephites had fled up into the land where they built the city of Nephi. Nephi's people had made him their king. They had built a temple. They had the brass plates, the Liahona, and the sword of Laban. When telling his story, Nephi wanted his people to know that he was the legitimate leader, and that he knew the will of the Lord.

He was not trying to be boastful. He just wanted to instill confidence in his people so that they would follow him as their appointed ruler.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Nephi Include the Story of the Broken Bow? \(1 Nephi 16:23\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 421 (April 3, 2018).

1 Nephi 16:23 — Nephi Uses Sonship Names for Christ

In his writings, Nephi uses ten names for Christ that no one else uses. This list provides an interesting reflection of his religious sensitivities. For example, Nephi calls Jesus “the Son of the Most High God,” “the Son of the Everlasting Father,” “the Son of Righteousness,” “the Beloved Son,” “the Very God of Israel” and “the Mighty One of Israel.” Here is a whole cluster of *son* names that only Nephi uses, in all the Book of Mormon. I have wondered if this use of *son* names is because Nephi had a unique understanding of what it means to be an obedient son, to show ultimate respect to his father. He has been there and done that, and so he would have appreciated, of all things, the son-ship of Jesus Christ. Even though Jesus was a God and had descended from heaven, He still was an obedient son.

In contrast, when Benjamin talked about the Messiah, he refers to the “Heavenly King.” He calls him “the Lord God Omnipotent.” Well, who was Benjamin? He saw himself predominantly as a king. So naturally, he would see attributes of kingship much more readily because they were personally meaningful to him. While Nephi also was a king, he was a reluctant king. He was prepared to do what he could to help his people, but he was not eager to extend himself into the mold of ancient demi-god kings. Instead, I see the element of son-ship going deep into the heart of Nephi, into his spirit, his soul, and his very being.

I wonder what it would be like to have some of these Nephite prophets come and speak at a BYU Devotional? How would you describe some of these men if you were asked to introduce them to an audience of 20,000? More than that, how might they introduce themselves? I thought in particular of how Nephi might introduce himself. “I Nephi, having been born of goodly parents,” he would have said, “I am the *son* of Lehi.” That was who he was. I think we see this coming through in the story of the broken bow, even when his father was in a weakened position and his faith was pushed to the limit. Nephi was still there, the faithful son.

Further Reading

John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, “Names Used for Christ by Major Book of Mormon Authors” in *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 44.

1 Nephi 16:26–29 — How Did the Liahona Work?

Interestingly, this first recorded use of the Liahona was not a case of its being used to help Lehi’s family learn the direction in which they should travel, but rather to help them find food. The Liahona should serve us, therefore, as a life-sustaining symbol, not just as a direction-giving instrument. It symbolizes the Lord’s willingness to direct us towards physical and spiritual sustenance or nourishment. Yet, if harmony and peace are absent, the Spirit of the Lord and this instrument cannot function.

Recall the time when Joseph Smith was translating the Book of Mormon and quarreled with Emma about a domestic matter. Without making any effort to repair their relationship, Joseph attempted to resume the translation, but the words of the Book of Mormon would not appear on his translation device. He had to retire to the woods in prayer for about an hour and then seek for Emma’s forgiveness before he was able to translate again. The main point is that the Liahona was used for more than just helping wandering travelers stay on the right path. It functioned as a multi-purpose revelatory device. And just like Joseph Smith’s *Urim and Thummim*, the Liahona only worked when those using it were sufficiently worthy. Likewise, we must have peace and harmony for the Spirit to fully function in our lives (see Alma 37:41–47).

Also, some writing appeared on the Liahona, which could change from time to time (1 Nephi 16:29), but we do not know exactly how it appeared or functioned. In some ways, it may have been like the biblical *Urim and Thummim*. Those are plural words which, in the Hebrew text of the Bible, appropriately translate as *lights* and *perfections* (or *truths*). People later described the Urim and Thummim as twelve stones. These stones were worn on the breastplate of the high priest. These stones reportedly had letters on them. Some people have speculated that the stones could be cast, like rolling dice, and the resulting words or messages that appeared would then provide a way for the Lord to send messages to the high priest or to his people. Unfortunately, we have little direct evidence for how the Urim and Thummim functioned. But such traditional understandings do somewhat connect this ancient Israelite relic with the Liahona, which similarly featured divinely revealed words or letters on spindles that somehow moved around. Remember that vowels were not written out in ancient Hebrew, so just a few consonants could make up a variety of divinely revealed words or sentences that would need to be interpreted.

In any event, 1 Nephi 16:29 states, “And there was also written upon them a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord; and it was written and changed from time to time.” It probably said more than just *here is where you are to go*. It was probably not just a matter of teaching people to have *the right attitude about this*. It gave instructions that were meant to teach and to give them further “understanding of the ways of the Lord,” as when angels appear to give further light and knowledge.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Were Joseph Smith’s Translation Instruments Like the Israelite Urim and Thummim?](#) (Alma 37:24),” *KnoWhy* 417 (March 20, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Were the Three Witnesses Shown the Liahona?](#) (Alma 37:38),” *KnoWhy* 405 (February 6, 2018).

1 Nephi 16:34 — Ishmael Dies at Nahom

Ishmael died and was buried at a place that Nephi says “was called Nahom”—suggesting it already had a name. A location with a similar name has been located in Yemen, right on the path that Lehi and his party seems to have been following. Much has been written about this solid archaeological evidence that now confirms that this place indeed “was called NHM” (variously rendered in English as Nahm, Nehem, and Nehm) dating back as far as the 8th century BC. This is widely recognized as strong archaeological corroboration of this detail in Nephi’s account.

But, more than that, how are you affected by the account that Nephi gives surrounding the death of Ishmael, Nephi’s father-in-law? What pathos! Imagine the emotions. The remarkable film, [Journey of Faith](#), shows the agony of burying someone and leaving them on the trail. Many Latter-day Saints have pioneer ancestors who suffered similar experiences, burying loved ones in shallow graves and knowing that their bodies would probably not be left in peace. How painful that must have been, knowing you had to move on, with the hardships of the heat, uncertainty, and dangers of many kinds. So, think of the hardships endured by Lehi and his party. A lot of you are going through hard times in your life and in your families. Does it help you to know that there was a land of fruit and honey (which they called Bountiful) at the end of that hardship; that the Lord knew where He was taking these people; that they followed; and that they were in the hand of the Lord, trusting that He would watch over them however things would turn out? By small means the Lord provides those things that we need the most. Too often we overlook the little things.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Who Called Ishmael's Burial Place Nahom?](#) (1 Nephi 16:34)," *KnoWhy* 19 (January 26, 2016).

Warren P. Aston, "[A History of NaHoM](#)," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012): 79–98.

Warren P. Aston, "[Newly Found Altars from Nahom](#)," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 57–61.

1 Nephi 17

1 Nephi 17:1–3 — Desperately Eating Raw Meat

In 1 Nephi 17, we have a comment about how they had to eat raw meat. Why did Nephi include that detail? They were apparently crossing the Empty Quarter (or, at least, the borders of the Empty Quarter), traveling nearly eastward through modern day Yemen to the coast of the Indian Ocean. What is out there? Virtually nothing. What can they burn? Very little. So, maybe they just could not cook anything at all. Perhaps they did not light fires because the smoke would have sent smoke signals, inviting others to attack them or to steal from them.

But more than that, the idea of eating raw meat must have been even more shocking and a reflection of extreme circumstances in another way, in light of the kosher law prohibiting the eating of blood found in raw meat. Under ancient Israelite law, one could not eat blood. To make meat kosher, they had to drain the blood as much as possible. Cooking it also helped get rid of the juices and the remaining blood, so for Nephi and his party to have eaten raw meat, they were likely in a truly desperate situation, perhaps on the brink of starvation. Saving life took precedence over obedience to lesser laws in the Torah.

I think what Nephi learned from their survival was not how self-sufficient they had become—*Are we not clever? Look how we were able to get all the way down the coast of the Red Sea! I was able to fix my bow!* No, he gave full credit to the Lord. *Look at the things the Lord has done for us: "So great were the blessings of the Lord upon us"* (1 Nephi 17:3).

Further Reading

Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "[An Archeologist's View](#)," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 74.

Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 5 (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1988), 64–67.

1 Nephi 17:3 — Echoes of Nephi’s Famous “I will go and do . . .”

Most readers of the Book of Mormon can repeat Nephi’s familiar statement, “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded.” It has a good rhythm to it. It’s beautifully memorable. In English it works wonderfully. It is a real gem of confession and profession of faith and faithfulness. But readers should not forget this verse’s almost-always-overlooked partner: 1 Nephi 17:3 is a structural counterpart and an echo of Nephi’s original statement in 1 Nephi 3:7.

Now out in the wilderness with his entire family, Nephi states, “And thus we see that the commandments of God must be filled. And if it be so that the children of men keep the *commandments of God*, he doth nourish and provide strength and strengthen them and *provide a means* [compare prepare a way] *whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them*” (1 Nephi 17:3). A similar expression also shows up in Sariah’s words as well: “I know of a surety that the Lord hath . . . hath given them power *whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them*” (see 1 Nephi 5:8). These strongly affirming words were a standard watchword for Nephi and his faithful family members throughout their arduous experiences in the desert.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Nephi Believe the Lord Would Prepare a Way? \(1 Nephi 3:7\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 263 (January 18, 2017).

1 Nephi 17:5–6 — Has Nephi’s Land Bountiful Been Located?

Good candidates for the location that Lehi’s party called “Bountiful” can be found in the Dhofar region of southern Oman. One such spot, called Khor Kharfot, complies with twelve requirements that can be derived from Nephi’s account. Such locations along the southern coast of Arabia are so tropical, especially in contrast to the barrenness of the surrounding desert, that I can imagine Laman and Lemuel saying something like, “Forget about going back to Jerusalem. Let us just stay right here.”

Interestingly, the very first account of this verdant region written by Westerners comes from 1850 when a British ship got caught in the monsoons and was blown into the coastland. They skirted along the southern coast of Oman and when they got to India, they wrote about what they had seen along the way. Their finding was newsworthy enough that it was then reported in a Calcutta newspaper. They were astonished at

these lush regions along the Arabian coast that did not look like they came out of Lawrence of Arabia's backyard.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Has the Location of Nephi's Bountiful Been Discovered?](#) (1 Nephi 17:5)," *KnoWhy* 259 (January 9, 2017).

1 Nephi 17:7–10 — Nephi Is Commanded to Build a Ship

Imagine that you are in a fertile place with delicious food, but no workshops and no factories. Then the Lord tells you to build a ship! When the Lord commanded Nephi to build a ship under such circumstances, what is the first thing out of Nephi's mouth? He asked: "Where do I go to get the ore?" I can almost hear his mind going, "*Okay, we're going to need this, that, and this, but I don't know where to get that, and where do I go to get this.*" Then he was off and running to do the part he knew how to do. Nephi just seemed to have this great sense of what he can accomplish through his own abilities and when he had reached his limits and needed to ask the Lord for help. For example, back when his steel bow broke, Nephi made a new bow out of wood, and then said, "*Where should I go to get food?*"

Then we sense Nephi saying, "*I am going to build the ship, but it won't be after the manner of men.*" It sounds like he had an idea of how he might approach the task. He was a smart guy. Maybe he was aware that the Lord was going to want it to be done differently than he would have done it, or perhaps even differently than *anyone* would have done it. And who knows? If Nephi had done it his way, it probably wouldn't have worked so well.

1 Nephi 17:13 — The Lord Leads Them to the Promised Land

The Lord never lets us down when we step into the unknown at His command. Notice how many times Nephi referred to the "land of promise" or the "promised land." He mentions the "promised land" seven times and "land of promise" seventeen times. Except for Ether, every other reference in the entire Book of Mormon to the Promised Land or the Land of Promise, comes from Nephi. If it is not directly from Nephi himself, it is a quotation or reference back to something that he wrote.

I have such a testimony that the Lord is generous with prophecy. Because of His revelations, we know what will be found at the end of the road, and we know it is going to turn out okay if we keep our heart on the goal. We know that. As King Benjamin said, all that the Lord requires of you is to keep the commandments (Mosiah 2:22). He does not say, "Guess what is in my head." He tells us. We have a living prophet, and we have scriptures. We have personal revelation, which, according to Nephi, are commandments (he uses these words in tandem). Whether the Lord tells you to do something through

the prophet or the scriptures or the Holy Ghost, either way it is a commandment and will safely guide us through.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Do Commandments Bring Us Peace and Happiness? \(2 Nephi 5:10\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 347 (August 2, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Does it Really Mean to be Blessed For Keeping the Commandments? \(Mosiah 2:41\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 367 (September 26, 2017).

1 Nephi 17:19–22 — Nephi’s Brothers Mock Him for Building a Ship

How easy it would have been for Nephi to get angry at his brothers? Perhaps he did get angry, but we never hear about it. He wrote the book and therefore had control over his own portrayal, but I think Nephi probably kept his cool most if not all of the time. There would have been very little for him to have gained by getting mad. His brothers obviously were ridiculing and pushing him pretty hard, and they were older than he, yet Nephi’s longsuffering was incredible—his willingness to forgive his brothers and his willingness to say, in effect, “I don’t have a dog in this fight. We are going to pull together. If we are going to succeed, it is going to take all of us. The cause, the mission, the purpose is much bigger than any of our personal interests.” There are valuable lessons in Nephi’s attitude for all of us—for leaders in the church, for wards, for families, and for individuals. It is so easy to get offended or to want to assert yourself, but that is not Nephi’s way.

Chapter 17 is a very rich and long doctrinal chapter. We usually focus on the stories, but what we have in this chapter is less about what they were doing than what they were arguing over. Something like 45 verses tell about the arguments that Nephi’s brothers raised against him, and then his rebuttal of those arguments. Verses 19 to 22 contain three arguments that Nephi’s brothers raised about why he should not build the ship.

1. The first argument begins in the middle of verse 19: “They rejoiced over me,” saying, “We knew you could not do it. You do not have good judgment.” Then in verse 20, “You are foolish.” This normally is the first criticism of naysayers. “You do not have good judgment. You cannot do this. It is too hard. This is impossible.” Imagine if somebody were to have said to Joseph Smith, “You think you can start a church? You think you can get this book published? Who’s going to want to buy the Book of Mormon? There are no printers around here. Foolish imaginations. You are just making all this stuff up.” Imagine someone saying to Brigham Young, “You are going to send people where? To St. George? To Hole in the Rock? This is foolishness.” Last Tuesday we went to the funeral of a friend of ours—quite an unusual, dynamic Canadian—and the thing that

drove him more than anything else was that if somebody said it was impossible, he did it, and he lived an amazing life as a result of that. Nephi was like that. His brothers say this is impossible, and Nephi does not wither. He says, “I will do it just because it is impossible.”

2. The second argument of naysayers is found in verse 20. “Well, we would be better off dead,” or “We would be happier elsewhere. We ought to go back to Jerusalem. You know, we have had to suffer all these things, and it would have been better if we had died before we came out of Jerusalem.” Well, this type of complaint is really not much of an argument. The grass always seems greener somewhere else! But that, in and of itself, doesn’t necessarily make it so.

3. The third argument is in verse 22: “We know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord ... wherefore, we know that they are a righteous people; and our father hath judged them.” In other words, “You and Lehi are judgmental and, therefore, we are off the hook. We do not have to do anything,” and so on, justifying themselves. This argument works, unless, of course, you stop to think about it. Laman and Lemuel are calling Lehi and Nephi *judgmental*. Of course, the very act of labeling someone as being judgmental is itself an act of passing judgment. And in this particular case, it was the pot calling the kettle black.

We have these three arguments. They are the sorts of raw objections that people often raise in desperate situations. Thinking about them can help us improve our own thinking. They say a lot about human nature, which the Book of Mormon carefully and helpfully exposes.

Further Reading

John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, “Murmurings of Laman and Lemuel” in *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 77.

Alan Goff, “Boats, Beginnings, and Repetitions,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 67–84.

1 Nephi 17:23–47 — Nephi Chastises His Brethren and Praises the Lord

We have 24 verses in which Nephi took Laman and Lemuel’s arguments apart, and did so in very powerful ways, which ended with them being overwrought by the realization of how wrong they had been. They, of course, tried to grab him to throw him into the sea, but Nephi was so filled with the Spirit that they are shocked by what they feel. You

may want to study those 24 verses in more detail, and see how he responded. Hint, the way I see it, he responded to argument 1, then to argument 2, then to argument 3.

And then in the middle (verses 36 to 40), Nephi proclaims a spontaneous hymn of praise about God being in control of all of things:

A: “Behold, the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited” (v. 36)—meaning we should go and inhabit some far-away place.

“He hath created his children that they should possess it” (v. 36)—he will give us a land of possession.

B: “He raiseth up a righteous nation” (v. 37)—us.

“And destroyeth the nations of the wicked” (v. 37)—the nations that are being destroyed and conquered at that time, including Jerusalem.

B: “He leadeth away the righteous into precious lands” (v. 38)—us.

“And the wicked he destroyeth, and curseth the land unto them for their sakes” (v. 38)—the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

A: “He ruleth high in the heavens, for it is his throne, and this earth is his footstool.” (v. 39)—meaning God deals with us lowly creatures on earth, but He still reigns in heaven.

“And he loveth those who will have him to be their God” (v. 40) —referring back to us, His children whom He loves.

This is beautiful parallelistic poetry. Indeed, Nephi uses it wisely, probably knowing that “a soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools pureth out foolishness” (Proverbs 15:1-2).

And notice that Nephi’s testimonial hymn has an overall A-B-B-A structure. It begins and ends with praising the Lord, and the two middle verses are about how the righteous and the wicked will be treated. So, this very elegant little chiastic hymn stands at the middle of Nephi’s response to his brothers, and its inverted structure helps to reverse the direction this very troublesome situation was headed in.

Nephi then continues, answering again argument 3 in verse 41, answering argument 2 in verse 42, and answering argument 1 in verse 44. So, altogether, he goes through arguments 1, 2, 3—gives his central hymn—and then answers arguments 3, 2, 1 in reverse order. Persuasive and eloquently done, he persuasively answers all of the questions twice-fold.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Is the Presence of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Significant? \(Mosiah 5:10–12\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 166 (August 16, 2016).

1 Nephi 17:35 — The Difference between God’s Love and God’s Favor

Nephi said to his brothers, “Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God.” We know that God is no respecter of persons, that all men are saved by obedience to the same laws and ordinances of the gospel. And yet, there is a corollary that Nephi rightly points out: “he that is righteous is favored of God.” In 1 Samuel 2:30, the Lord said, “them that honour me I will honour,” and in John 14:21, he said: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him”. We believe that God loves all of His children, but we also believe, with Nephi, that “he that is righteous is *favored* of God.” Although this truth bothers some people, to think that God could favor those that follow him, believe him, love him, and serve him, Nephi teaches clear doctrine here to us and to his brothers, once again establishing his announced opening thesis that the tender mercies (or the favors) of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith and faithfulness (see 1 Nephi 1:20).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Samuel Say the Lord ‘Hated’ The Lamanites? \(Helaman 15:4\),” *KnoWhy* 186 \(September 13, 2016\).](#)

Book of Mormon Central, [“How Can We Be Delivered through the Lord’s Tender Mercies? \(1 Nephi 1:20\),” *KnoWhy* 447 \(July 5, 2018\).](#)

1 Nephi 17:36 — Purpose of the Creation

Nephi also shared with his brothers his important understanding of the purpose of the creation of the earth and the blessings that come from righteousness and obedience. “Behold, the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited.” There was a clear purpose behind the creation. The earth was created so that it could be inhabited by the sons and daughters of God. To Moses the Lord said, “And worlds without number have I created; and I also created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten” (Moses 1:33). And the Lord explained to Enoch, “And were it possible that man could number the particles of the earth, yea, millions of earths like this, it would not be a beginning to the number of thy creations; and thy curtains are stretched out still” (Moses 7:30).

In the Doctrine and Covenants Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon declared: “For we saw him”—meaning Jesus Christ—“even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God.” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:23–24). As a part

of their ministry and calling, many prophets have been blessed with this vision of the God's creations and His purpose in providing it as a place for our life and progression. Nephi understands the importance of this foundational truth for his brothers. He attempts to share this knowledge with them even knowing what he has seen in vision of them and of their likely future.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Where Can You Best Learn about God's Plan of Salvation? \(Alma 24:14\),](#)" *KnoWhy* 272 (February 8, 2017).

1 Nephi 18

1 Nephi 18:3–4 — Similarities in the Stories of Building a Ship and Retrieving the Plates

There are two main stories in 1 Nephi and they have certain similarities in common: the story of Nephi building a ship in 1 Nephi 17–18, and the story of retrieving the brass plates back in 1 Nephi 3–5. The stories are both about the same length, and in each case, Nephi succeeds where Laman and Lemuel say it cannot be done. The angel of the Lord or the power of the Lord is manifest in both stories, and in both stories, Nephi mentions Moses in his arguments about how the Lord will deliver them, particularly how the Lord brought Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt just like He brought Lehi's family out of Jerusalem.

These stories are not identical, but they make a matched pair. We might call them a *doublet*. We see doublets in the scriptures fairly often, for instance, in the parallels between Hannah giving Samuel to the priest, and John the Baptist being born to Elizabeth and Zacharias. It seems that the authors of the scriptures wanted to have these narrative echoes come to mind so we can recognize the hand of the Lord operating consistently in similar contexts.

1 Nephi 18:3 — Revelation Comes through Constant Prayer

Clearly, Nephi did not receive just one revelation at the beginning on how to build the ship. He went many times into the mountain to pray, and the Lord showed him many things, more things than just about the ship. The mountain was a place of revelation and inspiration. Nephi was a man who believed in prayer. At the end of his narrative he will affirm: "But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; 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” (2 Nephi 32:9). He learned that lesson at the beginning and never forgot, as it was reinforced through his experiences that he must pray always and over everything.

He said in 2 Nephi 4:25: “And upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains. And mine eyes have beheld great things, yea, even too great for man; therefore, I was bidden that I should not write them.” We do not have all of the great and marvelous things that Nephi beheld when he was on the mountain and carried away by the Spirit, but we know that these revelations were facilitated through Nephi’s diligent prayers.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Must One Pray Always to Endure to the End?](#) (2 Nephi 32:8–9),” *KnoWhy* 298 (April 10, 2017).

1 Nephi 18:5–6 — The Lord Commands Lehi to Leave Bountiful

Note that Nephi said “the voice of the Lord came unto my *father*” (v. 5). Who is the prophet? Lehi is still the prophet. The voice of the Lord does not come to Nephi and say, “It is time to go. Get your father and family and depart.” The voice of the Lord came unto the prophet Lehi and told him that it was time to enter the ship. Verse 6 begins with “on the morrow.” The Lord said it was time, and they went the next day. They obeyed immediately as daunting as that might have seemed.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Has the Location of Nephi’s Bountiful Been Discovered?](#) (1 Nephi 17:5),” *KnoWhy* 259 (January 19, 2017).

1 Nephi 18:7 — Jacob and Joseph are Mentioned

Verse 7 talks about the two sons that were born in the wilderness. The elder was called Jacob and the younger was called Joseph. What is the significance of naming their last two sons Jacob and Joseph? Jacob surely comes from the famous patriarch of the Old Testament, whose father was Isaac, whose grandfather was Abraham, and whose sons became the twelve tribes of Israel. And Joseph? Lehi’s noteworthy discourse in 2 Nephi 3, which is all about the prophecies of Joseph who was sold into Egypt, indicates his admiration for his recently discovered ancestor who also left Israel so that his family might eventually prosper.

Further Reading

Matthew Bowen, “[‘And There Wrestled a Man with Him’ \(Genesis 32:24\): Enos’s Adaptations of the Onomastic Wordplay of Genesis,](#)” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 10 (2014): 151–159.

1 Nephi 18:8 — The Ship Is Led by God

In whatever manner the ship was constructed, they were not going to have to row it to get to their destination. They had to get out into the currents of the sea and into the winds, and the Lord would guide them to the Promised Land. We read that they were driven by the wind, but they still needed the Liahona to work. This suggests their ship may have had sails or rudders or something so that enabled it to be guided.

Thus, they still needed the Liahona. They could not just sit back and allow the wind to blow them to the Promised Land. There was a purpose to have the compass working on their ocean voyage. When they were sailing, they had to use the compass. Thus, it says they had to steer the ship, and they needed the Liahona to know where to steer it. It also said that the wind blew them back and they were back-tracking for days. It was a combination of the Lord providing the means and them following the path.

1 Nephi 18:9–12 — Laman and Lemuel Bind Nephi

In verse 9 the sons of Ishmael and Laman and Lemuel and their wives began to be merry and to dance and to speak with much rudeness. When Nephi tried to get them to refrain, they would not listen to him and in verse 11, Laman and Lemuel “bind [Nephi] with cords,” and in verse 12 “the compass, which had been prepared of the Lord, did cease to work.” This Liahona is different from a compass that points north. The Liahona pointed the direction that they are to go, and it has writing on it that gave instructions. Yet as soon as Nephi’s brothers tied him up, the compass stopped working.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Can Wickedness Never Bring Happiness?](#) (Alma 41:10),” *KnoWhy* 329 (June 21, 2017).

1 Nephi 18:23 — They Arrive at the Promised Land

In verse 23 they arrived at the Land of Promise. This is about 11 years after they had left Jerusalem. They were in the wilderness for 8 years. It likely took them a couple of years to build the ship, and then there was the time needed for the ocean voyage. We do not know where they landed. Many people believe they arrived on the western coast of Central America, perhaps in Guatemala. But there are no definitive answers. Many Book of Mormon scholars believe most of the Book of Mormon story took place in what is called Mesoamerica, which is mostly made up of Guatemala and southern Mexico. Other people believe it took place in other locations. Wherever it was, the important thing is that they arrived at a Promised Land which the Lord had prepared for them.

The Lord told Nephi right at the beginning that “inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land

which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands" (1 Nephi 2:20). Joseph Smith and other early church leaders and members interpreted the "promised land" as a reference to *all* of America, meaning all of North America and South America. So, for several reasons, we know that wherever they landed, it was in the Western Hemisphere.

We also know that the Lord described this land as "choice above all other lands" (Ether 2:7) and promised that "whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ" (Ether 2:12). That is what happened with the Jaredites. That is what happened with the family of Lehi. When they served the God of the land, they prospered in the land.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Where is the Land of Promise?](#) (2 Nephi 1:5)," *KnoWhy* 497 (January 8, 2019).

1 Nephi 18:25–19:1 — Metal Plates in Antiquity

The plates of the Book of Mormon may have had the appearance of gold, but they were surely not 24 carat gold. In places like Oaxaca, Mexico and also among the Inca ruins, we have evidence of the inhabitants using an alloy of mostly copper, but with some gold also mixed in. With the copper and gold together, they could make a nice foil that was really quite rigid. They then rinsed it in a light citric or vinegar acid. That leached out the top molecules of copper, leaving, in effect, a very thin but pure exterior of gold plating.

Those plates ended up with the rigidity of copper, but the color of gold. When they scratched the surface of the gold, it actually went through the gold down into the copper, making it much more legible because they had a different color for contrast, especially after the copper had oxidized. We find examples of this kind of gold-copper alloy, called Tumbaga, in Mesoamerica in that time period. This may have well have been the kind of metal that the Nephites used for the plates of the Book of Mormon.

Other metal plates can be found all over the ancient world, including the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean. For example, Brigham Young University owns a set of Roman brass plates dating from the first century AD. These plates were a military retirement diploma given to soldiers who had served for 25 years in the Roman Army as a retirement bonus for their service, and certified their award of Roman citizenship.

As you may know from the New Testament, Roman citizenship was worth an enormous amount, and the citizenship rights also extended to sons and daughters of the soldier as

well. The interesting thing about these plates is that on the outside, there is the full text of the grant by the Roman Emperor, and on the back, there are seven names. These are the Roman officials whose seals would have been put on the back. And through two holes in the middle, they would wrap and twist a wire to seal the two plates shut. Should the outside become damaged, a judge could break the seal and open it up. What he would find inside is a duplicate copy of the outside text. It is called the *interior* or *sealed* portion. There are many examples of plates just like these in museums all over Europe. Similar sealed documents with inside and outside information have also been found on papyrus, on parchment, and on clay going back into the middle of the second millennium BC. It was a fairly standard, legal way of formalizing and protecting documents.

How hard would it have been to make metal plates of any kind? First of all, the creator would need some substantial metallurgical training and skill. Such records needed to be made of the right material and in the right way to remain durable. The brass plates, for instance, made it across the ocean, and Lehi prophesied that they “should never perish; neither should they be dimmed any more by time” (1 Nephi 5:19). In contrast, papyrus would not likely have survived the waves dashing over the sides of the ship in a storm—how would you keep *anything* dry in a boat like the one Nephi’s family must have built? But metal would survive and it had to be some kind of metal that would not rust. Even silver will corrode. But gold will not rust, and brass will not rust.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Is the Book of Mormon Like Other Ancient Metal Documents?](#) (Jacob 4:2),” *KnoWhy* 512 (April 25, 2019).

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Kind of Ore did Nephi Use to Make the Plates?](#) (1 Nephi 19:1),” *KnoWhy* 22 (January 29, 2016).

1 Nephi 19

1 Nephi 19:3 — Nephi Makes the Small Plates for a Wise Purpose

Nephi made a large set of plates, upon which he engraved his father’s record, which is often called the “Book of Lehi.” What happened to the Book of Lehi? Why does the Book of Mormon not start with Lehi chapter 1? Well, the translation of contents from the Book of Lehi was lost with the 116 pages that Martin Harris borrowed to show to his wife and family. Will we ever have the Book of Lehi? Yes, some day. Will we have the brass

plates? Yes. We will eventually have all of the important records of the Nephites, including the two-thirds portion of the Book of Mormon that was sealed.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Does the 'Mosiah-First' Translation Sequence Strengthen Faith?](#) (Words of Mormon 1:5)," *KnoWhy* 503 (February 22, 2019).

1 Nephi 19:6 — Nephi Writes That Which Is Sacred

We often say that the large plates of Nephi contained a secular history, and the small plates a spiritual history. Is that completely accurate? Let us look at 1 Nephi 19:6. What is the key point there? Nephi said it is *all* sacred: "Nevertheless, I do not write anything upon plates save it be that I think it be sacred." I think to Nephi all history was sacred because the hand of the Lord, His providence, was involved in guiding and directing the affairs of mankind. We might see a record as being more politically or economically focused, but Nephi never took God out of the situation. To put it in modern terms, whether the people prosper or perish has less to do with how the stock market is doing and more to do with their collective righteousness. To Nephi, even what we would call secular was sacred.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Nephi Write His Small Plates?](#) (1 Nephi 9:4)," *KnoWhy* 11 (January 14, 2016).

1 Nephi 19:8 — Nephi Looks Forward to the Coming of Christ

In this verse, Nephi reports a prophecy given by an angel that the God of Israel (meaning Jesus Christ) would come in 600 years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem. Some revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants refer to timing of Christ's mortal ministry as the "meridian of time" (D&C 20:26; 39:3). He came approximately after 4,000 years of recorded history, and there has been a little more than 2,000 years since then. The scriptures say that Jesus will come a second time in the beginning of the 7th thousand years. We have finished 6 thousand, and so we are now in the beginning of the 7th thousand years. We do not know exactly when the Second Coming is, but it is getting closer.

There is a time set, and He is going to come when He is supposed to come. It is our duty to be ready and to watch for the signs. Some people say "the Lord delayeth his coming" (Matthew 24:8), but He is not delaying His coming, and we cannot make Him come faster just because of what we do. He is going to come when it is time for Him to come. So, we should watch and be ready because that is what He told us to do, to look for the signs and be ready for His Second Coming.

Do we know that he is coming again? Yes. Just as much as Nephi knew that he was coming the first time. Nephi was a great prophet. He believed in Christ, that he would come in 600 years after they left Jerusalem. We believe that Christ is coming again, maybe during this century. I do not know when, but it is getting closer. He is going to come in a day of wickedness. He is going to come in a day of wars and rumors of wars. That is happening. Earthquakes in diverse places—there are all kinds of signs of the times that are happening. In fact, if you just make a list of all the signs of the times, most of them have already happened because many of the signs had to do with the restoration of the gospel, including the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the establishment of Jesus Christ’s Church, the missionary program taking the gospel to the world, and the gathering of Israel. If you make a list, most of the things that need to happen before he comes have happened.

There is one verse in Matthew 24 that is my favorite verse pertaining to the timing of Christ’s return. Jesus said: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matthew 24:14). So just watch the missionary program and watch for this gospel to be preached in all the world, and it is probably going to happen in some ways that we are not expecting. When I was a bishop at Brigham Young University, I gave a fireside in 1988 and said to the BYU students in my ward, “You will see the day when missionaries go to Russia and behind the iron curtain, and you will see the day when we have churches and temples and stakes of Zion in what is now the Soviet Union.” And just a short time after that President Reagan said, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” Not because he said it, but because of what happened, the wall came down and the Soviet Union collapsed and missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints went into all those countries.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does Prophecy Shape the Book of Mormon’s Content and Structure?](#) (Words of Mormon 1:4),” *KnoWhy* 498 (January 15, 2019).

1 Nephi 19:10–12 — Nephi Quotes Prophecies of Zenoch, Zenos, and Neum

These verses introduce three Old Testament prophets who are not specifically mentioned in the Bible: Zenoch, Zenos, and Neum. Traditional English spellings of names in ancient languages are a little bit arbitrary because a single English letter can sometimes represent different sounds or the same sound can be represented by different letters. For instance, if an ancient name had what approximately the sound of a “k” in it, should a translator render it with a “k” or with a “c”? An additional challenge arises

when we do not have *any* letters or sounds in English that precisely match how scholars believe a particular ancient consonant or vowel (or combination of them) was uttered.

So, with that in mind, consider the name Neum. Nephi says that Christ will be “crucified, according to the words of Neum” (1 Nephi 19:10). While we don’t have anybody in the Bible by the name of Neum, we do have an Old Testament prophet named Nahum. Perhaps these were the same individual.

As for Zenock, his name sounds a bit like Enoch, and there is an ancient book called 1 Enoch (as well as books called 2 Enoch and 3 Enoch.) 1 Enoch is preserved in the Ethiopic tradition, and it has been translated and studied at great length in recent times. There was a translation of it that was done back in 1821, but even if Joseph Smith had access to it, that translation would not have given him some of the interesting information that modern scholars, such as George Nickelsburg, have uncovered in more recent translations of the text.

Interestingly, I was struck to find in 1 Enoch a list of what are called the twenty evil “watchers.” These are spirits or powers that are somewhere out there in the heavens. They participate in the cosmic and spiritual dramas that the Book of Enoch is all about, with Enoch seeing visions and being taken up into the heavens and so on. In the normal translations of 1 Enoch, what we get is just a list of the names of these so-called spirits or watchers. Samyaza is one of them, and Arakiel is another—names that will not mean anything to you unless you are told that these proper names have meanings. When translated they are things like *the star of God*, *thunder of God*, *shooting star of God*, *the one of the mountain*, *the earth is power*, *vein of God*, *the cloud of God*, *the winter of God*, *the perfection of God*, *the sea of God*, and *God will guide*. Now why is that significant? As you read down the list of cataclysms in 1 Nephi 19:11–16 you find the **opening of the earth**. We find volcanic **clouds** mentioned, and one of the names deals with the **smoke** apparently of volcanic eruption. One of them, as I have said, is called *the thunder of God*. **Thunderings** are here. You go down this list in 1 Nephi 19, and most of the physical calamities line up closely with the names of these 20 watchers (or forces) mentioned in 1 Enoch.

Nephi also refers to Zenos as having spoken about these signs: “All these things must surely come, saith the prophet Zenos.” Many physical forces are going to be at play as a sign of the death of Christ: Thunderings, lightnings of his power, tempests, fire, smoke, vapor of darkness, opening of the earth, mountains which shall be carried up, the rocks of the earth must rend, groaning of the earth and so on. And does 3 Nephi report the complete fulfillment of this prophecy? It does! And almost precisely in Zenos’s order.

Nephi had spoken in some detail of the death of Jesus back in 1 Nephi 11. And Lehi did too, in 1 Nephi 10. Now Nephi is basically saying, “I am not the only one who saw this. I am not the only one who prophesied this.” These verses in 1 Nephi 19 offer a fairly specific prophetic explanation of what is going to happen when Christ comes to the earth and suffers the insults and eventually the death that he will be subjected to. Here in 1 Nephi 19, Nephi calls other witness to his side, using records on the brass plates to support the truth of the coming of the Messiah, which he saw in vision.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “Enoch Translated,” *FARMS Review* 16, no. 1 (2004): 413–417.

Book of Mormon Central, “Is Anything Known of the Prophet Zenos Outside of the Book of Mormon? (Jacob 5:1),” *KnoWhy* 67 (March 31, 2016).

1 Nephi 19:23–24 — Nephi Also Quotes from Isaiah

Although Nephi says here that he had quoted and taught things from the Torah written in the books of Moses, he preferred to quote from Isaiah, and he particularly encouraged his family members and his readers to “liken all scriptures unto” themselves. Thus, for example, Nephi quoted a prophecy of Isaiah mentioning the “the isles” of the sea (Isaiah 49:1; 1 Nephi 21:1), and we can see how they would have seen the word “isles” pertinent to themselves. For, at the end of 1 Nephi, at the time, Lehi’s group had just recently arrived in the New World. Lehi had not died yet. They all must have been relieved to have arrived safely in the land of promise. They were rejoicing, and they now read in Isaiah that God will not forget even the people who are on the isles of the sea. Nephi knew that he was on land, but how would he have known then how big a land mass they were on? A few years later, Jacob would say, “we are upon an isle of the sea” (2 Nephi 10:20). They must have known by then that they were on a big island, but they had little idea yet that it was continental in scale. But there were also prophecies of Zenos (1 Nephi 19:16) about people on the islands of the sea, and Nephi could see how the words of the prophets Zenos and Isaiah could be likened to themselves. In these descriptions of how the Lord would remember the people of the isles of the sea, we can imagine how reassured the Nephites would have been on finding those prophetic words. We too can see how these great prophecies speak both about us and to us.

The next two chapters, 1 Nephi 20 and 21, are thus quotations by Nephi of Isaiah 48 and 49. Let me emphasize how accurate, how useful, and how really astonishing the words of Isaiah are in the Book of Mormon, and also how intricate and verbally detailed Nephi’s understanding of Isaiah is.

I have looked a fair amount at what people were saying about Isaiah in Bible commentaries being written in the early 19th century, just to compare how they were interpreting these chapters. Actually, it appears that very little was being said in Joseph Smith's day about Isaiah, and what they were saying was quite sparse, not systematic, and not very sophisticated. For example, in the 18th and early 19th centuries, the dominant reading for the passage in Isaiah about how kings and queens would be nursing mothers and fathers to the gentiles used these words to justify the divine right of kings and to support the monarch's privilege to speak authoritatively and to give the people an official state religion. Thus, as a divinely favored ruler, the king of England was seen as the nursing father of his people, and Isaiah's words were seen as justifying the Church of England. In America, Isaiah was likewise used to show that the church should be part of politics and government. The famous French visitor de Tocqueville once said it was impossible for a democracy to be a solid and good government and that America would never succeed. The Americans answered back, confidently, that democracy would succeed because there will be public virtue, and public virtue will be taught by the churches of our states and of this new nation, seeing this passage in Isaiah for local political purposes, to say that religion would become the nursing strength of the society.

But the Book of Mormon does not see this passage in that way. It talks instead about how the gospel will go into the hands of the Gentiles, but that the Gentiles will be nursing fathers and mothers, who will someday bring the gospel back to descendants of Lehi's people. Ironically, the Gentiles will help reestablish the house of Israel, fulfilling the covenants of the Lord. As obvious as I think this interpretation is in the text, that didn't seem so obvious to biblical scholars in the 19th century. But careful readers today see that this is what Isaiah must have meant. In this, Joseph Smith was ahead of his time, precisely because he had Nephi's help, and Nephi understood the words of Isaiah. Nephi grew up in Jerusalem, where Isaiah had lived. Isaiah ended his main prophecies around 701 BC, and Nephi left Jerusalem around 600 BC, so, there was only about a hundred years, only a couple generations, between them. Thus, when Joseph Smith quotes Isaiah at length, we can appreciate that Isaiah was the most important and venerated prophet of Lehi's time. This may offer yet another explanation of why Nephi used Isaiah so extensively and authoritatively.

In reading the words of Isaiah, Nephi saw particular words and phrases as being (1) relevant to his own world—we did “liken all scriptures unto us” (1 Nephi 19:23), temporally (1 Nephi 22:1, 3, 27). (2) In addition, Nephi relates Isaiah's prophecies to his own prophetic world view, informed by Nephi's great vision in 1 Nephi 11-14. I think this is what Nephi means when he speaks of reading these things not only temporally

but also spiritually (1 Nephi 22:1-3). And finally, (3) Nephi expects us and all of his readers to see these fruitful texts as being relevant to themselves and to read them “for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23). Getting through Isaiah is difficult, but it works better when readers try to get things out of Isaiah, not just to get through it. I recommend following Nephi’s model. By pondering each verse of Isaiah in his three ways has yielded rich rewards for me.

Further Reading

See several chapters in Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), notably John W. Welch, “Getting through Isaiah with the Help of the Nephite Prophetic View,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 19–45.

1 Nephi 20

1 Nephi 20:1 — Isaiah Prophecies of the Scattering of Israel

In chapter 19, Nephi has spoken of the coming of Christ. Chapter 20 (quoting Isaiah 48) then pertains to the rejection of Jesus Christ by certain Jews in Jerusalem and, consequently, the complete scattering of Israel. Thus, Isaiah 48 speaks of Israel’s condition in apostasy: “They swear not in truth, nor in righteousness” (v. 1), and they do not “stay themselves upon the God of Israel” (v. 2). This is because of their stiffneckedness, even after having been shown the truth (v. 4). Nevertheless, Isaiah says, God will defer his anger for His name’s sake and will refrain from cutting Israel off (v. 9), but will refine them in a furnace of affliction (v. 10) and lead them through the deserts (v. 21). They will be scattered and cast out, but the promise still stands that Israel will eventually come forth out of the world (v. 20). The chapter ends by seeing no peace for the wicked (v. 22). When you read this chapter in connection with stage 2 of the Nephite World View, you can spot each of these and several more points of relevance to the covenant House of Israel, to the situation of Lehi’s family, to the scattering and hardships suffered by Jesus’s early followers, and also as valuable instruction in your own personal life.

1 Nephi 20:2 — Stay Upon the Lord

For example, 1 Nephi 20:1–2 tells us that the Israelites did not *stay themselves upon the Lord*. What does it mean to *stay oneself*? It means to hold in place, to steady, to really be faithful, to be enduring, to be supported. Where do we get real support? How can and do you *stay* yourself? You surround yourself with strong people, those with strong enduring ideas and with a full set of the strong foundational principles of life. Most of

all, we stay ourselves upon the Lord. It is hard to stay *yourself* just on your own. It is by having these *stays* around you that will help you stay faithful. Strive to say, “I have done everything I can, and I will stay with the Lord, and he will then strengthen us and as we go forward, *staying ourselves* together upon the Lord.”

1 Nephi 21

1 Nephi 21:1 — The Day of the People of All Nations

In 1 Nephi 21, Nephi then quotes Isaiah 49, speaking of the day of the gentiles (Nephi’s stage 3). The key verses are: “Thus saith the Lord God: 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,” describing how the gentiles will carry the sons of Israel—“in their arms and thy daughters shall be carried on their shoulders” (v. 22). And in verse 1, Isaiah mentions the isles of the sea, the widespread scattering of the House of Jacob. This chapter also tells how a particular servant will be raised up “for a light to the gentiles” (v. 6), that “kings shall see and arise,” (v. 7), while messengers will be sent “to them that sit in darkness” (v. 9).

1 Nephi 21:9 — Who is Sitting in Darkness?

These are the people who have been scattered—the covenant House of Israel. They are in the lands of darkness, broken off and driven out, afar off. Some of them are the remnants of the tribe of Lehi, and there is a promise that messengers will go out and will be sent to these people. That is also what Nephi has talked about in 1 Nephi 13. The Lord promises that He will comfort and not forget his people (vv. 13, 15). Again, we can see why Nephi would have been especially attracted, for many reasons, to these words of Isaiah.

1 Nephi 21:22 — The Victory of the Lord Jesus Christ

Verse 22 wraps up this prophecy with a strong declaration of the eventual victory of God: “And all flesh shall know that I, the Lord [Jehovah], am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Might One of Jacob.” There will be one shepherd who will reign in dominion and might and power and great glory. This final theme is introduced at the very end of 1 Nephi 21 (cf. Isaiah 49). Isaiah had prophesied that Israel will be restored and that they who oppress the righteous shall be “drunken with their own blood” (v. 26). We know, then, that the bad guys are going to be subdued. We know that God is going to win. That is where Isaiah leaves off in Isaiah 49, and Nephi thus picks right up with that optimistic point as he continues his own teachings and prophecy through the end in chapter 22, his closing chapter in 1 Nephi. And in the end, “all flesh shall know

that I, the Lord, am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob" (v. 26). That is the ultimate victory which, again, Nephi had prophesied about in 1 Nephi 14.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[What is the Day of the Gentiles?](#) (1 Nephi 21:22)," *KnoWhy* 44 (March 1, 2016).

1 Nephi 21:14–16 — The Lord Will Not Forget His People

Is it reassuring to you today to know that God will not forget you? You have made covenants with Him and while you may on occasion forget Him, He will never forget you. That thought must have been very reassuring to Nephi living now in a remote place, and feeling the weight of responsibility for his people. How heartening it would have been to read to all of them of the promise of God's enduring love and covenant. "Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee" (v. 15). Just as we can be reassured by that, Nephi and his people must all have taken great comfort in those very words.

1 Nephi 21:18 — We Are as Gems in Christ's Eyes

The wedding garment is symbolic of the covenant that is made with the Lord: "Thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, . . . even as a bride" (21:18). All these people will be a part of that covenant, thereby being bound eternally with Him. The bride offers a powerful and beautiful image. What does a bride do with the ornament that she puts on her bridal gown? She wears and protects it as her most precious possession. The Lord is saying here that all these people, every one of them, will be that valuable.

1 Nephi 22:1 — What Do Isaiah's Prophecies Mean?

Laman and Lemuel ask, "What meaneth these things which ye have read? Behold, are they to be understood according to things which are spiritual, which shall come to pass according to the spirit and not the flesh?" (v. 1). In other words, they were asking if Isaiah was prophesying about things that are actually going to happen in history, for example when Isaiah talks about the gentiles, the nursing fathers, the isles of the sea, and so on. Are these things to be understood as events in history, or are these abstract spiritual concepts that can apply to any person anywhere? Nephi's answer is that it is both, as can be seen in how Nephi himself interprets and applies these teaching, both temporally and spiritually. Nephi answers in verse 2 by saying that these things "were manifest unto the prophet by the voice of the Spirit; for by the Spirit are all things made known unto the prophets," so they are spiritual. In verse 3, he explains that "the house of Israel, sooner or later, will be scattered upon all the face of the earth, and also among all nations," so they are temporal. And in verse 4 he states that: "the more part of all the tribes have been led away; and they are scattered to and fro upon the isles of the sea," and so they are also physical or material. All things are known unto the Lord.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Where Did Joseph Smith Get His Ideas about the Physical and Spiritual Gathering of Israel?](#) (2 Nephi 21:11)," *KnowWhy* 290 (March 22, 2017).

1 Nephi 22:3–5 — Where and How Are the Lost Tribes Lost?

We know the lost tribes are lost. We say, they are lost, but they are not in some hidden valley or someplace under the earth's crust or on some distant star. The lost tribes are "scattered" among every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In what senses are they lost? They are lost to the lands of their inheritance. They are lost to the gospel and the saving ordinances. They are lost to the priesthood and the blessings that flow from it. They are lost in the sense that many do not even know that they are of the house of Israel. One of the reasons we send our missionaries to the four corners of the earth is to find, gather and expand the house of Israel.

Then how can they know that they are Israel? They come into the church. Passing through "the waters of baptism" (1 Nephi 20:1), they can next receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. They can receive a patriarchal blessing from an ordained patriarch who declares to them that they are of one of the lineages of House of Israel, and these days patriarchs have pronounced lineages of all of the twelve tribes. Historically, the majority of the members of the Church have been declared to be of the tribes of Ephraim or Manasseh, but now there are members of the Church from all of the different tribes of Israel.

In verse 5, Nephi states that Israel will be scattered among all nations. He knew that the northern ten tribes were conquered by the Assyrians in 721 BC and taken into the north and then scattered. The southern kingdom of Judah was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 587 BC. Then some were allowed to return so at the time of Christ there were Jews in Judah, but Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews were scattered by the Romans in AD 70, and Israel was further scattered all over the world. Nephi saw this as the result of their hardening their hearts "against the Holy One of Israel" (22:5). We would say that Israel was scattered, dispersed and disorganized because of apostasy. Nephi also states that ultimately the seed of Lehi will likewise be scattered (22:7) and "dwindle in unbelief" (as Nephi had seen in 1 Nephi 12:20-22).

1 Nephi 22:8–12 — The Restoration Will Bless All People

In verse 8 we read that to remedy all this "the Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles." And He has. The gospel was restored, and the Book of Mormon was translated. It is indeed a marvelous work and a wonder. Verses 11-12 then state that the Lord will bring "about his covenants and his gospel unto those who are of the house of Israel, wherefore, he will bring them again out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought out of

obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel.”

Joseph Smith commented on the extent of these missionary efforts to reach out into all the world: “The Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing;...the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Role Does the Book of Mormon Play in Missionary Work?](#) (2 Nephi 30:3),” *KnoWhy* 288 (March 17, 2017).

1 Nephi 22:15–19 — The Millennium Will Be a Time of Peace

In verse 15 the prophet Zenos says that “the time cometh speedily that Satan shall have no more power over the hearts of the children of men.” The Lord is going to bind Satan before the Millennium can begin, and the Millennium will be ushered in by the power of God. Satan will be bound and become powerless by the power of God as well as by the righteousness of the members of the Church. In verses 16–26, Nephi talks about the word *righteous* and *righteousness*. These words appear here ten times (vv. 16, 17, 17, 17, 19, 21, 21, 24, 26, 26), pointing to a complete righteousness.

1 Nephi 22:20–26 — Nephi Looks Forward to Christ

Verse 20 quotes the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15: “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, like unto me.” Who was the prophet that was like unto Moses that the Lord raised up? First, in the meridian of times, Jesus Christ fulfilled this prophecy. This is the most often quoted messianic prophecy in scripture, and has been quoted by Nephi, Peter, Stephen, Moroni and Jesus Christ himself. As Moses was a miracle worker, a redeemer, a deliverer, a liberator, a mediator of the covenant, a law-giver, a revelator, a prophet, priest and king—in each of these ways and in many others—the Lord Jesus Christ is even a greater prophet than was Moses.

In verse 21 Nephi declares that “this prophet of whom Moses spake was the Holy One of Israel.” In verse 22 we read that the “righteous need not fear.” Verse 24 says 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.” That is really going to happen in the Millennium, when Jesus reigns as king of kings and lord of lords.

Verse 25 states that “he gathereth his children from the four quarters of the earth.” In other words, all of Israel will be gathered, including any remnants of the Ten Tribes.

Israel is scattered among all nations; Israel will be gathered from all nations. And verse 26 notes that it is “because of the righteousness of his people” that “Satan has no power.” This will be during the millennium, and Satan “cannot be loosed for the space of many years.” He is bound by the power of God so that the Millennium can begin. Then the people are righteous and Satan is bound by the righteousness of the people and by the power of the priesthood. Then, when the thousand years of the Millennium is ended, he is loosed for a little season.

1 Nephi 22:30–31 — Nephi Exhorts All to Keep the Commandments

Once again, remember Nephi’s statements about going and doing the Lord’s commandments in 1 Nephi 3:7 and 17:3. These concluding words here in verses 30–31, encouraging all to be obedient to the commandments and to endure to the end, are clearly related to Nephi’s earlier declarations of commitment that reverberate throughout the book of 1 Nephi and consistently draw the book of 1 Nephi together.

In sum, I testify that Nephi was truly a great prophet. There are so many things that we can learn about him and from him. I bear witness that Nephi saw the Lord Jesus Christ. He testified in 2 Nephi 11 that he had seen him, that Isaiah had seen him, that Jacob had seen him, just as Lehi had also seen him. We have here eyewitnesses of the premortal Christ. Throughout his life, Nephi was a great preacher of righteousness, not only in word but also in deed: “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).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Do Commandments Bring Us Peace and Happiness? \(2 Nephi 5:10\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 347 (August 2, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Does it Really Mean to be Blessed For Keeping the Commandments? \(Mosiah 2:41\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 367 (September 26, 2017).

1 Nephi 22:31 — Why Did Nephi Divide His Writings into Two Books?

1 Nephi can be seen as the book of Lehi and his son Nephi. It even ends, “Wherefore, ye need not suppose that I and my father are the only ones that have testified” that the Holy One will reign and only those who are obedient to the commandments will dwell safely with him (22:24, 28, 31). But 2 Nephi continues on with the history of Nephi without his father. It begins with the final testament and death of Lehi, and then continues as Nephi, with the priestly help of his much younger brother Jacob, successfully establishes his people in the land of promise.

But this is the only place in the Book of Mormon where we have two books named after one person. We do not have a book of 1 Alma and another of 2 Alma, even though the book of Alma goes on for 63 chapters. The book of Alma could logically have been divided at the place in which Helaman became the leader of the church in chapter 45, but it was not. Here, in the case of Nephi, we have a single author, one man, who interrupted his record at the end of where chapter 22 now ends, suggesting that somehow the 22 chapters of 1 Nephi were intended to be read as a complete or unified record. Indeed, that composition has a coherent structure to it, drawing largely on certain repeated themes or motifs. At that point, Nephi carries on and creates the book of 2 Nephi, which has a very different purpose. In his first book, Nephi is getting out of the Old World, and in the second, he is getting established in the New. And there are other differences as well.

As we study the overall structures of these two books, the most important part of each book becomes clear. The crucial theme is often found at the center, and at the middle of 1 Nephi we find Nephi's great vision, beginning in chapter 11, where he sees the birth of Christ, the condescension of Christ, the love of God. This is where Nephi says he does not "know the meaning of all things," but he does "know that [the Lord] loveth his children" (1 Nephi 11:17). I see this as the structural center of 1 Nephi. That is the main theme and message of this book. The center of 2 Nephi is the long quotation of Isaiah 2-14 as the third witness, together with Nephi and Jacob, of the testimony of Christ.

Then are other oft-repeated themes. In 1 Nephi, sometimes Nephi reinforces the idea of being his father's successor. At the same time, we see the repeated struggles and spiritual degeneration of Laman and Lemuel. The similarities and contrasts in these stories help us see their underlying purposes, the main messages that Nephi wants us to get out of this. Notice how many things happened or are mentioned twice in 1 Nephi: (a) Nephi was tied up twice—once in the first half of the book when he and his brothers were returning from Jerusalem with Ishmael's family, and later, a second time, on the ship, during their voyage to the promised land. (b) The daughters of Ishmael are mentioned twice, once in 1 Nephi 7 and again, later, when they marry the sons of Lehi and Zoram in 1 Nephi 16. (c) Brass is mentioned two times—plates of brass, and then the ball made of brass, called the Liahona. Both of these brass objects functioned as guides. (d) We also encounter two objects made of steel—Laban's steel sword, and the steel bow that broke. The steel bow would not have been a bow made completely out of steel, but rather probably had steel strips or straps to reinforce or strengthen a wooden bow, giving it a little more spring. Such bows are called composite bows. Likewise, Laban's sword was not completely made of steel either. It had a hilt made of gold, so both items were likely composites. Both were weapons; both functioned in the hand of the Lord to

accomplish, in one case, life through death, and in the other case, life through hunting; and both became symbols of the divine right to lead or rule. And so on.

Although every element in 1 Nephi does not fit into a rigorously inverted or chiasmic structure, many of its features counterbalance each other. Noticing these interconnections can help in seeing this book as a unified and purposeful narrative. Remember, 1 Nephi was not written as a journal that Nephi wrote as these events were going on. It is a purposefully selective, organized, coherent, and memorable retrospective account of what happened in his life. It looks back on how Lehi and his posterity reached the Promised Land, and it provides the backstory for why the Nephites ended up separating from their brethren, the Lamanites. Readers are then in a position to see how the hand of the Lord was involved in these people's lives and how He will continue to give guidance and blessings to all who will come unto Him.

Further Reading

For a chiasmic arrangement of 1 Nephi, see John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim, Germany: Gerstenberg, 1981), 199–200; see further, Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephi’s Outline,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982), 53–74.

2 NEPHI 1–5

John W. Welch Notes



2 Nephi 1

2 Nephi 1:1 — Lehi Gathers His Posterity to Teach and Bless Them

2 Nephi 1–4 contains Lehi’s final words as a patriarch to his posterity. It echoes the promises and prophecies of Jacob in Genesis 49 to his posterity. As we read these chapters, we could spend time pondering our own patriarchal blessing and its promises, blessings, and how it has shaped our life. One of the great realities of the Restoration is referred to as continuing revelation. Where else in the world can a person go to get a patriarchal blessing?

Patriarchs in our midst have the blessing of laying their hands on your head to give you guidance that will lead you in the paths of righteousness. Lehi set a wonderful precedent for us, as he blessed his posterity. And why did Joseph Smith commence this practice as early as 1833? In many ways, the Book of Mormon served de facto as the guiding handbook during the early years of the restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by Joseph Smith. Seeing Lehi bless his children and grandchildren may well have been the model that inspired Joseph to ask permission to have his own father commence doing likewise in this dispensation.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “Lehi’s Last Will and Testament: A Legal Approach,” in *Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 61–82.

2 Nephi 1:3 — Through His Mercy, the Lord Helped Lehi's Family

There are many ways to be merciful. As Alma taught in his blessing to his son Corianton, one way that God can be merciful, without robbing justice, is by temporarily staying justice while giving us more time to repent. Of course, He could proceed immediately to judgment as soon as we sin. He doesn't need to collect witnesses or evidence against us; He already knows all of what we have done. But knowing all of that, He withholds judgment to give us time, knowing that we might yet choose righteously.

Has Lehi done that too? Yes. While he had recalcitrant sons, he warned them. But did he withhold blessings from them? No. They still have the blessing of the Land of Promise, if they will only come around. Lehi shows a Christ-like attitude here. In setting a good example for all, Lehi is merciful not only in the sense of withholding judgment, but also in demonstrating a loving kindness, where he shows blessings and a positive (not just the neutral) part of being merciful.

2 Nephi 1:4 — Lehi Received a Vision of Jerusalem's Destruction

Lehi and the family of Ishmael left Jerusalem before its destruction. In 1 Nephi 7:7, Laman and Lemuel and some of Ishmael's family wanted to go back to Jerusalem. Its destruction, as Lehi had prophesied, was not yet certain. But Nephi also was allowed to see the things that his father had seen (1 Nephi 11:1; 14:29), which may have included what Lehi read in the heavenly judgment book (1 Nephi 1), as well as Lehi's dream (1 Nephi 8). Before leaving the Old World, Nephi subdued his brothers, assuring them that the people in Jerusalem were wicked and were "at this day about to be destroyed . . . save only a few, who shall be led away into captivity" (1 Nephi 17:43). Having arrived at the new land of promise, Lehi now confirmed that he had "seen a vision, in which I know that Jerusalem is destroyed; and had we remained in Jerusalem we should also have perished" (2 Nephi 1:4). The Lord blessed Lehi with a knowledge that Jerusalem had been destroyed, confirming Lehi's prophecies in yet another vision. We know from various historical sources that Jerusalem was destroyed sometime between 590 BC and 586 BC by the Babylonians.

Lehi's prophecy in this regard was historically confirmed in Nephite history about 400 years later. In Omni 1:15, Mosiah learned that the people of Zarahemla came out from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, King of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon. One of Zedekiah's sons, Mulek, escaped the Babylonian captivity and with a group of people left Jerusalem, crossed the ocean, and came to the western hemisphere. They were the people of Zarahemla, and their ancestors had witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Should Readers Pay Close Attention to the Mulekites? \(Omni 1:19\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 434 (May 17, 2018). “Mulek’s witness of Jerusalem’s destruction proved that Lehi and Nephi were true prophets and, therefore, that Laman and Lemuel had unjustly rebelled against them.”

2 Nephi 1:5 — Lehi Refers to Many Similarities between Moses and Himself

There are many similarities between Lehi and Moses which Nephi mentions in his record, especially near the end of his father’s life. Being recognized as “a prophet like unto Moses” added authority to religious leaders in the minds of ancient Israelites. Consider a few of the similarities between Moses and Lehi:

- Both of them left a civilization—a place of wickedness—and crossed a wilderness to a Promised Land.
- Both suffered afflictions.
- Both had their people enter into covenants with the Lord.
- Some in their company wanted to go return to that place, while some were faithful.
- Both prophets had great visions; Lehi saw a pillar of fire, and Moses saw the burning bush. In each case, both saw God and were called to be prophets through these visions.
- They both had the law of the Lord. Lehi ensured that he had the brass plates which contained the five books of Moses. Moses received the law from on high.
- Moses and Lehi both crossed a sea by the power of God.
- They both believed in temple worship and had temple ordinances.
- They both knew of the need for atonement and protection by the blood of the Lamb.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Is Lehi Depicted as Similar to Moses? \(2 Nephi 3:9–10\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 268 (January 30, 2017).

2 Nephi 1:7–9 — The Americas Are a Choice Land

2 Nephi 7:7 opens by saying “Wherefore this land is consecrated unto him whom God shall bring,” and ends with, “unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever.” I believe this refers to the whole land of America, the whole Western Hemisphere, the North and South American continents. This all is a chosen land, a choice land, a land that has been blessed by God since the beginning, and it all will remain a promised and choice land so

long as the inhabitants “shall keep his commandments” (1:9). But they will be “brought down into captivity . . . if iniquity shall abound” (1:7), but their lands will be taken away if they “reject the Holy One of Israel, the true Messiah, their Redeemer and their God”(1:10–11).

I believe one of the reasons that so many people have joined the Church in the Western Hemisphere is because these are the lands that were given to Joseph and the descendants of Joseph, the descendants of Lehi that are still here, and the people that left Europe and came to America, many of whom were descendants of Ephraim. In patriarchal blessings throughout North and South America, the descendants of Joseph, either Ephraim or Manasseh, are most consistently found or declared. The Book of Mormon is a record of Joseph, the son of Jacob (Ezekiel 37), and Lehi was of the tribe of Manasseh, a son of Joseph (Alma 10:3). So the Book of Mormon rings familiar in many ways to Lehi’s descendants.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Where is the Land of Promise?](#) (2 Nephi 1:5),” *KnoWhy* 497 (January 8, 2019).

2 Nephi 1:14 — Lehi Speaks to His Sons about His Impending Death

In 2 Nephi 1:14, Lehi spoke to his sons, “Awake, arise from the dust, hear the words of a trembling parent whose limbs you must soon lay down in a cold and silent grave from whence no traveler can return.” Critics of the Book of Mormon have said that Joseph Smith plagiarized these lines from Shakespeare. This phrase, however, is probably a reference to Job 10:20, from which both Lehi and Shakespeare likely drew.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Did Lehi Quote Shakespeare?](#) (2 Nephi 1:14),” *KnoWhy* 26 (February 4, 2016).

2 Nephi 1:15 — Lehi Knows That He Is Redeemed

In 2 Nephi 1:15, Lehi said, “The Lord hath redeemed my soul, I have beheld his glory, I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.” Lehi had seen the Lord Jesus Christ and experienced his glory and was sealed up unto eternal life. As he approached death, Lehi was prepared to leave this life with the knowledge that he had finished the course, kept the faith, and that his salvation was sure—a wonderful blessing of eternal assurance.

2 Nephi 1:20 — Lehi’s Posterity Will Prosper in the Land If They Keep the Commandments

In 2 Nephi 1:20, Lehi said, “[God] hath said that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land.” Lehi repeats this stipulation over and over because he wants his sons to keep the commandments. After he is gone, he wants them to prosper, and Lehi knows that the way they will prosper is if they keep the commandments. These words of this promise are mentioned predominantly in the book of Deuteronomy. Lehi remained true to his prophetic calling to establish firmly the principles taught in Deuteronomy, the book of scripture that had been found during Lehi’s young adulthood. Many passages and practices embedded in Deuteronomy, along with Isaiah and the Psalms, will persist down through the centuries of Nephite righteousness, as well as among the teachings of Jesus.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“How Is Prosperity Defined in Nephi’s Small Plates? \(Words of Mormon 1:6\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 383 (November 21, 2017).

2 Nephi 1:28–29 — The Significance of Lehi’s “First Blessing”

2 Nephi 1:28 says, “And now my son, Laman, and also Lemuel and Sam, and also my sons who are the sons of Ishmael, behold, if ye will hearken unto the voice of Nephi ye shall not perish. And if ye will hearken unto him I leave unto you a blessing, yea, even my first blessing.”

At first, Lehi speaks to Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and the sons of Ishmael, and tells them that their blessing is contingent on them (ye) obeying Nephi. Notice that Lehi doesn’t include Zoram, Jacob, or Joseph in this contingency. The word “you” in the subsequent statement, “I leave unto you a blessing,” can be read as a singular pronoun, addressing Laman, who would in the case of their obedience be entitled to Lehi’s “first blessing” and thus he could claim the power and privilege of being Lehi’s first son, the son who was presumably redeemed as an infant by Lehi in the temple. I assume that this would mean that Laman would receive a double portion of Lehi’s estate (twice as much as each of the other sons receive, as mentioned in Deuteronomy 22:17).

But if Laman and those others (note the plural “ye”) do not hearken unto Nephi, Laman will lose that blessing and Nephi will step into that position. As Lehi continued in 2 Nephi 1:29, “But if ye will not hearken unto him I take away my first blessing, yea, even my blessing, and it shall rest upon him.” Thus, the right of leadership would be taken away if Laman and the others do not hearken unto Nephi. At that point, Nephi would become Lehi’s primary successor.

The Lord had promised Nephi that he would be the teacher and leader in the event of the brothers' iniquity (1 Nephi 2:21–22; cf. 3:29), and Lehi arranged his estate accordingly. Thus, Lehi provided that all could receive the blessings of prosperity and peace, if they would obey the commandments of God, the operation of religious laws, and the interpretation of scripture, as Nephi shall teach.

Lehi wanted his children to be in harmony, so he left them, as much as possible, in a position of equality. To compensate for the legal requirement that Laman receive the double portion, Lehi provided that Sam's portion would be combined into Nephi's: "thy seed shall be numbered with [Nephi's] seed" (4:11). Lehi's division of his estate was his final, creative effort to keep his family together in righteousness. Unfortunately, his plan did not last for long.

2 Nephi 1:30–32 — Lehi Blesses Zoram

Zoram's blessing was that he would dwell in safety and prosperity, as long as he remained aligned with Nephi. When Nephi, shortly after the death of Lehi, left the land of first inheritance, Zoram went with him. Thus, Nephi's oath and promise to Zoram, made outside the walls of Jerusalem, that "you shall have place with us" (1 Nephi 4:34), was fulfilled. That promise was not made by Laman or Lemuel. Zoram was bound into this family because of Nephi, and Lehi honored Nephi's bond.

The descendants of Zoram, the Zoramites, continue to be a separate tribe well into Nephite history. Zoram had been a servant to Laban, probably a soldier of some kind under Laban's command. Thus, it is interesting and realistic that Lehi provided that Zoram's seed would live in security with Nephi's seed (1:32). Zoram was willing to go with Nephi, probably for a number of reasons, not the least of which were the terms of Zoram's blessing. If he doesn't stay with Nephi and doesn't remain a "true friend" or ally of Nephi (1:30), the promises and his rights of inheritance in this confederation would be compromised and voidable, because those are the conditions upon which those blessings are given.

When they left, Nephi's group was composed of Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites. Jacob was given the temple, Joseph was made a teacher, and Zoram appears to become the military leader. Zoramites are mentioned many times in the Book of Mormon, but almost always in connection with military positions or affairs.

This was their tribal cast or their role in this society. Centuries later, Alma the Younger becomes worried because the Zoramites have left the Land of Zarahemla and have moved to the Land of Antionum. They have built their own city, they have withdrawn, and they have severed relationships with the Nephites. Alma the Younger will take a

group of missionaries to go to preach to them. He wants to bring them back for spiritual reasons, but also because he is afraid that the Zoramites will form an alliance with the Lamanites (Alma 31:4), effectively renouncing Lehi’s arrangement set forth here in 2 Nephi 1.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How is the Name Zoram Connected with Pride?](#) (Alma 31:25),” *KnoWhy* 458 (August 14, 2008).

2 Nephi 2

2 Nephi 2 — Seeing Temple Themes throughout Lehi’s Blessing to Jacob

Jacob received a special blessing from Lehi and was eventually “consecrated” to become a temple priest to the Nephites (5:26). In a lot of ways, Lehi’s blessing prepares him for that sacred calling. Lehi’s blessing covers the topics of the Creation, Fall, and Atonement—all things taught and represented in the Temple. Although our temple ordinances weren’t practiced anciently in exactly the same way that we have them today, the endowment and blessings of the temple have remained standard, being appropriately tailored for the eras and the needs of people over time. But the basic configuration and essence of the ordinances of the temple remain the same.

Many ancient societies included versions of the creation story in their temple worship. The Egyptian temples begin with a lotus blossom and a lotus lily pad coming up out of the Nile River. For the Egyptians, this was the beginning of the emergence of plants and living beings out of the water and the inorganic world. From this came all of the developments and expansions of life. The tall pillars in Egyptian temples are actually lotus stalks, showing how the orderly earth came up out of primordial chaos.

The temple in Jerusalem was not so very different. The Holy of Holies was the inner sanctum where God dwelled. In order to get into the Holy of Holies, one had to go through a room that was twice the size of the Holy of Holies, sometimes referred to as “the holy place” or the *hekal*. On the walls of that room were scenes from the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Life, represented by the candelabra and paintings of plants and other things. We wouldn’t call it the “world room,” but it is, in a sense, a representation of the created world. One had to symbolically pass through it to reach the veil. On the veil in some eras were heavenly images: the sun, the moon, the stars, the colors of the light spectrum, and so on. Cosmological elements were present in essentially all ancient temples.

In overview, Lehi's blessing operates in much the same way. Verse 1 states, "And now Jacob. I speak unto you. Thou art my firstborn in the days of my tribulation in the wilderness." The *firstborn* male among Israelite children held special privileges or rights. So, it is noteworthy that even though Jacob technically wasn't Lehi's firstborn son (Laman was), Lehi describes him as being the *firstborn* in the wilderness, perhaps signaling that some sort of special privilege or blessing was reserved for Jacob. The firstborn or firstlings of a flock were sacrificed (or consecrated) upon altars, which is a prominent temple theme pointing to Jesus Christ, who is also sometimes referred to as the Firstborn. The wilderness theme is also important to consider. Jacob was the firstborn *in the wilderness*, and the wilderness—represented as the lone and dreary world—is also a temple theme.

Righteousness (mentioned in v. 3) is clearly a temple concept, as well as *holiness* (v. 11). As for *misery* (v. 11), we know that Satan wants everyone to be miserable like unto himself, which is a point brought up in verse 18. Misery is also a temple element—something we must pass through, but which isn't the end or purpose of life.

In verse 11, Lehi famously pronounced that "it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things." The basic opposition of good and evil, pleasure and pain, hot and cold, sin and righteousness, runs through all of this creation. Without opposition, there would have been "no *purpose* in the end of its creation" (v. 12), so we also know that Lehi is thinking about the purpose of life and creation, something he would have known about from his activities as a prophet in the temple of Jerusalem.

Starting in verse 14, we can see that Lehi's explanation is not just given to Jacob but to all of his sons: "And now, my sons . . ." In a way, this is quite fitting. It is as if Lehi knows that Jacob will become the temple priest who will officiate for all his people, and therefore he talks through Jacob to all of his sons. Verse 14 discusses things both "in the *heavens* and in the *earth*." Verse 15 discusses the creation of "our first parents," Adam and Eve, and of "the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air," and of the *tree of life*. This verse also mentions the *forbidden fruit* in opposition to the tree of life, and in verse 18 the devil enters into the scene to entice Adam and Eve to partake of that which is forbidden, promising them that "ye shall not die but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil." Adam and Eve are driven out into the world (v. 19), their days were prolonged that they might repent (v. 21), commandments were given (v. 21), having posterity is central (v. 23), and all are allowed to choose, of their own free will, whether to obey the great Mediator or suffer the captivity under the kingdom of the devil (v. 27, 29). When looked at altogether, Lehi's blessing to the future High Priest Jacob is a series of temple-related concepts and themes.

Let me relate to you an interesting experience I once had. We had an academic presentation by Douglas Davies, an Episcopalian scholar from England, who had spent a lot of time studying architecture and the way that sacred buildings, such as churches or temples, typically embody a people's most important values and principles. Architecture of sacred space is not accidental, he insisted. People spend a lot of time and effort to make sacred structures compatible with their religious worldview. Anthropologists and people who study religion evaluate sacred structures and how they relate to the religious ideals of their participants. For instance, architecture in Congregationalist churches emphasizes the presence of the congregation. Catholic churches emphasize the high altar which is up above the ordinary people. In our own temple buildings, there are important designs, symbols and stained glass windows. The décor is thought through very, very carefully, by people who have spent a lot of time studying the importance of symbolism.

Now this Episcopalian scholar had never been in a Latter-day Saint temple, except on a tour through one temple that hadn't yet been dedicated, so he didn't know exactly how it functioned. But he knew enough to know that what we enshrine in our temple is the plan of salvation, beginning with the creation room, going into the Garden of Eden, being cast out, finding our way in the lone and dreary world—as anyone can see in the model at the Visitors' Center in Salt Lake City. As you go from the creation room, you go up a few steps into the garden room; then you go up several more steps into the celestial room, with yet more steps into the terrestrial room. The lights get brighter as you are going up, although many people are almost unconscious of all this. And then you enter the celestial room, representing the highest degree of glory, and completing the cycle in the sealing rooms. What we have here is a wonderful architectural representation of the Plan of Salvation, and understanding all this Professor Davies said, "I know how important the Plan of Salvation is to Latter-day Saints." It was interesting to have him acknowledge that the Plan of Salvation is interwoven with temple-related themes.

How long did Joseph Smith have to figure out these basic principles? How long did he have to translate 2 Nephi 2? Not even half a day. At his standard rate, this occupied maybe two hours of translation. All this came out in a flood of revelation, one idea after another, stitched together in a way that, as you outline and diagram Lehi's blessing to Jacob, and follow it through, you find interwoven many temple themes, existential axioms, cogent logical arguments, theological propositions, and an understanding of the great big picture of our situation here in this world.

What Lehi has given here, and what Joseph Smith in one fell swoop has revealed to us, is the picture on the box of the puzzle of the Plan of Salvation. It yields a beautiful picture, and the pieces are perfectly clear. They fit together. It talks about the fullness of time and the fullness of the gospel, and it presents the full picture. This is what really matters. How blessed we are to have the fullness of the gospel revealed to us on the pages of the Book of Mormon. These are eternal truths that are fundamental to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to our hope, to our faith, to our motivation to be charitable, and to our opportunity to return back to the presence of God. If you compromise any of these core principles, then the picture begins to blur, pieces are missing, and the sections begin to fall apart.

2 Nephi 2:2 — The Lord Will Consecrate Jacob’s Afflictions for His Gain

“Behold in thy childhood thou hast suffered afflictions and much sorrow because of the rudeness of thy brethren, nevertheless Jacob my first born in the wilderness thou knowest the greatness of God and he shall *consecrate* thine afflictions for thy gain.” The word *consecrate* means to dedicate, to imbue with sacredness, to make sacred or holy. In the ancient world, one would go to the temple and make a vow or promise, typically covenanting one’s willingness to do certain things, to suffer, pay or sacrifice in a certain way, so that the Lord would reciprocate by honoring the person’s request for certain blessings. In this passage, Jacob’s privation and suffering is acknowledged, and his father Lehi vows to him that all of the things that he will suffer through in his life will be consecrated to God and this will bring blessings to him.

Jacob suffered as a young child from the difficulty of years of journey, danger, horrendous fears of shipwreck, the lack of adequate food or water. Jacob never knew Jerusalem, never knew the comforts of home, never knew the riches the family of Lehi once enjoyed. But his father said that the Lord would consecrate all these afflictions for his gain. In Doctrine & Covenants 98:3, the Lord said, “All things wherewith ye have been afflicted shall work together for your good,” and to the Prophet Joseph Smith he said, “All these things shall give thee experience and shall be for thy good.” Lehi imparted a similar message of reassurance, both to Jacob and importantly to all who read and regard his words today.

2 Nephi 2:3 — Jacob Will Spend His Days in the Service of God

“Wherefore thy soul shall be blessed. . . . Thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother Nephi. And thy days shall be spent in the *service* of God.” Jacob became the keeper of the sacred records, but he also had a special role in the temple that Nephi built in the city of Nephi. Jacob was given priestly duties as the High Priest of the temple. In Hebrew, the same word can be translated as *servant* or *slave*. When Samuel was dedicated by his mother,

he became a servant in the house of the Lord, he belonged to the temple. Jacob is being dedicated here by his father, as Samuel had been, to spend his days, in other words, his whole life serving in the temple.

We have been commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is a commandment of the Lord, one that we as his servants or slaves are obligated to obey. Now we don't like to think of ourselves as *belonging to* anyone else, or being *slaves* of God, even though it was then, or would be now, a high honor to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. It is the greatest wish that David can express in Psalm 23: "That I may live in the House of the Lord." What does this imply? Temple symbolism presents the heavenly realm as a model, a prototype of the eternal world, and to dwell in the temple represents living in the presence of God forever.

The scriptures indicate that we are God's "peculiar people." The English word *peculiar* comes from a Latin word, *peculia*, which means *personal property*. And indeed, we are bought with a price. We are *peculiar* because we belong to God, having been purchased by Christ's blood, and therefore we belong to him as his servants. This is a very important part of the way in which ancient Israelite religion and the relationship between God and man were understood. All this would have applied to Jacob's consecrated state as a lifetime servant of God.

2 Nephi 2:3 — Jacob Is Redeemed

"Wherefore," Lehi says, "I know that thou art *redeemed*." All of the sacrifices of the temple are a part of redemption, being bought back from sin. Under ancient Israelite law, the faithful brought the first fruits of their crops or herds and offered them as a sacrifice, and with this they became redeemed from a state of being outcast or lost. To better understand this, think of the way we use the word *redeem* in mortgage foreclosure law: A property that has gone through foreclosure has had the mortgage paid and the debt cleared by the "redeemer," the person who will now own the property. Under ancient Israelite law, as seen in Leviticus 5, the *redeemer* had to be a relative. It wasn't possible to redeem someone else's land as a third-party volunteer or business partner. In fact, there was an obligation on the part of family members to redeem the land if one of their kinsmen became poor. Because the Holy Land belonged to the tribes as their inheritance, it was important that that land stay within the family.

This was so important that the Law of Moses said that if one of your kinsmen needed to sell his property, that property was subject to a right of first refusal given to a kinsman who could buy it for the price that had been paid by an outside purchaser, thereby preventing the family property from being lost to the family (see Leviticus 25:25–28). Thus, the notion of redemption is a part of the law, and it is used as a symbol of the way

in which we are redeemed from our transgressions and sins. We have debts that we owe to God, and we don't have the resources to pay, but we have a Savior who comes and pays the price of our redemption. We are redeemed by a kinsman of our own—our elder brother—as part of the plan for how God's children, all of us, with Christ our elder brother, will be able to return to His presence.

Lehi also says in verse 3, *Thou hast beheld that in the fullness of times thy Redeemer cometh to bring salvation unto men*. Lehi knew that Jacob had passed the test and even at an early age was assured of his salvation. Apparently, Jacob had been shown a vision similar to the vision of Lehi of the Lord's coming in the fullness of time to bring salvation to everyone in the world.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How the Book of Mormon and the Old Testament Help Us Understand What it Means to be Redeemed?](#) (2 Nephi 2:3)," *KnoWhy* 436 (May 24, 2018).

2 Nephi 2:3–4 — Jacob Saw His Redeemer

In 2 Nephi 11:3, Nephi will bring to his side two witnesses to corroborate his understanding of the prophecies of Jesus Christ and the history of salvation. He called his brother Jacob as one witness, and Isaiah as the other. Nephi said: "And now my brother Jacob also has seen him as I have seen him, wherefore I will send their words, [meaning Isaiah's and Jacob's words] forth as companions." Thus, we have three witnesses testifying of these things.

When did Jacob see these things? We are not told, but in 11:4, Lehi says, "And thou hast beheld in thy youth his *glory*." When I see the word *glory*, I think of the beauty of the celestial room. I love the depictions and the feelings of what that anticipates for us. For the ancient Israelites, the Holy of Holies was the place of glory. There was found the pure altar of mercy, the mercy seat with the glory, the seraphim, the burning beings who guard and protect the presence of God. It is there in the Holy of Holies that Isaiah saw God (see Isaiah 6; 2 Nephi 16).

Lehi, Nephi and Jacob have been out in the wilderness for many years. They don't have a temple yet, but they have certainly had experiences. They long for a temple, and they've been blessed with visions of seeing the glory of God almost as if they were in the Holy of Holies. They will soon build a temple. It will be the first order of business as soon as Nephi can build what will be called the City of Nephi.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Who Are the Witnesses of Christ in 2 Nephi?](#) (2 Nephi 11:2–3)," *KnoWhy* 37 (February 19, 2016).

2 Nephi 2:4 — God Is the Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever

Continuing verse 4, "Wherefore thou art blessed even as they unto whom he shall minister in the flesh. For the spirit is the *same* yesterday, today and forever." The Holy of Holies in the ancient Jerusalem temple was a cube, 10 cubits by 10 cubits by 10 cubits—a perfect cube. It represented the perfect creation and the holy unity of God who is constantly always good in every way imaginable.

2 Nephi 2:4–5 — The Way Is Prepared and Salvation Is Free

"And the *way* is prepared from the fall of man and salvation is free." There was a *way* that led to the Tree of Life, and that path had to be protected by flaming swords so that the people wouldn't partake of the fruit early and live forever in an impure state. Lehi knew that, from the moment that Adam and Eve were discovered in a fallen state after their transgression, a *way* was provided and a Savior was promised so that they would not perish.

In the flesh, Jesus Christ will say, "I am the truth and the *way* and the life." And the word that he uses there for *way* is this word that is also in Genesis 3. It is in Lehi's vision as well, with the iron rod that guides you on the way. Walking in the way is one of the main themes of Psalm 1, which is the introduction of the path that leads back to God. We need a Redeemer, someone who will offer us the gift of salvation.

All people will be resurrected with a gift that is definitely free. Gerald Lund has argued very cogently, that our resurrection is free because all people must stand physically in His presence. But if the grace of Christ did not also create the *way* in which we could move up that path toward exaltation, all would be in vain. So, not only is our resurrection free and given to all people, but the creation of the path and the *way* in which we can become exalted is also free and open to all people. Furthermore, moving along that path is also possible for all people, because everyone has been "instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil" (2:5).

2 Nephi 2:6–10 — The Holy One of Israel Will Make an Atonement for Mankind

Lehi teaches his son Jacob about Jesus Christ in the next few verses. In verse 7, He will offer himself as a *sacrifice* for sin. In verse 8, no flesh can dwell in the *presence* of God, that's the Holy of Holies. In verse 9, He is the *first fruits* which belonged to God and had to be brought to the temple under the Law of Moses. Through the sacrifice of the first

fruits one could be reconciled with God. Lehi would have known that from his own revelations and also from Isaiah Chapter 53.

“He offers himself to answer the ends of the law unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit.” Those last words are found in the Psalms, and they will also be spoken by Jesus from the darkness of the cloud in 3 Nephi, and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered. “Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God save it be through the merits and mercy and grace of the Holy Messiah.”

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How is the Day of Atonement Understood in the Book of Mormon?](#) (2 Nephi 2:10),” *KnoWhy* 479 (October 25, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Was the Requirement of a ‘Broken Heart’ Known Before the Time of Christ?](#) (2 Nephi 2:7),” *KnoWhy* (February 5, 2016).

2 Nephi 2:8 — The Merits, Mercy, and Grace of the Savior

We might ponder what those three words mean. Right in the next phrase, Lehi says that the Savior will lay down his life according to the flesh. Those are his merits, and he taketh it up again by the power of the spirit that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead being the first that should rise. That’s certainly his suffering, his overcoming of death which gives him the power, gives him the merits, the strength, the worthiness, to be able to then become the first-fruits unto God inasmuch as he shall make intercession for all the children of men and there I see the mercy, the intercession which allows for further time for repentance to take place, that they that believe in him shall be saved. And that’s the grace that operates to allow us to be saved. And then, because of the intercession for all, all men come unto God and must stand in the presence him to be judged according to the truth and holiness which is in *him*. We will not only be judged according to our works, but we will be judged in accordance with the mercy, truth, and holiness of God as well.

Intercession is a word relating to how the priests, particularly the high priest in the temple of Israel, would make an *offering*, an atoning sacrifice which would act as an intercessory sacrifice—one person doing it for the benefit of the whole nation—and this what Lehi is referencing. *Christ* will make himself an intercessor, offering himself as a *sacrifice* for all the children of men. That is classic temple imagery.

2 Nephi 2:11 – Opposition in All Things

Verse 10 tells us that in this way all men may *come* unto God and stand in the presence of him to be judged. *Judgment* is another word of temple significance bringing the idea of opposition as we see in the creation account with the light being separated from the dark, the wet from the dry, the mountains from the valleys, the animals from the plants, male and female. We learn in the temple that opposition is the fundamental characteristic of the world in which we find ourselves and when we understand that, then lots of things like obedience and disobedience, choosing Christ or choosing Satan, life or death become fundamental choices explaining the reasons why we are here.

How are things opposed to each other, but also as Lehi says a compound in one? God created something which in the beginning was pure and unified and good, but then in the world where you have opposites, we must learn to choose one or the other. Lehi understands that there is a choice between good and bad, between happiness and misery and yet this will not necessarily deteriorate into chaos. It's controlled because each thing has something that is set in opposition to it.

Everything that comes from God is good. Light, life, truth, joy and good. Satan takes away light; darkness is the absence of light. Satan takes away life; death is the absence of life. Satan takes away truth; falsehood is the absence of truth. Satan takes away joy; misery is the absence of joy. And Satan takes away good; evil is the absence of good. It is the existence of opposites coupled with our agency that gives meaning and purpose to our mortal probation.

2 Nephi 2:13 – The Importance of Laws

In Lehi's understanding and fundamentally sound way of viewing things, there can only be law when you have a choice between two opposing alternatives. If there are no laws and if you don't have all of these opposites that Lehi has described, then you end up with a situation where there couldn't really have been a creation of things. There could have been a creation of one thing, but it would have been a compound in one; there would have been no differentiation. But when God created things (plural), then you have some that can act and some that can be acted upon, and that is the beginning of Lehi's discussion of agency. When you get to verse 27 toward the end of what Lehi says, there is no question that this is all moving toward our understanding of the importance of agency: "Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh and all things are given them which are expedient unto man and they are free, and so they must be free to obey the laws of God and free to break those same laws, ready to accept the consequences for either action they choose."

2 Nephi 2:14 — God Created All Things in Heaven and in Earth

Lehi understands that the world was created for certain purposes. One may wonder how close the version of Genesis was on the brass plates to the version that we now know as the Book of Moses, but there are some very interesting connections between the Book of Moses and passages reflected in the Book of Mormon that make it look like there were some strong similarities between the brass plates version of Genesis and what we now have as the Book of Moses. Moses 1:39, for example, reads, “For this is my work and my glory,” where the purpose of the creation is clearly set forth, and we have Lehi similarly reflecting that same purpose. The Plan of Salvation was set forth from the very beginning in the Council in Heaven. The world in which we live is not an arbitrary, random place. It is a place where we have come to do certain things, to accomplish certain purposes and objectives, and every person who comes has the opportunity to act and not just be acted upon, to choose between right and wrong, between Christ and the way of life and Satan and the way of death (2 Nephi 2:25–27). Making that choice, and hopefully making it to our eternal joy, is our number one purpose in this existence. As we are shown in the endowment in the temple, our world was created not just for amusement, but as an environment in which people can make serious choices.

2 Nephi 2:16–18 — The Devil Fell from Heaven and Entices Men to Sin

In verse 16, notice that in order for the purpose to be accomplished, it was necessary that man should be enticed by one or the other. I like that word *entice*; it’s a little different than the word *tempt*. We can be enticed by a lot of things and not all of them are bad in the sense that they come from Satan. Some things are better and other things are worse. One of the reasons that there is an opposition in all things is that we might be *enticed*—drawn to things—and because of that enticement, we can then make choices.

In verse 17, Lehi stated, “And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven.” He is referring to the brass plates. Lehi had the plates of brass and he had studied them and in the plates of brass he learned that an angel of God had fallen from heaven and had become a devil, “for he sought that which was evil before God.” What does that phrase mean? “To seek evil before God?” It may refer to the Council in Heaven when before God, meaning in the presence of God, Satan chose to rebel or to not adopt the plan of the Father, and because of that he became fallen. This is an important part of the Plan of Salvation.

Verse 18 reads, “And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind.” Some people think that Lucifer’s misery is that he was cast out of the presence of God and cannot go back. No. He is not

miserable because he cannot be with God; He opposes God and fights against him. His misery is not that he cannot be *with* God; his misery is that he can never become *like* God. He can never have a physical body, he can never be a husband, he can never have children, he can never have posterity. He is miserable because he is stopped in his progress. Satan is our adversary, a serpent, a father of lies, the evil one, the dragon, perdition, Beelzebub. He fights against God and does everything that he can to turn God's children against God.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Lehi 'Suppose' the Existence of Satan? \(2 Nephi 24:12\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 43 (February 29, 2016).

2 Nephi 2:21 — The Days of Mankind Were Prolonged

Why were the days of the children of men prolonged? It is so "that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men. For he gave commandment that all men must repent." Repentance is not just an option; it is a requirement. All people must repent, and that's why the Doctrine and Covenants, repeatedly says, "Say nothing but repentance unto this generation" (see D&C 6:9; 11:9).

Lehi teaches here that we are in a state of *probation*. The word *probe* is identical philologically to *prove*. It's a time when we can prove ourselves, not only to God but also to ourselves. It's a time of testing as to whether we will repent or not. We learn by our experiences, and in our *probation* we learn the difference between good and evil. For Lehi, there really are only two options. It's either the Savior or the devil. It's either happiness or wickedness. It's either joy or misery. It's corruption or incorruption. Lehi understands too, however, that we aren't just being thrown out into the wilderness. He has lived through the wilderness where he has been guided by the Liahona, by the revelations that he has received. He knows that the Lord doesn't just send his children without resources. This idea connects with the concept of mercy, as in Alma 42, where Alma connects mercy explicitly with God withholding the execution of the judgment. You see, if you commit a sin, if you violate his law, he would be perfectly just if he were to lower the boom on you immediately, right? He doesn't need further evidence. He knows it all. He doesn't have to call witnesses. There's no risk that he would judge improperly. His judgment will be righteous, so why doesn't he just go ahead? Since he is *just*, God could have created a world in which as soon as we committed any transgression, we would immediately experience a punishment or a consequence. But

that is Satan's plan, or pretty close to it, isn't it? When you get slapped real hard and too quickly before you have learned for yourself, you're being coerced or forced into it.

In verse 21 we learn that the "days of the children of men were prolonged ... and their time was lengthened." So that means we have a time on earth to prepare to meet God, a probationary time, a time of testing, a time of repentance. Their time was lengthened. In the beginning they were given lots of years to go through this process and to have many, many children. Methuselah lived 969 years; his days were indeed lengthened. Noah lived 950 years, and Adam lived 930 years. No doubt, their days were lengthened!

Now we have fewer years. We may have 80 or 90 or 79 or 91, or however many years we have, but we still have a probation. We still have a time on earth when it is our time to prepare to meet God.

2 Nephi 2:22 – How Can All Things Have No End?

Verse 22 makes it pretty clear that if there had not been a transgression, all things that were created would have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created, and they would have remained forever and had no end or purpose. That word *end* can also mean *purpose*. This is a good description of where we came from and why we are here.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Do We Have Three Different Accounts of the Creation?](#) (2 Nephi 2:22)," *KnoWhy* 400 (January 18, 2018).

2 Nephi 2:23 – Joy Is Linked with Families

They would have had no children. They would have remained in a state of innocence but they would have had no joy, right? I know that sometimes teenagers bring misery, but there is also joy and rejoicing in your posterity. Well the fall was a planned event; it was a noble thing for Adam and Eve to fall, otherwise they would have remained in the garden. And they would have had no children, and we would have been in the pre-mortal existence waiting for them to do something so that they could have children so that we could become mortal. I know I was up there, chanting, *eat the fruit! eat the fruit!* because until that happened, they were just eating pomegranates and riding zebras and having a good time, but they needed to fall in order for the plan to take effect.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Can the Book of Mormon Strengthen Marriages and Families?](#) (Jacob 3:7)," *KnoWhy* 302 (April 19, 2017).

2 Nephi 2:24–25 — Adam Fell That Men Might Be

The word *might* is the most important operative word in this famous saying, not the resultant word *joy*. Adam fell that men *might* be. Adam and Eve did not know all things—they did not know exactly how they could fulfil this commandment to multiply and replenish the earth once they were cast out. It took a great deal of faith for Adam to choose to fall.

Until there was a fall, we were just waiting. There was no way for the great family of God to receive bodies until after the fall of Adam. Because Adam fell, we are and by his fall came death. By reason of transgression cometh the fall and the fall bringeth death. The fall was to bring mortality, and men were placed on earth to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. The great purposes of God would have been frustrated without the fall of Adam.

And then Lehi says, “men are that they might have joy.” Lehi knows from his vision of the tree of life that a joyous outcome is not guaranteed but must be chosen. Initially, Adam says more definitely in Moses 5:10: “for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy.” Adam is confident that he shall or will have joy. And in verse 11, in her response, Eve states more specifically that the joy to be experienced was, at least initially, “the joy of our redemption”: his wife Eve answered, “Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed [children], 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.”

Before the Fall, they were not mortal; after the fall they were mortal. Before the fall they were not subject to physical death; after the fall they were subject to physical death. That is one of the things Satan lied about, “Ye shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). Before the fall they were in the presence of God; after the fall they were cast out or cut off from the presence of God. Before the fall they were spiritually alive; after the Fall they suffered a spiritual death—they died spiritually, they died as pertaining to things of righteousness, they were cut off from the presence of God. That is what spiritual death is. Before the fall they were in a state of innocence; after the fall they had knowledge. Before the fall they did not know the difference between good and evil; after the fall they knew the difference between good and evil. Before the fall they would have had no children; after the fall they had children. So let us vote. How many people believe that the fall was good? Yes! And yet so many Christian believers do not have that understanding. The fall was a great blessing. It was part of the plan—first the creation in a certain condition, then the fall changed that condition. We said they are subject to death and they are

subject to spiritual death. Now we need to do something to *save* them and to redeem them, and that is why Lehi immediately follows with the message of a Savior.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Did Lehi Teach that the Fall was Necessary? (2 Nephi 2:22–25)," *KnoWhy* 269 (February 1, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, "What are the Origins of Lehi's Understanding of the Fall? (2 Nephi 2:25)," *KnoWhy* 28 (February 8, 2016).

2 Nephi 2:26–27 — Christ Is the One Who Sets Us Free to Choose

For Lehi, one of the results of the redemption of Christ is to make us free. Only then can we have joy by choosing properly. We have freedom to choose, and that is because the redemption of Christ allows us to choose either life or death. Without that redemption, we could not have that choice. Now it doesn't mean that we are free to do whatever we want. We are not free to violate the laws of gravity. We are not free to do things and not suffer the natural consequences. It means free to make a choice between Christ and life or Satan and death.

Lehi goes on to explain how this will happen. You are free, first of all, to make a choice and in order to make that choice, you know good from evil. Again, one of those oppositions, and because of the redemption and because of your experience you can know good from evil, you are then free to act for yourselves and not to be acted upon. That is crucial—you aren't being compelled and you aren't being driven. It is Satan's plan to have you be acted upon. The only proviso in the Plan of Salvation is you are free 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" (v. 26). Everyone is subject to this. No flesh can dwell in the presence of God save it be according to this plan.

So, we have here the Creation, the Fall, and now we have the Atonement—three grand pillars of eternity. "And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall" (v. 26). How does mankind get back into the presence of God? He died spiritually—being cut off from the presence of God—so he has to be born again right? The Book of Moses tells us that Adam was born again, that he was baptized, that he received the spirit of God and came back into the presence of God spiritually (see Moses 6:64). But in order to enter the presence of God and overcome spiritual death it had to be done by the power of the Redeemer, and Adam received spiritual life just like all of us receive spiritual life. Faith in Jesus Christ, repentance of sins, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. I am not exactly sure who laid their hands on Adam's head, but

he received the Holy Ghost and endured to the end in righteousness, for 930 years! He endured to the end, and he received a crown of eternal life. He is the great Michael, and he will preside at the final gathering—a conference that will be held before the Second Coming of the Savior. Adam will receive the keys back from all the prophets and deliver them up to Christ. I like to think that it was that mighty Michael who was the one who came to the Garden of Gethsemane as an angel and comforted the Lord in his great agony.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Lehi Teach About the “Two Ways”?](#) (2 Nephi 2:27),” *KnoWhy* 287 (March 15, 2017).

2 Nephi 3

2 Nephi 3:1–2 — Lehi Blesses His Son Joseph

How old was Joseph when this blessing was given? Probably under ten years old, perhaps just barely old enough to understand what is being said here. But how would this have impacted the life of a very young person, especially one in Joseph’s situation?

He is reminded of his namesake. Joseph of Egypt was a man of great accomplishment, and it is good for young people to know for whom they have been named. That would have had a powerful effect on young Joseph. This is something to instill in a person at a very young age, so that at a young age one can appreciate the tradition and background one comes from.

Lehi will quote heavily from the scriptures as he speaks to Joseph. Jacob will be set apart as the priest, and Joseph will be set apart as the teacher. Joseph is, in a way, being mentored. He is being taught how to teach. You read the scriptures, you apply them to your situation, and that ties in to the need for establishing and maintaining their traditions.

2 Nephi 3:3 — Joseph’s Seed Will Not Be Utterly Destroyed

Another blessing Joseph will receive is that his people will not be utterly destroyed. For a young person that is a heavy thing to say; you will have influence and your family will not be destroyed. That is a hopeful thing for a young person to hear, especially one in Joseph’s situation.

If he is eight to ten years old, he has seen his older brothers quarrel. He was probably fairly traumatized by what happened on the ship. His parents are old. They have just landed. The

family knew how to survive in Arabia, but they are in a completely new environment. This would be enough to cause doubt, insecurity, and tears in any young child.

In 2 Nephi 3 Joseph is promised four times that his seed will not be destroyed. How can Lehi be so confident of that? He knows that these were promises given to Joseph in Egypt. Lehi sees himself as carrying much of the burden of ensuring that the tribe of Joseph goes forward. He is passing some of that burden to young Joseph, in effect saying to him: “you are going to be the one through whom these promises are kept!” There is also reassurance in that these are old promises and the Lord has protected us so far, you can count on him to protect you further.

2 Nephi 3:4 — Lehi Is a Descendant of Joseph

In 2 Nephi 3:4, Lehi says, “I am a descendant of Joseph.” From the Book of Mormon, we learn that Lehi was a descendant of Joseph through his oldest son Manasseh. From Erastus Snow in the *Journal of Discourses* quoting Joseph Smith and also Joseph Fielding Smith in *Answers to Gospel Questions*, the Prophet Joseph informed us that Ishmael was of the lineage of Ephraim. He brought his daughters and his two sons. Lehi’s sons married Ishmael’s daughters and perhaps Ishmael’s sons had already married Lehi’s older daughters, and so both branches of Joseph’s posterity were represented. The people of Lehi were pure Josephites. That is why this can be called the *stick of Joseph*. It is a record of descendants of Joseph.

2 Nephi 3:5–21 — Lehi Quotes Prophecies Made by Joseph in Egypt

In this prophecy Lehi quotes only several small parts of the much longer text of words spoken to Joseph by Jacob found in the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 48:7–11, and also containing words spoken by Joseph to his brothers in JST Genesis 50:24–38.

For example, Lehi said that “the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel; not the Messiah, but a branch that would be broken off” (3 Nephi 5:5). This tracks the ancient prophecy in JST Genesis 50:24 that “the Lord God will raise up a righteous branch out of my loins . . . (not the Messiah).”

Lehi spoke of “a choice seer” that would be raised up “out of the fruit of [the] loins” of Joseph of old (3 Nephi 3:7). The version in JST Genesis 50:27 used the words “a choice seer” who will be “raise[d] up out of the fruit of thy loins.”

Lehi promised his son Joseph that this seer would be called Joseph “after the name of his father” (2 Nephi 3:15). That prophecy to which Lehi was referring is now found in JST Genesis 50:33, “and his name shall be called Joseph, and it shall be after the name of his father.”

And Lehi said, “Thus prophesied Joseph: I am sure of this thing, . . . for the Lord hath said unto me, I will preserve thy seed forever” (2 Nephi 3:16). In the longer JST version, the text assures that “the Lord sware unto Joseph that he would preserve his seed forever” (JST Genesis 50:34).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Lehi Likened the Scriptures to Himself](#) (2 Nephi 3:18),” *KnoWhy* 418 (March 22, 2018). “Most of what Lehi quoted to his son is similar to the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 50:24–38. However, the differences between the Joseph Smith Translation and Lehi’s blessing in the Book of Mormon show how Lehi specifically applied the scriptures to the lives of his descendants.”

2 Nephi 3:5–6 — Joseph in Egypt Prophesied of Joseph Smith

Who is this seer that Joseph of Egypt saw? Joseph Smith was the choice seer raised up by the Lord.

2 Nephi 3:7 — Joseph Smith’s Reputation

Verse 7 states that “he [the seer Joseph Smith] shall be esteemed highly among the fruit of thy loins . . . [and] he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins.” While his name will be known throughout the world for good or for ill, it was foreseen that the descendants of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, would esteem Joseph Smith highly. Indeed, many who have come into the restored Church of Jesus Christ have discovered through their patriarchal blessings that they are the fruit of the loins of Joseph, and they also know that he is a true prophet. They sing with enthusiasm, “Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah.”

Brigham Young said, “I feel like shouting hallelujah all the time when I think that I ever knew Joseph Smith.” His work was to translate the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God, and Doctrine and Covenants 135:3 states that “Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it.”

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can We Know What to Believe about Joseph Smith’s Personal Character?](#) (3 Nephi 18:1),” *KnoWhy* 413 (March 6, 2018).

2 Nephi 3:9–11 — Joseph Smith Will Also Be a Prophet Like Moses

In 2 Nephi 3:9, we read, “He shall be great like unto Moses.” Doctrine and Covenants 28:2 states that “no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., for he receiveth them even as Moses.” Then in D&C 107:91 we read, “And again, the duty of the President of the

office of the High Priesthood is to preside over the whole church, and to be like unto Moses.” By fulfilling these priesthood responsibilities, Joseph Smith fulfilled this prophecy of Lehi.

In 2 Nephi 3:11 it is prophesied that this seer will “bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins ... to the convincing them of my word, which shall have already gone forth among them.” The word that had already gone forth is the Bible. Joseph Smith brought forth the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Mormon was written to the convincing of Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, proving to the world that the holy scriptures, the Bible, that the holy scriptures are true. The Book of Mormon proves that the Bible is true. It is not the other way around. And that also is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Lehi.

2 Nephi 3:12 — Ezekiel Foresees a Stick of Joseph

In Ezekiel 37, the prophet Ezekiel prophesies that the records that would become the Holy Bible and the Book of Mormon will become one in the hands of readers. When we study the Bible and Book of Mormon together, it is profitable to notice the subtle ways in which these two volumes of scripture connect together.

The name Ezekiel means “God will strengthen,” and God certainly strengthened both him and Lehi. Did Lehi know Ezekiel? Potentially. Ezekiel would have been a young man at the time Jerusalem was destroyed. He must have been very prominent and well-educated, for he was among the few who were taken into Babylon. He was likely about the same age as Nephi.

In that relatively small circle of prophets in Jerusalem, there is no reason why Lehi and Ezekiel should not have known each other. Ezekiel was a priest in the temple, and many of his prophecies relate to promises that Lehi was also concerned with. Ezekiel likely knew that people, like Lehi and also Rechab, were leaving. Ezekiel may not have had any idea where Lehi had gone, but he would have known that Lehi and his family were suddenly gone. He knows God is watching over them, that the Lord will be their strength. As a prophet, he is aware of the scattering of Israel, and he will prophesy about the strength of the Lord bringing them back together again.

Like Lehi, Ezekiel was also a man of great visions. The last nine chapters of the Book of Ezekiel are visions of the eternal covenant and the eternal temple that would be restored in the millennial last days. Interestingly, in Doctrine and Covenants 29:21, the Lord speaks of the whore of all the earth being cast down by devouring fire, for abomination shall not reign, quoting Ezekiel 38:22 and mentioning Ezekiel by name. Lehi used similar phrases in his teachings and prophecies.

Did Ezekiel know that these people going out into the far reaches of the world would write and that their writings and his would someday come back together again? Lehi never quotes Ezekiel 37. However, in 2 Nephi 3:12, Lehi says something similar to his youngest son Joseph: “Wherefore the fruit of thy loins shall write and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write, and that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah shall grow together.”

Lehi then states, in 2 Nephi 3:12, five reasons for why these two records need to come together. These five purposes should be carefully considered:

1. To confound false doctrines.
2. Unto the laying down of contentions.
3. To establish “peace among the fruit of thy loins.” Notice that it does not say establishing peace in the whole world. That may be an unachievable objective, but when this book is brought together with scriptures from Judah, it can establish peace in the hearts of those who are of the House of Ephraim and the seed of Joseph, the son of Lehi. Giving peace is one of the great purposes the Book of Mormon will serve for all.
4. To bring them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days.
5. To bring them to the knowledge of the covenants of the Lord. Moroni reiterates this final purpose on the Title Page of the Book of Mormon, thus emphasizing the importance of the book fulfilling these purposes.

2 Nephi 3:12 – Did Ezekiel Prophesy Using a Visual Aid?

In his prophecy, Ezekiel may have used two sticks—or tablets or rods—speaking to a group of people. He could have taken one and written on it “*Judah*” or “*Judah and his posterity*.” He would have then taken the other and written, “*for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and for all the House of Israel and his companions*.” And then what does the Lord say? “Ezekiel, I want you to put those two together, and they will be one in your hand.”

Prophets in Israel loved to do this sort of thing, to act out certain events. When Jeremiah wanted to prophesy that the children of Israel were going to be taken into captivity, he draped chains and ropes all over his body and walked through the streets of Jerusalem saying, “We are going to be taken captive.” It did not make him popular, but it made an impression. Likewise, Abinadi graphically used a “simile curse” in prophesying about King Noah’s demise (Mosiah 12:3). In saying, in effect, to the people, “Just as I am putting these two little sticks together in my hand, something much bigger is going to happen someday when the Lord will bring these two together,” Ezekiel dramatically

conveys the idea that the gathering will happen because two books—two writings, two staffs of authority—will come back together.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Is the Book of Mormon ‘Another Testament of Jesus Christ’? (2 Nephi 3:12),” *KnoWhy* 494 (December 18, 2018).

2 Nephi 3:15 — The Naming of Joseph Smith

It is interesting that Lucy and Joseph Smith, Sr. named their first son Alvin, their second son Hyrum, and only then named their *third* son Joseph Smith, Jr., after his father. That is not how it usually worked in the 1800s. If there was going to be a Junior, he was usually the firstborn son. But Alvin was not the great seer of whom Joseph in Egypt and Lehi had prophesied. It was Joseph Smith, Jr., the thirdborn son. Somehow, the Lord inspired his parents to name their children in that order.

Joseph Smith, Sr. was the first to hold the office of patriarch in this dispensation. He was the oldest man of the blood of Joseph, meaning that he was the oldest direct lineal descendant of Joseph of Egypt on the earth at the time. Brigham Young said that the Lord watched over the blood from Ephraim down through the generations until it came to Joseph Smith, Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith and that Joseph Smith was a pure Ephraimite.

Whatever that may mean, Joseph Smith Jr. also had the blood of Joseph, the blood of Israel, the blessings of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, flowing in his veins, and he was the great seer that has been prophesied by his ancestor Joseph who was sold into Egypt.

2 Nephi 3:20 — A Voice from the Dust

The Book of Mormon contains the voices from those that are in the dust. “And they shall cry from the dust.” From the Plates of Brass, Lehi would have known the words of Isaiah 29:4, “And they speech shall be low out of the dust.” The testimony of the dead lives, and that testimony is that Jesus is the Christ, that He has risen from the grave, and that He is the only begotten Son of God.

Further Reading

Jeff Lindsay, “‘Arise from the Dust’: Insights from Dust-Related Themes in the Book of Mormon (Part 1: Tracks from the Book of Moses),” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 22 (2016): 179–232.

2 Nephi 4

2 Nephi 4:1–2 — The Prophecies of Joseph in Egypt Are Great

In 2 Nephi 4, Nephi says, “I, Nephi, speak concerning the prophecies of which my father hath spoken, concerning Joseph, who was carried into Egypt.” Joseph in Egypt “truly prophesied concerning all his seed. And the prophecies which he wrote, there are not many greater ... and they are written upon the plates of brass.” Eventually, in the restitution of all things, we can hope to have in more detail these prophecies of Joseph in Egypt.

2 Nephi 4:3–7 — Lehi’s Grandchildren Are Free from the Sins of their Parents

Lehi promises his grandchildren that they will not suffer in the eyes of God because of the failures of their parents. In Deuteronomy 24:16, a very important principle of Jewish law was established, and it was recognized in the days of Lehi, that prohibited vicarious punishments: “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.” This was not the case in most ancient Near Eastern laws. Under the Code of Hammurabi, for example, if a physician committed malpractice and killed the son of a freeman, then the son of the doctor was to be killed. In his blessing to Laman’s and Lemuel’s children, Lehi assured them that they will not be punished for their parents’ wrongdoings.

2 Nephi 4:11 — Sam Is Blessed to Be Numbered among the Nephites

In his last will and testament, Lehi arranged his posterity into seven different groups, but he went out of his way to divide his property into eight shares. This was because Laman, as the oldest son, was entitled under Deuteronomy 21:17 to a share twice the size of the other sons’ portions of Lehi’s estate. Typically this was the rule because the oldest son had the obligation to take care of his mother and other dependents in the family, and therefore the oldest son needed a larger part of land, or more of the cattle, or whatever the father was dividing up.

But Lehi has a problem. God had called Nephi to be the leader of the people, and Lehi reaffirms Nephi’s call to be his successor. But how can Nephi be Lehi’s successor if he does not have the resources to manage not only his own family but to lead the whole group? And Lehi also wants, I think, to keep balance and harmony in the family as much as possible. So, in order for Nephi and Laman to have equal resources, Lehi gave Laman the “first blessing,” while at the same time combining the allocations of Sam and Nephi, putting the two of them into one tribe. Lehi says to Sam, “thou shalt inherit the land like unto thy brother Nephi. And thy seed shall be numbered with his seed” and

the two of your will merge. I think this is clever estate planning. Lehi is trying to do everything he can to divide his estate up as fairly and as effectively as he can.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Lehi Divide His People into Seven Tribes?](#) (Jacob 1:13)," *KnoWhy* 319 (May 29, 2017).

2 Nephi 4:15 — Nephi Delights in the Scriptures

Besides the Lord speaking in Doctrine and Covenants Section 25, the only other people who use the words, "My soul delighteth" are Isaiah and Nephi. The only two who use the words "the robes of righteousness" are Isaiah and Nephi. Jacob uses this phrase, but he is quoting Isaiah. Nephi loves Isaiah and his writings, and he is so familiar with these words and passages that he may not even have realized that he was quoting any phrase in particular.

2 Nephi 4:16–35 — Nephi's Psalm

The text in 2 Nephi 4:16–35 is often called the Psalm of Nephi. It is among the most eloquent, sublime writings found anywhere in scripture.

What circumstances is it written in response to? Lehi has just died, and Nephi feels strongly motivated to admonish his brothers. But he doesn't have the strength of his father who has held this group together, and now Nephi finds himself completely alone. He tries to admonish his brothers, and it doesn't work. He laments. He feels that he is weak and has failed. By the end, however, he is back on track and he knows in whom he trusts.

We can tell that his confidence has been rebuilt and restored. On the Small Plates of Nephi, there would have been no chapter break after the end of verse 35 where he concludes, "Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God. Amen." The text would have gone straight into the opening of 2 Nephi 5: "Behold, it came to pass that I, Nephi, did cry much unto the Lord my God, because of the anger of my brethren."

With that reinforcement, Nephi has renewed his commitment, and he has renewed his strength of spirit. Whatever self-reservations he had felt before, he now thinks, "I'm going to try again. I know that I've failed once already, but maybe God can soften their hearts." However, what happens? "But behold, their anger did increase against me, insomuch that they did seek to take away my life" (v. 2). They murmured and God warned Nephi in 2 Nephi 5:5 to leave. That was the setting and the subsequent development in which this psalm was written.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Is ‘Nephi’s Psalm’ Really a Psalm?](#) (2 Nephi 4:16–17),” *KnoWhy* 30 (February 10, 2016).

2 Nephi 4:16–35 — Literary Styles of Nephi’s Psalm

There are about 30 different Hebraic literary forms or styles of writing, but the basic one is parallelism. There are different kinds of parallelism, such as *synonymous* parallelisms, *synthetic* parallelisms, or *antithetic* parallelisms. All of those different types of parallelisms are present in Nephi’s Psalm. It is a masterful work in the highest tradition of the Hebrew lament and also of the Hebrew Psalms of praise and of reassurance.

One article by Matthew Nickerson is called “[Nephi’s Psalm: 2 Nephi 4:16–35 in Light of Form-Critical Analysis](#).” Nickerson examines the ways in which biblically trained scholars have studied the writing style of the “lament psalm.” There are about twenty Psalms in the Old Testament that fall within the form of the lament. In the lament, there are five stages:

- Stage 1 is an invocation, where you invoke or address God
- Stage 2 is a complaint, where you register some kind of complaint
- Stage 3 is where you confess and profess your trust, reassuring God that you will trust in Him
- Stage 4 is a petition—you ask for something
- Stage 5 is when you make a vow of praise

It is not hard to see that Nephi’s Psalm follows that pattern precisely.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Is ‘Nephi’s Psalm’ Really a Psalm?](#) (2 Nephi 4:16–17),” *KnoWhy* 30 (February 10, 2016).

2 Nephi 4:16–35 — The Lord’s Name Uttered Ten Times

The word *Lord* (which would be the translation for the name *Jehovah* or YHWH) appears ten times in this Psalm. There is something very significant about ten utterings of the holy name of Jehovah. Under Jewish law and ritual practice, this could only happen once every year, on the Day of Atonement. If you spoke the name of Jehovah aloud except under these circumstances, you were committing blasphemy, which was a capital offense.

On the Day of Atonement, however, the high priest offered a prayer of repentance. On that day the people had to fast. The high priest would then offer prayers on their behalf. There would be two goats, one would be sacrificed and another—the scapegoat—would be sent out into the wilderness to bare the sins of the people away from the city.

In the course of these prayers, statements of thanksgiving, and blessings, the high priest alone could speak the name of Jehovah ten times aloud. And each time the people heard the name, the Jewish texts say that they had to fall down on their face, to be completely reduced to the dust of the earth, before the great presence of the goodness of God.

We do not know when Lehi died, but within a few months Nephi wrote this Psalm. It is possible that it was composed on the first Day of Atonement after the death of Lehi. In any event, the Psalm of Nephi makes a perfect Day of Atonement text. It shows how we are ultimately dependent upon the Lord, not just for guidance and for strength, but for his forgiveness, that we might become one again with him to be encircled in the robes of his righteousness and then we can go forward trusting in him.

Further Reading

Matthew Nickerson, "Nephi's Psalm: 2 Nephi 4:16–35 in Light of Form-Critical Analysis," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 26–42.

2 Nephi 4:16 — Nephi Delights in the Word of God

Throughout this psalm there are *parallelistic couplets* identifiable by the way the lines break. Here the *soul* is parallel to *heart*, and *delighteth* is parallel to *pondereth*, and *things of the Lord* parallel *things which I have seen and heard*, which are the things of the Lord. This is not, however, a synonymous parallelism. This is a parallelism that intensifies. At first Nephi just delights, but then he ponders it. It is something heavier.

It is not just "the things of the Lord," but more than that—"the things which I have seen and heard." It's not distant things that the Lord has said to someone else, but it is now intensified with a more personal reception. We can follow that same pattern in our lives as we first delight, but then say, "I need to ponder." It must be done deeply and continually and in more than just a passing way.

2 Nephi 4:17 — A Subtle Wordplay

The word Lord here—whenever it appears in this Psalm—would be *Yahweh* in Hebrew, the word for Jehovah. And that is connected philologically to *I am*. So, there is a subtle connection between the great goodness and marvelous works of the Lord, I am, and Nephi's sober comparison, "O wretched man that I am." There is a play on ideas, if not play on words here, between that divine name of God, *I am*, compared to what I am.

2 Nephi 4:18–25 — Nephi Trusts in the Lord

Nephi worries here. He says, "I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me," and "when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins." But he then goes on to state that "nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted." "My God hath been my support."

Then Nephi leads us into a series of statements of what the Lord has done for him.

- He hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness
- He hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep
- He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh
- He hath confounded mine enemies, and unto the causing of them to quake before me
- He hath heard my cry by day, and he hath given me knowledge by visions in the night-time Upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains. And mine eyes have beheld great things, yea, even too great for man

Each of these are personal events in Nephi’s life. He has told us about these in 1 Nephi. So, this psalm is not simply a lyrical poem of abstract experiences. This offers a template for meaningful and successful prayer. When we remember things that God has done, we should not just say in one word, “Thanks.” We should give thanks and remember in detail the specific ways God has blessed in our personal lives.

2 Nephi 4:26–30 — Nephi Will Praise the Lord Forever

In the *Lectures on Faith*, Joseph Smith said that faith is mental exertion, not physical force. We have all done our part at lifting ourselves out of something, but ultimately it is the Lord who lifts us. And we have to be willing because God won’t yank us out of our problems or circumstances against our own will or desires. That’s a wonderful thing about what Nephi says here. He talks about God being with him, about the wonderful gifts he has received from God. Why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow and my flesh waste away and my strength slacken because of mine afflictions? Why should I yield to sin? And why should I give way to temptations? Why? Why? Why? And why am I angry because of my enemy? Awake my soul! Come on!

Much more, I will praise the Lord forever and I will rejoice in the rock of my salvation. There is great power in that moment when one yields to the welcoming enticings of the Lord and of the Spirit.

2 Nephi 4:31–35 — Nephi Petitions for Grace and Pledges His Loyalty

Nephi petitions the Lord, “wilt thou redeem my soul?” and “wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road!” He also asks the Lord to “hedge not up my way but the ways of mine enemy” and “Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin?” And, indeed, the Lord had made his enemies quake and shake in his presence, as we saw in 1 Nephi 17. Nephi himself

wants to shake the same way, but at the appearance of sin. Then “O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness!” And “I will trust in thee forever.”

2 Nephi 5

The book of 2 Nephi is almost exclusively a book of sacred writings. It is comprised of inspired prophecies, spiritual teachings, divine revelations, and beautiful personal testimonies of Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah. Here, on his small plates, Nephi turned toward spiritual things, as he and his righteous followers sought to find strength in the Lord and to establish themselves successfully in their new land of promise. Unlike the book of 1 Nephi, very little in the book of 2 Nephi deals with historical facts, political developments, or social tensions. Those types of worldly matters and concerns were reported by Nephi mainly on his large plates. The one exception to that rule is here in 2 Nephi Chapter 5, where Nephi establishes the pillars of his leadership over his people, as he became their ruler and teacher. Those pillars were (1) law, (2) authority, (3) temple, (4) kingship, (5) membership, and (6) record keeping. All of these organizational elements worked together to unite Nephi’s people (7) under God, building upon Him as their foundation.

2 Nephi 5:4–7 — Following Lehi’s Example, Nephi Departs

In how many ways does Nephi’s departure from the land of first inheritance echo Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem? (5:4–7). Both Lehi and Nephi left under threats of death (5:2, 4) because of their words (5:3); both were warned by the Lord to depart and flee into the wilderness (5:5); both took their families, took their tents, journeyed for many days, and pitched their tents (5:6–7). Might Nephi’s mentioning of these detailed similarities be significant in reflecting and fulfilling Nephi’s need to establish himself as Lehi’s legitimate successor? How might this pattern of obedient and organized response to serious threats help anyone in following the Lord’s prophet in fleeing from threats to spiritual dangers?

2 Nephi 5:10 — The Prominence of the Law among the Nephites

Why does Nephi specifically affirm that they kept the law of Moses “in all things”? What would be involved in doing this? From his sacrifice and deliverance in obtaining the plates of brass, Nephi knew the seriousness of obeying the law as completely as possible. Nephi’s determination in this regard set a strong precedent that ran through Nephite societies and governments in the lands of Nephi with King Noah, in Zarahemla under King Benjamin, and on down until the coming of Christ among the Nephites in Bountiful and his pronouncements regarding His giving and fulfilling of that law (3

Nephi 15). Nephi testifies that his people “did prosper exceedingly” in the land, as their crops and herds flourished (5:11), as the law in Deuteronomy particularly assured. How does it help promote righteousness and spirituality to strive to observe the requirements of the Lord with exactness?

Further Reading

John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2008), 12–16, 33–47.

2 Nephi 5:12–14 — Nephi’s Three Symbols of Authority

What three symbols of power and authority did Nephi take with him? (5:12–14). He mentions particularly (1) the plates of brass, (2) the Liahona, and (3) the sword of Laban. In many kingships throughout history, three elements have dignified royal authority, namely the book of the law, the orb or the world sphere, and the sword of defensive power and justice. What can these three symbols represent in our lives and in the world today, as we strive to make righteous judgments and to become kings and queens unto the most high God ourselves?

Further Reading

Gordon C. Thomasson, “Mosiah: The Complex Symbolism and Symbolic Complex of Kingship in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (1993): 21–38.

2 Nephi 5:16 — The Temple’s Importance to the Nephites

In how many ways might it have been important for Nephi to build a temple “after the manner of the Temple of Solomon”? (5:16). Just as the answer to this question had many answers among the people of Nephi, one can appreciate how temple-building can and does deeply increase one’s devotion and commitment to eternal things in every land and among every people still today. Certainly, the temple was central in Lehi’s and Nephi’s world. It was the place where people gathered to be taught the law of the Lord, to express their loyalty to God and to their leaders, to make purifying sacrifices, to pray, and to experience and express joy. Life in Nephi’s world was almost unthinkable without a temple. And so, one of the very first things Nephi does when he establishes his new city was to construct a temple. Having been taught many useful building skills and becoming hard workers (5:15, 17), Nephi and his people, at great sacrifice, built a glorious temple, modeled after the Temple of Solomon. Although not as opulent, it was no less the House of the Lord. It was the center of life, devotion, and happiness for Nephi and his people. The temple is no less important in the world today, and maybe even more so.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful,” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 297–387.

2 Nephi 5:18 — Nephi’s Righteous Kingship

Why might Nephi have been reluctant to become a king? (5:18). He certainly knew that he had been cut out by the Lord to become a ruler and teacher over his brothers. But becoming a king would have been something else! Nephi had not been raised in the royal household. He was not of the tribe of Judah, let alone in the bloodline of King David. Kings were anointed and consecrated in coronation ceremonies (see Psalms 2), but who would have enthroned Nephi? Only the voice of God himself, elevating the new monarch to this high and holy office. Reading in Deuteronomy 17:14–20, Nephi would have learned the Lord’s scriptural handbook of instructions for his kings: read the law all the days of your life; and do not multiply wives, gold, silver, or possessions unto yourself. Considering Nephi’s humble example and the guidelines found in Deuteronomy, what qualities should be found in the character of good leaders of all kinds still today?

Further Reading

Taylor Halverson, “Deuteronomy 17:14–20 as Criteria for Book of Mormon Kingship,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 24 (2017): 1–10.

2 Nephi 5:23 — Maintaining Membership Markers

Kings or queens are nothing without an identifiable group of people who are willing to follow them. Maintaining a sense of belonging, social cohesion, loyalty, and membership is essential in forming any kind of organization, whether it be public or private, national or familial, social or religious. As their leader, Nephi did all that was within his power to help his people, and he needed to deter members of his small and fragile group from defecting back to their cousins. Especially because those family members who would not obey Nephi’s words were “cut off from the presence of the Lord” (5:20)—which would have meant that they should neither enter the temple of Nephi nor intermarry with the people of Nephi (compare Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:1)—it was important to the survival of that fragile society that those dissenters should “not be enticing” unto the people of Nephi (5:21). Their hearts were hard as flint; their hands were impure; but these social problems were not indelible. They were not innate. These defects could be overcome simply if those dissenters would “repent of their iniquities” (5:22). This concern, especially in antiquity, was not about any modern construct of the idea of race,

but was rather about ensuring generational obedience to the first commandment to have no other god before the Lord (Exodus 34:14–16).

2 Nephi 5:30–32 — The Acute Need for Accurate Records

Nephi gladly reports that his people “lived after the manner of happiness” (5:27), and he was told by the Lord to begin keeping a second set of records “for the profit of thy people” (5:30). Nephi’s obedience to this commandment distinctively guaranteed that his people would always be a record-keeping people. In modern times, the first instruction given to the Church upon its organization on April 6, 1830, only ten days after the Book of Mormon had come off the press, was that “there shall be a record kept among you” (D&C 21:1). And thus it has always been among the faithful. In addition to its religious purposes (1 Ne. 6:4–5; 9:5), sincere records also enhance our memory, provide wisdom in addressing social and political challenges, and will be one of the bases on which we will be judged according to our knowledge and accountability (see, for example, Mosiah 3:24).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Is It Important to Keep Records?](#) (1 Nephi 9:5),” *KnoWhy* 345 (July 28, 2017).

2 NEPHI 6–10

John W. Welch Notes



2 Nephi 6

2 Nephi 6:1–10 — Why Is Jacob’s Sermon in Nephi’s Record?

Many of the themes that show up in 2 Nephi 6–10 have been identified as typical of the New Year and the Feast of Tabernacles on the regular Jewish calendar. At that time, ancient Israelites also typically held coronations and the renewal or re-enthronement of the king. Every year there was a renewal of the people’s loyalty to obey the king of Israel. So, what we have here in Jacob’s speech is likely a covenant renewal speech. We know that this is dealing with covenant because 2 Nephi 9:1 states Jacob’s purpose as follows: “Behold, my beloved brethren, I have read these things *that ye may know concerning the covenants of the Lord* that he has covenanted with all the House of Israel.” Several parts of Jacob’s speech follow old traditions that the Nephites carried on.

For example, several scholars, both those who are and are not Latter-day Saints, have identified in the Old Testament a covenant treaty pattern. This pattern was not just limited to the Hebrews. Such “treaty-covenants” had (1) a preamble, (2) gave a historical overview, (3) stated stipulations of the covenant, (4) extended blessings and curses structured as “if you do this, this will happen; if you do not do it, such and such will happen.” Then there was (5) a witness formula, and (6) a recording of the covenant.

Joshua 24 offers an example of an ancient covenant renewal: “Choose ye this day whom ye will serve; whether the Gods which our fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Jacob’s words in 2 Nephi 6–10 can be read well in the

context of that treaty-covenant pattern, as covenants were renewed on several different occasions, including coronations and covenant-renewal festivals. Such is quite prominently the case at the coronation of Mosiah by his father Benjamin.

One might get the impression that this was Nephi's inauguration or coronation as king. However, 2 Nephi 5:28 tells how the Nephites built a temple, and thirty years passed away, and then Nephi made the record, and then another ten years had passed away (5:34). So, Jacob's speech appears to have been given at least ten years after Nephi's coronation. It may have been a ten-year anniversary celebration.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Did Jacob Refer to Ancient Israelite Autumn Festivals?](#) (2 Nephi 6:4)," *KnoWhy* 32 (February 12, 2016).

2 Nephi 6:17–18 — What Drew Jacob to These Words of Isaiah?

From 2 Nephi 6:6–7 and 6:16 to 2 Nephi 9:2, Jacob quoted Isaiah 49:22 to Isaiah 52:2. What was it that had drawn Jacob to these particular words of Isaiah?

First, Jacob was told by Nephi to read these selected words to the assembled people of Nephi (6:4). As prophet and king, Nephi surely wanted to reassure his people that God would protect his people: "the Mighty God shall deliver his *covenant* people" (6:17; Isaiah 49:25). This fledgling community must have worried and needed this reassurance. And thus, Nephi and Jacob wanted their people especially to be a faithful "covenant people." For that precise reason Jacob spoke to them so they might "know concerning the *covenants* of the Lord that he has *covenanted* with all the house of Israel" (9:1).

Second, all the people were to know that "all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Savior and thy *Redeemer*, the *Mighty* One of Jacob" (6:18; cf. Isaiah 49:26). Jacob, the priest of the temple in the city of Nephi, would have been especially desirous that his people would find redemption and deliverance through Jehovah, their Redeemer. In their isolated state, it was pertinent for them to know of their "deliverance" (Jacob used the word "*deliver*" or "deliverance" 12 times in 2 Nephi 9) by the Mighty God (Jacob calls Him the Lord God "*Almighty*" in 9:46). Despite their being more alone than ever before, the Lord had not abandoned them out in the wilderness. Thus, this block of text suited their needs perfectly.

Third, from these words, Jacob hoped that the people were to "learn and glorify the *name* of your God" (6:4). Previously, Jesus Christ had been called several names, such as "messiah," "the Lamb of God," "the Lord [Jehovah]," and others. Now, in order that they might "learn . . . the name" of their God, to be used in glorifying Him, Jacob will

disclose to his people that his holy name, when he would come among the Jews in the flesh, would be “Christ.” That name had been spoken to Jacob by the angel of the Lord during the night (10:3) in the interval between the two days of this coronation and covenant renewal celebration. Because the word “Christ” literally means “anointed,” raising that name on the occasion of renewing the people’s covenant to God and loyalty to His anointed king (as kings in Israel were called, Psalm 2:2) would have been especially appropriate.

Finally, Jacob would have been especially pleased at the opportunity to draw his people’s attention to the name for the Lord that was used by Isaiah, “the Mighty One of Jacob” (6:18; Isaiah 49:26).

Further Reading

John S. Thompson, “Isaiah 50–51, the Israelite Autumn Festivals, and the Covenant Speech of Jacob in 2 Nephi 6–10,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 123–150.

2 NEPHI 7

2 Nephi 7:1–10 — The Lord Has Not Put Away His people

The first verse in this chapter uses poetic language to describe the love of the Savior as being mother-like—unbreakable. The phrase “thus saith the Lord” had been used twice in 6:17 and it is used twice again in 7:1. We know to pay close attention when the prophet says, “thus saith the Lord.” Here it emphasizes that, like a mother, Jesus Christ will not cast off His covenant children. As the poetic emphasis grows, so too does the promissory certitude that he will stand immovable, to a greater degree than even a mortal mother is capable. If there is separation, it will be due to the choice of man, and not to God’s withdrawal.

Isaiah likens our covenant with God to a marriage covenant. Under the Law of Moses, a man could find some offense in his wife and say, “I divorce thee” and give her a paper of divorcement, which would end the marriage. But the Lord has not done that. If a person had huge debts, they would sometimes sell their children into slavery to the creditors. But the Lord has not done that, and He will not do that.

Look at verse 2. There it says, “O house of Israel is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem or I have no power to deliver?” Is the Lord’s hand shortened? If you look back at 2 Nephi 6:6, the Lord says “I will lift up my hand to the gentiles.” What does it mean to “lift up the hand?” When the Israelites were wandering through the wilderness, they had several conflicts with other groups. On one occasion Moses had to literally hold

his hands up in order for his people to win a battle. For this reason, he had to have two counselors of sorts, one on each side of him to hold up an arm. Christ is going to hold up his hand to the gentiles—he is going to extend to them his protective authority as long as possible.

Indeed, the Lord will send his Servant who has been given knowledge (7:5). The Servant was not rebellious, but instead would give his back to the smiter, the plucker, the shamer, and the spitter (7:6). He would set his face like flint, and would not be ashamed (7:7). And thus the Servant will be justified in the face of his accuser. They will stand together to be judged, and those who condemn him will wax old as a garment, and a moth shall eat them (7:9). These words of Isaiah, quoted by Jacob in the city of Nephi, will reverberate four hundred years later, also in the city of Nephi, when Abinadi will warn king Noah that his life will be valued as a garment in a furnace because of his wicked ways.

Further Reading

Leland Gentry, “God Will Fulfill His Covenants with the House of Israel,” in *Second Nephi: The Doctrinal Structure*, The Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 3, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 167–172.

2 Nephi 7:11 — What Does It Mean to “Walk in the Light of Your Own Fire?”

Joseph F. Smith warned against those who falsely teach, using their own light, preaching false doctrines disguised as Gospel truths. He said they are “proud and self-vaunting ones, who read by the lamps of their own conceit; who interpret by rules of their own contriving; who have become a law unto themselves, and so pose as the sole judges of their own doings” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 381).

2 NEPHI 8

2 Nephi 8:1 — The Rock from Whence Ye Are Hewn

Isaiah’s words continue by telling people to “Look unto the rock from whence ye are hewn.” This is how the victory of the Lord will be won. First, his people must look. But what rock are we hewn from to which we must look? Consider the eternal bond of Abraham and Sarah (the promise), the priesthood that Peter would be entrusted with when he was called the Rock (the power), the eternal nature of the covenants made in the temple also called the dome of the rock (the place); in other words, the rock of our Redeemer.

As Jacob continues to read, his people heard a number of words and phrases that would have helped them remain firmly founded on the rock of the Lord. They were assured that the Lord will comfort them in all their “waste places” (8:3). His law, judgment, righteousness, and salvation shall extend to judge the people. Those on “the isles of the sea shall wait upon” the Lord (8:5), if the law of God is written in their heart (8:7).

Three times, the Lord calls for his people to “Awake, Awake” (8:9, 17, 24), as the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and the Lord will plead the cause of his people, as the Lord will take the cup of trembling out of the hands of His people (8:22). The scene of God’s judgment will reappear in Jacob’s text in chapter 9, where the word *judgment* appears seven times.

In one other way, the words of Isaiah pave the way for Jacob’s main words to his people. Seven times Isaiah used the emphatic opening expression, “O . . .” in Isaiah 51 (2 Nephi 8): O my nation, O arm of the Lord, O Jerusalem, O Zion, O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, O captive. Jacob will continue this pattern, beginning fourteen of his powerful exclamations this same way: O the wisdom, O how great the goodness, O how great the plan, O the greatness and justice, O the greatness of the mercy, O how great the holiness, O that cunning plan, O the vainness, O my beloved brethren (five times), and O Lord God Almighty. Not just stylistically, but thematically, Jacob’s words elaborate and personalize many of the main themes found in the words of Isaiah that Nephi assigned Jacob to read and teach.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Helaman Compare Christ to a Rock? \(Helaman 5:12\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 176 (August 30, 2016).

2 Nephi 8:24 — Modern-day Revelation Clarifies

In D&C 113:7, a very thoughtful man named Elias Higbee asked, “What is meant by the command in Isaiah, 52d chapter, 1st verse, which saith: Put on thy strength, O Zion—and what people had Isaiah reference to?” (Of course, Isaiah 52 and 2 Nephi 8 are the same.) Joseph Smith explained,

[Isaiah] 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. (D&C 113:8)

And then Higbee asked about the meaning of the “bands around the neck,” and Joseph Smith said,

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. . . . The bands of her neck are the curses of God upon her, or the remnants of Israel in their scattered condition among the Gentiles. (D&C 113:10)

2 Nephi 9

2 Nephi 9:1–7 — Jacob on the Atonement

Jacob’s marvelous chapter 9 is unsurpassed in the Book of Mormon or elsewhere. The Atonement is the first theme of redemption that he addresses (expressly in 9:7, 25, 26). What are some of the powers of the Atonement that Jacob mentioned here? There are several: the power of resurrection, the power to bring one back into the presence of God, and the power to make what was corrupted incorrupt. That is one of the main powers of at-one-ment, bringing and holding things together.

Although ancient people did not use the term *entropy*, the basic principle of this law of physics was understood by Jacob. Everything in nature disintegrates. As you look around, you will see decay everywhere. But the power of the Atonement arrests that entropy and reverses it, restoring each corrupted thing to its most perfect state—physically *and* spiritually. Beyond restoration, Christ will permanently stop the process of entropy and corruption. “If it were not so, this flesh must be laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth and rise no more” (9:7).

We can think of Christ as the Great High Priest, especially in regard to duties the High Priest would have performed when he officiated in the temple. The High Priest is the one who made the atoning sacrifice, and accordingly Lehi had said to Jacob: “Wherefore redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah for he is full of grace and truth. Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin to answer the ends of the law unto those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (2 Nephi 2:6). The picture here is of the Great High Priest who not only performs the offering, but *he is* the offering. What more could you ask for than that?

Elder Jeffery R. Holland wrote,

Jacob’s testimony was that “the Mighty God” will always deliver “his covenant people” and that the Mighty God is, by his own divine declaration, the Lord God Jesus Christ, the “Savior . . . and Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”

Jacob reflected on such teachings—especially those contained in the writing of Isaiah—so that his current audience and future readers “might know concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the House of Israel,” giving the parents of every generation cause to “rejoice” and to “lift up [their] heads forever, because of the blessings which the Lord God shall bestow upon [their children].

And then Elder Holland adds something that is key to chapter 9: “At the heart of the covenant and the reason for such rejoicing is the atoning sacrifice of that ‘Mighty God’ who is the Savior and Redeemer of the world.” (*Christ and the New Covenant* [1997], 66–67).

2 Nephi 9:14 — A Perfect Knowledge of Our Mistakes

For Jacob, it is important that we recognize our sins. “Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness,” but through the Atonement of Jesus Christ those made righteous shall equally “have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness” (9:14). President Gordon B. Hinckley often taught that a daily recommitting to accepting the Atonement of Christ and an honest willingness to change *is* daily repentance. It is not the Lord’s intent that we read these things and say, “O how wretched am I?” and cry all night. True repentance comes from a bright recollection and a genuine confidence that the Lord has provided everything essential for us, pending our acceptance.

Confidence also requires understanding. That is to say, we do need to understand the commitments we make when we enter into covenants. We cannot be saved in ignorance. We must consider that we have a responsibility and act accordingly. Every time we make a covenant, we invoke either blessings or curses upon ourselves dependent on if we keep or break those covenants. We must make an honest accounting of our actions. We must see if we have called woe upon ourselves. If so, we must do what is necessary to repent; this is what Jacob means when he wants us to have a perfect knowledge of our mistakes.

Jacob’s words don’t seem to be an ordinary call to repentance. Jacob certainly pronounces woes upon the wicked, but his words are more of an encouraging priesthood blessing. His focus is more on the promises that are extended to the righteous, so, it seems, at this point he is not worried too much about the wickedness of the people. Nephi and his group had separated from Laman and Lemuel only about twelve years before. They have worked hard together, and they have dedicated themselves to building the temple. But when things are going well, that is the best time to give a warning, while hearts are still soft, and ears are still open.

At the same time, Nephi's people were secluded and probably insecure. They didn't have a large network of connections to potentially keep them safe. If you look back in 2 Nephi 6:2, they were worried about security, protection, and safety. They were looking to Nephi as the king and protector and were depending upon him for safety. They were not starting the fights, but they may have been watching at night. They may have had guards posted, but they were really counting on the Lord to deliver them. In that frame of mind, they were open to Jacob's powerful speech, one of the most inspiring texts in all the scriptures.

2 Nephi 9:27–38 — Jacob's Ten Woes

After assuring his people that the Atonement will satisfy the demands of God's justice "upon all those who have *not* the law given to them" (9:26), people who know better will be held accountable. As a warning, Jacob then pronounces a set of ten woes upon those (1) who set aside the counsel of God, (2) who despise the poor, (3) who will not hear and obey, (4) who will not see, (5) whose hearts are impure or uncircumcised, (6) who tell lies, (7) who deliberately kill, (8) who commit whoredoms, (9) who worship idols, and (10) all who die in their sins (27–38). In a covenant setting, this list of Woes functions similar to the list of twelve curses found near the end of the book of Deuteronomy (27:15–26).

Several of Jacob's woes are consequential warnings related to several of the Ten Commandments, which served as the basis of the Lord's covenant with the children of Israel at Mount Sinai. Covenants come with commitments, and failing to keep one's righteous commitments leads to unhappiness. Such ten-fold structures signal to listeners the completeness or perfection of the Lord's covenant teachings and promises (See Figure 1).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Does Jacob Declare so Many 'Woes'? \(2 Nephi 9:27\),](#)" *KnoWhy* 35 (February 17, 2016).

2 Nephi 9:27, 30-38	Compare Exodus 20:3-17
1. Woe unto them who knowingly transgress God's commandments	1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me
2. Woe unto the rich who despise the poor and make their treasure their god	10. Thou shalt not covet
3. Woe unto the deaf who will not hear	5. Honor (hear) thy father and thy mother
4. Woe unto the blind who will not see	
5. Woe unto the uncircumcised of heart	3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain
6. Woe unto the liar	9. Thou shalt not bear false witness
7. Woe unto the murderer who deliberately kills	6. Thou shalt not kill
8. Woe unto them who commit whoredoms	7. Thou shalt not commit adultery
9. Woe unto those who worship idols	2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image
10. Woe unto all those who die and remain in their sins	

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Figure 1 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Jacob's Ten Woes and Ten Commandments*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999.

2 Nephi 9:41 — Christ Keeps Watch Over the Gate to Salvation

As the High Priest, Jacob would have stood guard over the gates and the holiness of the House of the Lord. Entering the temple can cast our minds forward to the time when we will come to the gate that is kept by the Holy One. Meeting Christ on that occasion is what we each have to look forward to, knowing that He will be there, that he is a person who knows exactly how you feel. He is the gatekeeper. He doesn't employ any servant there. He is the one who stands in wait of you. We have "gates" of the temple that in many ways are like that gate. As we enter, we can be looking forward to the time we will enter completely into his presence and joy. What role then do the covenants made in the temple play in our passage through that eternal portal? And what does it mean to you that Christ keeps watch over that gate Himself? Jacob would like us to think about that more often.

2 Nephi 9:44–45 — Jacob Shakes His Garments

Visualize Jacob as he took off his high priestly robes and shook them saying, "I shake them before you" (9:44). Why would he do that? He wants his people to be responsible. He is telling them that he has shaken their iniquities from his soul as if saying, "I'm not bearing your iniquities any longer." Jacob couldn't have that impurity on him as the high priest, otherwise that would compromise his ability to be a pure officiator in the temple.

This scene must have been very dramatic. Imagine if President Nelson during General Conference took off his coat and stood there and shook it in front of everybody and said, "I have given you all that I can. Now I shake off any responsibility for you and your sins." How would you feel? Wouldn't that leave an impression? That is how ancient prophets often got their points across. In this case, Jacob wanted to absolutely impress upon his people the importance of holiness. God wants his people to be holy. Several key words are used by Jacob in this chapter, including "judgment" (7 times), "remember" (8 times), and "deliver" (12 times). But the dominant key word in this temple-covenant speech is "holy." It appears 23 times, and "holiness" two times more. The dominant name used by Jacob here for the Lord is "the Holy One of Israel," which appears thirteen times. One may well conclude that the main theme of Jacob's temple speech here is holiness, Holiness to the Lord.

Further Reading

Parry, Donald W., "[Symbolic Action as Prophecy in the Old Testament](#)" in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University and Deseret Book 2005), 337–355.

2 Nephi 10

2 Nephi 10:1–2 — The Nephite Branch Will Be Restored

The next morning, Jacob resumed his speech where he left off, by assuring his people that they are a “righteous branch” (9:53; 10:1). Zenos and Isaiah and Nephi had spoken about branches of the House of Israel, righteous or evil (for example, 1 Nephi 15:12; 19:24; 2 Nephi 14:2; 21). Jacob thus assured his audience: You too are a branch of that tree, and you still belong to that tree, and you will be grafted back in when their posterity comes to a knowledge of their Redeemer (10:3). They will be preserved. That image, of course, will reappear in Jacob 5, when Jacob recited to the people Zenos’s lengthy Allegory of the Olive Tree.

2 Nephi 10:3–7 — Jesus Will Be Rejected Because of Priestcrafts

But in the meantime, Christ will appear back in the land that Jacob’s father and family had left. There, just as the leaders of the people had killed prophets like Urijah and were prepared to kill Lehi and Jeremiah, the descendants of those priests will likewise kill the anointed Holy Christ. Jacob rightly does not blame all the people in Jerusalem, but primarily those priests involved with priestcrafts and iniquity (10:5). Nephi called them wicked shepherds. “Because of the wickedness of the pastors of my people,” those who have been driven out have been broken off (1 Nephi 21:1). Years later, people like those wicked priests will reject Jesus in spite of—and perhaps because of—the “mighty miracles” (2 Nephi 10:4) he would perform. Those powerful signs and wonders would understandably have terrified people who did not think Jesus was the Son of God, figuring that Jesus must then have had a devil and that his miracles were powered by the Evil One. Likely the same angelic being who spoke along these lines to Jacob (10:3) later explained further to King Benjamin that Jesus’s opponents would actually condemn him, declaring him to have “a devil” (Mosiah 3:9).

From their point of view, death was the required legal penalty for performing miracles, signs, or wonders that led people away to follow other paths or to worship in unauthorized ways (see Deuteronomy 13:1–5), and the mode of execution for such an offense was crucifixion or “hanging on a tree” (Deuteronomy 21:22). And, indeed, as Jacob knew, no other nation had such laws as are found in Deuteronomy. For these reasons, Jacob could well have foreseen that in no other nation would a group of priestly leaders react with such awful fear and hostility against such beneficial miracles, signs, and wonders. But nevertheless, and amazingly, on the cross the Lord had the strength to forgive the soldiers who knew not what they were doing. In addition, it would seem, Jesus also would have soon held out forgiveness to all who were involved in any way in

bringing about his death. They too must not have really known what they were doing either. Evidence of Jesus's continued extension of mercy and willingness to forgive can be found in Jacob's declaration that Christ has "covenanted with their fathers that [these people] shall [still] be restored in the flesh, upon the earth [when they] shall believe in me, that I am Christ" (10:7). He has not thrown them away or cast anyone off.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "The Factor of Fear in the Trial of Jesus," in *Jesus Christ: Son of God, Savior*, ed. Paul H. Peterson, Gary L. Hatch, and Laura D. Card (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2002), 284–312.

John W. Welch, "Latter-day Saint Reflections on the Trial of Jesus," *Clark Memorandum* (Fall 2000): 2–13.

2 Nephi 10:8–19 — Israel Will Be Remembered in All Lands

To prepare the way for that to happen, the Jews and Israel who will be scattered among the nations will be remembered and gathered from "the isles of the sea" (see 2 Nephi 8:6). Jacob and his people would have been relieved to hear this promise. They would have been comforted not only in their being remembered, but also in the knowledge that there would be others like them scattered about amidst the nations of the world. When we hear the word *gentiles*, we often think of people who are not members of the Church. But the word *gentiles* in ancient times literally meant the *nations* or birth lines. We get our word *genealogy* from that root word. The Lord was saying that He will work through all kindreds and nations, their kings and queens (10:9, see 2 Nephi 6:6), to restore his people.

In this prophetic connection, Jacob also spoke concerning the future of his people's posterity in their land of promise, which will be a "protected" and "consecrated" land of liberty, where no kings "shall raise up unto the Gentiles" (10:11, 19). Secret works of darkness will be destroyed (10:15), those who fight against Zion must needs perish (10:16), the hearts of the Gentiles will be softened, and they will be "like a father to them" (10:18; compare 2 Nephi 6:6). These are wonderful promises of the Lord that surely gave great assurance to Jacob and his people.

2 Nephi 10:20–25 — Jacob Comforts the Nephites

In closing, Jacob reassured his people that the promises of the Lord will protect them and that they will not be forgotten. Their posterity in years to come will still be remembered and blessed, and that, even though they may die out in the wilderness, it's not all over. The real land of promise will be the eternal heavenly Kingdom of God (10:25). We too can find comfort in the promise that we will be brought back again into God's presence because of the Atonement and Resurrection of the Savior.

May you take this encouragement of Jacob into your hearts and take it away with you from this lesson: “Therefore, cheer up your hearts and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves, to choose the way of the everlasting death or the way of eternal life” (10:23). “Reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the Devil and the flesh; and remember after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved” (10:24; accord 2 Nephi 25:23). Jacob’s plea that people will choose the way of life over the way of death echoes Lehi’s words regarding choice and accountability spoken to Jacob and his brothers in 2 Nephi 2:27. And those words align with Joshua’s ancient covenant-renewal charge: “Choose ye this day whom you will serve,” either the Lord or other gods (Joshua 24:15). Nothing much has changed. The plan is the plan, and it is still the plan.

2 NEPHI 11–25

John W. Welch Notes



2 Nephi 11–12

2 Nephi 11:2–3 — Nephi Establishes His Word in the Mouth of Three Witnesses

Nephi begins this long section, which he quotes from the book of Isaiah, by saying that his “soul delights in the words of Isaiah” (see also how Nephi repeats these words in 2 Nephi 25:5). He says that he will liken these words unto his own people and send them forth because Isaiah “verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him, and my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him.” This produces three witnesses: Isaiah, Nephi, and Jacob.

Nephi is doing this on purpose, because “by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word.” Nephi is probably thinking of Deuteronomy 17:6 or 19:15 that requires that “at the mouth [or by the words] of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.” This was a well establish point of Jewish law (see 2 Corinthians 13:1). Nephi legally qualifies them all as witnesses by establishing that each of them comes as an eyewitness. Isaiah, Jacob, and Nephi have each “seen” their Redeemer. Nephi will mention this important three-witness principle again in 2 Nephi 27:12, as will Moroni later on (see Ether 5:4; Moroni 6:7; 10:4).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Can Textual Studies Help Readers Understand the Isaiah Chapters in 2 Nephi?](#) (2 Nephi 11:8),” *KnoWhy* 39 (February 23, 2016).

2 Nephi 11–25 — Introduction: The Nephite Prophetic View

Getting through this large block of Isaiah material is notoriously challenging. But back in 1 Nephi 11–14, Nephi developed a framework which has been called “the Nephite prophetic view,” which can be a great aid in understanding what Isaiah is saying. Taking Nephi as your guide is your best chance of success. Nephi’s four stages are apparent as the four chapters, 1 Nephi 11, 12, 13 and 14, divide naturally into these four stages:

Stage 1: Christ’s coming (1 Nephi 11)

Stage 2: his rejection and the scattering of the Jews (1 Nephi 12)

Stage 3: the day of the Gentiles (1 Nephi 13)

Stage 4: the restoration of Israel and the ultimate victory of good over evil (1 Nephi 14)

In 2 Nephi 12–14, Nephi uses Isaiah as a witness to the visions of the future that he had also received from the Lord. Nephi will then interpret these Isaiah passages in 2 Nephi 25–30, following this same four-stage pattern. But in Isaiah’s case, elements of these four stages are scattered among Isaiah’s recorded sayings. Many of Isaiah’s prophecies were short sayings, several of which have been combined into one long scrapbook of the words of Isaiah, which was only divided into chapters much later.

Watch for the development of these same four stages in Nephi’s selection of Isaiah prophecies. As a handy guide to Isaiah 2–14, notice how the following statements by Isaiah can be easily clustered under each of Nephi’s four stages:

Stage 1. The coming of Jesus Christ among the Jews and his rejection because of priestcrafts

7:10–16	A sign is given of the birth of Immanuel (see also 1 Nephi 11:13–18), but the land will be forsaken
7:17–25	The land of Judah will be desolate, filled with briers
8:1–8	“As this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah” (v. 6) they will be overrun
8:9–40	Those who counsel against God will come to naught
8:11–18	The Lord will be a “sanctuary” for some, but “a stone of stumbling” for others (v. 14); “I will look for [the Lord]” (v. 17)

9:1–7	A “great light” has shined, “for unto us a son is given” (v. 6)
9:8–17	The proud will be devoured, for they do not seek the Lord; their leaders “cause them to err” (v. 16; see also 2 Nephi 10:5; Isaiah 3:12), and they that follow them are destroyed (cf. 2 Nephi 10:6)

Stage 2. Jews will be scattered and smitten, will suffer in contention and darkness, but the Lord will not forget them

3:1–4:1	The stay will be taken away from Judah; Jerusalem will be ruined; proud men and women will fall
5:1–25	“What could I have done more [for] my vineyard?” (v. 4); “my people are gone into captivity” (v. 13); the anger of the Lord is against his people, but he will still lift up an ensign for them (vv. 25–26)
6:1–12	How long will they not understand? Until the land is “utterly desolate” (v. 11)
8:18–22	Those with no light in them will be driven to darkness
9:18–21	“No man shall spare his brother” (v. 19); all will be against each other (see also 1 Nephi 12:21); but the Lord’s “hand is stretched out still” (v. 21)

Stage 3. In the day of the Gentiles, a remnant will be summoned and gathered again

5:26–30	He will “lift up an ensign to the nations” (v. 26); “they shall come with speed” (v. 26)
6:13	A portion will return
10:20–23	The remnant of Israel will return
11:10–16	An ensign will stand for the Gentiles; the Lord will recover the remnant a second time from the islands of the sea and from all the nations

Stage 4A. In the day of God’s judgment, the wicked will be destroyed, and concurrently 4B. God’s righteousness will be victorious

Stage 4A

2:6–9, 11	Idolatry in the land will be destroyed
2:12–22	The lofty “shall be brought low” (v. 12)
10:1–19	In the day of visitation, God will punish the wicked and will “burn and devour [them] in one day” (v. 17)
10:24–34	The Lord will “stir up a scourge” (v. 26) and lop off the haughty bough with terror (see v. 33)
13:1–22	“The day of the Lord is at hand” (v. 6); he will destroy the sinners and cause arrogance to cease (see v. 11); God will destroy the wicked speedily
14:9–28	“Hell ... is moved” (v. 9); Lucifer is fallen, cast out like a great and “abominable branch” (v. 19); See Book of Mormon Central, “ Why Did Lehi ‘Suppose’ the Existence of Satan? (2 Nephi 24:12),” <i>KnoWhy</i> 43 (February 29, 2016).

Stage 4B

2:1–5	The Lord’s house and peace will be established; See Book of Mormon Central, “ Has the Prophecy of the Lord’s House Established in the Mountains been Fulfilled? (2 Nephi 12:2),” <i>KnoWhy</i> 41 (February 25, 2016).
2:10–11	“The Lord alone shall be exalted” (v. 11)
4:2–6	The branch of the Lord will be beautiful; a tabernacle will be in Jerusalem, “cloud... by day” and a “fire by night”
11:1–9	“A rod [will grow] out of the stem of Jesse” (v. 1) and will judge the earth with righteousness; the wolf and the lamb shall dwell in peace, and “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord” (v. 9)
12:1–6	The righteous will be comforted; “God is my salvation”; “with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation”
14:1–8	“the Lord will have mercy” and choose Israel; they will return to their lands (v. 1); “the whole earth is at rest” (v. 7)
14:29–32	Zion is established

Studying 2 Nephi 12–24 this way, see how many more words of Isaiah you can relate to Nephi’s four main prophetic stages. This approach offers power in not only interpreting the words of Isaiah, but also analyzing the prophetic outlook of all writers in the Book of Mormon who follow in Nephi’s tradition. The writings of Isaiah are puzzling for all modern readers, but the fact that Isaiah’s complicated overall scheme goes hand in hand with Nephi’s world-view adds additional credence to Nephi’s testimony that he and Isaiah were talking about the same things. In 2 Nephi 25–30, Nephi’s use of Isaiah in light of his prophetic overview will make coherent sense of these impossibly difficult passages. That is no small feat. See if using this interpretive tool doesn’t make your reading of these Isaiah chapters your best time through them ever.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “[Getting through Isaiah with the Help of the Nephite Prophetic View](#),” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 19–45.

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Vision Guides Nephi’s Choice of Isaiah Chapters?](#) (2 Nephi 11:2),” *KnoWhy* 38 (February 22, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Who Are the Witnesses of Christ in 2 Nephi?](#) (2 Nephi 11:2–3),” *KnoWhy* 37 (February 19, 2016).

2 Nephi 11:2–8 — Isaiah’s Influence on Nephi’s World

Isaiah was active as a prophet of Judah living in Jerusalem from 740–701 BC. Lehi and Nephi left Jerusalem approximately 100 years after Isaiah’s death. This may sound like a long time later, but if you consider it in the context of generations, it is only two to three generations later. When Lehi was a young boy, there may have been people alive who remembered the Prophet Isaiah, just as there were still people alive in late pioneer Utah, in the early 1900s, who could tell children what it was like to listen to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Nephi likely thought of Isaiah as The Prophet, much as we think of Joseph Smith as The Prophet. Isaiah was that important.

Further Reading

David Rolph Seely, “[Nephi’s Use of Isaiah 2–14 in 2 Nephi 12–30](#)” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 151.

2 Nephi 11:2 — Nephi’s Love of Isaiah

When Nephi wrote these passages, he was without his father. Nephi would have rejoiced in knowing that there is a plan, that the covenant of the Lord was still firm, that his arm was outstretched, that his people were not going to be forgotten, and that even the isles of

the sea would not be ignored. Think about being desperately in need of that kind of comfort. We can see why these texts of Isaiah would have meant the world to Nephi.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why is the Lord's Hand 'Stretched Out Still'? \(2 Nephi 19:12\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 49 (March 8, 2016).

2 Nephi 11:2 — How Much Did Isaiah Know about Christ and His Suffering?

When approaching the question of how much the prophets of the Old Testament knew of the Savior's life, consider Psalm 22. This Psalm was used in the temple (and remember, Isaiah was a temple priest and would have received his call to be a prophet in the temple). Psalm 22 begins, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" You will recognize these as words that Jesus spoke from the cross. Usually, when we read these words in the accounts of Christ's crucifixion in the Gospels, we think that it is the end of the story—that Jesus feels as though He has been completely abandoned and left alone.

However, for the ancient Israelites, the opening lines of many of the Psalms were a lot like the opening lines of our hymns. If someone were to hang on a cross and say, "Come, come ye saints," we would know that "no toil nor labor fear" was next. Even if there was toil and labor that the person was called to endure, there would be a positive feeling because we would know that the next line was, "with the saints we shall dwell." We must consider the totality of the hymn in order to understand what was encompassed by and symbolized by that one, opening line. Christ knew this Psalm and knew how it symbolized Him. Likely, all the prophets knew much of what the Savior would have to endure from this hymn alone.

Further Reading

Terry B. Ball, "[Isaiah's 'Other' Servant Songs](#)," in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*, The 38th Annual BYU Sidney B. Sperry Symposium (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), 207–218.

Book of Mormon Central, "[Can Textual Studies Help Readers Understand the Isaiah Chapters in 2 Nephi?](#) (2 Nephi 11:8)," *KnoWhy* 39 (February 23, 2016).

2 Nephi 13

2 Nephi 13:16 — The Daughters of Zion Are Lifted Up in Pride

The daughters of Zion can symbolize members of the church who are in the covenant with God, regardless of gender. David Seeley wrote an article in the book entitled, *Isaiah*

in the *Book of Mormon*, explaining that the main lesson we learn from the Isaiah chapters in the *Book of Mormon* is to avoid haughtiness and pride manifested in every imaginable way. Isaiah was warning the people of his day. You would think we would get the message—it is still pertinent.

Further Reading

David Rolph Seely, “[Nephi’s Use of Isaiah 2–14 in 2 Nephi 12–30](#)” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 156–164, esp. 164: “Isaiah looks into the future and sees the destruction of a series of nations and peoples, and in each case he cites pride as the cause of their rejection of the Lord and of their eventual scattering and destruction. In his own prophecy about the history of the Jews, Lehites, and gentiles, Nephi also identifies, often in the language of Isaiah, the main challenge that each of these groups faces as pride.”

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does Nephi Use Isaiah to Teach Us to Avoid Pride?](#) (2 Nephi 15:21),” *KnoWhy* 48 (March 7, 2016).

2 Nephi 15

2 Nephi 15:1–7 — Isaiah Saw the Great Apostasy

Isaiah saw there would be a falling away after the Lord established his church. Does that mean that the Lord did not do a good enough job? No. We see in Isaiah’s allegory, recorded in 2 Nephi 15, that the Lord did all he could to save the choice vine.

The vineyard represented the world. A choice vine was planted in the vineyard, representing the House of Israel. The Lord did all he possibly could. He built a wall to protect the vineyard, and he built a tower in the vineyard, perhaps symbolic of the temple. He hoped that the plant would bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild ones—even though he had already built a wine press. There may be an allusion to the Garden of Gethsemane and the press of the atonement in this allegory. No stone was left unturned by the Lord. Literally, he took all of the stones out of the vineyard. He made it as productive as he could. He gave it every possible chance, but it still produced wild fruit.

The Lord’s covenant people would not become domesticated. Maybe they were too interested in the ways of the world. They (and we) are influenced too much by the culture of the world. This account is one of many references to the way in which the Lord does everything he possibly can for his vineyard. We will see more of this theme again, when we get to Zenos’ parable in Jacob 5.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[What are the Roots of Zenos's Allegory in the Ancient World? \(Jacob 5:3\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 70 (April 4, 2016).

2 Nephi 15:26 — The Lord Will Call His People Back

The Lord will remember the covenants he has made with his people. Verse 26 says that he will lift up an ensign. He will hiss or whistle to them to call them back. The Lord is not angrily hissing—he is reaching out in love to his children and fulfilling his promises. The ensign will be erected; it will be a gathering point and a rallying post that will bring people back together so that, in the end, the Lord will be victorious.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Do Early Nephite Prophets Speak about the Scattering of the Jews? \(2 Nephi 15:13\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 42 (February 26, 2016).

2 Nephi 16

2 Nephi 16:1 — Isaiah Receives His Prophetic Call

Isaiah recorded his experience in receiving his prophetic call: "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." Can you envision that? Does it remind you of Lehi's vision in 1 Nephi 1:8, where he saw "God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels [the train that filled the temple] in the attitude of singing and praising their God."

Isaiah was in the temple, in the Holy of Holies, and he saw the Lord. If Isaiah saw the Lord, there must have been some reason for the Lord to come to Isaiah. The Lord does not make cameo appearances. We do not know what he told Isaiah. In the First Vision of Joseph Smith, Joseph was told many things. We only know a few of them. The Lord may have explained to Isaiah the basic Plan of Salvation, his mission, what the Lord would do, and how it would be part of the ministry of Isaiah to declare at least part of this message to others.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Did God Call His Prophets in Ancient Times? \(1 Nephi 15:8\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 17 (January 22, 2016).

Stephen D. Ricks, "Heavenly Visions and Prophetic Calls in Isaiah 6 (2 Nephi 16), the Book of Mormon, and the Revelation of John," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 171–190.

2 Nephi 16:2–4 — Isaiah Sees Seraphim

In verse 2 we read, "And above [the throne] stood the Seraphim." These were bright, burning beings, and it looked as though each one had six wings. I do not imagine these were actual wings, but maybe flames. How else do you describe a flame? The flames would look like wings. These were glorious, radiant beings. Two "wings" covered their faces, two covered their feet, and two were used to fly. One cried to another and said, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts [the pillars] of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke." The smoke was probably incense, or perhaps some kind of smoke connected with the fire at the altar.

2 Nephi 16:5–7 — Isaiah Protests That He Is "a Man of Unclean Lips"

Isaiah stated, "Wo is unto me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips; and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." Unclean lips! That was the first thing that Isaiah felt self-conscious about in the presence of God. He was a prophet. His main tool was speech. Isaiah spoke, and yet felt that his voice was unclean or inadequate. It is an interesting warning that even though we do all the right things and we go through the right motions, if our lips and our thoughts are not pure, we will strongly feel shame in the presence of God. We need to be clean—every whit.

Isaiah's concern with his unclean lips is then addressed: "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand." This coal was some kind of a burning ember. It may have been a piece of burning wood. I doubt that they had charcoal briquettes or even coal. It may have been hot ashes. Nonetheless, the seraph had something very hot in his hand, "which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; And he laid it upon my mouth, and said: Lo, this has touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

How did people living in ancient times determine whether or not a witness was telling the truth? How could they know whether to rely on the veracity or truthfulness of the testimony of a witness? We know from some ancient Near Eastern texts that "trial by ordeal" was used in situations where it was difficult to determine if a witness was speaking truth during his testimony at trial. Any person who strongly questioned whether a particular witness was telling the truth could challenge that witness and force him to submit to a specified "ordeal." Something very hot (a hot spatula or coal) was put

on the tongue of the witness. If the witness was hurt or injured during the ordeal, it was considered to be evidence that he was lying. The reasoning was that someone who is lying would have a dry mouth and tongue. Therefore, a liar would not be able to tolerate something hot placed on his tongue. It would hurt a lot and cause physical damage. However, if the witness was telling the truth, he would be relaxed and his tongue would be coated with saliva to prevent the heat from searing and hurting his tongue. This operated like a type of primitive lie detector test.

I wonder if Isaiah saw himself being subjected to this type of ordeal. He passed the test. Isaiah was sanctified by the Holy Ghost, and his sins were forgiven. This is one of the responsibilities of the Holy Ghost, is it not?

This experience was symbolic. I do not believe Heavenly Father was chastising Isaiah with a negative message like, "You bad, evil, child. Let me cleanse you." I think Heavenly Father was comforting Isaiah and addressing his concerns or doubts about his ability to preach repentance to the people in Jerusalem. The Lord was telling Isaiah that he was forgiven of his sins and that he would receive divine assistance in his personal ordeals as he preached truth. It reminds me of Enoch's doubts when he was called as prophet. Enoch knew that he was slow of speech and questioned why he would be called as a prophet. We all feel inadequate about these types of callings, and Isaiah was no exception.

Further Reading

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David J. Larsen, *In God's Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014), 36: "Obvious similarities with the calls of Moses and Jeremiah present themselves in this verse. Moses responds to his call as follows: 'Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?' Later Moses objects more specifically in saying that he was 'slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.' Jeremiah complains by saying: 'Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.' Enoch combines the objections of Moses and Jeremiah, adding that 'all the people hate me.'"

Blake T. Ostler, "[The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis](#)," *BYU Studies* 26 no. 4 (1986): 72, 83.

2 Nephi 16:8–10 — The Lord Calls Isaiah to be a Prophet

The Lord asked, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah answered the call, "Here am I; send me." As recorded in Abraham 3:27, this is identical to the words spoken by the Savior in the premortal council as He accepted the call to perform the

Atonement as Savior of mankind: “Here am I, send me.” Isaiah was willing to make whatever sacrifice was necessary to fulfill his calling as prophet.

The Lord then instructed Isaiah: “Go and tell this people—Hear ye indeed, but they understood not; and see ye indeed, but they perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes—lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted and be healed.” The Lord explained that the people in Jerusalem were not ready or worthy to be told everything in plain language. Isaiah would be prophesying at a time when Israel would be destroyed.

These verses explain why many people today find it difficult to understand the words of Isaiah. Isaiah was simply magnifying his calling as instructed by the Lord. He had been told to make his writings and teachings opaque—without absolute transparency. But, as Nephi would later explain, Isaiah’s prophecies would become clear to those who have “ears to hear.”

2 Nephi 16:11–12 — Isaiah Inquires How Long He Should Preach to the People

After Isaiah’s mission was explained to him, he enquired, “Lord, how long?” Is this a two-year call, an 18-month mission? The Lord answered, “Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate: And the Lord have removed men far away, for there shall be great forsaking in the midst of the land.” This was, of course, prophesying of the remaining tribes being taken into captivity. How would you like to be called with the knowledge that your efforts would not change or make much difference?

2 Nephi 16:13 — What Is the Symbolism of the Tree and the Holy Seed in Isaiah’s Prophecy?

Finally, the prophecy in verse 13 undoubtedly gave Isaiah some hope that the House of Israel would not be lost forever: “But yet there shall be a tenth, and they shall return.” So, here is the hope. There will be a tithing, one tenth, or a remnant who will return to Jerusalem at a future time. The prophecy continues, stating that when the remnant return, it “shall be eaten, as a teil-tree, and as an oak whose substance is in them when they cast their leaves; the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.”

There is much symbolism in this passage. Even though during winter time a tree without its leaves may appear to be dead, there is still life in it. Similarly, even though it may appear like the House of Israel is desolate and dead, without further seed or progeny, there will be a remnant that will return and bring life back to the land and its people. From this remnant will come a “seed” or the promised Messiah, who will bring

life back all-together (to all people). I think this Isaiah passage was perhaps alluding to Psalm 22, which is one of David's Messianic Psalms.

2 Nephi 17

2 Nephi 17:3 – The Covenant Meaning Behind the Name of Isaiah's Son

Isaiah gave the name of his son as "Shearjashub," which has been proposed to mean "a remnant shall return." Perhaps this was not a birth name, but maybe a bar mitzvah or a covenant name. The covenant of the Lord was that a remnant would return.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Onomasticon, "[Shearjashub](http://onoma.lib.byu.edu)," online at onoma.lib.byu.edu.

Roseann Benson and Shon D. Hopkin, "[Finding Doctrine and Meaning in the Book of Isaiah](#)," *Religious Educator* 15, no. 1 (2014): 107–109.

2 Nephi 17:14 – A Virgin Will Conceive

Some scholars have disagreed on the meaning of this prophecy in Isaiah—specifically how to interpret the condition of the woman who would conceive the Messiah. The original word in Greek describing the woman is *parthenon*. This is normally interpreted as "a virgin" but can also mean "a young girl." In the ancient world, women married at a young age and would be young when they conceived. Christians, of course, view this as a prophecy about the virgin birth of Christ. In the Greek world, the word *parthenon* clearly indicated virginity. However, that was not necessarily the interpretation in Hebrew.

It is important to understand that Isaiah was prophesying that there was going to be something really unusual about this birth. If it were just a girl getting pregnant, that would not be very extraordinary—there would not be much to this prophecy. However, Isaiah's prophecy indicated that this was going to be a special birth in some way. It was similar to other prophecies of unusual births in ancient scripture—like saying that an octogenarian woman was going to conceive (like Sarah, wife of Abraham or Elizabeth, wife of Zacharias). Isaiah was stating that there would be a very unusual birth and this child would become the Mighty Counselor and the Prince of Peace.

Even though a large number of Jews rejected the Savior, we should not forget that there were many Jews who did accept Jesus. In the early days of Christianity, Jews were the main group of people who converted. Matthew was one of them. Matthew saw Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy. Paul, also, was a Jew. Where did Paul teach? His first stop was always to the synagogue in every town where he preached. These were the people

who knew the prophets. They were the ones who knew the tradition and prophecies of the Messiah. They could see how Jesus fulfilled all of these prophecies. Therefore, there were many Jews who did accept Jesus as the Messiah. We can be very grateful for that.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Did Nephi Read Isaiah as a Witness of Christ's Coming?](#) (2 Nephi 17:14)," *KnoWhy* 40 (February 24, 2016).

2 Nephi 18

2 Nephi 18:9—The Lord Will Gather His People from All the Far Countries

Verse 9 says, "Give ear all ye of far countries." This call indicates that the Lord will gather Israel again and bring back his people from wherever they may be in the world. The promise is that even though Israel will be scattered, the Lord will not forget them. This theme runs strongly through all of the Isaiah prophecies. This verse describes Stage 2 of Nephi's worldview of God's victory in gathering Israel.

2 Nephi 19

2 Nephi 19:6 — Isaiah Prophecies of Christ (see also 2 Nephi 17:14, above).

Though Isaiah knew that somebody important was going to be born at a future time, he did not spell it out very clearly. We know that the child would be a king. He would bear many royal titles and would have divine and powerful roles.

How has the Savior fulfilled each of these roles? Christ is a counselor when we pray for help. Christ is wonderful and a prince of peace when we need grace. Think of how Jesus Christ has fulfilled these roles and functions for you in your personal life.

2 Nephi 21–24

2 Nephi 21:1–5 — The Stem and Root of Jesse

Isaiah continued to prophesy about the coming of Christ in 2 Nephi 21:1–5. Among the many biblical prophecies that Moroni spoke to Joseph Smith, words in Isaiah 11 (2 Nephi 21) were declared to be "about to be fulfilled." Isaiah 11 speaks of "the stem of Jesse," "a rod [or branch] that will come out of the stem of Jesse," and a "root of Jesse." D&C 113:1–6 explains that the stem of Jesse refers to Jesus Christ. Who was Jesse? He

was the father of David from the line of Judah. Isaiah was prophesying that the Savior would come through this line. Seeing Christ as the stem of Jesse has had a long and honorable tradition. Many artistic representations show Jesse sleeping with a tree growing from of his body. David is often represented in the tree and Jesus is at the top. A common theme in medieval art was to show the promise given to Jesse—that Christ, the king of Israel, would come through his posterity (See Figure 1).

Isaiah also spoke of a rod or branch, as well as of roots, that would come from the stem. The rod and the roots are described in D&C 113:3–6 as being two different people who would both descend from the tribe of Ephraim (and Joseph) and also from the tribe of Judah. Does Joseph Smith fit the bill as a rod or branch of Jesse? Is he a descendant of Jesse? He might be through a collateral ancestral line. We don't know about that for sure, but we do know that he is of the Tribe of Ephraim.

What should we make of the root? Who is that? I think we are still waiting for further light and knowledge to identify that person. The root prophecy could be looking forward to another time or another person who will eventually bring these two lineages together. I think the prophecy is saying that this branch and this root will bring the House of Judah and the House of Ephraim together. It appears that this prophecy is looking forward to the final millennial stage in Nephi's world-view because chapter 21 introduces the lamb and the lion lying down together with each other.

Even though the entire prophecy of Isaiah may not be clear, the symbolism of the stem is clear—the stem refers to the coming of Christ.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Moroni Quote Isaiah 11 to Joseph Smith? \(2 Nephi 21:10\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 50 (March 9, 2016).

2 Nephi 21:9 — Everyone Will Know of the Lord and His Atonement

What is this knowledge that will fill the earth at the end of times? It is that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior of mankind, and that only through him can we be saved. It shows that the Atonement is for all of us. The whole world will have that knowledge. This describes the final or fourth stage of the Nephite prophetic view.

2 Nephi 21:11 — The Lord Will Gather His People a Second Time

Verse 11 states, "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." The important words in this verse are "the second time." There would be a gathering, as Nephi said, when a remnant of Israel would be brought back from the first exile in Babylon. Nephi explains

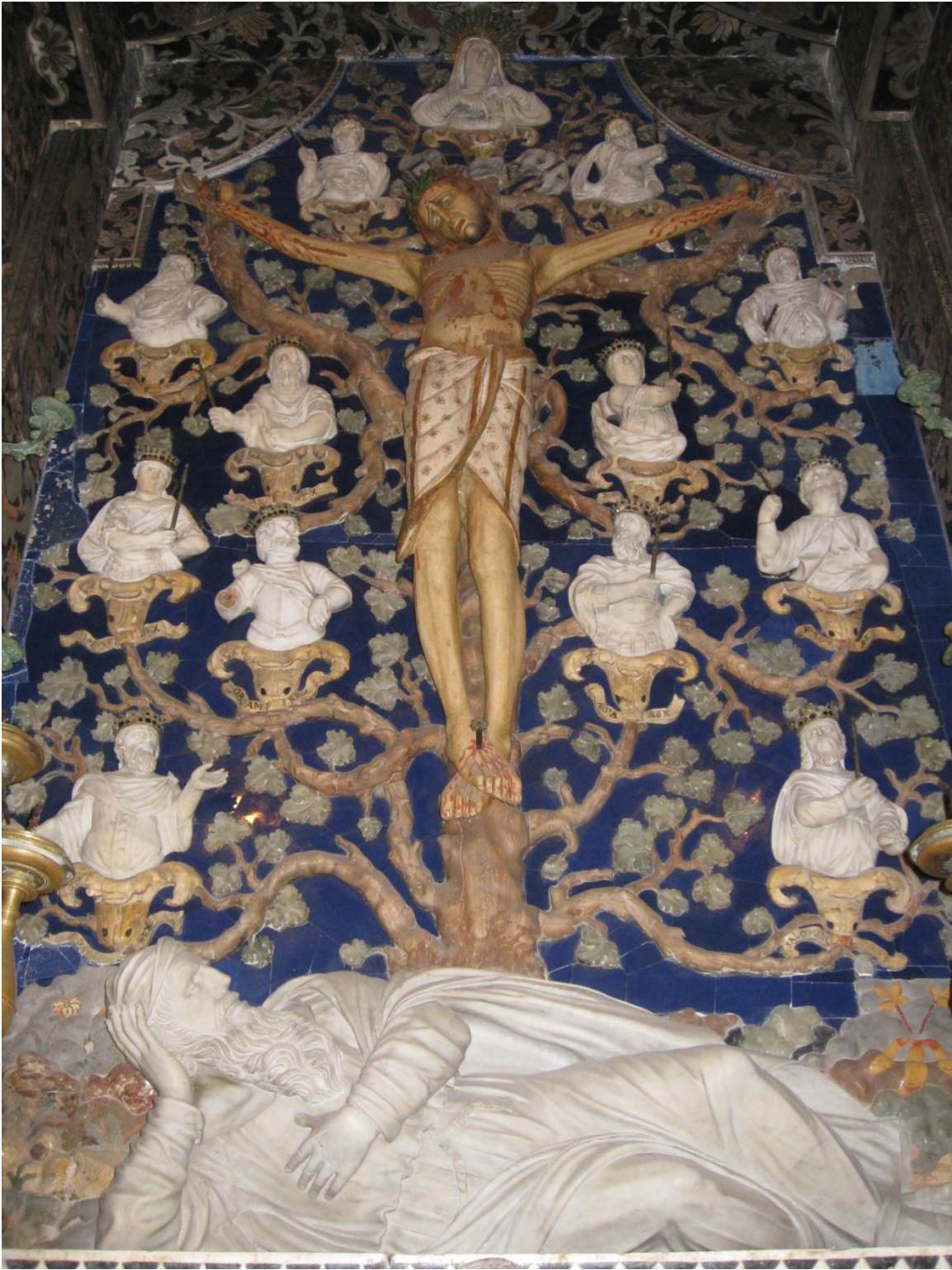


Figure 1 Depiction of the stem of Jesse as the tree of life in the Monreale Cathedral in Sicily. Photo by John W. Welch

in 2 Nephi 25 that they would be brought back so that the Lord could appear to them in Jerusalem.

However, the House of Israel would be scattered again because of the hardness of their hearts and their rejection of Jesus. Here, Isaiah knew that the Lord would have to set his hand a *second time* to gather them “from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.” Nephi speaks of this gathering of Israel both in physical and also in spiritual terms.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Where Did Joseph Smith Get His Ideas about the Physical and Spiritual Gathering of Israel?](#) (2 Nephi 21:11),” *KnoWhy* 290 (March 22, 2017).

For what Isaiah says about the last days, see Nephi’s explanation in 2 Nephi 30 and also Book of Mormon Central, “[What Do Nephi and Isaiah Say about the End Times?](#) (2 Nephi 23:6),” *KnoWhy* 46 (March 3, 2016).

2 Nephi 25

2 Nephi 25:1 — Nephi’s Commentary on Isaiah’s Teachings

After quoting from Isaiah 2–14 (2 Nephi 12–24), Nephi provided five additional chapters of his own interpretation of Isaiah. Rather than being a strict commentary, it is more of a Midrash—an explanation of what he saw in those chapters that he wanted his people, and us, to understand. It was not enough for his people to know *what* Isaiah said on the brass plates; Nephi wanted his people to *understand* what it meant.

That tells us something more about Nephi, doesn’t it? He was a teacher. He was meticulous about what he did. He was very careful. He understood what Isaiah was saying. If you are patient with both Nephi and Isaiah, there is no better guide to take you through Isaiah than Nephi.

The Book of Isaiah is somewhat of a scrapbook of seemingly disconnected revelations, like the Doctrine and Covenants. Each little section is a separate prophecy. Isaiah did not sit down and write all of this in one sitting. We do not know when all the prophecies of Isaiah were put together and collected. The old Jewish tradition is that they were collected in the days of King Hezekiah and finally put into one collection then, but we do not know how decisions were made for selecting the order of the Isaiah writings.

2 Nephi 25:1 — A Brilliant and Insightful Commentary

Nephi claimed that we really would not understand Isaiah unless we had lived in Jerusalem in his day and understood the manner of speech, the usage of the language, the culture, and the places. He said, “For behold, Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many of my people to understand; for they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews.” Nephi had lived there, he knew Jerusalem.

These Isaiah chapters are difficult for anyone to understand, but for the Book of Mormon to give us such brilliant and insightful commentary on these very difficult chapters is a most useful element of the book and a great testimony of the Book of Mormon itself.

2 Nephi 25:4 — Nephi Will Prophesy in Plainness

Nephi said that his soul “delighted in plainness.” Do you think Christ likes plainness? What is important about plainness? When Christ said “Judge not that ye be not judged,” it was a very plain saying. Of course, you can judge all you want, but you had better be sure that you are judging righteously, because whatever standard of judgment you use, that will be used to judge you. Be wise about it. That is a plain statement. So is, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Very plain. I think as we look at the words of Jesus, we see that plainness is a great virtue. Sometimes we over-value sophistication and complexity.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does Nephi Help Us Understand Isaiah? \(2 Nephi 25:4\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 47 (March 4, 2016).

2 Nephi 25:12–13 — Nephi Saw Christ’s Day

After Nephi had quoted the Isaiah passages, he started going through the four main elements in his prophetic world-view. In verse 12, Nephi talked about how Christ would come and how Jesus would manifest himself to the people in Jerusalem but they would reject and crucify him. Nephi included new information here that had not been mentioned before in the Nephite record, specifically he prophesied that after Jesus was laid in a sepulcher for the space of three days, he would rise from the dead. In 1 Nephi 19, Zenos had been quoted as saying there would be three days of darkness, but it did not mention what was going on during those three days of darkness. Here we learn that there would be a three-day period in which Jesus would be in the tomb.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Caused the Darkness and Destruction in the 34th Year?](#) (3 Nephi 8:20),” *KnoWhy* 197 (September 28, 2016).

2 Nephi 25:12–17 — Passover and Temple References

There is a corollary between the three days of darkness surrounding the death of Jesus and a prior significant experience in Israelite history. Under the Law of Moses, the Israelites celebrated the Passover as a reminder of God's hand in saving them from death, redeeming them from slavery, and bringing them safely out of Egypt. Moses had cursed the land of Egypt and prophesied that the firstborn of the Egyptians would die by the hand of the destroying angel. However, the destroying angel would pass over those Israelites who followed his specific instructions to paint their doorposts with the blood of a male lamb without blemish. Three days of darkness and death prevailed in Egypt. This was a foreshadowing of the three nights and days of darkness when Jesus would be crucified, would die, and would lie in the tomb. Significantly, the destruction among the inhabitants of the New World particularly afflicted the wicked, while those who were "more righteous" were "spared" (3 Nephi 9:13).

Moreover, in 2 Nephi 25:16, Nephi quotes Psalm 24:4 in order to worship God "with clean hands and a pure heart." This was the basic temple entrance requirement in the Temple of Jerusalem and, apparently, also in the Temple of Nephi.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Were Nephite Prophets Familiar with the Passover Tradition? \(Mosiah 13:30\),](#)" *KnoWhy* 420 (March 29, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Nephi Connect Isaiah's Prophecies with Joseph Who Was Sold into Egypt? \(2 Nephi 25:17\),](#)" *KnoWhy* 375 (October 24, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Lehi 'Suppose' the Existence of Satan? \(2 Nephi 24:12\),](#)" *KnoWhy* 43 (February 29, 2016).

2 Nephi 25:18 — One True Messiah

Notice that Nephi needed to say that his people should not look for another Messiah to come. There would be no other Messiah, "for there is save one Messiah spoken of by the prophets, and that Messiah is he who should be rejected of the Jews." Nephi must have been aware that some people wondered how many Messiahs there would be. What made them wonder?

The word *mashiach* in Hebrew means "anointed" or "anointed one." In ancient times, a high priest was anointed to be the high priest. So, in a way, every high priest under the Law of Moses was a "mashiach" — a messiah. In 1 Nephi 10:5, Lehi said that *a* messiah would come. He did not say *the* Messiah, so Nephi may have wanted to clarify this matter.

There are reasons why we have multiple anointed people, but that does not make them all *the* Messiah. The name “Mosiah” is actually related to the same word. “Messiah” was a word that was used in more than one way, but Nephi wanted us to know that there is only one Messiah—he who would perform the atonement and would be the one whom we worship through his holy name. As Nephi taught in verse 13: “for I have seen his day, and my heart doth magnify his holy name.”

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Was Mosiah a Type of Christ? \(Mosiah 26:12\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 104 (May 20, 2016).

2 Nephi 25:19 — Six Hundred Years after Lehi Left Jerusalem

Nephi not only made it very clear that there would be only one Messiah, he also revealed the name of the Messiah—“Jesus Christ, the Son of God”—and even gave a timeframe when this one Messiah would be born. Nephi did not pin the date down precisely, but he did say that it would be “six hundred years from the time that [Lehi and his family] left Jerusalem.” In other words, Christ’s birth would be close enough to 600 years that people would have recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, and would have been convinced that there was no need to look for another.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does Prophecy Shape the Book of Mormon’s Content and Structure? \(Words of Mormon 1:4\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 498 (January 15, 2019).

2 Nephi 25:20 — Symbols of Christ

Again, Nephi referred to the Israelite ancestors of the Nephite people: “And as the Lord God liveth that brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt, ... there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved.” This is another Passover metaphor.

Nephi continued: “[T]he Lord God . . . gave unto Moses power that he should heal the nations [the tribes of Israel] after they had been bitten by poisonous serpents, if they would cast their eyes unto the serpent which he did raise up before them.” The serpent, especially a serpent raised on a pole, is a symbol of Christ, and it refers to when Moses put the brazen serpent on the pole so that anyone who looked at it would be healed. Jesus used that reference in John 3:14: “[E]ven so must the Son of man be lifted up” just as the healing serpent had been lifted up on the post by Moses.

Nephi also referred back to the time in the wilderness that the Lord “gave [Moses] power that he should smite the rock and the water should come forth.” Once again, this is a type and symbol of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul pointed to this same event in

Israelite history and explained “that Rock was Christ” and the spiritual water would come forth from him. All these things had been revealed to Nephi, and he understood that these images typify Christ. The belief that the Law of Moses and its related events were given to represent what would happen in the life of the Savior is a tradition that goes way, way back in Judeo-Christian thought.

Further Reading

Andrew C. Skinner, “[Serpent Symbols and Salvation in the Ancient Near East and the Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 42–55, 70–71.

2 Nephi 25:19–20, 26 — The Name of Jesus Christ

It seems that Nephi, and many of the ancient prophets, had a well-developed and sophisticated understanding of the mission of Christ, of his life, and also of his name. In the ancient world, the people greatly appreciated the importance of what we call “name theology.” We do not have quite the same appreciation today. They had to know the name of the god that they were worshipping, and the name was usually very holy, kept sacred, and only spoken under certain conditions.

In verse 19, Nephi knew and used the Savior’s full name, Jesus Christ. Often, the Savior was referred to as the Only Begotten of the Father, the Father of Heaven and Earth, and the Son of God. There are a number of ways in which Nephi described the Messiah who was to come (see Figure 2). Possibly, the understanding of the Messiah’s name was something that came gradually and Nephi, Jacob, and all the subsequent Nephite prophets from this point forward knew him by his name, Jesus Christ.

Nephi had deep respect for and interest in the name of God. I am sure he emphasized this. So, when Nephi taught that “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,” this would have been a very solemn, spiritual, and holy teaching of his time.

Further Reading

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

2 Nephi 25:23 — Persuading Our Children to Be Reconciled to God

Nephi explained his purpose and focus in life: “For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God.”

Names Used for Christ by Major Book of Mormon Authors

	Lehi	Nephi,	Jacob	Abinadi	Benjamin	Alma ₂	Amulek	Samuel	Mormon	Moroni
A Messiah	2	1								
A Son of God					1					
All-Powerful Creator			1							
Beloved Son		1								
Christ		40	12	8	12	12	8	2	43	46
Christ Jesus					1					
Christ the Lord				1	1					
Christ the Son						1		1	1	
Creator			3	1	1		1			
Eternal Father		2		2			2		1	5
Eternal God		2	1				2			1
Father		18	3	5	2		1	1	13	22
Father of Heaven and Earth		1		1	1		1	1		
Father and Son				1						
First-Fruits	1									
God	41	135	87	44	57	201	29	9	76	72
God of Abr., Isaac, Jacob		1				2				1
Good Shepherd						7				
Great Creator			3							
Great and Eternal Head								1		
Great Mediator	2									
Great and True Shepherd								1		
Heavenly King					1					
His Son Jesus Christ									1	

Figure 2 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Names Used for Christ by Major Book of Mormon Authors*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, chart 44. Continued on pages 200–201.

	Lehi	Nephi ₁	Jacob	Abinadi	Benjamin	Alma ₂	Amulek	Samuel	Mormon	Moroni
Holy Being										1
Holy Child								1		
Holy Messiah	2									
Holy One	1	1	1		2			1	1	
Holy One of Israel	2	14	17							
Holy One of Jacob		1								
Jehovah										1
Jesus		4	2					9	6	
Jesus Christ		4		3	3	1	1	7	17	
King of Heaven			1		1					
Lamb		29			1	1				1
Lamb of God	1	31			1					2
Lord	64	175	46	49	32	54	29	47	53	54
Lord God	8	38	18		6	8	1	1	1	1
Lord God Almighty	1	1	1							
Lord God of Hosts		2								
Lord God Omnipotent				2						
Lord of Hosts		9	7				3			
Lord Jesus										1
Lord Jesus Christ				1	3		1	3	2	
Lord Omnipotent				4						
Maker			2							
Messiah	13	12	2	1						
Mighty God			1							

	Lehi	Nephi ₁	Jacob	Abinadi	Benjamin	Alma ₂	Amulek	Samuel	Mormon	Moroni
Mighty One of Israel		1								
Mighty One of Jacob		1	1							
Only Begotten of the Father		1				2	1			
Only Begotten Son			2			3				
Prophet	1									
Redeemer	5	12	3			3		1	2	
Savior	1	4	1		1				4	1
Shepherd		2				11		1	1	
Son		8		6		12	1		2	8
Son of the Eternal Father		2								
Son of the Everlasting God		1								
Son of the Most High God		1								
Son of Righteousness		1								
The Christ		1								
The Son of God	2	5		1	2	10	8	3	3	3
The Very Christ		1							1	
The Very God									1	
True Messiah	2	1								
Very God of Israel		1								
TOTALS										
References to Christ	148	565	215	119	126	339	86	74	224	247
Names used unique to author	4	10	4	1	3	3	0	2	3	3
Different names used by author	17	38	22	11	15	20	14	15	20	21
Percent names unique to author	24	26	18	9	20	15	0	13	15	1

What does it mean to “be reconciled” to God? “Reconciled” is not a very complicated word, but what does it mean “to be” reconciled? It could mean to be at peace with God and, when we are at peace with God, we follow his commandments and love Him. More than anything, “to be reconciled” is to follow the first great commandment, to love God. When you are reconciled to him, when you love him, everything else will follow.

2 Nephi 25:23 — After All We Can Do

What does “after all we can do” mean? How many ways can that phrase be understood? In the 1960s and 1970s, the German translation of this verse in the Book of Mormon read, “in spite of all we can do,” we are saved by grace. That translation has since been changed. The translation now says, “after all that we can do.” This verse was probably changed to avoid a common misconception among some churches that our works will not matter—we can do whatever we want—as long as we accept the Savior.

As mentioned in the Notes for the previous Come Follow Me lesson, Jacob also said something similar in 2 Nephi 10:24, “Reconcile yourselves to the will of God, . . . and remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved.” Nephi seems to be paraphrasing and simplifying Jacob’s statement to make it plain. But Nephi most likely understood the doctrine of salvation by grace the same way that Jacob expressed it. “After all that we can do” would thus involve all that it takes for us to “reconcile [ourselves] to the will of God” and to be “reconciled unto God,” as Jacob said, and as Nephi hopes to persuade all “to be reconciled to God” (25:23).

After that, it is not only “*by* grace” that we are saved, but also, as Jacob said, “*in and through* the grace of God” that we are saved. “By” seems to express the instrumental effect of God’s grace upon us. “In” would seem to express the interpersonal relationship with God and Christ in which the binding aspects of grace thrive. “Through” grace may inspire a sense of the enduring power of grace that persists through time and throughout all eternity.

Alma 24:11 also correlates well with 2 Nephi 25:23, which is imbedded in the Book of Mormon narrative of the Ammonites, who buried their weapons of war. Regarding their hope of being cleansed from their past wicked, murderous and sinful behavior, they stated:

[I]t has been *all that we could do*, (as we were the most lost of all mankind) to repent of all our sins and the many murders which we have committed, and to get God to take them away from our hearts, for it was *all we could do to repent sufficiently* before God that he would take away our stain.”

In other words, all we can do is turn to Christ and he will be there for us. What was all the Ammonites could do? They buried their weapons, they made a covenant, and they kept it. They refused to fight, even when they were attacked. They offered up their lives rather than fighting. Talk about enduring to the end! This was a deliberate calculation made by the Ammonites. Individually, in their own hearts, they knew and believed that they would be saved and redeemed from all of their problems, but after all they could do. And that turned out to be quite a lot for some of them. So, in our own trials we can look to this scripture as a beacon of hope. We will be free from our sorrows, regrets, burdens and trials after all we can do to turn to God in the midst of that trial.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Does Nephi State that We Are Saved by Grace ‘After All We Can Do’? \(2 Nephi 25:23\),” *KnoWhy* 371 \(October 10, 2017\).](#)

2 Nephi 25:23–24— Saved by Grace

Even though we have work to do, we are still saved by grace. The interpretive proof of our reliance on grace is found in these two verses: 2 Nephi 25:23–24. Verse 23 ends with the statement that “we are saved [by grace], after all we can do.” This is followed with verse 24, which begins with “notwithstanding [even though we are saved by grace] we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled.” All of us, every one of us, must rely on grace—the Atonement, the Resurrection, and the sustaining influence of Jesus Christ—in order to be made perfect. Then, through our faith we are made alive in Christ because we are willing to do what he has commanded. We still keep the commandments—that is part of all we can do.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks referenced 2 Nephi 25:23 and the principle of grace, when he made the following comment in his April 1998 General Conference address entitled, “Have You Been Saved”:

Some Christians accuse Latter-day Saints ... of denying the grace of God through claiming they can earn their own salvation. We answer this accusation with the words of two Book of Mormon prophets. Nephi taught, “For we labor diligently ... to persuade our children ... 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.”

One of the footnotes in verse 23 points to D&C 138:4, which says, “That through his atonement, and by obedience to the principles of the gospel, mankind might be saved.” This verse undoubtedly implies that we must also be obedient to ordinances as well as

principles, because participating in ordinances are things that we have to do to be exalted. We should also look at being saved in the context of a covenant life.

These verses explain that grace is not simply the means by which we are saved—it is the principle that we live and the salvation that Christ brings. In other words, when we have been saved by grace, we live in grace. This also means that we live *in love* because grace is unconditional love, manifested through the giving of gifts.

The Greek word for “grace” does not describe a tangible gift you may receive. In the ancient world of Jesus and Paul, “grace” established a relationship because when you accept a gift from someone, you are then obliged, and you are then a part of a relationship with the person who gave the gift. I have a friend who is writing a book entitled, “His Obliging Grace.” It is “amazing grace,” but it is also “obliging grace” because we are obliged and welcome to live in that relationship.

Further Reading:

Dallin H. Oaks, “Have You Been Saved,” *Ensign*, April 1998, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

2 Nephi 25:24–25 — Being Made Alive in Christ through Faith

It is important to understand that because of our faith, we become alive in Christ. Jesus submits his will to the Father and, therefore, if we want to be Christ-like, we must also submit our will to the commandments of God. There is a Christ-like echo in our recognition of this principle.

2 Nephi 25:26 — Rejoicing in Christ

Nephi was well aware that Jesus would come down—the condescension of God—and that he would suffer and die. We take our knowledge of Christ’s ministry on earth for granted because we have hindsight. We know what happened. He lived, he died, and he was resurrected. But Nephi was living before all of this occurred.

Nephi knew that Christ was going to suffer much throughout his life. Nephi understood suffering. He had a difficult life—leaving the comforts of his childhood home in Jerusalem, facing exposure in the wilderness and the risk at sea. Nephi knew that Christ was willing to endure extreme pain and suffering for all mankind because of love. I think Nephi probably took great comfort in the fact that he was being Christ-like as he suffered and endured to the end.

When Christ appeared to the Nephites in 3 Nephi 27:27, he stated, “What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am.” There is no principle of ethics or morals that is stronger than following the best example that you can find. Christ

showed us, by example, how to best live our life. Following him will make it a reality that we can become Christ-like.

2 Nephi 25:26 — Nephi Writes the Prophecies of Christ for His Posterity

Nephi served in a lot of different positions, as we all do. He was a prophet, he was a builder, he was a record-keeper, he was a king, and he was a leader. Nephi was also a father. We know he had plenty of children. How many prophets in the scriptures tell you what they taught their children? We learn two things about Nephi from this scripture. First, it was important to Nephi to mention his children. Second, teaching his children about Christ was a priority for Nephi. He put his children on the top of his list of things that are most important.

2 Nephi 25:26 — Nephi the Diligent Record-Keeper

Nephi was a record-keeper. He was also a record-maker. This task was very important in Nephi's life. It was extremely difficult to make and keep records on sheets of metal. It involved a lot of time, work, expense, and training. Intense focus was necessary—there were no erasers in that medium.

Nephi had left the Holy Land behind, but had brought the brass plates with him. The plates were, in a way, his connection back to the holiness, the tradition, and the prophets. Nephi was the custodian of all of that! No wonder Nephi felt a strong desire to make sure that these things would come forth at a later time. Nephi labored to teach his children. He also labored to teach them through the records that he kept. The scriptures were obviously very important to Nephi. Talk about the price he had to pay in terms of obedience!

Nephi was also a careful and artistic writer, as is evident in the chiasmic structure he composed in 2 Nephi 25:24–27. Through that inverted parallel arrangement, Nephi focused all attention on Christ at the center of his most famous personal statement of purpose. See Book of Mormon Central, [“What Can We Learn from 10 of the Best Chiasms in the Book of Mormon? Part 1 \(2 Nephi 25:26\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 349 (August 7, 2017); [“Why Is the Book of Mormon So Focused on Jesus Christ? \(2 Nephi 25:26\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 484 (November 13, 2018).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Is It Important to Keep Records? \(1 Nephi 9:5\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 345 (July 28, 2017).

2 Nephi 25:29–30 — Living the Law of Moses

The Nephites were taught by Nephi that “ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul.” Where did Nephi's

people worship? In the temple! Soon after Nephi and his people settled in the land they eventually called “Nephi,” they built a temple.

Because Nephi’s people were still living the Law of Moses, they needed a temple to obey many parts of that law. He instructed his people: “[I]nasmuch 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” (25:30). Among other things, the Law of Moses was the Law of Sacrifice. Nephi’s temple had an altar. The people offered appropriate sacrifices on certain days, as specified under the law. They would have also observed certain festival days such as the Day of Atonement or the Feast of Tabernacles, which were connected particularly with particular sacrifices and solemn observances.

However, Nephi was well aware and knew that all ordinances and covenants under the Law of Moses pointed to the coming of Christ. Nephi preached of Christ and also the importance of fulfilling the requirements under the Law of Moses. The word “expedient” in verse 30 probably means “appropriate” or “necessary.” Nephi was explaining to his people that it was still necessary for his people to perform the ordinances under the law of Moses because that law had not been fulfilled. He also understood that, with the coming of Christ, the performances and ordinances under the Law of Moses would be fulfilled.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Did Ancient Israelites Build Temples Outside of Jerusalem?](#) (2 Nephi 5:16),” *KnoWhy* 31 (February 11, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Does the Book of Mormon Say We Must Worship God with Our Whole Soul?](#) (2 Nephi 25:29),” *KnoWhy* 467 (September 13, 2018).

2 NEPHI 26–30

John W. Welch Notes



2 Nephi 26

In overview, beginning in 2 Nephi 25, Nephi spoke “somewhat concerning the words which I have written, which have been spoken by the mouth of Isaiah” (25:1). That set of interpretive sayings continues on until the end of chapter 30. I imagine that Nephi wrote these words midway through his reign as king in the city of Nephi. These chapters would have reassured Nephi’s people that, even though they would live in isolation and even though they knew that their posterity would not last, their efforts would not be in vain or unimportant. The Lord would come to them (ch. 26), they would leave a record that would come forth miraculously (ch. 27), and even though the devil would seek in many ways to impede the progress of that book (ch. 28), it will figure prominently in the last days (ch. 29), when many covenant people shall be restored with rejoicing unto the blessings of the Lord (ch. 30). At that point Nephi says, “And now, my beloved brethren, I make an end of my sayings” (30:18). And thus, these chapters should rightly be read as a textual unit.

2 Nephi 26:1 — The Law Fulfilled after Christ’s Resurrection

It is apparent in verse 1 of chapter 26 that Nephi clearly understood that in the future, when Jesus would come to the people in the Americas following his resurrection, he would fulfill the Law of Moses and issue a new law which would then take the place of the Law of Moses. Until then, he instructs the people of Nephi to be strict in observing the Law of Moses. This verse picks up seamlessly as a continuation of Nephi’s statement in the final verse of Nephi’s previous chapter: “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" (25:30).

2 Nephi 26:4–6 — The Wicked Destroyed

In verse 4, Nephi identified those among his people who will be destroyed, namely the proud and those who do wickedly. In this summation, Nephi captures one of the main themes in the long block of Isaiah chapters that he has just quoted. The Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, prophesied over and over again about pride being the great pitfall of the people living in the land of Jerusalem during his time. Isaiah also prophesied that pride would be the great pitfall for those of us living in the latter days.

Nephi elaborated in verse 5: "They that kill the prophets, and the saints, the depths of the earth shall swallow them up, . . . and mountains shall cover them, and whirlwinds shall carry them away, and buildings shall fall upon them and crush them to pieces and grind them to powder." This statement of the divine punishment of those who kill the prophets compares with Nephi's previous prophecies (see 1 Nephi 12:4 and 19:10–18) about the types of calamities that would eventually befall the lands of the Nephites and Lamanites in the New World at the time of Christ's death. These things can be related to the catastrophes that took place in 3 Nephi 8–9. People were specifically warned by Nephi, several hundred years before those events occurred, about the thunderings, lightnings, earthquakes, and all manner of destruction that would take place.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Does Prophecy Shape the Book of Mormon's Content and Structure?](#) (Words of Mormon 1:4)," *KnoWhy* 498 (January 15, 2019).

2 Nephi 26:7 — Nephi Anguishes for His Posterity

Look at verse 7: "O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people!" Can you imagine Nephi's feelings as he was shown the awful destruction of his own people? Nephi, undoubtedly, had hope and a desire for the best for his posterity. Don't we all wish for the best for our children, our grandchildren, and our posterity? Nephi knew that there would be many good things that would happen in the lives of his posterity. Christ would even come to them. But Nephi also knew that they would be destroyed—and what pain and anguish that must have made him feel. We all can relate with Nephi. However, in spite of that inexpressible agony, what was Nephi's response at the end of this verse? Did he curse God and object to what will happen? No. He said, "I *must* cry unto my God: thy ways are just." What a lesson we can learn from Nephi on how we can regroup and respond to calamities and problems, many of which are happening today in the world.

2 Nephi 26:9 — Christ Will Appear to the Faithful Nephites

Nephi saw that the righteous people who hearkened to the words of the prophet would not be destroyed. The “Son of righteousness” would appear to them, heal them, and they would have peace for three generations. This is exactly what happened in 3 Nephi 17 with the healing of the people at the time of Christ, followed by peace for three generations in 4 Nephi.

Have you thought about the impact your direct influence has over three or four generations? What is significant about three or four generations? You, through your grandchildren, are included in this span of time. Consider this: If you had been among those who had witnessed the teachings of Christ and if you had seen and felt his marvelous love, you could live to tell your children, your grandchildren, and perhaps your greatgrandchildren, about that remarkable experience. The period of three subsequent generations marks the affect we can have personally on others. Our direct influence does not reach through seven or eight generations because we aren’t around to personally know that later progeny.

The little children who were present and who personally interacted with Christ would have remembered that experience all of their lives. They were eye witnesses of the Savior and, throughout their lives, they could relate their experience to others. Therefore, for three or four generations, people who were actually there at Christ’s appearance—who were first-hand witnesses—were around to relate their personal accounts. However, after three or four generations, the opportunity for first-hand oral testimony would become lost, and people would have begun to ignore and discount the significance of what had happened. The people in 4 Nephi eventually went a different way and, when that happens, they were ripe for destruction. A century ago, a similar challenge was faced, when a generation arose that had not known Joseph Smith personally. Fortunately, intense historical efforts were made to record their recollections and experiences with the Prophet. This explains why the Church is so avid about keeping faithful historical records, and why our own personal histories should not go missing.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did the Peace Last So Long in 4 Nephi?](#) (4 Nephi 1:16),” *KnoWhy* 225 (November 7, 2016).

2 Nephi 26:24 — Jesus Does Nothing Unless It Is for Our Benefit

Verse 24 tells us something about Jesus: “He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world.” What a statement! That is an absolute statement—*everything* Jesus does is

for the benefit of the world. If you are striving to be Christ-like, you may want to look at your life and ask, “Do I do nothing except for the benefit of the world?” That is a challenge.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why the Book of Mormon’s Depiction of a Loving God Fits with the Old Testament \(2 Nephi 26:24\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 422 (April 5, 2018).

2 Nephi 26:27 — We Are Commanded to Help Others Repent

Christ commands all people that they “should persuade all men to repent.” We assist Christ in His work when we get people to repent—it is a Christ-like effort. In a [BYU Devotional](#), I once stated that there is no intellectual challenge greater than figuring out what you can say and what you can do to help someone else repent. This intellectual challenge is greater than learning the laws of astrophysics, molecular biology, or any other complex academic pursuit.

But this is what Bishops often do—somebody walks into your office who needs help, direction, and assistance in the process of repentance. One of the scariest moments of my life occurred two or three weeks after I had been ordained and sustained as a bishop. I realized that these faithful people who sat in my office for a fifteen-minute interview would actually go out and do what I advised them to do. I realized that I had to do my best to be right! I was asked many questions about many things, but the most important advice sought was how to fix their life and how to repent. It is quite a challenge. How do you respond? How do you do it? Try to figure out how Christ would respond. What would He advise or do in this situation? This is a quintessential Christ-like endeavor. And we are all charged to go and do likewise, to preach nothing—directly or indirectly—except repentance, reproving betimes with sharpness but showing forth an increase of love (D&C 121:43; see also Leviticus 19:17).

2 Nephi 26:29 — We Are Commanded to Avoid Priestcraft

The Lord has also commanded that there shall be no priestcrafts, “[F]or, behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion.” We need to scrupulously avoid the behavior described in this verse. Fortunately, we are blessed with a structure of Church leadership, from the ward level all the way to the top, where we do not have the opportunity for this kind of priestcraft. This is a great blessing to members of the Church of Jesus Christ in our day.

2 Nephi 26:31 — What Does Nephi Mean When He Says We Cannot Labor for Money?

This scripture is not a blanket statement that implies we should not work. The scripture specifies that “the laborer in Zion” should not work for money, meaning you should not be paid when you are doing service for the Church. We don’t get paid when we minister to others. In some churches, however, ministers are paid—it is a job. The concern expressed in verse 31 is turning the holy service of the priesthood into a commercial activity. Another interpretation of this scripture might be a warning not to let your job become so all-consuming that you become obsessed with money. That would also be a problem.

2 Nephi 26:25, 33 — All Are Alike unto God

Verse 33 talks about Christ-like love. “And he inviteth all to come unto him ... and he denieth none that come unto him.” A Christ-like person invites all people into his or her life. The statement is followed by an inclusive list of people we need to love and invite into our lives: black and white, bond and free, male and female, the righteous and the heathen. “All are alike unto God, both Jew and gentile.” This is a Christ-like attitude about humanity because we truly are all alike. We are all children of the same Heavenly Father, and we are all loved by Him. We are all brothers and sisters of the same, divine brother. That makes us all alike in the ways that really matter.

The love Nephi is speaking of is a welcoming love. We should welcome all people into our personal lives and into the Kingdom of God. At the time Nephi wrote this, he knew that his posterity would be destroyed. He also knew God’s promise that there would eventually be Gentiles and others who would bring the gospel again to his people and that his posterity would be welcomed into the Church. Nephi also knew of Isaiah’s promise that the Lord’s voice goes to all people. Nephi had echoed that prophecy of Isaiah a few verses earlier in 2 Nephi 26:24: “He doth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world.”

And verse 25 further elaborates: “[D]oth he cry to any, saying: Depart from me? ... I say unto you, Nay. ... Come unto me all ye ends of the earth, buy milk and honey, without money and without price.” Where did Nephi get this phrasing? It comes from Isaiah 55:1. This would appear to be the last writing in the book of Isaiah that the Nephites had. Nephi drew on many of Isaiah’s passages, including this one, as he crafted his own words to convey the prophecy that he knew would happen to his people and others. Consider what Nephi says in 2 Nephi 26:27: “Hath he commanded any that they should not partake of his salvation?” No. Rather, “[H]e hath given it free for all men,” which is substantively related to Isaiah 55:1.

And this brings us back to verse 33, which I think is a most moving conclusion. What a wonderful, universal message we have here in the Book of Mormon of the reach of Christ's Atonement to all people throughout the world. Isn't it wonderful to live at a time when this prophecy is being fulfilled, a time when people are being gathered from all parts of the world?

One may wonder about the 1978 revelation received by President Spencer W. Kimball about extending the blessings of the priesthood to all worthy males. How did that happen? *BYU Studies* published an article several years ago which was written by Edward L. Kimball who is President Kimball's son. It is a very long article, going into great detail about all the steps that were involved in receiving that revelation. It is an over-whelming experience to read and understand how the Spirit of Revelation was upon President Kimball, inspiring him to bring forth this revelation at the time, when it was proper, everything in the Lord's due time.

Recently, I had in my office a black member of the Church who graduated from Brigham Young University's law school several years ago. His name is Keith Hamilton. Keith has written a book about his thoughts from the perspective of a black member of the Church. You would probably enjoy reading his whole story. During our conversation, I asked Keith, "What do you make of the revelation about blacks receiving the priesthood?" Sharing our thoughts, we both concluded that the important thing is that the Lord blesses every people in their proper time. There was a time when the Church went primarily to the Lamanites. And, there was a time when it went primarily to the Germans in Prussia. There was a time when the Church put great emphasis on the Polynesian Islands. The Church is small. We have limited resources, and can't do everything for all people instantly. We are blessed to live at a time when many things have come together making it possible for all blessings of the priesthood to be offered to all.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Are So Few Women Mentioned in the Book of Mormon? (2 Nephi 26:33)," *KnoWhy* (December 19, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Did Nephi Say That All Are Alike Unto God? (2 Nephi 26:33)," *KnoWhy* 278 (February 22, 2017).

2 Nephi 27

2 Nephi 27:6–8 — Nephi Testifies That the Record of the Nephites Will Come Forth at a Future Time.

Think of how disoriented and isolated Nephi must have felt. With respect to the people living in the world that Lehi and his family left, Nephi and his people were out in the middle of absolutely nowhere. As far as they knew, they were living on an island of the sea and Nephi, of course, knew that Isaiah recorded the promise that God would not forget even the people on the isles of the sea. At this point in time, Nephi and his people had likely not yet had an opportunity to explore far enough to really know how large of a land they were inhabiting.

Nephi had built a temple. He was trying to reestablish things and bring order to his people. He must have also wondered if this work would be for naught, because he also knew that there would be great wars and that his people, the Nephites, would eventually be wiped out. This must have been a most depressing vision. Nephi was undoubtedly struggling with concerns of anonymity, of annihilation, and extinction. So, when Nephi was brought to the understanding of the voice of his people speaking from the dust, it must have brought great hope.

In 2 Nephi 26:16, Nephi had first prophesied that the writings on the plates would speak from the dust, alluding to Isaiah 29. Nephi then spent a great deal of time discussing the role the plates of his people would have in gathering Israel. The whole of chapter 27 then discusses how this prophecy about his words speaking out of the dust would be fulfilled. Nephi quoted from a section in Isaiah 29 and explained how God would bring about the great and marvelous work that would come forth—the marvelous work and a wonder. Isaiah prophesied that God would not forget the people whom Isaiah was addressing. Neither would God forget Nephi and his people. Nephi understood that his posterity would have an important role to play in the history of Israel and that the record made by Nephi and his people would change the hearts of the whole house of Israel. God would keep his promises and somehow this prophecy would be fulfilled, if Nephi would only keep the records and do what he was commanded to do with the plates.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Are the Words of the Book of Mormon Like 'One That Hath a Familiar Spirit'?](#)" (2 Nephi 16:16)," *KnoWhy* 491 (December 16, 2018).

2 Nephi 27:7 — A Sealed Book

Anciently, why would a scribe have a seal? When a scribe wrote an official document (such as a legal contract, a divorce decree, or a promissory note), the scribe would bind the written record, tie it up, put a lump of clay or wax on the knot, and imprint his seal in the clay or wax to indicate that the record was an official, formal, correct document. This is how official transactions were conducted in ancient times. Notice that in 2 Nephi 27, Nephi knows that there will be a record. It will be witnessed by three witnesses, and it will be sealed, meaning that the record will not just be closed up, but that it will be preserved with seals of authority. Sealing important documents that directly affected the life of an individual was part of Nephi's world. We can learn something from the fact that the record of the Nephites was witnessed and sealed. It is important to ascertain the attestation and testimony of those who influence us in making decisions that affect our eternal life.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Would a Book Be Sealed? \(2 Nephi 27:10\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 53 (March 14, 2016).



Figure 1 This is a cuneiform record of a lawsuit heard before Ini-Teshub, Hittite viceroy at Carchemish (about 1270–1240 BC). It is sealed with his large stamp seal. Photo by John W. Welch in Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

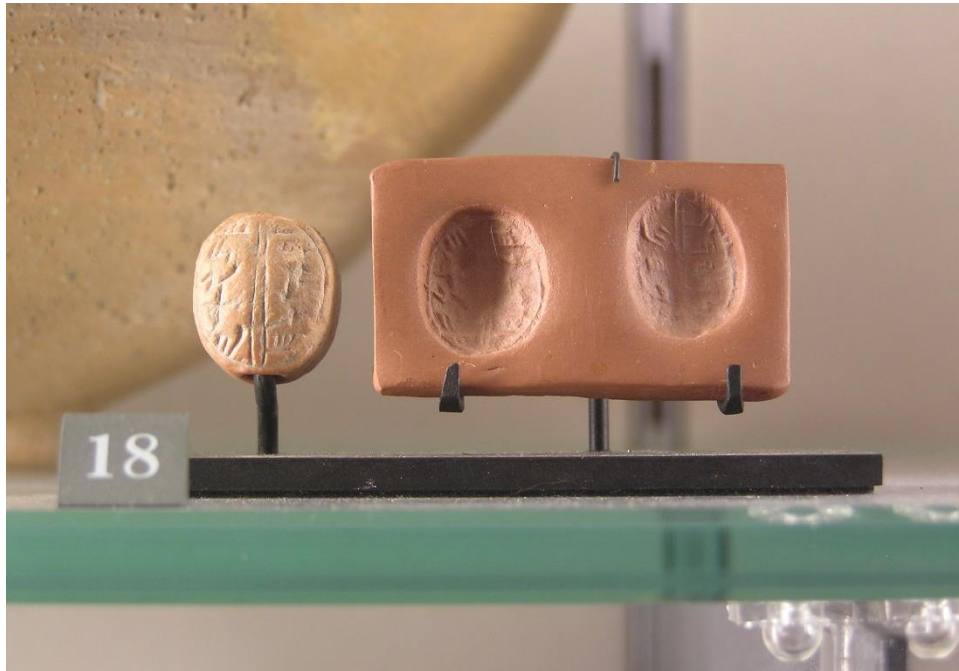


Figure 2 Example of Hebrew seal, belonging to a servant of King Hoshea, King of Judah, from the 7th–8th centuries BCE. Photograph by John W. Welch in Louvre Museum, Paris.



Figure 3 Example of Egyptian seal scarab from the 7th–8th centuries BCE. Photograph by John W. Welch.

2 Nephi 27:26 — What Is Significant about the Marvelous Work and a Wonder?

There are many, many ways to know that the Book of Mormon is true—hundreds of ways, I would say. Of course, they all are ultimately grounded in knowing that the Book of Mormon is true through prayer and study.

Isaiah prophesied, in chapter 29, that the Book of Mormon would come forth out of the ground and that it would be *a marvelous work and a wonder*. Following general rules of English, the King James translators, and maybe Tyndale before them, did not like repetition of the same word. The phrase “a marvelous work and a wonder” sounds better in English than “a miraculous miracle and a miracle.” Those who speak English prefer the use of synonyms because we don’t like redundancy. We strive for variation so it does not just sound like we are saying the same thing over and over again. But in many ancient languages, especially in Hebrew, using the same root over and over again was good style. When Lehi stated, “I dreamed a dream,” he was using a form that is called “cognate accusative.” What else do you dream? You might just say, “I dreamed,” and that would get the job done in English. Even though you would flunk English by using such a repetitive phrase today, the idea of repetition was a positive thing in ancient languages. It was considered to be good style.

What was Isaiah really saying in Isaiah 29? Isaiah stated that the record that would come forth was going to be a *miraculous work and a miracle*. In other words, the book would be a really big miracle—a double miracle—a miracle squared. It was not enough to simply say, “It is going to be amazing.” Isaiah wanted to express that it was going to be “miraculously amazing.”

As you go through the Book of Mormon this year, I hope you will come to see its amazing qualities in so many different ways. One of the things that makes the book miraculous is that it has so many features and qualities. In the past, I have tried to list some of these. I do not know if you have a list of your own. Many of these words end in “-ity” and some of them end with a “-y.” For example, there are things in the Book of Mormon that miraculously manifest its antiquity, and its use of cognate accusatives is one of them. The list of its amazing characteristics is long. This book manifests variety, simplicity, clarity, profundity, sagacity, objectivity, spirituality, practicality, reliability, creativity, maturity, artistry, spontaneity, specificity, generality, beauty, complexity, honesty, subtlety, familiarity, accuracy, consistency, legality, authority, universality, reality, and sanctity. I think that’s a really big miracle!

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Did the Book of Mormon Come Forth as a Miracle? (2 Nephi 27:23)," *KnoWhy* 273 (February 10, 2017).

John A. Tvedtnes, "The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 80–81.

2 Nephi 28

2 Nephi 28:3–6 — Many False Churches Will Rise in the Last Days

As we discuss Nephi 28, I would like you to refer to the two-page table below, which comes from my book, *Charting the Book of Mormon* (See Figure 4).

To help his readers recognize Satan's many tools and false teachings, Nephi used phrases to describe false doctrine and wrong attitudes that were applicable in his day but will also arise in most times and places. The accompanying chart (Figure 4) identifies 48 expressions found in 2 Nephi 28 and then uses or coins an "-ism" that puts a convenient label on these 48 tactics that Satan uses to try to lead people away from God. Let's look at the first few of these statements in some detail and elaborate on how they can be understood. Knowing how the Devil works and seeing his tactics in operation in the ideologies of the world helps us avoid being taken captive by him, who leads people "carefully" under his influence and powers (28:21).

Nephi warns people to be sure that what they build up is built up onto the Lord (28:3). In the modern world, people build organizations, businesses, and even churches, and most often what is "built up," is "not unto the Lord." In particular, Nephi warned people against misappropriating things for their own use that have been given to them for other purposes and are, therefore, violating a stewardship. The dangers of misappropriation are a general concern in the operations of a church as an entity, but may also be done by individuals who happen to belong to that church. They may be misappropriating talents or assets they have and are building up for purposes other than bringing people to God. The Devil is behind acts of self-aggrandizement for political, military, or other purposes, rather than building for the Lord.

Second, his strategy of what may be called "exclusivism" occurs when people claim, "I am the Lord's" (28:3). What is wrong with a person claiming, "I am the Lord's?" This statement is a problem when it manifests a sense of pride and selfish privilege to the

The Ways of the Devil

2 Nephi 28:3–30

Tactic	Quotation	Verse
Misappropriation	"built up, and not unto the Lord"	3
Exclusivism	"I am the Lord's"	3
Disputation	"contend one with another"	4
Sophism	"teach with their learning"	4
Cynicism	"deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance"	4
Secularism	"deny the power of God"	5
Historicism	"the Redeemer hath done his work"	5
Empowerment	"he hath given his power unto men"	5
Skepticism	"believe it not"	6
Naturalism	"he is not a God of miracles"	6
Hedonism	"eat, drink, and be merry"	7
Fatalism	"tomorrow we die"	7
Cavalierism	"it shall be well with us"	7
Popularism	"many . . . shall say"	8
Appearances	"nevertheless, fear God"	8
Rationalizing	"justify in committing a little sin"	8
Criticism	"take the advantage of one because of his words"	8
Entrapment	"dig a pit for thy neighbor"	8
Legalism	"no harm in this"	8
Permissivism	"do all these things"	8
Leniency	"God will beat us with a few stripes"	8
Faddism	"many . . . shall teach after this manner"	9

Sensationalism	"false"	9
Egotism	"vain"	9
Imprudence	"foolish"	9
Arrogance	"puffed up in their hearts"	9
Self-Deception	"hide their counsels from the Lord"	9
Persecutionism	"blood of the saints shall cry"	10
Corruptionism	"they have become corrupted"	11
Oppressionism	"rob the poor"	13
Ostentationism	"because of their fine sanctuaries"	13
Narcissism	"their fine clothing"	13
Supremism	"persecute the meek and poor in heart"	13
Elitism	"stiff necks and high heads"	13
Immorality	"abominations and whoredoms"	14
Distortionism	"pervert the right way of the Lord"	15
Trivialism	"turn aside the just for a thing of naught"	16
Meanness	"revile against that which is good"	16
Dismissivism	"say that is of no worth"	16
Tantrumism	"rage in the hearts of the children"	20
Emotionalism	"anger against that which is good"	20
Mollifying Pacifism	"others will he pacify"	21
Materialism	"into carnal security"	21
Toadyism	"others he flattereth"	22
Relativism	"there is no hell"	22
Complacency	"wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion"	24
Secularism	"we need no more of the word of God"	29
Faithless Humanism	"putteth his trust in man"	30

Figure 1 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *The Ways of the Devil*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, chart 79.

exclusion of others. Actually, nobody can rightly say “I am the Lord’s,” for we are *all* the Lord’s. As discussed in 2 Nephi 26:33, “all are alike unto God.”

Third on the list, Nephi saw that people would “contend one with another” (28:4). Nephi was acutely aware of the problems of living in a contentious society from his days in Jerusalem. When the boy Joseph entered the grove to pray, one of his primary concerns was what to personally make of the many dissensions between the churches of his time. He wanted to know “which of all the sects was right.” The Father and the Son addressed Joseph’s concern by recognizing that the various churches built up creeds and then contended one with another.

We most certainly live in a time of contention. Manifestations of contention are all around us. All you have to do is listen to major news outlets to observe arguing, disputation and dissension. We deceive ourselves that this is a good way of getting to the truth, especially when such discourse deteriorates into a contest to see who can shout the loudest. That is really not a good political or democratic solution. People contend and argue and it doesn’t really change much, nor does it seem to ever stop. Nephi gives us a warning: Contention is not of the Lord. It drives out the Spirit. It drives out love. And the devil knows that.

Fourth, Nephi stated that organizations and churches would “teach with their learning” (28:4). One might call this sophism. One should be on guard when those who teach are not teaching *with* the scriptures, inspiration, and the Holy Ghost.

Fifth, Nephi’s discussion of the manner of teaching was then followed by his observation that such will cynically “deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance” (28:4). As one reads the scriptures or is taught gospel truths, the Holy Ghost can “give utterance” to what is being communicated—through the power of the Holy Ghost, one can know the truth of all things.

In addition, sixth, people will “deny the power of God” (28:5). We can see plenty of this in the modern or post-modern ways of thinking. Arguments are made that feelings from the Spirit cannot be proven by science. People may say that there is no scientific way of proving the existence or intervention of God, or that the Holy Ghost won’t or can’t reveal truth to the mind. This is secularism—a belief that God is not active in the world today and that he doesn’t have the will or the power to affect things.

What does it mean to “deny?” The root word “denego” means to say “no” (“*de-negate*”). To deny means to refuse or to be negative. People will deny themselves, they will deny other people, and they will even deny that they belong to Christ. There are lots of ways to deny. You can deny something, even when you refuse to acknowledge that you are

denying it. One may say, “I do not deny that there is a living prophet on the earth today.” But, if we listen to General Conference and do not do what we are instructed to do by modern-day prophets of the Lord, we are effectively denying what we have been told to do by one who has received revelation for the Church. You may not deny that the power of God exists. But you deny the power of God when you do not allow it to work in you, when you do not give it room in your life, when you push it away. The devil wins when people deny the power of God.

Seventh, what about Nephi’s observation that people of our day will say, “the Redeemer hath done his work” (28:5)? Isaiah used the word “Redeemer” in Isaiah 49 to refer to Jehovah—the God of the Old Testament who redeemed Israel from Egypt, who had entered into a covenant with Israel, and who had given Israel the commandments and the Law. Isaiah was speaking to the people living in Jerusalem during his lifetime. They believed that God had done his work, had forsaken them, and was now irrelevant in their lives. Isaiah spoke of the Messiah’s redemptive work that was yet to come: “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”

Nephi prophesied of a similar attitude in our day: “[B]ehold, there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, and he hath given his power unto men. ... [I]f 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” (28:6). These statements are forms of skepticism and naturalism.

Nephi was a person who was open to new revelations and new developments. He had seen that the Lord was, and always would be involved in the affairs of man. He knew that the Lord was a God of miracles and always would be. People today speak and behave like the Lord is a thing of the past—he did his work and now “he hath given his power unto men.” It is true that God gives his priesthood power to men. But it is still God’s power, and men holding the priesthood act in God’s name. What the prophecy is revealing is that people will say God doesn’t have power anymore. Morality is now just a matter of democracy—the majority rules. People believe that individuals, not God, decide what is right and wrong.

2 Nephi 28:7–9 — Nephi Warns against Seventeen More of the Devil’s Tactics

Nephi next goes on to focus on social attitudes that lead people away from the Holy Spirit. In these three verses he expresses concerns about hedonism, fatalism, popularism, rationalizing, criticism, permissivism, leniency, imprudence, and arrogance. As you read his words, it is apparent that Nephi understood and knew the ways of the devil and that he had particular concern and worries about how these tactics would unfold. Nephi’s treatise on Satan’s tools is actually pretty amazing.

Ask yourself, “How did Nephi know that this is the way Satan works?” Nephi knew the ways of the devil because he grew up in Jerusalem at a time when the state of Jerusalem was very wicked—things were really bad. Nephi’s father was a prophet who spent his days in Jerusalem preaching repentance and trying to correct this corrupt and evil society. Nephi knew what it was like to live in a society that was ripening for destruction. How about in his own life? Nephi had challenges that arose because people—even those in his own family—objected to his teachings of the Lord. Nephi had also seen a vision. He saw the Tree of Life, but he also saw the great and spacious building and the river of filthy water. He knew the temptations that accost individuals. He also knew the meaning of all these things. Lehi saw the big picture, but Nephi asked to see these things with more specificity. This tells us something about Nephi’s personality. Nephi was in the details. Nephi was an administrator. He was a king. He was trying to run a city. He was a builder. Nephi was doing many things that Lehi was never asked to do. So, Nephi saw the urgency of the situation when he saw the specifics of Satan’s influence.

As you read, seek to be sensitized to the workings of Satan’s tools and his influence on the doctrine and philosophies of man. Once again, referring to Figure 2, consider the phrases Nephi used to describe the tactics of Satan and their practical meanings and manifestations.

When Nephi pointed out that “many . . . shall say” (28:8), he was describing a type of populism—whatever the majority agrees upon can’t be all that bad or whoever yells the loudest must be right. This is always problematic. Long ago, Exodus 23:2 commanded, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.”

According to Nephi, the wicked will continue in outward and inward acts of sin, but will say, “nevertheless, fear God” (28:8). Here Nephi is warning that, even though the wicked don’t really believe in God, they go through the appearances of being righteous. The sinner desires to save face and appear to be good to those in society who continue to hold onto standards of moral behavior. The wicked want to continue in immoral behavior while also feigning that what they are doing is good for themselves as well as good for society.

Nephi prophesied that in the last days, sinners’ attitudes would be reflected in the following statements: “[God] will justify in committing a little sin”; “God will beat us with a few stripes”; and “at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God” (28:8). This is justification and rationalization in committing sin, and should be averted. Attitudes of leniency and a philosophy of freedom *from* responsibility are reflected in these statements. We all desire freedom, and we all appreciate the gift of agency. However,

part of personal freedom and agency requires personal responsibility and accountability for the consequences of our choices. We can choose, but we cannot choose the consequences for the choices we make. To believe that we will somehow be saved in the kingdom of God in our sinful state is self-deception.

Isaiah, like Nephi, also described a society that would tolerate and even encourage people who lay traps to ensnare others and ruin their reputations and livelihoods, a society that is willing to ignore the enormous negativity that results from this type of contentious behavior. To do this, one has to participate in deception, criticism, cold-heartedness, and persecution. One has to rely on others believing or accepting the lies, perhaps by justifying that “everyone does it.” This is the atmosphere described by Nephi with the phrases, “lie a little,” “take advantage of one because of his words,” and “dig a pit for thy neighbor.”

Continuing on, Nephi warns that, in order to sound reasonable and intelligent while, at the same time, attempting to gain acceptance for ignoring and even promoting sinful behavior, some sinners may take a sort of legalist approach to sin. The reasoning that if there is no legally enforceable damage, then it can’t be a problem, assumes too much about the goodness and completeness of public law.

How can someone get away with teaching false, vain, and foolish doctrines (28:9)? How is outright lying even possible? False, foolish, and imprudent statements and behavior can be accepted in a society that accepts the philosophy of moral relativism where what is true and what is wrong is determined exclusively by the individual—not with any consideration for God or for one’s duties to society.

And so Nephi’s long list of the ways of the Devil continues with many more examples that are revealing and arresting. In general, these tactics ignore the fact, or even the possibility, that there is truth and that there are falsehoods, or that certain behaviors are moral and other behaviors are not, or that some things are just flat-out wrong.

From Nephi’s list, it is apparent that Satan has a lot of tools in his bag.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does the Devil Lead Us Astray?](#) (2 Nephi 28:21),” *KnoWhy* 55 (March 16, 2016).

2 Nephi 28:19–30 — The Devil Will Rage in the Hearts of Men

At the end of chapter 28, things get really dark. There are seven woes here (28:24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 32), and one curse (28:1). Nephi knew, from the vision he received and recorded in 1 Nephi 13–14, that after the day of the Gentile, after the efforts to convert all

people, and after the efforts to convince Jews that Jesus is the Christ, there would be the great, apocalyptic showdown and there would be forces of evil at home and abroad in the world. At this time in history, Nephi affirms, there will basically be only two choices: follow God or follow the ways of Satan. It's like Lehi's dream, with the Tree of Life on one side and the great and spacious building on the other side. Eventually, we are all going to have to be on one side of that divide or the other. Either that, or we are going to be lost in the mists of outer darkness. This is where Nephi returned to the Tree of Life theme, but here he extensively elaborated upon this dark part of Lehi's dream and applied it unto his own people as well as to the world in the latter days, the world that we know.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Are There Really Only Two Churches?](#) (1 Nephi 14:10)," *KnoWhy* 16 (January 21, 2016).

2 Nephi 29–30

2 Nephi 30:5–6 — Lehi's Posterity Receive the Gospel

But just as Nephi's vision in 1 Nephi 14, and just as Isaiah's prophecies in 2 Nephi 23 and 24 all end in the victory of God, Nephi concludes his exposition of Isaiah's revelations on a set of very promising notes. After writing with assurance that the Lord will preserve the testimonies of "two nations . . . that I am God" (29:8), and that he will also "speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it" (29:12), Nephi prophesied that after many years, the seed of Lehi's posterity will receive the gospel again (30:5). Nephi used a metaphor to describe the moral state of people before they receive the gospel—they have *scales* of darkness, like fish scales, over their eyes (30:6).

Take a careful look at verse 6. Nephi specified two things that must precede the falling of the scales of darkness from one's eyes. First, the person must "rejoice" (receive the gospel with gladness) and second, the person must "know [that the knowledge of the gospel] is a blessing unto them from the hand of God."

2 Nephi 30:10–14 — Nephi Testifies of the Victory of the Lord

At the end of chapter 30, Nephi testified of the eventual victory of the Lord. Nephi explained that evil would be overcome. In verse 10 we see that this is done by the Lord causing a great division among the people, with the wicked destroyed and His people spared. In verse 11, Nephi stated that "righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins." In verse 12, Nephi described a time of peace where

gentle docile animals would lie down with beasts—lamb and wolf, kid and leopard, calf and lion. Does this sound familiar? Where did Nephi get this imagery? These descriptions come from Isaiah 14 (quoted by Nephi in 2 Nephi 24). It is apparent that all of Nephi’s words beginning in 2 Nephi 26 and running to the end of chapter 30, make strong use of the words of Isaiah—material from the Brass Plates that Nephi and his brothers brought out of Jerusalem at great risk and sacrifice.

2 Nephi 30:17–18 — All Secret Things Will Be Revealed

Finally, after speaking about the millennial condition, Nephi said, “There is nothing which is secret save it shall be revealed.” Every work of darkness will “be made manifest in the light.” Does this change the way you live—knowing that everything you say and do is going to be revealed?

I think that if you repent, your wrongdoings will be erased from the disc, so that when the events of your life are played, the things that you have repented of will be just a blip. We are going to have all eternity, and what is one thing we will do? Maybe we are going to watch everybody’s home movies. We’re going to see everybody’s life replayed so that we can learn from one another and laugh with each other. “Oh, you had that problem too?” This scripture informs us that everything we do will be shouted from the rooftops for all to see and to hear.

The Lord says that when we repent, “I, the Lord, remember [the sin] no more.” In some miraculous way, repentance provides an omniscient God who knows everything to forget something. Now how can that happen? I don’t know, but it does.

But for the unrepented parts of our lives, I think the reality spelled out in verses 17 and 18 can be a big motivator for us: everything will eventually be manifest. Sometimes we sweep things under the rug and ignore them. We think nobody will ever know. However, if we’re going to have integrity, if we’re going to be pure, if we are really going to have the kind of love and respect for God that it will take to regain his holy presence, we must recognize that everything secret will be revealed—all cards will be on the table. Nephi leaves us with this warning as an important thing for all to keep in mind every day.

2 NEPHI 31–33

John W. Welch Notes



2 Nephi 31

2 Nephi 31:1–2 — Nephi Writes His Last Words of Prophecy

Beginning in 2 Nephi 31:1, Nephi says that he will now make an end of his prophesying, and he can only write a few select things. Indeed, chapters 31, 32, and 33 are relatively short, only 45 verses in total. But here Nephi chooses to speak about the main elements in the all-important doctrine of Christ. The basic outline of Nephi's farewell testimony deals with baptism, the Holy Ghost, enduring to the end on the way to eternal life, praying always, and giving Christ place in your soul.

It is interesting how often in the Book of Mormon, a person will say something like, "I am about to die, or I think I might be leaving soon, or someone is now the new king, and so this will be the last thing I have to say to you." Whether these words come in an actual address or in their final writings, when it is the final time they believe these inspired leaders will be speaking (especially when they have a prophetic worldview as Nephi did), it is important to pay close attention. One can almost imagine red flashing lights around these parts of the scriptures.

2 Nephi 31:3 — The Lord Speaks to People in Their Own Language

Nephi chooses his words carefully in these three final chapters. He talks again about the plainness he had discussed before in 1 Nephi 13 and 2 Nephi 25. How many times does he say, in effect, that he is trying to deliver his message as plainly as he possible can so that people will not misunderstand?

For example, in 2 Nephi 31:3 he states: “For my soul delighteth in plainness; for after this manner doth the Lord God work among the children of men. For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding.” This is good counsel for everyone teaching the gospel. This is also why missionaries are given the gift of tongues, and why it is possible that even when they struggle, somehow everyone understands what they are truly saying.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Does the Lord Speak to Men “According to Their Language”?](#) (2 Nephi 31:3),” *KnoWhy* 258 (January 6, 2017).

2 Nephi 31:5 — Why Are We Baptized?

What is the purpose of baptism, and what does Nephi say will cause the remission of sins? Latter-day Saint scholar Noel B. Reynolds has written an exhaustive analysis of the language that is used to describe the baptismal covenant throughout the Book of Mormon. Interestingly, he found that the Book of Mormon never talks about baptism as *washing* away our sins.

The purpose of baptism is not so much to wash something away, and that especially makes sense when we baptize eight-year-old children who have no sins. After all, why would we baptize them to wash away non-existent sins? More fundamentally, this ordinance is mainly about the commitment to keep the commandments and witnessing to Heavenly Father, that you will keep the covenants that you have made. And then, when the baptismal covenant is renewed with the partaking of the sacrament, the remembrance of the forgiveness of sins is also relived.

The Holy Ghost is then what purges and washes impure things away, the baptism of fire that brings forth the remission of sins. It is much like the sacrifices of the temple in Israel, where burnt offerings were the offerings of atonement that would bring one back into good standing with the Lord. It was the fire that was able to remove impurities.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What is the Purpose of Baptism in the Book of Mormon?](#) (2 Nephi 31:6–7),” *KnoWhy* 59 (March 22, 2016).

Noel B. Reynolds, “[Understanding Christian Baptism through the Book of Mormon](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012): 3–37.

2 Nephi 31:6–7 — Christ Will Humble Himself before the Father by Being Baptized

Nephi is the only one who will call Jesus the “Son of the Most High God”, the “Son of the Everlasting Father”, or the “Son of Righteousness.” He will call him “the Christ”, “the Beloved Son”, and the “Very God of Israel.” What stands out is how many times Nephi refers to Jesus specifically as a very devoted, beloved son.

If Nephi came and introduced himself to us, and we asked him, “So, Nephi, tell us a little bit about yourself,” he would begin by saying, “I Nephi, having been born of goodly parents,” Nephi’s identity as the loyal son, as the one who would always do the will of his father, Lehi, and the will of God was a very important part of his personality and character. Unlike Laman, Lemuel, and others, Nephi was the quintessential, obedient son. It is not at all surprising that he would see Jesus’ submission to the will of His Father in much the same way.

2 Nephi 31:10, 13–14 — Covenants Are about Being Willing to Obey

The word *willing* shows up three times in Nephi’s discussion of the baptismal covenant. Later, this word will also appear in the sacramental prayers. What do we promise when we partake of the sacrament? Do we promise that we will remember him always? No. Do we promise that we will keep every commandment? If we do, that’s not a promise that we’re likely to keep.

The blessing on the bread states that those who participate in the sacramental ordinance witness unto “God, the Eternal Father, that they are *willing*” to do the following three things:

1. “take upon them the name of thy Son,”
2. “and always remember him”
3. “and keep his commandments which he has given them”

To be *willing* to remember him always is a promise that we can all make, and that is what God wants—a *willing heart*. But that means we *really* must be willing. This is a willful commitment. It is voluntary. We must be submissive. This factor of willingness will later be reflected in King Benjamin’s speech. In Mosiah 5:5 as the Nephites have fallen down and felt the mighty change in their hearts, they say, “And we are *willing* to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will.” One might well assume that Benjamin had his people use this word in entering into their covenant on his occasion precisely because that language and understanding had become a traditional part of Nephite covenant making and theology.

2 Nephi 31:11–15 — The Voices of the Father and Son Command All to Be Baptized

In 2 Nephi 31:13, Nephi says that people must act “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.” How is baptism a way of witnessing to God that we are willing to keep his commandments? Why is that an act of covenant making? It is because it is a symbolic reenactment of the atoning death and the resurrection of Jesus. It is also symbolic of our own spiritual rebirth as sons and daughters unto Christ.

Today, most people are baptized in a domesticated font in a stake center where it is tiled, perfectly safe, and the water is still and usually warm. In ancient Israel, however, when you were immersed for purification purposes, the water had to be *living water*—running water—and it was cold, sometimes very cold. Standing water was, by definition, impure. Moreover, Lehi had taught that Jesus would be baptized in the flowing water at Bethabara, the place of crossing the Jordan River (1 Nephi 10:9). That place would also have symbolized risking your life in the river’s current as well as crossing over from one place in life into a new covenant land of promise. Likewise, the early pioneers were all baptized in rivers or oceans or places like that. Most of these people, in ancient or in more recent times, did not know how to swim very well. For them, going into the water could be a frightening thing. In fact, in ancient law submitting yourself to the “river ordeal” was one way of establishing in court that you were telling the truth. Thus, witnessing to God that you are willing to risk your life by going into the water seems to have been a symbol of serious commitment, much more than we usually think of it as today.

This is especially powerful when one considers the universal ancient belief, that under the waters were all types of evil spirits. In the ocean you have the death monster that swallows Jonah, and all of these evil, unknown creatures that are there. The waters, rivers, and lakes were thought to be orifices entering into the underworld. With this understanding, the ordinance of baptism by immersion profoundly showed that you were willing to go down even into the depths of the underworld, and there, through the power of Christ, be brought up out of that water, thereby overcoming all of the evil in the world. By being baptized, you descend below all things and go beneath the world so that you may ascend up above the world. It is a very powerful symbol.

2 Nephi 31:14 — Ordeals and Covenants

In the ancient world, it was common for the parties entering into a contract to go through some type of ceremonial ordeal. Sometimes, this would take the form of invoking a curse upon themselves. In the Hittite world, they would “cut” a deal,

contract, or covenant by taking a small animal and killing it. The first party would essentially say, “If I don’t keep my agreement, may this happen to me!” The other party or parties would then invoke that same curse upon themselves. We see a glimpse of this later when the Nephites rend their clothing upon accepting the Title of Liberty and covenant that if they do not fight valiantly, the same thing should happen to them, being torn to shreds and trampled upon. These ordeals showed that people really meant what they were saying.

2 Nephi 31:17 — Baptism Is a Covenant of Admittance and Entrance

The Book of Mormon very clearly teaches about the covenant of baptism (31:7, 10, 13, 14). Nephi frames the doctrine of Christ—the gospel, with baptism at the center—as an important gateway. It is “the gate” (31:17). People in the ancient world would rarely have thought of just wandering into a gated city without permission, authority, and an agreement to abide by the laws of that city. When we compare our mode of baptism to the forms of baptism used in other faiths, however, what do we typically emphasize? Immersion, of course, and also that it is performed by authority. But also, we should make it clear that baptism is a *covenant* of admittance and entrance. Sometimes we don’t mention that covenantal aspect of baptism as prominently as we might.

2 Nephi 31:18 – The Difference between ‘Straight’ and ‘Strait’

In several places, Nephi uses the word *strait*. Spelled in that way, *strait* means *narrow*. So, the strait and narrow pass is actually a narrow, narrow pass. When it is spelled *straight*, it means not crooked. Sometimes it may feel crooked, especially as we are pulled in unexpected directions. In life, we get taken places we don’t expect, even though it always leads us to Him.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Is the Path to Eternal Life ‘Strait’ or ‘Straight’?](#) (1 Nephi 8:20),” *KnoWhy* 456 (August 7, 2018).

2 Nephi 31:19–20 — Nephi Tells Us What We Need to Do to Gain Eternal Life

What do we commit to do and need to do? We must “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ,” being, as Lehi said, “steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord” (1 Nephi 2:10). We must obey the first two commandments—the two great commandments, to love God and our neighbor—as well as all the others. We must feast upon the word of Christ (31:20). There is an important distinction between eating and feasting. As we make daily scripture study an important part of our lives, we are able to do more than just occasionally nibble at the scriptures. We work towards learning to feast on the spiritual banquet spread before us in the words of God and thereby be filled.

We find a “perfect brightness of hope” somewhere along this journey. Nephi’s phrase here brings to mind his comment in 1 Nephi 1:1 where he says, “having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days.” Seeing the hand of the Lord sustaining you even in trials and troubles is the essence of a brightness of hope.

A brightness of hope is not divorced from reality but fully immersed in reality. When you have the gospel in your life, you are optimistic. There is no doubt that it helps you just see things differently. You can have the spirit to be with you no matter how rough things are. You just are more optimistic, and we are counseled to be so. If we’re not feeling that optimism, the Lord can help us to be so. That is part of our covenant relationship with him. He will help us to be of good cheer, won’t he?

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can One ‘Feast upon the Words of Christ’? \(2 Nephi 32:3\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 306 (April 28, 2017).

2 Nephi 31:21 — What Is the Difference between the Doctrine and Gospel of Christ?

The Doctrine of Christ and the Gospel of Christ are similar, but how do they relate to each other? The *doctrine* is faith, repentance, baptism, receiving the Gift of the Holy Ghost and enduring to the end—those five points. And the Savior says, “And there will be no more doctrine.” In other words, that is the *doctrine* of Christ. (See 3 Nephi 11:28–39).

But in 3 Nephi 27:21, the Savior says, “And this is my *gospel*.” A few verses earlier, He stated, “This is the *gospel* which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me. And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross.” So, one might say that when Book of Mormon writers use the word *gospel*, they may be speaking a little more broadly, referring to something we more often would call the Plan of Salvation. The specific *doctrine* of Christ is part of and wholly consistent with the Plan of Redemption, the Plan of Happiness. The great plan goes by several names, emphasizing parts of that plan. The terms *doctrine* of Christ and *gospel* of Christ, while overlapping considerably, may evoke somewhat different aspects of the same great Eternal Plan of the Father.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What is the Doctrine of Christ?](#) (2 Nephi 31:21),” *KnoWhy* 58 (March 21, 2016).

Noel B. Reynolds, “[The True Points of My Doctrine](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 26–56.

Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1991): 31–50.

2 Nephi 32

2 Nephi 32:2–3 — What Does It Mean to Speak with the Tongue of Angels?

What do angels do when they come? They are mostly messengers, teachers, and ministers. New converts, for instance, sometimes bear their testimonies after baptism about how two “angels” came to their door or stopped them on the street. The word for angel in Greek or Hebrew actually means *messenger*. And angels are God’s messengers. They deliver the message with utmost accuracy, and we must feast on each word, so that we can get the whole message right.

In April General Conference 2007, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland spoke on the tongue of angels, and he brought in a dimension of it that is not often considered. Speaking of Nephi in this part of the Book of Mormon, he said:

So, brothers and sisters, in this long eternal quest to be more like our Savior, may we try to be “perfect” men and women in at least this one way now—by offending not in word, or more positively put, by speaking with a new tongue, the tongue of angels. Our words, like our deeds, should be filled with faith and hope and charity, the three great Christian imperatives so desperately needed in the world today. With such words, spoken under the influence of the Spirit, tears can be dried, hearts can be healed, lives can be elevated, hope can return, confidence can prevail.

Because we are members of Jesus Christ’s Church who have been baptized and have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, if we are living righteously, we actually have that gift of having the tongue of angels. That makes me consider, “What am I doing with this tongue of an angel that I have?” We do not want to desecrate that gift by having something come out of our mouth that is unworthy of the Lord, whose messengers we are. It should give us pause in all of our doings: “Am I speaking with the tongue of angels?”

Are not priesthood blessings spoken by the tongue of angels? By the words of righteous ministers, I learn. I feel comforted. I feel instructed. Sometimes I feel reprov'd. I feel led. I think it is a very specific and marvelous gift to have the tongue of an angel.

The same can be said for any ordinance. Several years ago, one of my young home teachers blessed the sacrament for the first time and I cried. I went up to him afterwards,

and I just hugged him. “How did you learn to do that?” I asked him. He spoke so slowly and so carefully with all his heart, and I was deeply impressed by that. That was the power of a good father, mother, and quorum leader who had taught him what this is all about.

Are we teaching our children about this blessing? Do they know what they have? We are starting to get it, but we can do better. Even a newly baptized child has been given the gift of the Holy Ghost and is on the road back to the Lord’s presence. Our children need to know what they have and need to know what they are capable of. They need to understand the power that comes with these covenants, enabling them to speak with the tongue of angels. There is power in these words of Nephi. This is the doctrine of Christ, and this is what “the gift of the Holy Ghost” affords. This is one of the main things everyone can do with this gift, and this is why families get up early and stay up late to read their scriptures.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “What is it to Speak with the Tongue of Angels? (2 Nephi 32:2),” *KnoWhy* 60 (March 23, 2016).

Neal Rappleye, “With the Tongue of Angels’: Angelic Speech as a Form of Deification,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 21 (2016): 303–323.

Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Tongue of Angels,” *Ensign*, May 2007, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

2 Nephi 32:3–4 — Nephi Invites Us to Feast upon the Words of Christ

As Gerald Lund once commented, the difference between *reading* the scriptures and *studying* the gospel is the same as the difference between eating and dining. The middle of 2 Nephi 32:3 states, “Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.” Not *know* but *do*. When we begin to feast upon the words of Christ, we learn more about what to do, how to apply the principles taught in the scriptures, and how to move forward.

2 Nephi 32:4 is the other side of that two-sided coin of duty. We are being told that the second that we have been given a gift or power, we have a duty to get to work and put that gift and power to work. It is the continuation of and obliging of receiving the benefits of the feasting, and it begins with the asking and the knocking. What should I be doing next? Where have we heard Nephi talk about this principle before? Clear back in 1 Nephi 15, when Nephi basically said, “Why don’t you ask the Lord? He will explain it to you and tell you what it should mean in your life, but have you even asked?” What

is their reply? “No. He won’t tell us. It doesn’t do any good, he only talks to you.” (1 Nephi 15:8–9).

Nephi learned as a very young man the whole essence of 2 Nephi 32:2–4. As a young man, Nephi feasted upon the words of Christ, and when people feast upon the words of Christ, the quality of their prayers change. Their ability to get answers to those prayers change. And their resolve to thus “go and do the things that the Lord has commanded” turns to action.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can One ‘Feast upon the Words of Christ’? \(2 Nephi 32:3\),” *KnoWhy* 306 \(April 28, 2017\).](#)

2 Nephi 32:8–9 — Nephi Teaches Us to Pray Always

Nephi says, in effect, “I perceive that you’re still pondering these things in your heart and you really haven’t bought into all of this, you’re still worried or wondering or puzzling about it, and this grieves me.” Pondering usually involves some kind of weighing and balancing, or halting between two opinions. Pondering can be a good thing, if it doesn’t become paralyzing. Moroni 10:3 invites people to ponder when they receive the Book of Mormon. But Moroni and Nephi both expect that pondering will lead to prayer and to asking God (Moroni 10:4). The solution for Nephi is also to pray. He wants his people to pray more often, so apparently this has become a problem in their little community. It is reminiscent of what the Lord says to the Brother of Jared, “Hey, it’s been a while since you’ve checked in with me.”

So Nephi says, “For if ye would hearken unto the Spirit which teacheth a man to pray, ye would know that ye must pray; for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray.” Prayer is crucial for what we do. Nephi emphasizes that with what he says next, that we must pray before we perform anything to the Lord. “But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; 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.”

We need to stop, pause, and pray. If we do not do this, our actions cannot be elevated to the level of being consecrated to the Lord, and that is something that will bless us deliberately. There is no limit on the occasions when we need to do this, for anything that we do unto the Lord needs to be dedicated unto him. Otherwise, we are just doing it, and that action will not have the same effect or yield the same results.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Must One Pray Always to Endure to the End? \(2 Nephi 32:8-9\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 298 (April 10, 2017).

2 Nephi 33

2 Nephi 33:3 — Nephi Has Loved His People All of His Life

One of Nephi's great characteristics is his love and concern for his people. As I read through this chapter, I thought, "We know our current Church Presidents so well." If we only had one speech from President Monson or from President Nelson, we would know part of him, but not nearly as much as having had him as our leader for so many years. We knew President Hinckley so well; we knew President McKay so well. What would it be like to be one of Nephi's people, to have had him as a leader for thirty or forty years? To get to know Nephi, we have to read between the lines. As we do, we can see a lot of depth and admirable aspects of his character that we can only regret that we haven't been able to get to know him better.

2 Nephi 33:6 — Nephi Glories in That Which Brings Him Closer to Jesus

Elder David A. Bednar has said that the standard is clear. If something distances us from the Holy Ghost, then we should stop thinking, seeing, hearing, or doing that thing. That is Elder Bednar's "I glory in plainness" moment. If that which is intended to entertain, for example, alienates us from the Holy Spirit, then certainly that type of entertainment is not for us.

As we become ever more immersed in the Spirit of the Lord, we should strive to recognize impressions when they come, and conversely turn away from the influences or events that cause us to withdraw ourselves from the Spirit of the Lord. Our accountability is to figure out what makes that happen, to be vigilant about that, and be constantly eliminating it. That is one part of what the sacrament process is, namely identifying those things that trip us up spiritually, getting rid of them, and asking for the Lord's help. This is the role of the grace of Christ; it is the divine, enabling power that helps us to have his spirit to be with us.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Nephi End His Sacred Record with His Testimony of the Redeemer? \(2 Nephi 33:6\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 61 (March 24, 2016).

2 Nephi 33:7–9 — Nephi Has Charity for All Men

Something that recurs often with Nephi is his discussion of the importance of having charity for the Jew and Gentile, for his family and for his brethren, for both those who are obedient and those who are not. There are many places in the Book of Mormon where someone has an incredibly powerful, personal witness from the Lord, and then you see their heart carry them further to go beyond themselves. They realize, “it’s not about me.” It is about them, until they make and know how to keep covenants with the Lord. And then it is no longer about them, but it is about, “what can I do to help the next person I can?” I believe that when we arrive at the gates of heaven, the Lord will say, “It’s nice to see you. Whom did you bring with you?” The Lord is happy to see us, but his joy is greater with every soul that repents. As President Russell M. Nelson has said, “Salvation is an individual matter, but exaltation is a family matter.” And we are all God’s family.

2 Nephi 33:12–15 — Nephi Makes His Final Farewell

Nephi has spoken about his tears watering his pillow by night, praying over his people, he is greatly concerned for them. “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.” Salvation is open for all people, “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, of course, to those who will not partake, “I bid you an everlasting farewell.” But Nephi is very optimistic that “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.”

Those are Nephi’s final words of testimony, encouragement and optimism. He is realistic; he is plain that we have got to do the things that we are now clearly instructed to do, but if we do so, he is confident that many people will be there together in the Kingdom of God.

I love this man Nephi. He is one of the great souls raised up to stand at the head of this very important group of Israelites who have been led out of Jerusalem, protected and brought to the New World, so that they could be a righteous group of people to whom the resurrected Lord could appear. This group of people had a very unique and important mission to perform. Even if Nephi knew that his people would ultimately be destroyed, he knew that that would not happen until the Savior Himself had appeared to them. That was their special blessing and mission, so that they could be a people of witness, witnessing to all the world, to members of the House of Israel, to Gentiles, to

everyone, that Jesus is the Christ. Without a man like Nephi standing at the head of that tradition, it may not have happened. But Nephi was called, he magnified his calling, and we are the beneficiaries of all that he did.

2 Nephi 33:15 — Nephi Seals His Words at the End of His Record

“For what I seal on earth, shall be brought against you at the judgment bar.” What is Nephi talking about? He is putting his personal seal on the truthfulness of his words and of those contained in his record. These words will then come forth and be part of what we all will be judged by. Knowing the words of this record, we are now accountable.

“For thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey. Amen.” That is just typical, reliable Nephi. “I will go and do the things which the Lord has commanded.” From the very beginning to the very end, obedience has to be one of Nephi’s great qualities.

Further Reading

H. Dean Garrett, “*Nephi’s Farewell*,” in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 377–390.

JACOB 1–4

John W. Welch Notes



Jacob 1

Jacob 1:1–4 — Keeping the Small Plates

At the beginning of his book, Jacob states the essence of the commandment that Nephi gave to him pertaining to writing on the Small Plates. He was told to touch only lightly on the history, to record sacred preaching, to summarize great prophecies, and do this all for Christ's sake. Interestingly, Jacob does exactly that. We don't get much history in the book of Jacob. His preaching in Jacob 2–3 deals with sacred matters, including chastity and consecration. His summations in Jacob 4 and 6 of the prophecy of Zenos in chapter 5 help focus the allegory of the olive tree on Christ. And the episode with Sherem in Jacob 7 affirms, for the peace and benefit of the people, the legitimacy of prophesying about the coming Christ (doing this is not false prophecy), of teaching the people to worship Christ (doing this is not leading people into apostasy), and of calling Christ a divine being (doing that is not blasphemy), as Sherem had accused.

Furthermore, in verses 5–8, Jacob certifies that he and his people had received many revelations, and that they labored to bring people to Christ and not to offend God, which would disqualify them from remaining in their new land of promise. He specifically stated that he took it upon himself to fulfill the commandment of his brother Nephi. Some people wonder why the books on the Small Plates are so short. One reason is that these authors all follow Nephi's specific instructions very meticulously as their guiding instruction.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Do the Authors on the Small Plates Follow a Pattern? \(Jacob 7:27\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 74 (April 8, 2016).

John W. Welch, "[The Father's Command to Keep Records in the Small Plates of Nephi](#)," *FARMS Preliminary Report* (September 1984), 1–12.

Jacob 1:10 — Nephi Was a Protector and Father Figure to Jacob

In verse 10, anticipating Nephi's impending death, Jacob went out of his way to ensure that his loyalty and close relationship with Nephi was clearly understood. I'm sure Jacob felt a great loss, just like Nephi did, when his father Lehi died. It should be remembered that Jacob was a fairly young man when Lehi died, and so it is understandable that Nephi, who was probably at least twenty years his senior, naturally became a protector and a strong father figure to him, defending his people and laboring for their welfare. In many ways, Nephi was seen as modeling good kingship and leadership.

Jacob 1:13 — Jacob Lists the Seven Tribes of Lehi

Even though 2 Nephi 5:6 gives a good overview of the lineages who supported Nephi, as discussed above regarding that verse, this is the first time in the Book of Mormon where it is stated that Lehi's colony was in fact fully divided into seven distinct tribes. These tribal designations are repeated in 4 Nephi 1:36–37, Mormon 1:8, and even in D&C 3:16–18. Seven was a sacred number in ancient Israel, which may explain, at least in part, why these seven tribes lasted for approximately 1,000 years of Nephite and Lamanite history. Interestingly, seven was also a sacred number among ancient Mesoamerican societies, and various legends from that region of the world depict their peoples as having emerged from seven caves or lineages. While no definitive connection can be made between these legends and the Book of Mormon, the relationship is certainly intriguing and may point to a shared historical setting.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Lehi Divide His People into Seven Tribes? \(Jacob 1:13\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 319 (May 29, 2017).

Diane E. Wirth, "[Revisiting the Seven Lineages of the Book of Mormon and the Seven Tribes of Mesoamerica](#)," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2013): 77–88.

Jacob 1:15–16 — The Nephites Began to Commit Many Sins

Jacob doesn't jump right out of the starting block and hit them over the head by saying, "You guys are all awful." Instead, he says, "I know you're *beginning* to" There are lots of things we can do to help someone who is having problems, but one of them is to put them in a good mood, build a positive relationship with them to where they will

want to listen to inspired counsel. If they feel accused, if you make them feel defensive, if you come on too strong right away, then they will likely either disengage or push back. I think that Jacob isn't being condescending here. He is trying to help these people *want* to see their problems.

Jacob 1:17–19 — Jacob, the High Priest, Magnifies His Calling

Without question, the high priest in ancient Israel had to be especially assiduous about his worthiness and purity. If the Lord was going to be able to bless his people and reveal his will, he had to be able to speak to a high priest who was worthy. We read in Jewish literature about the great lengths that the Jews anciently went to in order to be sure that that high priest was pure, and a lot of it had to do with the family of the high priest. He had to be married, and he had to be living in a righteous home. How can you lead the people if you can't lead your own family?

This requirement is reflected in Paul's writings in 1 Timothy 3:1–7, but it is also part of the long-standing Jewish, priestly tradition. They were so concerned about the high priest being righteously married that they had a stand-by bride ready to go, someone designated, that if the high priest's wife should all of a sudden keel over dead, she would be there and she would be married to him within minutes of the time she died, so he always had a home. Well, there are reasons for this—probably lots of them—and a similar attitude is reflected in Jacob's writings. He is likewise concerned about righteousness, purity, avoiding abominations, and having a righteous family and home. These themes come up throughout his writings.

It is also worth considering how fragile Jacob's people were at this time. After Lehi's death, they must have felt awfully concerned when the group split up into different factions. They likely worried that the Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites would either attack them militarily or weaken them morally through marriages or other social interactions. What happens if somehow Jacob drops the ball? Who is going to pick it up? Who will carry this on? Who will talk about where their people came from? Who will reveal the mind and will of the Lord?

Civilization is actually pretty fragile. Even in the modern day, we think "Oh, civilization will carry on. We have books, and we have a lot of buildings and things that really stabilize who we are." But society changes quickly, and we have seen it in the last 10–15 years. I think the shift was even more dramatic for Jacob's people. He clearly felt a great sense of responsibility, and I think we can learn a lesson from his diligent concern for his people at that crucial time in their existence.

Jacob and his brother Joseph were set apart by Nephi and consecrated as priests. They were given the responsibility of preaching the gospel to their people, and we see them doing that at the temple. We also see their understanding that if they didn't preach with all diligence, the sins of the people would be on their own heads. So they are extremely serious about that, and my guess is that when they were set apart they were given clear instructions about their responsibilities.

I think that when a leader knows that the people under his stewardship have a problem, he indeed has a responsibility to address it. Did Jacob know there was a problem? Yes. He makes this very clear. In essence, he says, "You're not fooling anybody you guys. The jig is up here." He knew exactly what was going on out there, even though he was spending so much time focusing on the temple. He was aware of the problem, and he couldn't ignore it.

D&C 121:43 speaks well of reproofing others "with sharpness, *when moved upon by the Spirit.*" And here in Jacob 1:17 it says that that before addressing the people, Jacob "first obtained [his] errand from the Lord." So he is speaking with sharpness because he has been moved by the spirit to do so. And then D&C 121 says that after we have been moved upon by the spirit and have spoken sharply, we still need to show an "an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproofed, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy" (121:43). We can't just say, "God told me to say that, so I can get away with it." We have to show extra love in conjunction with any sharp words that we feel inspired to speak.

Often when people get bad news their reaction is, of course, to kill the messenger. Yet Jacob is so explicit about where he got his assignment that to reject his message would be to reject the Lord. When trying to help people, whether my grandchildren or those I was responsible for in my church assignments, I have never had someone react badly if I have honestly said, "I feel strongly that the Lord would like you to hear this message." No matter how hard the news is, they didn't blame me. Now they may not accept it, but it makes the message clearer and more understandable. It puts it in the right framework. I'm not telling them they ought to change, but if I in good conscience can say that I have felt inspired to say this, then they take it much better.

Sometimes the Spirit moves you to say things you wouldn't otherwise say, and maybe even that you would rather not say. In such cases, however, one must be confident that one's errand truly is from the Lord. The last thing the Lord needs is for members of his kingdom to go forth, without his errand, and unjustly, untactfully, or inappropriately reprove others, whether their faults are real or only perceived.

I think the right way to approach giving reproof is modeled very well here by Jacob. He may have never said anything like this before to these people. If he was just a younger brother to Nephi and kind of tucked away in the temple a lot of the time and all of a

sudden he comes out, this probably was really out of character for him. I suspect his people were really quite startled. We don't know what the outcome was. Jacob doesn't say, but at least he did his job. That seems to be the important message. He did his job and not only were his people warned, but we get the same warning today because Jacob recorded this important speech.

Jacob 2

Jacob 2:1 — What Were the Circumstances of Jacob's Sermon?

Three times a year under the Law of Moses, men, women, and children had to come to the temple. These were festival days, such as the Feast of Tabernacles, and they were filled with feasting, rejoicing, celebration, glorifying God, being grateful for the giving of the law, and the performing of sacrifices to atone for all sins. Even the Day of Atonement—which begins with fasting, prayer, and mourning—ends with a great time of jubilation as the people rejoice about how they have been blessed. It also may have been the coronation of the second Nephite king. So it was likely a big event with a big gathering, and may have had multiple sessions. Despite the many activities going on, Jacob's sermon was possibly the first order of business. And it seems to me that the people might have been a little surprised at what he told them.

According to Deuteronomy 31:9–13, the Levitical priests were required to read the law so that the people could hear the word of the Lord. They were to be taught the same thing over and over, much like we are today. But there is also here a sense that this is sort of General Conference, and that Jacob was inspired to deliver a particular message to the people, based on their needs. Jacob declared in the previous chapter that before giving his speech, he “first obtained [his] errand from the Lord” (Jacob 1:17). I can't imagine him having the courage to address such difficult topics without the Lord's mandate. King Benjamin essentially says the same thing in his speech, declaring that “the things which I shall tell you are made known unto me by an angel from God” (Mosiah 3:2). So, in both cases, these prophets emphasize that their message is indeed the word of the Lord, even though it may not have been a rote presentation of the law.

Jacob 2:4–5 — The Nephites Begin to Labor in Sin

Jacob says, “For behold, as yet, ye have been obedient unto the word of the Lord, which I have given unto you” (Jacob 2:4). Apparently they were at least outwardly performing the ordinances of the temple, whatever those were. But then Jacob follows up this statement by declaring, “But behold, hearken ye unto me, and know that by the help of the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth I can tell you concerning your thoughts,

how that ye are beginning to labor in sin, which sin appeareth very abominable unto me, yea, and abominable unto God" (Jacob 2:5).

Over and over again, the authors of these small plates tell us that the Nephites were strict in observing the Law of Moses, and several centuries later, at this same temple, King Noah will perform daily sacrifices. Yet, speaking to Noah and his priests, Abinadi basically said, "You do this, you go through the motions, but you're just doing it mechanically; you don't understand what it's all about, and you're not doing it righteously." It is possible that the people in Jacob's day had similarly misunderstood the meaning of the ordinances set forth in the Law of Moses. The daily sacrifices at the temple would have been the thank offerings of bread and of grain, and there are a number of those. There were also atonement sacrifices. If people had committed a sin of some kind, they needed to bring an atonement sacrifice and, of course, those are symbols of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Nephite prophets understood that the Law of Moses just looks forward to the great sacrifice that will come (Mosiah 13:27–28). But the people generally were prone to obey the outward ordinances but fail to live up to the other commandments and standards of the Lord.

Jacob's language indicates that this is just a preliminary happening—the people are only now just "*beginning* to labor in sin" (Jacob 2:5). And he indicates that he only knows the extent of this problem because the Lord is revealing it to him. So there is an element of prophecy here. On several occasions in chapter 2, Jacob says that he is absolutely obligated to address this issue—he *must* tell them of their wickedness. He says:

- "I **must** testify unto you concerning the wickedness of your hearts" (v. 6).
- "And also it grieveth me that I **must** use so much boldness of speech concerning you" (v. 7)
- "Wherefore, I **must** tell you the truth according to the plainness of the word of God" (v. 11)
- "I **must** speak unto you concerning a grosser crime" (v. 22)

The first one is interesting because Jacob focuses on the wickedness of their "hearts." There are several other occasions during the speech where he similarly emphasizes thoughts and intentions. So it is clearly more than just their *doings*. I think most of us have experienced that nanosecond when we know something is not right, and we are left to choose what to think or how to act, knowing fairly clearly which path will lead away from God. In some cases, the warnings from the Spirit are much more than a nanosecond; they provide a very clear and sustained understanding that something is wrong. It is by entertaining sinful thoughts and desires in our hearts that the seeds of disobedient or rebellious actions are planted within us.

Jacob 2:7–9 — Jacob Preaches Repentance in a Temple and Family Setting

We don't know at what point Jacob delivered his message on this apparently notable occasion, but we know that there was a lot of doctrine being taught. They are at the temple (Jacob 1:17). Families are present. The Spirit is present. It is the type of setting where someone's heart can be touched when the prophet stands up and lovingly but sternly testifies of the peoples' sins. Jacob no doubt expressed a lot of love to them prior to this. It is clear, from his anxiety for his people, that he was truly a caring person. I'm sure he was beloved by the people, and so their hearts were likely in the very best possible place to receive his instruction.

I understand that many women, when they have been in some way betrayed by their husbands, tend to place the blame themselves. They wrongly think they have done something wrong, and that it is all their fault. So to hear someone like Jacob saying "this is not your fault at all" must have been very consoling. Church leaders today say this same kind of thing all the time, and for good reason. Thus, while Jacob's message was painful to both husbands and wives and children, he did his best to console their wounded hearts.

Further Reading

Jeffrey R. Holland, "Place No More for the Enemy of My Soul," *Ensign*, May 2010, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

Jacob 2:12–13 — The Search for Gold and Silver Hints at "Outsiders"

How large can this community be? Not very big unless—as many people now believe—they had begun to interact and mix with indigenous peoples. After all, why else would you need gold and silver, unless you are trading with other people for commodities that are now precious and valuable? Similarly, the only reason that many early pioneers in Utah wanted to have gold is so they could buy things that they could import from people coming across the Oregon Trail.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Did 'Others' Influence Book of Mormon Peoples? (Jacob 3:13)," *KnoWhy* 435 (May 22, 2018).

Jacob 2:17–19 — When Is It Appropriate to Seek for Money?

In these verses, Jacob issues one of the most trenchant sayings in scripture about wealth. Remember back in 2 Nephi 9:29, Jacob had famously said, "To be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God." And he followed that statement by placing a wo upon the rich who "despise the poor and persecute the meek" (2 Nephi 9:30). True to form, here in Jacob 2:18, he similarly said, "before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the

kingdom of God,” and in 2:19, “after ye have obtained a hope in Christ, ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted.” Placing God ahead of seeking worldly things, and using riches or knowledge to bless those in need, were consistent and persistent admonitions of Jacob.

Never in Jacob’s young life had he had opportunities to obtain either higher education or worldly fortunes. But he had seen the corrosive influence that these things can have on people if they seek them for the wrong reasons. He probably sensed this most acutely from his reading of the book of Deuteronomy on the plates of brass. Deuteronomy talks a lot about being blessed with prosperity in the land, and it raises the question, how can we become truly rich?

One of Hugh Nibley’s books, called *Approaching Zion*, talks at length about this very question. He was invited once to go down to St. George to speak to a very wealthy ward or stake. They wanted to bring him down and have him enlighten them about all kinds of esoteric things. But, after thinking the matter through, he said to them, “Advertise my talk this way—I will talk about ‘How to Get Rich.’” The title drew a large crowd, expecting something quite different than what they got.

But indeed, it is a profound talk on that very subject. It offers one of the best commentaries on the Book of Deuteronomy that I have ever read. It really captures the sense of fairness, goodness, and concern for humanity that you get in that inspired Old Testament document. You can’t even muzzle your ox under the Law of Deuteronomy. And if you have someone who has worked for you for seven years and then you let them go as you must, you don’t just turn this person out and say, “Thanks for the hard work.” You have to be liberal and set them up so they can have a place to live. Anyway, that is how you get rich, and that talk eventually found its way into Nibley’s book.

You must be free with your substance so that others may have what they need, “that they may be rich like unto you” (2:17). This kind of equality is important within a covenant community. In regard to what makes a society good and wealthy and just, Lindon Robison, an economist and a member of the Church, wrote an article several years ago about what maximizes wealth in a nation. His findings were that if you have got a top-heavy society (with a few very wealthy people at the top and lots of people who are very poor at the bottom), the total wealth is likely going to be less than if you have a society where there is nearly equal distribution among all people. Of course, the economy in Jacob’s day was very different from complex industrial and financial economies. But fundamentally, what Jacob is teaching is economically sound as well as

morally and religiously desirable. True riches come from having satisfaction of the heart, knowing that you have done what is good, righteous, and socially justifiable.

When we think about paying our tithing and making offerings, the Lord invites us to test him. He says, “prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open *you* the windows of heaven” (Malachi 3:10). The “you” in that verse is plural. It is a little hard to tell in English, but in the Hebrew it is clearly plural. So, anyone who pays tithing can expect to be blessed. But so will those nearby. The rains from heaven will fall on their backyards as much as their neighbors’, and that is a great principle of consecration and community.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Does the Book of Mormon Warn Against Seeking after Riches?](#) (Jacob 2:18),” *KnoWhy* 518 (May 30, 2019).

Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 9 (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 178–201.

Thane Robson, “[Attitudes Toward Wealth](#),” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992), 1551–1553.

Lindon J. Robison, “[Economic Insights from the Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 1, no. 1 (1992): 35–53.

Jacob 2:22–23 — The Nephites Begin to Commit Whoredoms

It seems to me that if there are big problems with prostitution, involving whores and whoredoms, this is not likely to be someone’s sister or niece within close family tribes. It might well be that these whoredoms involved foreign women, and that they were bringing them in and using them as domestic servants or slaves. Under the Law of Moses, you could not have a member of the house of Israel as a slave, but you could have foreigners as slaves. Remember that Lehi’s people are all closely related at this point. Except perhaps for Zoram, they are all blood relatives. Even finding someone they could marry that wouldn’t result in an incestuous relationship under the laws of Leviticus would likely have presented problems. The rise of whoredoms makes a lot more sense if they had begun to have interactions with outsiders.

I recently read an article in the *Deseret News* about a study done in Holland. It showed that there is a direct correlation between power and promiscuity. Typically, the more power an individual has of any kind—whether it be corporate, political, or economic—and the more that individual ascends into the higher ranks of power, the more likely he or she is to be involved in some form of sexual infidelity. Power tends to get to people’s

heads, and when they get power they think they are immune or can get away with things that are risky. Many of us could probably name celebrities or social elites who fit this pattern.

It is important that we warn people, especially our young people who have their whole lives ahead of them, about the temptations that come with power. On the other hand, children need to know we want them to succeed. We want them to be wealthy and prosperous. We want them to excel in business and so forth. But I think we need to talk more directly and say, "You're going to go out into this world and face a lot of temptations. You should know that there is a direct correlation between power and immorality."

In every case of divorce that I personally know, the divorce was preceded by some other issue, such as seeking wealth or worldly acclaim. It may start with smaller things and then you get to the bigger stuff, because all of a sudden the spouse and the children can seem like a detriment to your getting ahead or putting yourself first. One of the reasons Jacob spoke in the temple, where everyone was present, was so everyone could be on guard and help each other in strengthening family relations.

Jacob used the word *crime* three times in this discourse. This is interesting because Jacob is the high priest. I would expect the high priest to use the word *sin* and that maybe a king or another political official would be more likely to use the word *crime*. This can probably be explained by the fact that under the Law of Moses, religious sins as opposed to civil laws were not distinguished in the way that we might think they are today. There was no separation of church and state in the ancient world. When a law is established by God, then to break it is just as much a *crime* under the law as it is a *sin* against God, which accounts for Jacob's use of this word here.

Jacob 2:23 — The Nephites Seek to "Excuse Themselves"

The fact that the people sought to "excuse themselves" suggests that they did not understand the scriptures. This is something that happens today just as much as it did then. One way that people often try to justify themselves is simply by interpreting the scriptures in a new way. Or it may just be easier for some people to say that a particular doctrine or standard isn't really for them. If people really want to hang onto something sinful, then they often feel a need to justify it. After all, who likes to think of themselves as being in the wrong? Unless such individuals truly repent, they will own the sins that they seek to justify.

Jacob 2:27–32 — The Lord Forbids the Nephites to Enter into Polygamy

In verse 27 Jacob declares, “hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord.” So this is apparently a law that they have not had before. Now, was it permissible or not under the Law of Moses to have more than one wife? It was permissible. Deuteronomy 21:15–17 says that a man cannot prefer the first son of his second wife over the first son of the first wife, so we know that there were plural marriages. Deuteronomy 17 says that the king, who may well have several wives, should not *multiply* wives or gold unto himself. So the problem was with excess, going to an extreme, having too much or too many. Deuteronomy 17 says that even the king cannot go too far.

Now what I think we may have going on here is a little bit of tension between the temple and the palace. It may have been the kings who followed Nephi who were modeling their conduct after David and Solomon: “for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son. Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines” (Jacob 2:23–24). But Jacob, speaking on behalf of the Lord, tells them that such practices were “abominable” (v. 24). Why? Well, they had way too many wives, especially Solomon who had a thousand wives, most of whom were foreign women. In verse 26 Jacob proclaims, “Wherefore I the Lord will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old.”

So this is apparently a new law that Jacob is giving them. And what is the law? It is that “there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none” (Jacob 2:27). Concubines were secondary wives (not prostitutes, as some might assume). They just did not have inheritance rights and so on. But Jacob is saying that the people can’t engage in such practices at all. He explains why in the next verses: “For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me; thus saith the Lord of Hosts. Wherefore, this people shall keep my commandments, saith the Lord of Hosts, or cursed be the land for their sakes” (vv. 28–29).

Then, in the next verse, the Lord clarifies the matter even further: “For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things” (Jacob 2:30). So there is an exception to this law. Polygamy can be permitted, but only when the Lord commands for the purpose of raising up a righteous people. That is what happened with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in order to fulfill the promises that they would have posterity that would be able to bless the entire earth. But Lehi’s family was not in that situation, in several ways.

Under ancient laws, fathers normally negotiated the prenuptial agreement with the bride for their sons. A lot of these marriage contracts are documented, and usually they contain a provision where the father of the bride has control over whether or not the groom can take a second wife or not. And if the bride's father doesn't want this to happen, we will see something in the contract that says in effect, "This marriage can go forward, but my daughter will not have a second wife in the home to deal with." On the other hand, sometimes the father of the bride didn't care. He may have thought, "Well sure, that might be a good thing. My daughter will be the primary wife, and if there is a second wife then my daughter will have someone to help her with the cooking and the household work and so on." Maybe it depended on what kind of a bargain the father could drive or what kind of a dowry the groom or father of the groom was offering in the deal. These things were negotiated.

There may well have been some kind of an agreement between Lehi and Ishmael when Ishmael's daughters married Lehi's sons. Notice that it says here that Lehi was the one who prohibited his sons to engage in plural marriage (Jacob 2:34). That was a right that he as a father had over his family. What I see going on here with Jacob is taking this matter one step further. Not only was this what their father Lehi did for their generation, but now this is the rule of the Lord for this people as a whole. Apparently, as they negotiated the terms of these marriage contracts, some of the fathers were saying, "Well, polygamous relationships would be okay with me." And Jacob is saying, "No, that's not going to work because it is against the commandments of the Lord for our people."

Also, sometimes there were conditions in these marriage documents about children as well. Not only could a second wife be taken if the first wife did not produce children, but sterility or infertility was, in the ancient world, an automatic ground for divorce. We see Abraham in that situation, where someone in Abraham's situation normally would have gotten rid of Sarah long ago, because he had been promised that he would have all these children and it wasn't working. But Abraham did not do that, no doubt realizing the eternal nature of his covenants and God's promises.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Does the Book of Mormon Say about Polygamy?](#) (Jacob 2:30)," *KnoWhy* 64 (March 28, 2016).

Jacob 3

Jacob 3:1–2 — Jacob Addresses the Pure in Heart

Jacob didn't neglect the pure in heart, who in many cases were hurt because of the bad choices of others, particularly of the husbands and fathers in this growing community. I appreciate here that Jacob leads the pure in heart to lean on Heavenly Father. It is so easy to get wrapped up in your hurt and want to react and be mean back. Yet, as Jesus repeatedly taught and demonstrated in the New Testament, that isn't the way to happiness. Jesus taught that we should love our enemies and that we must forgive to be forgiven. Put it in the Lord's hands and there will be justice.

It is noteworthy that in chapter 2, Jacob talks repeatedly about the thoughts and hearts of those who are setting out to do the wrong things, and then in chapter 3:1–2, Jacob follows up by addressing the hearts and minds of the righteous. I love the expression *firmness of mind*. It takes a lot of exertion to hang in there when no one around you is. Righteous resolve begins with firmness of mind. And the promises here are great. You can just feel the Lord's love and strengthening power that is available to the righteous. What does Jacob tell them to do?

- “Look unto God with firmness of mind” (v. 1)
- “pray unto him with exceeding faith” (v. 1)
- “lift up your heads” (v. 2)
- “receive the pleasing word of God” (v. 2)
- “feast upon his love” (v. 2)

Jacob mentions the pure in heart. Are we ever completely pure or not pure? Not until we stop being fallen people, right? Fortunately, the Lord will console you in your afflictions, including in those sins that you're trying to forsake, and he will plead your cause. What is “the pleasing word of God”? It is the Atonement of Christ, the message that you can be forgiven. So, “feast upon his love.” How do you think they felt, those of them who needed to change (as we all do, but some more than others)? There is love for every one of God's children, and the pleasing word of God “healeth the wounded soul” (Jacob 2:8). Is Jacob just talking about the people who are hurt or suffering from the sins of their husbands or fathers? No. Everyone is spiritually wounded to some extent, and therefore everyone needs divine healing. The Lord is merciful, the Lord is kind, and what better place to talk about these things than at the temple where we are taught more about the Atonement of Christ than any other place. So in essence, Jacob's message is that sin is real, and we should call it what it is. But his message is also that the Lord can heal those

wounds caused by sin and bring reconciliation between those who have caused or received harm.

I think that we sometimes unnecessarily separate the choices in our ordinary lives from our covenants. We sort of place our covenants on a shelf when in reality they apply to our choices throughout every day of our lives. I love temple recommend interviews for that reason. It gives us an opportunity to connect those dots. Every single one of those questions points toward a covenant. Live this way, keep these covenants, and blessings will naturally follow.

Jacob 3:5–7 — Jacob Uses the Lamanites as an Example of Righteousness

In a way, the problem faced by Jacob’s people is similar to the plague of pornography in our day. Pornography denigrates women by treating them as a commodity or as a mere object of lust. How does that make women feel? Jacob uses the Lamanites as a righteous example, saying, “Behold, their husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children” (v.7). We can learn a big lesson about how that can help us. Concerning pornography, you can’t just say to kids, “Don’t do it, don’t do it, don’t do it.” It helps when they understand why it is wrong. Fairly recently, the *Deseret News* published a number of articles on pornography, and how it is not a victimless crime. There are indeed victims, and we have to make people aware of the spiritual, emotional, and also mental injury and damage that can come from it.

This might be one of the first places in the Book of Mormon that demonstrates and clearly emphasizes that righteousness is not merely a matter of lineage. At least in this regard at this time in their history, the Lamanites were more righteous than the Nephites. This idea was likely somewhat of a very new concept for them. The Nephites apparently saw themselves as the *righteous* lineage, and because of this they probably were tempted to excuse their own sins. In fact, they may not have even recognized their own spiritual decline. We need to be careful that we don’t ever feel that personal righteousness can be inherited or that it is a product of culture or upbringing or any other factor besides personal agency.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can the Book of Mormon Strengthen Marriages and Families?](#) (Jacob 3:7),” *KnoWhy* 302 (April 19, 2017).

Jacob 3:11 — Jacob Invites the People to Repent

A couple of years ago, I gave a devotional at BYU called “[Loving God with All Thy Mind](#).” And toward the end of that talk, I reminded the audience that “Jacob would

have known the commandment “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.” from Deuteronomy 6:5. President Kimball once talked about the false gods we worship and how we can create things that we care about that crowd out our love for God. Wealth can be one of them, and sexual immorality can be another. President Kimball talked very bluntly about how idolatry takes us away from our ability to love God. If it is a commandment to love God, then it is certainly possible to break that commandment. So I proposed, in my devotional, that we should think about ways that we break it, so we can stop doing so.

Here is an excerpt from that talk,

Beware: Satan is the father of lies. And he’s a good liar. Take the lie of pornography. Satan tells us we will find satisfaction by staring at pornography. This is simply a lie. Can we love God with all our mind if even part of our mind is filled with this pollution? When I came to BYU in the sixties, we were just beginning to worry about environmental pollution. Previous generations had foolishly believed that the oceans could absorb an endless amount of garbage and waste. We learned that pollution doesn’t just go away.

I wonder if people aren’t just as naïve today. They foolishly think that the human mind can absorb an endless amount of filth and violence and that somehow we can just push a delete key in our brain and erase all that. You have been blessed with an amazing brain, with incredible retentive powers. Whether or not you can recall that information during a test, it’s all still there. Old folks often find that their brains retain things they haven’t thought of for decades. Mental pollution sticks; there are no teflon brains. Just as it is true that “whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection” (D&C 130:18), so, too, whatever degree of unrepented smut or cynicism we attain unto, it will rise with us as well.

Now I would hope that recognizing the amazing storage capacity of the brain may help us be careful about what we put into it. The things we choose to participate in and witness will be written deep into our countenances. I think that is what Jacob is saying when he tells them about the “awful consequences” of “fornication and lasciviousness” (v. 12). And he pleads with the people not to go down that path, which he warns will transform them into “angels of the devil” (v. 11). That is ultimately where all sin leads.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Does It Mean to Love God with ‘All Thy Mind’?](#)” (Moroni 10:32), *KnoWhy* 517 (May 23, 2019).

Jacob 4

Jacob 4:1 — What Does It Mean to Minister in Word?

In chapter 4, Jacob writes a few words to introduce his long quotation of Zenos’s Allegory of the Olive Tree. He says that he has “ministered much unto my people in word,” realizing that verbal talk will be forgotten and can’t be remembered. And thus it is important for him, and all of us, to leave a written record. He admired the writings of Zenos, which set the example and had “remained.”

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Book of Mormon Prophets Quote Long Passages of Scripture? \(1 Nephi 19:22\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 473 (October 4, 2018).

Jacob 4:2 — Jacob Can Write Only a Little

Because he was most likely in a climate or situation where writing on anything but metal plates would perish, Jacob and his scribes had to take great steps to preserve a few choice things, especially for the benefit of their children. He was also probably right in thinking that his posterity would not take a lot of time reading what they wrote, and so he probably struggled to say only things that mattered most.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Is the Book of Mormon Like Other Ancient Metal Documents? \(Jacob 4:2\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 512 (April 25, 2019).

Jacob 4:3 — Jacob Hopes His Posterity Doesn’t View Their First Parents with Contempt

Jacob hopes that the posterity of his people will read the words which he and others have written upon plates, and that they will “look upon them that they may learn with joy and not with sorrow, neither with contempt, concerning their first parents” (v. 3). Who are the first parents here? Possibly Lehi and Sariah. But why would Jacob worry that his grandchildren and great grandchildren would hold Lehi and Sariah in contempt? One possibility is that the Lamanites had a different version of history than the Nephites, and that the Lamanite version placed Lehi, Sariah, Nephi, Jacob and other righteous leaders in a less-than-favorable light.

It may also be possible that Jacob was concerned that his people wouldn’t understand the purpose of their mortal condition and that they would look unfavorably upon Adam and Eve—the *first parents* of the human family. As a temple priest, Jacob would have been keenly aware of the creation story, the Fall of Adam and Eve, and the introduction of the law of sacrifice. These are things that were essential to the temple in Israel, the

tabernacle in the wilderness, and the ordinances and rituals over which Jacob would have been responsible.

Moreover, Jacob probably knew a more accurate story of Adam and Eve than is found in Genesis. I say this because there is good evidence that some of the things in the Book of Mormon are also found in the Book of Moses but not in the Book of Genesis. For instance, Lehi’s blessing upon Jacob includes information about the necessity of the Fall, stating that “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy (2 Nephi 2:25). This seems to echo Adam’s words in Moses 5:10 (“Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy”) and also Eve’s words in Moses 5:11 (“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”).

It is thus possible that Jacob was trying to help his posterity better understand the purpose and necessity of mortality and that Lehi and Sariah, just like Adam and Eve, willingly chose to leave their comfortable home and embark on a journey through the wilderness—or, in other words, through a lone and dreary world. Jacob, who was Lehi’s “firstborn in the days of [his] tribulation in the wilderness,” knew very well that “afflictions” and “sorrow” were a necessary part of mortal life and that the Lord can ultimately “consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain” (2 Nephi 2:1–2). There is no need to condemn our first parents when the power of Christ can transform our sorrows and afflictions into joy and into opportunities for spiritual growth and understanding.

Jacob 4:4–7 — The Prophets Knew of Christ and Prophesied of His Mission

Most of all, Jacob wanted his posterity to know that they knew of the coming of Christ. So Jacob emphasized in Jacob 4:4 that his people indeed “knew of Christ” and that they “had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us.” He also says that they searched the prophets and had many revelations that witnessed of the powers of the name and grace and condescension of Jesus.

All this sets the stage for his quoting of Zenos in chapter 5. That is a detailed prophecy, one which Jacob’s people could place confidence in because during their day it was already partially fulfilled. For example, it talks about the olive tree branches being scattered to the nethermost parts of the region and how one of those trees, planted on a “good spot of ground,” was divided so that only some of its fruit was “tame” and the other fruit was “wild” (Jacob 5:25).

I think Jacob and his people could already see themselves as that tree that had been planted far away and how the Nephites and Lamanites had indeed separated. Well, if they knew it had been fulfilled that much, then they could trust that the rest of the prophecy was going to come true as well. They could also trust that the Lord of the vineyard will come and the harvesters and workers will come and all of the things that will occur as the Lord tries to restore Israel. They could trust that the Lord will do all he can to save the good fruit of the house of Israel and eventually restore the tree so that it can again bear the kind of fruit that he wants.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Do We Learn About Ministering from the Account of Sherem?](#) (Jacob 7:15)," *KnoWhy* 534 (October 3, 2019).

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac Illuminates the Atonement](#) (Jacob 4:5)," *KnoWhy* 412 (March 1, 2018).

Jacob 4:8 — Jacob Warns the People to Not Despise the Revelations of God

But even at that, Jacob feels a strong need to admonish some of his people to "despise not the revelations of God." This tells us that there must have been people there who *were* despising the revelations. Jacob thinks the best way to get them to not do that anymore is to just lay out for them the entire text of Zenos' Allegory of the Olive Tree from the brass plates. They may not have read or heard this text recited very often in such complete detail.

Jacob even seems concerned that he might fail in his task: "I will unfold this mystery unto you; if I do not, by any means, get shaken from my firmness in the Spirit, and stumble because of my over anxiety for you" (v. 18). This makes me wonder if he was reciting Zenos' allegory from memory. Whatever the case, the people likely didn't have their own copy of the scriptures. So maybe the best thing Jacob could do to get them to not despise the scriptures was to just let them hear the whole thing and be impressed with the magnitude and the profundity of this elaborate allegory.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Jacob Share the Allegory of the Olive Tree?](#) (Jacob 4:17)," *KnoWhy* 66 (March 30, 2016).

Jacob 4:10 — Jacob Teaches His People Not to Counsel the Lord

In verse 10, Jacob also wants his people to know that they should seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from him. There are some passages in the Allegory of the Olive

Tree where the master and servant of the vineyard debate about what to do. The servant pleads for God to be patient, and it works, but only because the Lord knows what to do and when to do it, in pruning and grafting the branches (Jacob 5:52). I think Jacob could have said to himself, “It is worth telling my people this whole story if my children will only learn from it to rely on the Lord and know that he knows what is ultimately best.” As Jacob and his people were living their days out, mourning and feeling bad for themselves, that might have been the most important thing he could have taught them.

Jacob 4:12 – Jacob Asks, “Why Not Speak of the Atonement of Christ?”

Jacob’s people, who lived the law of Moses (Jacob 4:5), believed in the atoning sacrifice of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement. So why not talk about the Atonement of Christ? It is just as logical. In fact, the symbolism of the scapegoat and many other aspects of the Law of Moses were indeed meant to point people to Christ.

The Hebrew word for *atonement* did not have the same meaning of *at-one-ment* that we see in its English form. Rather, the Hebrew has more the concept of “covering” sins so they cannot be seen. Only then can one appear before the Lord.

Jacob 4:13 – The Spirit Speaks the Truth and Does Not Lie

Jacob prepares the people to receive the words of Zenos by assuring them that the Spirit of the Lord speaks plainly of things as they really are and as they really will be. Prophets often try to speak plainly, in a way that people can understand. Although the prophecy of Zenos will be long and detailed, it covers a lot of ground and does so in a plain manner that ordinary people, most of whom were small plot farmers, could relate to, agree with, and also obtain a testimony of this prophecy’s truth.

Jacob 4:14–18 – The Jews in Jerusalem Were a Stiffnecked People But in the End They Will Bear Good Fruit unto the Lord

Verse 14 emphasizes that “the Jews were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand.” Perhaps Jacob had children or grandchildren who were wondering why their family had left Jerusalem. Well, the wickedness of the Jews provides an understandable answer.

And how does this relate to Jacob’s rehearsal of the Allegory of the Olive Tree? Well, what happens to the branches of the main tree, which is the tree in Jerusalem? It begins, right off the bat, to grow rotten. And it seems that Jacob wants his people to know that this was prophesied of long before any of them came on the scene.

But the Lord knew that the house of Israel would become sinful, and so he provided a way for branches to be cut off, transplanted, grafted in, and eventually brought together again. He would even remember those branches—like Lehi’s family—that were grafted into trees in the most remote parts of the vineyard (i.e. the world). I think it would have been comforting to Jacob and his people to know that, despite their physical separation from the land of Israel, they were still important to the master of the vineyard. They weren’t forgotten.

And, most of all, these people would eventually play an important role in the restoration of the house of Israel. Indeed, somehow those Jews who had “looked beyond the mark” would again be able to build upon “the only sure foundation” (4:16). How that would happen was a great “mystery” which Jacob now proposes to unfold to his people.

I think Jacob now has their undivided attention, and he has prepared them to hear the Allegory of the Olive Tree. Nevertheless, he is fearful for his audience. He may well be extremely anxious because, if they aren’t careful, they might find themselves among the branches that will be cast away for not bearing good fruit. And with that, Jacob turns to Zenos.

JACOB 5–7

John W. Welch Notes



Jacob 5

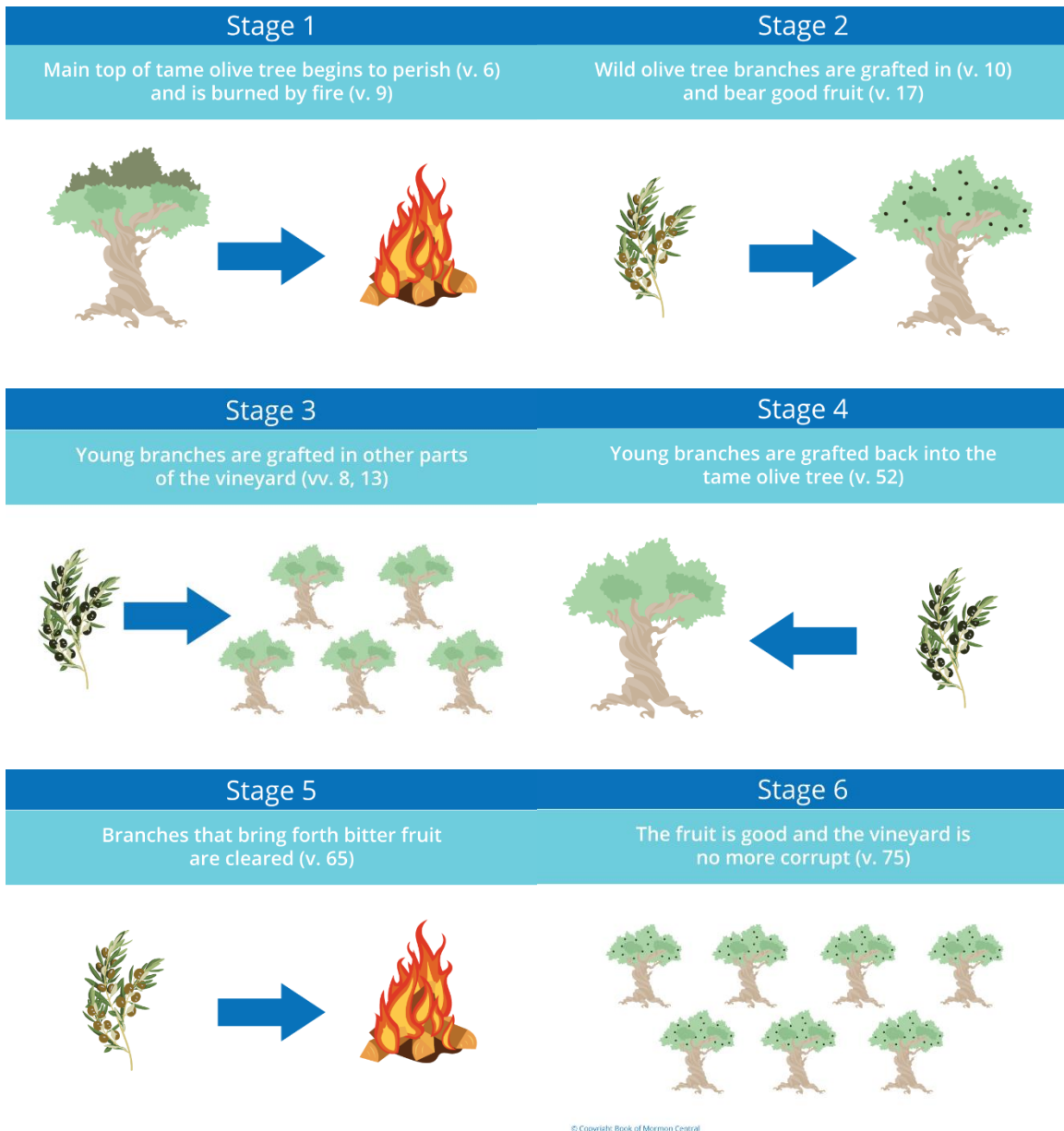
Jacob 5:1 — Jacob Quoted the Prophet Zenos

When Jacob spoke to his people, he read an allegory and explained it to them, but he had probably never even seen an olive tree. To Jacob, the concept of the olive tree must have been a great mystery. I imagine that Nephi was Jacob's tutor, teaching him how to write and especially to read and understand the writings on the plates of brass. Who else could have taught Nephi's younger brother? I suppose that at some point Nephi may have sat Jacob down and said, "Let me explain to you how olive trees grow, and how this extended prophetic allegory really works. In fact, before you were born we used to have olives on our property in the land of our inheritance." Presuming Nephi was familiar with olive horticulture, he could have passed on such knowledge—which he described earlier as "the things of the Jews" (2 Nephi 25:5)—to his brother Jacob.

Indeed, all the things that are mentioned in the allegory of the olive tree are the exact things that one needs to do to raise not just wild olives or bad, bitter olives, but to make them good. To be good olives they have to be cultivated. Unless you have actually been out there cultivating olives, it would not have the same allegorical value that it had when it was originally written by Zenos.

In reading this complicated and richly meaningful chapter, it helps to have some charts or a roadmap beside you. Here are three charts (Figures 1, 2, and 3) that make this allegory of the olive tree understandable, meaningful and applicable.

The Allegory of the Olive Tree Jacob 5



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Figure 1 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, chart 81.

Symbolic Elements in Zenos's Allegory

1. The Trees



a tame olive tree

young and tender branches

mother tree

main top

natural branches

root of the main tree

moisture of the root

transplanted branches

a wild olive tree

grafted branches

many other trees

good, tame, natural fruit

bad, wild, bitter fruit

equal fruit

Trees' Doings



growing

waxing old

decaying and perishing

cumbering the ground

overrunning the roots

bringing forth much fruit

becoming corrupt

withering away

growing faster than roots

taking strength

good overcoming evil

thriving exceedingly

(Chart Continued Below)

2. The Actors



master of the vineyard
servant

a few other servants

Actors' Doings



nourishing

digging about

dunging

pruning/plucking off branches

burning, casting into fire

grafting

planting branches

cutting down trees

grieving

laboring long, caring

sparing

balancing the root and top

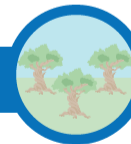
preserving

laying up fruit

obeying

rejoicing

3. The Places



a vineyard

nethermost part

poorest spot

poorer than the poorest spot

good spot

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Figure 2 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Symbolic Elements in Zenos' Allegory*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, chart 82.

Personal Applications of Olive Symbolism

Symbol	Possible Applications
Planted in God's vineyard	Membership in God's church
Olive trees grow slowly	Spiritual growth is slow
Without care olives become wild	We must remain faithful
Each tree needs particular care	Lord knows us individually
Even trees in good soil go wild	Use blessings properly
Branches should balance the roots	Grow patiently and deeply
Olive trees like dry, rocky soil	Adversity can be a blessing
Strong roots will support the stock	Keep spiritual roots strong
Branches should not become lofty	Avoid pride
Pruning is necessary	Repent regularly
Each branch needs light to grow	Keep Light of Christ in all
Prunings must not cumber the ground	Completely remove evil
Grafting will preserve the stock	Draw strength from others
Dunging is necessary	Study, ponder, and pray
Olive oil is very valuable	The worth of souls is great
Pressure is needed to extract oil	Attaining purity takes work
"What could I have done more?"	God does all he can for us
"It grieveth me to lose this tree"	God loves his children
"Spare it a little longer"	The Lord is patient with us

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Figure 3 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Personal Applications of Olive Symbolism*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, chart 83.

First, this chart (Figure 1) divides the allegory into six stages. There is a lot of repetition in this text, as the steps of pruning, planting, grafting, tending, and gathering fruit are repeated over many seasons of slow and selected growth. Cultivating an olive tree is a lifetime's work that requires considerable knowledge and expertise. But in the end, the effort is well worth the loving care of the lord of this vineyard or orchard.

Second (Figure 2), notice all of the many features that play a role in this complex allegory of God's whole plan for the history of salvation for the covenant House of Israel. Each of these elements has symbolic value. (1) There are many trees, and indeed olive trees do not produce alone, they require an orchard, a community of trees of their same kind. These trees behave in many ways and experience various stages of life, growth, and decay. (2) There are also several key actors: the master, the main servant, many other servants, and undoubtedly lots of other workers. Raising olives is labor intensive, and so Zenos's allegory involves these actors in many necessary and beneficial tasks. (3) There are several locations in this allegory. Some are better than others. Some offer certain helpful advantages. Others are thought to be poor spots, but they turn out to be necessary in the overall success of the orchard. All these details show the dynamic interchange between the master and his trees and his servants. The meanings of these elements remain for readers to discern by careful reflection.

Third, this chart (Figure 3) serves as an aid in applying this elaborate parable to individual parts of our own personal lives. While the tame tree in Jacob 5 clearly represents the House of Israel, it can also apply more particularly to Jacob and to his people, and just as well to all of us. Of the many possible personal applications, here is a list of nineteen elements that readers can pause and think about. See how many of these spiritual truths and needs have meaning to you.

Further Reading

Swiss, Ralph E. "The Tame and Wild Olive Trees—An Allegory of Our Savior's Love," *Ensign*, August 1988.

Jacob 5:1 — Who Wrote This Allegory?

Was Jacob 5 written by a person other than Jacob or Joseph Smith? I do not think Jacob could possibly have written this. He did not have the botanical knowledge or agricultural experience, so while it is in the Book of Jacob, it was not written by Jacob. Jacob says that Zenos wrote these words to all the house of Israel. And indeed, there is evidence of different authorship here, including difference with any other author in the Book of Mormon either. Mormon did not write this. Nephi did not; he had gone, and his vocabulary was different.

In the 600-page book, *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, hundreds of details in this amazing text are probed in depth. For example, in chapter nine, called “Words and Phrases in Jacob 5,” I went through and tabulated how many vocabulary words we have in this lengthy chapter. There is a very small vocabulary to this allegory, but it is also a very distinctive vocabulary. There are 30 phrases or expressions in Jacob 5 that never appear again anywhere in the Standard Works. There are also seven idioms that are found in the early chapters of Genesis but nowhere else in the Bible or Book of Mormon. They are part of the Creation account, pertaining to how God created the world and the House of Israel. There are 21 further expressions that are found in Jacob 5 and in other Old Testament texts, but which don’t show up in the New Testament, and so on. As a whole, Zenos’s vocabulary does not belong to any other writer known to us in the scriptures.

This writing style is just one more important indication that this exquisite prophetic text was not written by anyone other than Zenos. It is an inspired work of a person who lived long ago, probably lived in Palestine somewhere, and was filled with a deep understanding of the mission and the plan of God for the House of Israel. Zenos embedded that synoptic vision in an elegant allegory that endures and continues to inspire us today in many ways. What a gem this great allegory is!

Could Joseph Smith have written this? As one of the authors in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, botanist Wilford M. Hess, concluded: “Joseph Smith probably had little knowledge of olive trees in New York, as they will not grow in the northeastern United States.” While some information on that topic was available in the Bible and other books from Joseph Smith’s time, the details were sparse.

Further Reading

Wilford M. Hess, Daniel J. Fairbanks, John W. Welch, and Jonathan K. Driggs, “Botanical Aspects of Olive Culture Relevant to Jacob 5,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 507.

John W. Welch, “Words and Phrases in Jacob 5,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 174–184.

Jacob 5:1 — The Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph Work Together

In this chapter, we see a particularly strong example of how the stick of Judah and the stick of Joseph work together. Chapters 12 and 14 of the book, *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, discuss the allegory of the olive tree and related figurative language in the ancient

Near East (chapter 12), and the relationship of Zenos to the texts of the Old Testament (chapter 14). These two chapters show that there are allusions to this allegory in Exodus, Hosea, and Ezekiel. As David Seely and I went through these biblical passages and pseudepigraphic and other texts, we felt that a significant argument could be made that the reason that Hosea and those other writers could use specific tree imageries the way they did was because they presumed that their readers were familiar with some bigger picture.

Their poetic allusions assumed that their audience understood the whole story. If you take all of those Old Testament allusions to olive trees together, you find that they, as a composite whole, have remarkable similarities to the Allegory of the Olive Tree. Although Zenos' writings do not appear in the Old Testament, there is an interesting argument to be made that many people in ancient Israel, along with Lehi and Nephi, *knew* this general prophecy. Indeed, Lehi at one point spoke "much concerning the Gentiles, and also concerning the house of Israel, that they should be compared like unto an olive-tree, whose branches should be broken off and should be scattered upon all the face of the earth" (1 Nephi 10:12). Nephi reports this as if everyone knows the story about the broken branches being scattered all over the earth. Maybe Nephi suggested to Jacob that he should tell and preserve that story.

Further Reading

David Rolph Seely, "The Allegory of the Olive Tree and the Use of Related Figurative Language in the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament," in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 290–304.

David Rolph Seely and John W. Welch, "Zenos and the Texts of the Old Testament," in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, eds. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo, UT/Salt Lake City: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies/Deseret Book, 1994), 322–346.

Book of Mormon Central, "Did Prophets Such As Ezekiel Know The Writings Of Zenos? (Jacob 5:24)," *KnoWhy* 440 (June 12, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, "Was Lehi Familiar with Zenos's Allegory of the Olive Tree? (1 Nephi 10:12)," *KnoWhy* 466 (September 11, 2018).

Jacob 5:1 — The Last Words of Cenez (or Zenez)

Another one of the chapters in the *Allegory of the Olive Tree* book, "The Last Word of Cenez," refers to a book that is not in the Bible. It has come to be known as *Biblical Antiquities*, not to be confused with Josephus' work of a similar title. In this early Christian-Jewish text (which dates to around the first century BC) there is an alternative

history of the Jews from the time of the creation of the world to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which happens to be the time that is said to have been covered in the history section on the plates of brass. In *Biblical Antiquities*, the grandson of Joshua is a prominent figure, and he gives a speech as they are establishing themselves in the new conquered land of Canaan. His name is *Cenez*, but in some texts his name is *Zenez*. Guess what he talks about? Olive trees, and how Israel is an olive tree and has been planted and so forth. That is interesting especially because the *Biblical Antiquities* book was not discovered until the 1880s, fifty years after the Book of Mormon was in print.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Is Anything Known of the Prophet Zenos Outside of the Book of Mormon? \(Jacob 5:1\),](#)” *KnoWhy* 67 (March 31, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[The Last Words of Cenez and the Book of Mormon,](#)” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 305–321.

Jacob 5:3 — What Does the Olive Tree Represent?

In this verse, Zenos says explicitly, “I will liken thee, O house of Israel unto a tame olive tree...” The allegory of the olive tree could be called the allegory of the olive orchard. Sometimes olive orchards were called *vineyards*. In Hebrew there is only one word for both “orchard” and “vineyard.” It is interesting that sometimes it was translated one way and sometimes the other, but here it is called “my vineyard.”

There are lots of plants and trees in a vineyard, but we are focused on one of them. The pattern we read about in this allegory may be a cycle that will repeat itself for other civilizations besides Israel. Nephi knew and prophesied that the Lord would speak to all nations and to the Lost Tribes of Israel, indicating that this is not just a one-tree story.

Further Reading

Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, “Introduction,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994). “The allegory speaks mainly of one much-loved tree. But there are others—an entire orchard of trees—each of which is valued by the Lord. In the allegory he toils personally alongside his hardworking crew of devoted servants as they cut and prune and transplant and nourish the precious trees. The allegory can be understood locally, perhaps in the context of a northern Israelite prophet who is deeply disturbed by the wickedness and apostasy that he sees in his beloved Israel in its early monarchical period or slightly later. Or it may be understood

cosmically, embracing the entire sweep of human history, or at least large portions of it. The allegory proves to be, at the same time, both precisely detailed and broadly pliable. Obviously, each individual and each group, in virtually any circumstance or period of time, can find in this graphic image meanings that are especially attractive to them in their daily lives and deepest thoughts. This allegory typologically represents many forms of God’s love and care, as well as many states of righteousness and apostasy, whether collective or individual.”

John A. Tvedtnes, “Vineyard or Olive Orchard?” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 477–483.

Jacob 5:3 — How Did the Olive Tree Represent the House of Israel?

There is no question that Zenos was critical of the place in which the tree was planted, and since he was referring to the House of Israel, that central starting place, according to Exodus 15, can be understood as the temple mount. The tree was a representation of the whole House of Israel—their family tree if you will. How does this prophecy begin? A tree was planted and it was rotten to the core—so rotten that God had to come and chop off all the branches, take those branches, scatter them around somewhere, preserve them somehow, and keep the roots alive by bringing wild branches in. Now for the Jews, that was not very promising, was it?

When the tree did well, the whole House of Israel was doing well. In fact, there were other trees in this vineyard, but they are not quite as important to the Lord as this one tree, which was planted in the most prominent place. It was the one that he really is counting on to produce these best fruits.

In this image, individuals are but a leaf, a little twig, or a tiny part of that tree. That is the way ancient Israelites thought about their collective responsibilities, their civic duties, and who they were. Individuality was less important to them than group survival; individuals could not really survive in the ancient world all alone. They had to have a village; they had to work together; they had to share. One person raised olives and another person raised wheat. They had to work together in order to make that happen, and they were acutely aware of the responsibility of all to see that the whole of Zion or of the nation succeeded.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “What Are The Roots of Zenos's Allegory in The Ancient World? (Jacob 5:3),” *KnoWhy* 70 (April 4, 2016).

Jacob 5:7 — Who Are the Lord and His Servant?

In the allegory, we meet the lord of the vineyard. He is the overlord, but it is his servant who comes and directs all of the things that are going on. I think that the overlord, the owner, is God the Father, and the long-suffering servant, as in Isaiah, is always Christ. I think Jacob may have said, “Can you not see that this prophet understands, as we understand, that Christ will come, and that it will be his law and his orders that we will follow?” Jacob introduced his telling of Zenos’s allegory by stating: “And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness” (Jacob 4:5).

Sanctification, or being made holy, is what the anointing with the olive oil was all about, as reflected in the purification rituals of the temple. Jacob was trying to communicate that sanctification is ultimately through Christ! The word *Christos* or *Messiah* means “the anointed one,” and what were they anointed with? Olive oil. Again, a couple of chapters in the *Allegory of the Olive Tree* book elaborate on the importance and symbolism of the anointing.

Jews believed in Jehovah well before the coming of Christ. Regardless of whether Jehovah for them represented the Father or the Son, Jehovah at least represented a very important person who interacted with God and got orders from him. In the allegory, the master of the vineyard has a servant who is in some ways equal to and working together with the Father. Jacob probably understood the Father to be the owner of the vineyard, but the servant is the suffering servant, the Messiah or Christ, who boldly pleads with the master to spare the tree a little longer.

There are places in which it clearly appears that Nephi understood that the Messiah would be different from God the Father. Jacob, in the contests with Sherem, was tested and pushed on whether there would be a Messiah who would come, and whether the Messiah and God are two different beings. This is a very important doctrinal issue.

Further Reading

Donald W. Parry, “Ritual Anointing with Olive Oil in Ancient Israelite Religion,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 262–289.

John A. Tvedtnes, “Olive Oil: Symbol of the Holy Ghost,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 427–459.

Book of Mormon Central, “Did Pre-Christian Prophets Know About Christ? (1 Nephi 10:17),” *KnoWhy* 12 (January 15, 2016).

Jacob 5:7 — The Lord Does Not Want to Lose the Fruit of the Tree

This fruit was very precious, and the Lord of the vineyard really wanted it, because it had so many uses and so much value. It was a major cash crop for ancient Israelites, who exported olive oil. Not every place can grow olives because you have to have the right elevation and the right moisture. There are only certain places in all of the world where olives will grow: around the Mediterranean and North Africa, in central Chile, and southern and central California, in particular.

The first pressing of the olives produces the purest and most valuable oil because it is more highly concentrated. It actually comes out looking a little red the first time. This oil was used for anointing and for offerings as the first-fruits or the first oils.

Further Reading

Truman G. Madsen, “The Olive Press: A Symbol of Christ,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 1–10.

John Gee and Daniel C. Peterson, “Graft and Corruption: On Olives and Olive Culture in the Pre-Modern Mediterranean,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 186–247.

Jacob 5:8 — The Lord Preserves the Fruit of the Tree

The olive is a very plastic tree. It can be grafted and cut and moved and so on. I grew up in Southern California and we lived in an area where there were many very large, completely useless olive trees. They made a huge mess, purple stain all over the driveway and the car and so on, but they were evergreen and they were attractive. We liked them and we needed some olive trees to plant down in the nethermost part of our property. We went next door to an older lady and her husband who had lived there for many years and had lots of olives on their property and asked where we might get one. She said, “Well all you do is you just cut off a little branch, you shave off the bark and you stick it in the dirt and it grows.” So that is what we did and I have pictures of these little trees that we grew by doing exactly what you read about in Jacob 5, in which they cut off the branches and stick them in the nethermost part of the vineyard or orchard. Now who would ever think that that would really work? How many trees can you do that with?



Figure 4 Olive Tree Graft. Photo by Derek Winterburn via Flickr.

Wilford Hess wrote an article on the botanical aspects of the olive tree and went into lots of details on their plastic nature, and as far as I can tell there are no trees that you can do that with in upstate New York. But with the olive tree, you can graft and it will live. The roots are very durable. Almost like a Redwood tree, they are very resistant to infection, rot, and mold. And they do not need very much water, but they *do* need to be pruned and taken care of.

What does it mean to *preserve*? It means to *keep* something that was yours to begin with. In effect, God is saying, “This is my work and my glory ... to preserve my children, my people. These are the ones that I, as God, care about and want to see preserved.” Does it help you to know that he is in the preservation mode? I think so. He wants to preserve absolutely every branch that can possibly be preserved. Some are going to be burned and thrown away and put in the fire because he cannot get the optimal result all the time, and sometimes there will have to be some selecting and choosing. He is trying to preserve everything he possibly can, but some little branches are going to have to be cut and thrown away. What will be preserved is the DNA, the stalk, or in relation to people, the reference is to the lineage, and posterity, in accordance with the eternal principle that we will eventually all be brought back into his presence.

Further Reading

Wilford M. Hess, Daniel J. Fairbanks, John W. Welch, and Jonathan K. Driggs, “Botanical Aspects of Olive Culture Relevant to Jacob 5,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 484–561.

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Did Zenos Give So Many Details About Raising Good Olives? (Jacob 5:9-10),” *KnoWhy* 71 (April 5, 2016).

Jacob 5:11 — The Lord Will Take Care of the Olive Tree

We had an experience with a member of the church (a professional agronomist) in Aix-en-Provence in Southern France. We talked to him for a while about the Allegory of the Olive Tree, and he said, “Yes, that is exactly what we do. You could use that chapter as a handbook and go out and just do what it says and you would raise good olives.” And I remember Hugh Nibley saying years ago, “Whoever wrote Jacob 5 knew everything you need to know to cultivate olives.” It is pretty amazing.

If you do not prune olive trees, they go wild; they revert back to being worthless, and you have to burn them. If you do not burn the prunings, you will get infestations and bugs and problems that will destroy the fruit and sometimes kill the trees. By clearing and dunging and doing all of those things, Zenos and Jacob were warning their people (and us) that if they did not allow themselves to be cultivated by the master and servant of the vineyard, they would not succeed.

Further Reading

William H. Krueger, Zachary Heath, and Dominic DeLeonardis, “Patch Budding: A Convenient Method for Top-Working Olives,” University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources Publication 8115 (2004): 1–6. Olive culture in California follows exactly the same procedures as described.

Jacob 5:13—What Are the Nethermost Parts of the Vineyard?

By the “nethermost” parts, the Nephites would have understood that as being the farthest away you can get, and that would refer to them. However, “nether” also means “lower.” Even though it seems to be an obscure and undesirable place, being located in the nethermost part of the vineyard can be a good thing. Unlike the high point of the vineyard the lower areas can be in protected ravines and not exposed to high winds. The trees in these lower places would also receive a little more of the runoff water that comes down through little ravines. It is a place where you would put a precious tree if you really wanted it to survive.

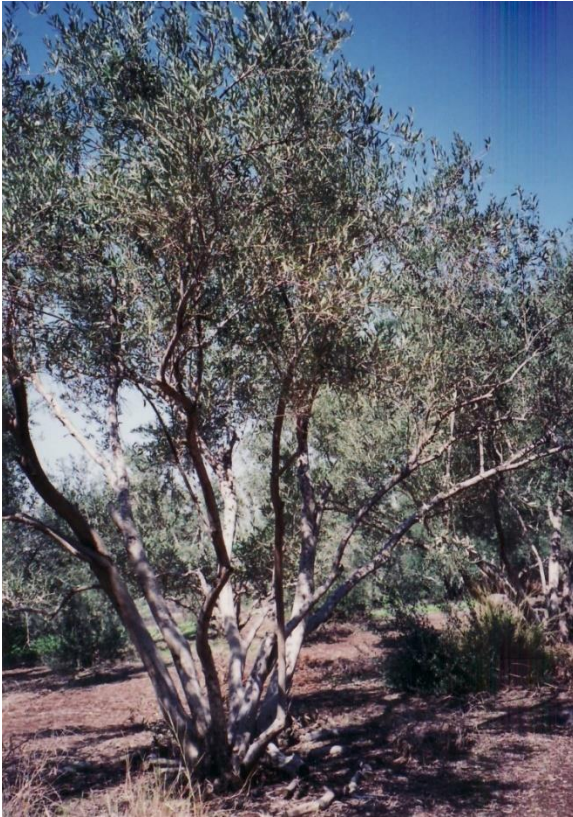


Figure 5 Small tree in a lower part of an olive grove in Galilee. Photo: John W. Welch

In a way, the trees in the nethermost parts of the vineyard are like the small, remote branches of the Church. They may not have the prominence and visibility that branches on the top of the hill have, but they often have the most cohesiveness. All fruit-bearing little branches in this parable can be grafted back up into the central tree where there are long-standing roots.

This goes back to the idea in Exodus 15 that Israel was planted in that place because it is a holy and special place. These deep roots—of the covenant with God in which he promised that he would always remember his people—are ultimately the ones that will be able to bear and support the longest time and produce the best fruit.

Jacob 5:34 — Grafting in Wild Branches to Nourish the Root

In the text, we read, “Behold, because thou didst graft in the branches of the wild olive tree they have nourished the roots, that they are alive and they have not perished,” and hence the master could see the tree was “good.”

According to Wilford Hess, “... it would also have been unusual for an olive grower to graft wild branches onto a tame tree, ... but circumstances exist when it makes good sense to do so. Due to the vigor and disease resistance of certain wild species, grafting wild stock onto a tame tree can strengthen and revitalize a distressed plant.”

Hess states, “... knowing that it was highly unusual to graft wild branches into a domesticated tree teaches about the extent and effort the Lord makes to reclaim His lost children.”

Further Reading

Wilford M. Hess, Daniel J. Fairbanks, John W. Welch, and Jonathan K. Driggs, “[Botanical Aspects of Olive Culture Relevant to Jacob 5](#),” in *The Allegory of the*

Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 484–561.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Zenos Give So Many Details About Raising Good Olives? \(Jacob 5:9-10\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 71 (April 5, 2016).

Jacob 5:41 — The Lord Asks What More He Could Have Done

In this verse, we can see the long-suffering nature of the Lord. What does the owner of the vineyard want to do? He is tempted to get rid of the tree. The servant comes back and says, “You know, we still have not succeeded. There are still problems down there,” and then he begs, “Give me one more time,” and the Lord is merciful and says, “Fine.” They work, and they work, and the servant says, “What more could I possibly have done?” Well this mercy and long-suffering are the predominate feelings that Jacob gets out of this allegory—and he wants his people to hear that.

Jacob 5:48 — Balancing the Growth of the Roots and the Loftiness of the Branches

In botany, we learn that we must have a balance between the roots and the branches. If the roots become too strong, they will keep the nutrients down there, and they will not be pushed up into the branches. If the branches are too big, though, they suck up all the strength from the roots.

In the parable, a lot of effort was expended on keeping the tradition, the roots, the covenant, and the foundational elements of Israel balanced with not running too fast, not looking beyond the mark, knowing their (and our) place, and not getting too lofty. Those lofty branches are always lopped off. A lot of them are suckers that never produce anything way up there, but they take a lot of strength away from the root.

I have seen a lot of olive trees in California, Galilee, and other places, but it was not until we went to Sicily, driving along the highway, I noticed that all of the olive trees there had a flat top. They had *butched* the top of these trees. We ended up staying in a place where it was actually a farm, an agricultural touristic place, so we were able to talk to the owner who was very proud of the quality of the olive oil that they produced there. I asked him why the trees are all cut off. He said, “Well, there are two reasons we cut those off. The first is to make it easier to pick because they grow way up there. The second, we do not get really good fruit up high. The best fruit is grown on the lower branches.”



Figure 6 Very old Olive Tree, in the garden of the Church of All Nations, Jerusalem. Photo: John W. Welch



Figure 7 Well-pruned olive orchard in western Sicily. Photo: John W. Welch

Jacob 5:61, 70, 72 — Other Servants Are Called

There is one servant at first. There were no more servants until the very end, when the final pre-harvest efforts are essential. When it was harvest time, they got everybody out there shaking the trees and collecting—they would actually catch the olives in nets or little cloths. They stood there and shook the trees. Interestingly, the psalmists refer to shaking the trees with no more information about why they were doing that, but they were harvesting. They called for all hands on deck. All the servants went out to harvest the fruit from the trees. The fruit of the olive tree was very valuable. It was pressed in an olive press (Figures 8 and 9) and used for many purposes: (1) for lighting temple lamps, anointings, and offerings, (2) skin ointment, medicine, burning in household lamps, cooking, eating, (3) the initial press residue was for burning in stoves, and (4) even the dregs were used for fertilizer, herbicide, and curing and sealing new pottery jars.



Figure 8 Michael Spencer and John W. Welch with Olive Press in Sepphoris, Galilee. Photo: Rita Spencer



Figure 9 Olive Press, near Peter's home in Capernaum, Galilee. Photo: John W. Welch

In addition to the central tree of the allegory, there were lots of trees in the vineyard and in the nethermost part. We do not know how many there were, but they represent the whole world with all its people. Zenos, as an early Israelite prophet, may have seen Jerusalem as the high place where the tree was planted. The tree represented the people that were brought out of Egypt and planted in Jerusalem where they built the temple. Exodus 15:17 refers to the Lord planning to *plant* his people on a high mountain. That planting can be seen as a type of many plantings by the Lord of his people in many times and places, from the Old World to the New, from the East to the West, near and far.

Further Reading

For many other marvelous studies of the olive tree, see the full 625-page volume, *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994). In addition to the chapters already mentioned, see also Truman Madsen on the olive press as a symbol of Christ, Noel Reynolds on Nephite uses of the Zenos's allegory, Paul Hoskisson on a detailed reading of Jacob 5 in connection with the history of Israel, Authur Henry King on language themes in Zenos's brilliant scripture, and John Tvedtnes on olive oil as a symbol of the Holy Ghost.

In addition, for an update and review essay on olive horticulture, see Wilford M. Hess, "Recent Notes about Olives in Antiquity," *BYU Studies* 39, no. 4 (2000): 115–126.

Jacob 6

Jacob 6:2–5 — Jacob Discusses the Allegory

Having quoted Zenos in full, Jacob picks up where he left off at the end of Jacob 4, applying this prophecy to his own people. In verse 2, the Nephites heard Jacob say, "God is going to set his hand a second time to recover his people," and so Jacob assures his people that they should not feel too bad sitting way out here in the middle of nowhere. Remember that the Lord is going to set his hand another time, and we will play a role in that gathering.

Verse 3 teaches, "How blessed are they who have labored diligently in his vineyard," so get to work! We must be like these laborers coming and working diligently. It is hard work to prune and to dig and to dung and to cultivate and to work for a long, long time, year after year, to see that the Lord is pleased. "And how cursed are they who shall be cast out into their own place! And the world shall be burned with fire."

But there is hope in verses 4–5: “How merciful is our God unto us, for he remembereth the house of Israel, both roots and branches” (Jacob 6:4). Those roots are the roots back in Jerusalem. The Nephites are a part of the branches. “He stretches forth his hands unto them all the day long; and they are a stiffnecked and a gainsaying people; but as many as will not harden their hearts shall be saved in the kingdom of God. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I beseech of you in words of soberness that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you” (Jacob 6:4–5). God has not forgotten. Where in the allegory do you see this attitude of mercy, care, concern? Just about everywhere.

Jacob 6:7 — Jacob Does Not Want the Nephites to be Cast into the Fire

I think that Jacob, as the temple priest, may have been concerned about blood coming on to his own garments. Where would a temple priest encounter blood? Every time he sacrificed an animal, he would likely get stained in blood. That blood, of course, was atoning blood and was expiating for the sins of the people who were making the sacrifices. The priest was a holy person who could absorb that blood, whereas the other people could not. The priest would go through his own re-purification so that he could serve as a holy instrument ensuring that his people’s sins would be forgiven. He would also light a fire and keep it burning continually on the altar of the temple, day and night, according to Leviticus 6:12–13. They continually kept a fire burning so that the impurities could be put into the fire and burned. Thus, when Jacob referred to the branches that were being cut off, “hewn down and cast into the fire,” he may have also been referencing some of the things he did for them as their temple priest.

Jacob 6:8–9 — Jacob Implores His People to Not Reject His Words

In verse 8, Jacob implores his people to heed his words: “Do not reject the words of the prophets that have been spoken concerning Christ ... after so many have spoken concerning him; and deny the good word of Christ, and the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and quench the Holy Spirit, and make a mock of the great plan of redemption.” The Father (God), the Son (Christ), and the Holy Ghost are all present in that statement.

“Quenching” means “pouring water on.” This could be a plea that the people not extinguish the temple fire, which must always be kept burning (Leviticus 6:12–13). When Jacob declared, Do not “make a mock of the great plan of redemption,” for God should not be mocked, he wanted to be sure that they appreciated and did not mock and ridicule the things that were going on in that all-important temple. Otherwise, they would have “shame and awful guilt” when they would stand “before the bar of God” (Jacob 6:9).

The purpose of the temple, of course, is to bring people into the presence of God, and we all hope that it will be a pleasant experience, that we have been purified to be able to stand before God and to be in his presence. But if we are not pure, we will stand with shame and awful guilt. It is significant that Jacob focuses his brief concluding remarks on temple elements. Just as Zenos's allegory ends with God's judgment harvest, Jacob ends with counsel and exhortation to remain faithful to the Lord, keep the commandments, and honor their temple laws, rituals, and covenants.

Jacob 6:11–13 — Jacob Bids Farewell to His People

What did Jacob really want his people to learn from the long parable? He concluded, "O then, my beloved brethren, repent ye, ... and continue in the way" (6:11), which may be an allusion to Psalm 1:3, 5, 6), promising the righteous that they will be "like a tree ... that bringeth forth his fruit in his season, ... for the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

"Finally," Jacob says, "I bid you farewell until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear. Amen." Here Jacob is saying goodbye to his people. He tells them that God's judgment will be pleasant and pleasing for the righteous, but it will be awful for the wicked. Jacob used the word "pleasing" six times in this sensitive book, referring to the tenderness and chastity of wives and children as "pleasing unto God" (Jacob 2:7), three times to describe the word of God as "pleasing" (2:8, 9; 3:2), once here speaking of the "pleasing bar of God," and finally that the outcome of Sherem's case was "pleasing unto me, Jacob, ... for the Lord had heard my cry and answered my prayer" (7:22).

It seems that, at the time Jacob gave his speech and long allegory in Jacob 4–6, he was sick or old, for it seems that he saw himself as being close to dying. But yet he would live long enough to withstand Sherem's strong confrontation, which Jacob reports in his one remaining chapter. Perhaps Sherem took advantage of Jacob's old age or poor health. Perhaps Sherem was previously well-known to Jacob, and possibly Sherem was the one Jacob had in mind when he warned people not to "reject my words" or "reject the words of the prophets; and ... all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ" (Jacob 6:8). Indeed, Sherem opposed Jacob specifically on his prophecies and teachings about Christ and his way.

Jacob 7

Jacob 7:1 — Who Was Sherem?

Who was this anti-Christ? He is not called an anti-Christ here, but he clearly was not accepting the doctrines that Jacob had been developing, applying them even further than did Nephi. Jacob, knowing the temple and being involved in the temple, had been emphasizing the role of Jesus as the Redeemer, as the Messiah, and as the source of salvation.

We do not know where Sherem came from, but it appears he did not come from the “temple lot.” The group of people who were loyal to the temple, such as the priests who operated the temple, probably came from Jacob’s and Joseph’s own families. On the other hand, it appears that Nephi’s sons may have inherited the government, the kingship, and the palace. It could be that Sherem came from the palace side. Jacob had already upset everybody in the aristocracy by calling them strongly to repentance, especially for their excesses regarding wealth and women, things prohibited to the king by Deuteronomy 17 (Jacob 2–3).

So, there may have been a power struggle in this little city about whether the king or the high priest had ultimate authority over the other. Does that sound familiar? Congress, the Supreme Court, the President—who is going to have ultimate authority here? These power struggles are perennial.

In verse 1, though, we get an odd thing: “After some years had passed away, there came a man *among* the people of Nephi.” That almost sounds as though Sherem was coming from outside. It is possible he was coming from the Lamanite-Lemuelite-Ishmaelite people, since the people of Nephi consisted of the Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites and Zoramites. Even if Sherem was one of the Lamanites, at this era of history he would have been a close cousin of the Nephites.

Sherem often gets lumped in with the anti-Christes like Korihor. However, Korihor was an atheist; he did not believe in religion or being under God at all. Sherem, on the other hand, at least purported to believe in the Law of Moses. To paraphrase, he said, “I just want the Law of Moses plain and simple; don’t muck it up with all this Christology stuff.” Over at the palace they would have been perfectly happy to have stayed with the Law of Moses, and that’s clear and sufficient. In a way, it was similar to what Joseph Smith would encounter; people believed in the Bible, but that was all.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "The Case of Sherem" in John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press: 2008), chapter 5, 108. "Sherem was intelligent, eloquent, and persuasive (Jacob 7:4), abilities that link him to the educated people in the small city of Nephi and probably to the royal group controlled by the kings who succeeded Nephi in the land of Nephi. Sherem's strident defense of the law of Moses as the source of righteousness would have appealed to royal administrators, who perhaps supported or even were the source of Sherem's political points of view. Because Zoram had been a servant to a public official in Jerusalem, it is enticing to think that Sherem may have been a Zoramite or may have had Zoramite ties."

Jacob 7:3 — Sherem Wants to Meet Jacob

This was certainly a very serious legal event, but it was also an important spiritual event for the whole community, because this is a stand-off of cosmic significance. "Are we going to worship Christ? Are we going to look forward to his coming many years in the future? How can you be a true prophet and prophesy about something that is so far in the future that you cannot even verify whether the prophecy is going to come to pass or not?" Sherem argued that it was out of order for a prophet to speak of something so far in the future because the truth of any such statement was untestable; they could not verify it and in none of their lifetimes could they verify whether it was going to be a true prophecy or not (Deuteronomy 13). Therefore, he claimed, that worship of Christ must be considered illegal, based on false prophecy.

Jacob 7:4 — Sherem Was an Educated Man

Sherem was a very sophisticated and over-confident challenger. How do we know this? He had a substantial and technical vocabulary; he was a very persuasive person. In this verse, it says that he was learned, and that could only mean that he knew the religious tradition in this small world. What else would he have studied? They did not have a chemistry department or a statistics department, but he had a perfect knowledge of the language *of the people*. Notice that Jacob does not say that he had a perfect knowledge of the language *of the scriptures*. He may not have known how to read the reformed Egyptian and things like that, but he knew the vernacular; he knew the idioms and what would play well with the people.

In this, he was a little bit like Korihor, who certainly was a demagogue and knew how to raise arguments that sounded good, but that were obviously pernicious and misguided. We read that Sherem "could use much flattery," so he was obviously playing to the crowd. He may have tried to appeal to their wanting to have things plainer, or at least to doing things the more familiar or traditional way.

He was dedicated in some way to the Law of Moses, and he thought that what Jacob was doing was not strict enough or did not follow the correct way of understanding the Law of Moses. He did not oppose the Law of Moses at all. In fact, he thought that Jacob was the one who didn't understand it quite correctly. However, what his view of the Law of Moses was or what the details of that argument were, we do not know.

Jacob 7:5 — Sherem Wanted to Shake Jacob's Faith

In Jacob 4:6, Jacob had said that their faith had become “unshaken,” but when we read Jacob 7:5, what did Sherem hope to do? Jacob said, “He had hoped to shake me from the faith.” Apparently, Sherem took Jacob's statement as a challenge. “Well you think you are unshaken; I will do my best to shake you.”

Jacob 7:6–7 — Sherem Raises a Judicial Complaint against Jacob

If you look back to see how people have previously described this encounter, they have usually seen it in the light of a philosophical or theological argument. Yet in the ancient world, these matters were never just theological concepts. If it were some kind of an intellectual discussion, why should Sherem end up dying over it?

There are clues that we are in the sphere of high-level legal material from the very outset. That word “contend” shows up in the Old Testament, so we have a good idea what it would have been in Hebrew; it is *rib*, the word for a “lawsuit.” So, when it says that Sherem *contends*, it means that he was bringing a legal action. He was raising an accusation against Jacob. As the high priest, Jacob would typically have been the chief judge in such matters. However, since Jacob was the accused, all that either of them could do was submit the matter to divine judgment. Likewise, in this context, if Jacob bore to Sherem his “testimony,” the word would mean here “witness” as in a witness in court under oath.

The accuser typically had to have personal knowledge of the alleged violation before he could commence his accusation. This is somewhat like our rule that you have to have *standing* in order to bring a lawsuit. The accuser also bore the burden of proof.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “The Case of Sherem,” *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, 122. “The crucial test in this regard is found in Deuteronomy: ‘If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him *that which is wrong*; Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD’ (Deuteronomy 19:16–17). Thus, Sherem's conduct requesting Jacob to produce divine evidence was not a casual case of idle sign seeking, but rather followed a significant rule of ancient Israelite jurisprudence.’”

Jacob 7:6–7 — A Nephite Trial with Jewish Roots

In the ancient world, trials could take place anywhere, but they typically took place either on the steps of the temple or the gates to the city. This case probably happened in a public place, partly because of the use of the word *contend* which is normally associated with contending in the gates. In addition, if Jacob and Sherem had simply conversed in private without public witnesses or observers, the pro-Sherem portion of the populace may have suspected foul play when Sherem fell helplessly to the ground. Nobody said, “What happened to him?” So it would seem that there were people present who knew, when Sherem fell, that the will of God had been manifested. And someone needed to care for him and keep him alive “for many days” after he fell to the ground (7:15). In addition, there would have been less reason for Sherem to have made a public retraction, had he not made a public accusation. His final confession was more than just a confession; it was an attempt to undo the damage that he had done. He had probably spoken out on many occasions; he probably had a following, so there was a great likelihood of this involving some of the public.

Nowadays, we recognize a professional judge by the robes he wears. There was no professional judiciary in the ancient world. Every man could be called to sit on a panel of judges, rather like our juries are. People who happened to be at the town gate could be impaneled and sit as a judge on that case. Trials usually were short. They would never go over a day or two long. If they did not have the necessary witnesses, the court would simply adjourn and give people time to bring the witnesses, but typically, cases in the ancient world probably lasted only a couple of hours.

Jacob was wise. He knew he would be unable to persuade Sherem, but Sherem also was skilled; he presented his case competently and sufficiently to call the question. Sherem probably knew that he would have to go through some kind of ordeal to seek validation of his claims and to substantiate his accusations.

Sherem accused Jacob of the capital offense false prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:20), likely on several grounds. This was a capital offense. Second, he also accused Jacob of blasphemy. The crime of blasphemy was narrowed by later Jewish traditions and law, so that that only speaking the holy name of God out loud qualified as an offense, but in pre-exilic Israel, *blasphemy* could mean a broad range of insolent or seditious statements; anything that was demeaning of God, of the king, or the leader could qualify. Even a slave could blaspheme the master by speaking insolently. It was a very serious offense, as we see when Abinadi said that God would come down and suffer, a very unflattering statement about God, and so the priests of Noah accused Abinadi of blasphemy on that very ground. Blasphemy was also a capital offense, under Leviticus 24. Third, leading

people into apostasy was another accusation that Sherem levelled; it was also a capital crime under the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 13).

So, Sherem accused Jacob of three capital crimes, and I guess he figured that all he had to do was win on one of the three. Sherem may have felt certain that God would sustain him. However, God does not support the wicked, and we know how the story ends. If Sherem had won, there likely would have been friends of Sherem who would have executed Jacob. But the way it turned out, in many ways, must have become a foundational precedent at the beginning of Nephite legal history which would affect the next 400 or 500 years of Nephite history until the coming of Christ.

Jacob 7:8–12 — Jacob Answers Sherem’s Accusations

The reason Jacob did not simply ignore Sherem’s slander, is that it was Jacob’s obligation to answer. Under this legal system, once a formal accusation had been raised, silence or failure to respond was a confession of guilt. Whereas we have the right to remain silent under our law today, they did not. So Jacob spoke up boldly, “having the spirit of the Lord insomuch that Jacob did confound him in all his words.” Such a protestation of innocence could be transformed into a legal accusation against the accuser, raising a counterclaim of some kind, and indeed, that was the effect of what Jacob said in his reply.

Jacob, responding to Sherem’s sentiments (“How can you say these things? Your ideas are confused”), rebuffed Sherem with scriptures regarding the coming of the Messiah and withstood him with contrary testimony. Jacob may have even responded to Sherem with an oath. If a party to a lawsuit swore an oath by God, that was the most powerful piece of evidence that a person could bring before a court. In Neo-Babylonian texts, after the Jews were taken captive to Babylon, we notice that the Babylonian legal system shifted from what we might call *religious* trials to more evidentiary-based trials. People no longer used ordeals, consulted the gods, or required people to take oaths before the rising of the sun, and so on, as they had in previous centuries. What they now asked for was documents, witnesses, and evidence. But that legal development had not yet occurred in the world that Lehi and Nephi and Jacob would have known. Their trials would likely have still involved putting more weight on oaths and ordeals to show the will of God than some kind of logical argumentation.

In the ancient world these oaths would invoke curses upon the oathmaker, such as, “If I am not telling the truth, then may I die of this awful disease, or may all my crops fail, or may all my animals die, etc.” Sometimes they would even take a little animal, cut the animal’s throat, and say, “If I’m not telling the truth, then may I die like this animal has died, may the gods make this happen to me.” In Alma 46:21, when Captain Moroni

gathered the troops, they all ripped their coats, and started stomping on the coats as a symbol of what would happen to them if they did not fight. They were making their covenant of allegiance and loyalty to Moroni with that same kind of symbolic action. They took these oaths very, very seriously.

But do we have any evidence that Jacob swore an oath? It may be found in the word *truly*. “They [the scriptures] *truly* testify of Christ.” The word *truly* is like the word *verily*, which is the word *amen*. When you used that word, you were often doing so in some kind of oath-swearing context. Maybe Jacob went that far. He was saying something like, “How can I counter your accusations except by my taking an oath.” That would then shift the burden of proof back to the other person, because the one who has taken the oath was presumed to be telling the truth. It was a very drastic level of testimony, because if they were wrong, they were not only causing themselves harm but they were offending God himself.

Jacob 7:13 — Sherem Requests a Sign

Sherem’s response to Jacob’s rebuttal turned out to be ill-fated. He could have retracted his allegations, but a retreat would have been hard, because the laws were pretty strict against false accusers. People could not lightly initiate a complaint without its being, in effect, a sworn statement. Presumably, if Sherem had retreated, Jacob probably would have not pursued the matter, but as you read in Deuteronomy 19, the punishment for those who initiate false lawsuits was strict. “Then shall ye do unto him as he thought to have done unto his brother.” If someone falsely brought a claim of capital significance and lost, the punishment was that the accuser was put to death. The threshold for bringing a legal action in this world was very high. They did not have a litigious society as a result of that.

So, at this point there were Sherem’s accusations and Jacob’s testimony in contrast—and it was a tie, a stand-off. The most common method of breaking such a tie was to draw on divine directions. In the case of Jacob and Sherem, it was Sherem who said, “Show me a sign.” He asked for some kind of divine oracle or manifestation, and that put the burden back on Jacob. Jacob had brought into the discussion the Holy Spirit, and therefore Sherem no doubt felt justified in saying, “Alright, let us take this one step further. You show me something to prove that God is on your side.” It appears that Sherem genuinely believed that he was right. He was about to learn that he had been deceived. I am willing to give him the benefit of the doubt; this matter was so serious that he would not have just gone casually through this as a political or intellectual maneuver of some kind.

Jacob 7:14–15 — The Lord Smites Sherem to the Earth

Then the question becomes, “Why does Jacob comply?” Jacob may have been willing to do this because he was not the one who had asked for the sign, so there was a manifestation of divine punishment that occurred as Jacob asked that the will of the Lord be done. The power of the Lord came upon Sherem insomuch that he fell to the earth. He was brought down to the dust, and this was a sign that he was wrong. Well, you might say, “Why does falling down prove that you were wrong?” In order to be an accuser, you had to stand up, and now that he was unable to stand his accusation literally fell flat.

Jacob 7:16–18 — Sherem Confesses His Sins

Under such circumstances, it would have been pretty clear to everyone that God had *cursed* such a person, and Sherem realized this. He also knew that if he went to his death without confessing what he had done wrong, things would go really badly for him. He had been nourished, or kept alive, by the ministering of the people for many days (7:14). And as he admitted, he believed that God was there and he believed in judgment, so he confessed.

Under Jewish law, if a person was going to be executed, the priests were told to instruct the person on how to give a proper confession, so that things would go as well as possible in the next life. Once they had obtained the confession of the guilty, they could then stone them. Sherem probably knew this. He confessed. In verse 18 he plainly said that he had been deceived.

In Jacob 6:8–10, Jacob had spoken interesting words in describing those who reject the prophets and reject the words concerning Christ. It refers to standing before God with shame and awful guilt. Sherem expressed that shame and guilt as a part of his confession. He knew that his condition and state would be awful and used several of these same words that Jacob had used.

As part of Sherem’s confession, shortly before his death, he requested that a public assembly be convened so that he could speak to the people. The assembly met so that Sherem could publicly confess his error and retract his previous teachings. A *rib*, or juridical dispute, was completed through some kind of confession, so it was perfectly suitable to the nature of this proceeding that it would have to come to some resolution by a confession, and it is interesting that it was not a forced confession. Later, Nehor will be “caused” to confess in Alma chapter 1, while Korihor will not confess entirely voluntarily, and his confession was deemed incomplete and inadequate by Alma. But Sherem seems to have given a fully acceptable, voluntary confession.

He denied the things which he had taught them. He “confessed the Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost, and the ministering of angels. And he spake plainly unto them, that he had been deceived by the power of the devil. And he spake of hell, and of eternity, and of eternal punishment” (Jacob 5:17–18). Bear in mind Jacob’s discussion of the fate of those who would be punished eternally, back in Chapter 6. Then he says—and notice that this is a chiastic confession, of which the center is, “I fear lest I have committed the unpardonable sin.”

This is the only quotation we have from Sherem. Jacob had simply summarized previously, but here are Sherem’s actual words. Bear in mind that Jacob introduced Sherem to his readers as someone who was skillful with the use of words. Interestingly and true to form, he made as complete a confession as possible. Why? Maybe he was hoping that somehow the curse would be lifted; that he will be healed. That did not happen in Sherem’s case, but he may have been trying to do everything he possibly could to reconcile himself not just with Jacob and Jacob’s people, but primarily with God.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Do We Learn About Ministering from the Account of Sherem? \(Jacob 7:15\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 534 (October 3, 2019).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Sherem Die? \(Jacob 7:7\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 73 (April 7, 2016).

Jacob 7:23— Peace and God’s Love Are Restored

When a controversy came up in the ancient world, when there were arguments and problems, society was disrupted. The overriding purpose of any lawsuit was not so much to punish someone. The ultimate objective of law in the ancient world was to settle the dispute, to restore peace, to get the people happy with each other again, somehow, and on terms that everyone could accept.

When you think of the temple, what is its purpose? Unity, peace, harmony, building Zion. Sometimes you have to cast the devil out to make that happen, but the objective is to have the peace of the spirit of God on the earth and for eternity. And thus Jacob concludes “that peace and the love of God was restored again among the people” (7:23). They again searched the scriptures, gave no more heed to Sherem, and *tried* (even if it was in vain) to restore the Lamanites to the truth (7:24). Life ended sadly for Jacob, born in tribulation, lonesome, and mourning. But he passed on the records obedient to Nephi’s command, hoping that many may read his words (7:27).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Do the Authors on the Small Plates Follow a Pattern? \(Jacob 7:27\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 74 (April 8, 2016).

ENOS—WORDS OF MORMON

John W. Welch Notes



Enos

Enos 1:1–14 — Enos Prays That God Will Preserve a Record of His People

Enos was a grandson of Lehi, a son of Jacob, and a nephew of Nephi. He, along with the other Nephites of his time, must have wondered why the Lord had directed them to a place where they were very isolated—a place where it was difficult to converse with and understand the native people of the new land. However, Enos and his direct line of descendants knew that they were serving an important purpose because they had the oral and written history of Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob. They were told that someday their records would serve a crucial function in gathering and reestablishing Israel. Even though it might take a long time, with many generations of Nephite scribes scratching their history on plates, they knew that someday, somehow, the Lord was going to make use of their work. This would have been a very powerful and sustaining motivator for them.

Enos is best known for spending a whole day and well into the night crying unto the Lord to know personally concerning eternal life, the joy of the holy saints, that his sins were forgiven, and that he would be blessed by the Lord (Enos 1:5). When he asked how this could be done—perhaps wondering how that atonement could be made when he had not offered any sacrifices in that regard in his father’s temple in the city of Nephi—Enos was told, it is “because of thy faith in Christ” (Enos 1:8). As soon as he heard those words, he offered an intercessory prayer, first for his people, the Nephites (1:9), and then for the Lamanites (1:11). Being deeply concerned about the eternal welfare of others is a profoundly righteous feeling. Enos was personally assured by the Lord that the Nephite records would eventually be brought forth unto the Lamanites (1:16).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Is It Important to Keep Records?](#) (1 Nephi 9:5)," *KnoWhy* 345 (July 28, 2017).

Dennis L. Largey, "[Enos: His Mission and His Message](#)," in *Jacob Through Words of Mormon: To Learn With Joy*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 4, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1990), 141–156.

Enos 1:15–17 — Following Nephi's and Jacob's Instructions

As was mentioned previously in these notes in connection with the book of Jacob, Nephi issued a commandment to his brother Jacob that was passed along to Enos and this line of recordkeepers. It involved not only a requirement to keep a record on the Small Plates, but also stringent requirements about the content:

And he gave me, Jacob, a commandment that I should write upon these plates a few of the things which I considered to be most precious; that I should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people which are called the people of Nephi. For he said that the history of his people should be engraven upon his other plates, and that I should preserve these plates and hand them down unto my seed, from generation to generation. And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these plates, and touch upon them as much as it were possible, for Christ's sake, and for the sake of our people (Jacob 1:2–4).

Jacob recorded, "I said unto my son Enos: Take these plates. And I told him the things which my brother Nephi had commanded me, and he promised obedience unto the commands" (Jacob 7:27). The verses noted below in parentheses demonstrate that Enos in particular obediently followed each of these requirements. This pattern, however, can easily go unnoticed if a reader is not actively looking for ways in which Nephi's original directive was followed:

1. A record is to be kept on the Small Plates by way of commandment (Jacob 7:27).
2. The record must be personally written (Enos 1:1, 11, 17, 19; Jarom 1:1; Omni 1:1, 4, 9, 10, 12).
3. The record must be preserved (Enos 1:13–17).
4. The record must be handed down within the lineage of Jacob from generation to generation (Jarom 1:1).
5. The record is to be added to by each person within the lineage of Jacob to whom the plates are entrusted. Note that it is not clear from Nephi's words to Jacob whether Jacob, alone, was supposed to write on the plates or whether subsequent

generations were also expected to write and add to the record. Jacob, however, clarified and solidified the tradition of extending these obligations to successive generations by specifically conveying the instructions to his son Enos. Likewise, Enos issued the command to his son Jarom (Jarom 1:1).

6. The record is to preserve only (a) precious things, (b) sacred preaching, (c) great revelation, or (d) prophesying. Even at that, only “the heads” or main points of the few precious, sacred, or great utterances should be written (Enos 1:1–17).
7. The record is not to cover the history of the people of Nephi “save it were lightly” (Enos 1:20–21, 24).
8. The words on the record are to be written “as much as it were possible for Christ’s sake, and for the sake of [the people of Nephi].” Enos, as often as possible, referred to the fact that he lived and preached for Christ’s sake “because of [his] faith in Christ” (Enos 1:8). He preached, prophesied, and declared “according to the truth which is in Christ” (1:26). The final written testimony of Enos was that he “shall rest” in his “Redeemer” (1:27).

It is remarkable how precisely and scrupulously Nephi and Jacob, as well as all the record keepers in the direct line of Jacob’s descendants (Enos, Jarom, Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki) followed this template.

Interestingly, this priestly line of record keepers also gave their sons names of strong and possibly pure Hebrew origins. By clicking on the links below, readers can more fully explore the likely meaning behind each of these names, as found in the [Book of Mormon Onomasticon](#):

- “[Enos](#)” is a Hebrew word meaning “Mankind.”
- “[Jarom](#)” is a Hebrew name likely meaning “Jehovah is exalted.”
- “[Omni](#)” may relate to Hebrew expressions such as “The Lord is my faith” or “Jehovah is my trust.”
- “[Amaron](#)” may be derived from roots meaning “The Command of the Lord” or “Jehovah has spoken.”
- “[Chemish](#)” has several possible etymologies, including the “Hebrew *ḥameš* ‘five,’ possibly because he was the fifth generation from Lehi.
- “[Abinadom](#)” quite readily relates to Hebrew proper names meaning “My father was a wanderer” or “My father was grieved,” a feeling expressed by Jacob at this head of this lineage. While the meaning of the name “[Amaleki](#)” remains puzzling, it was a name that would likely have been known from the plates of brass.

These names reflect the devotion that these men felt toward their inherited family calling as scribes, as well as their calling and commitment to preserve their ancient

family traditions. Although the records left by this line of patriarchs were brief, they span more than three centuries and provide lessons of faithfulness, duty, and preservation of family history and heritage.

Life Spans of Book of Mormon Lineages

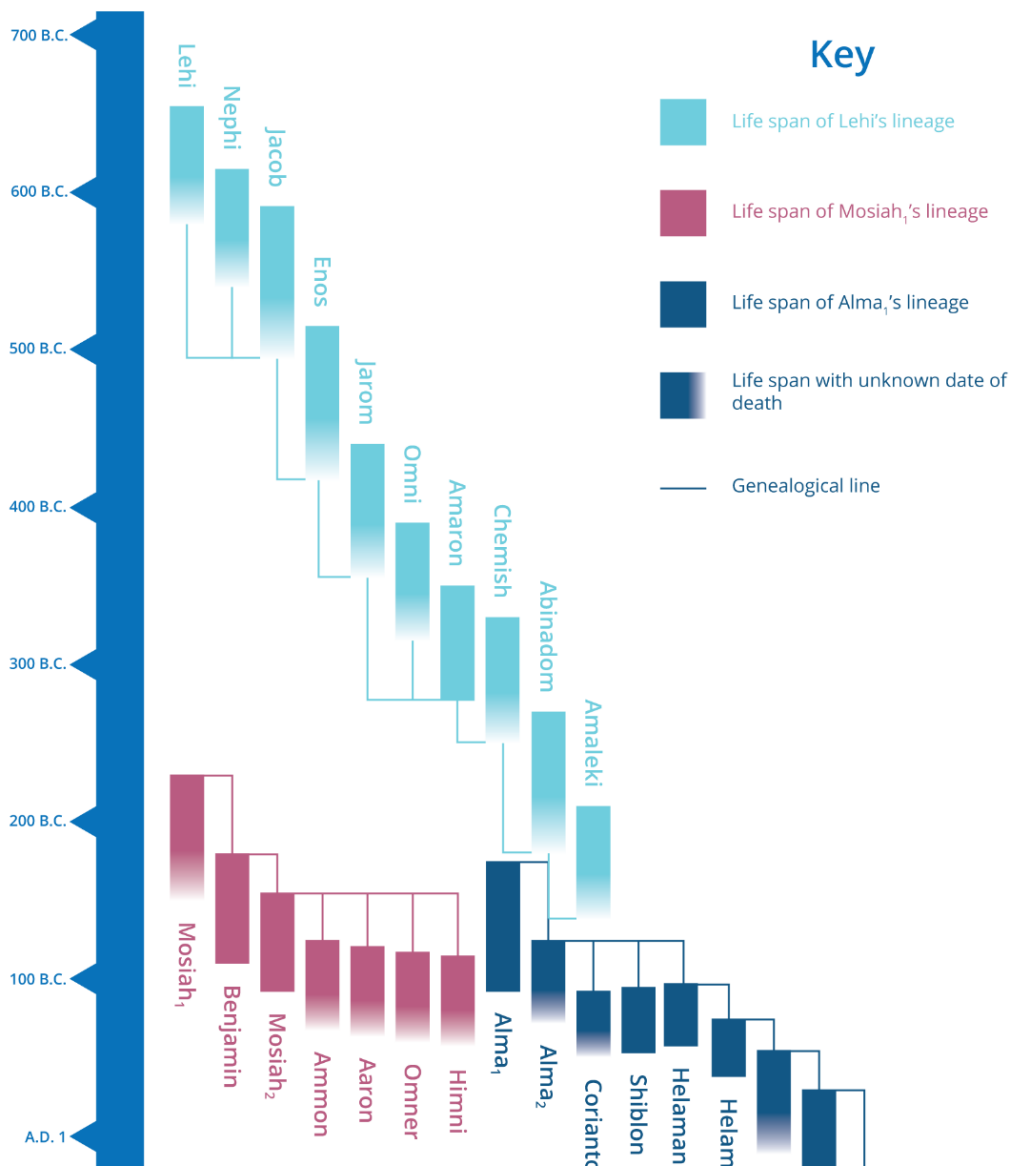


Figure 1 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Life Spans of Book of Mormon Lineages*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, charts 26–28. (Continued on next page)

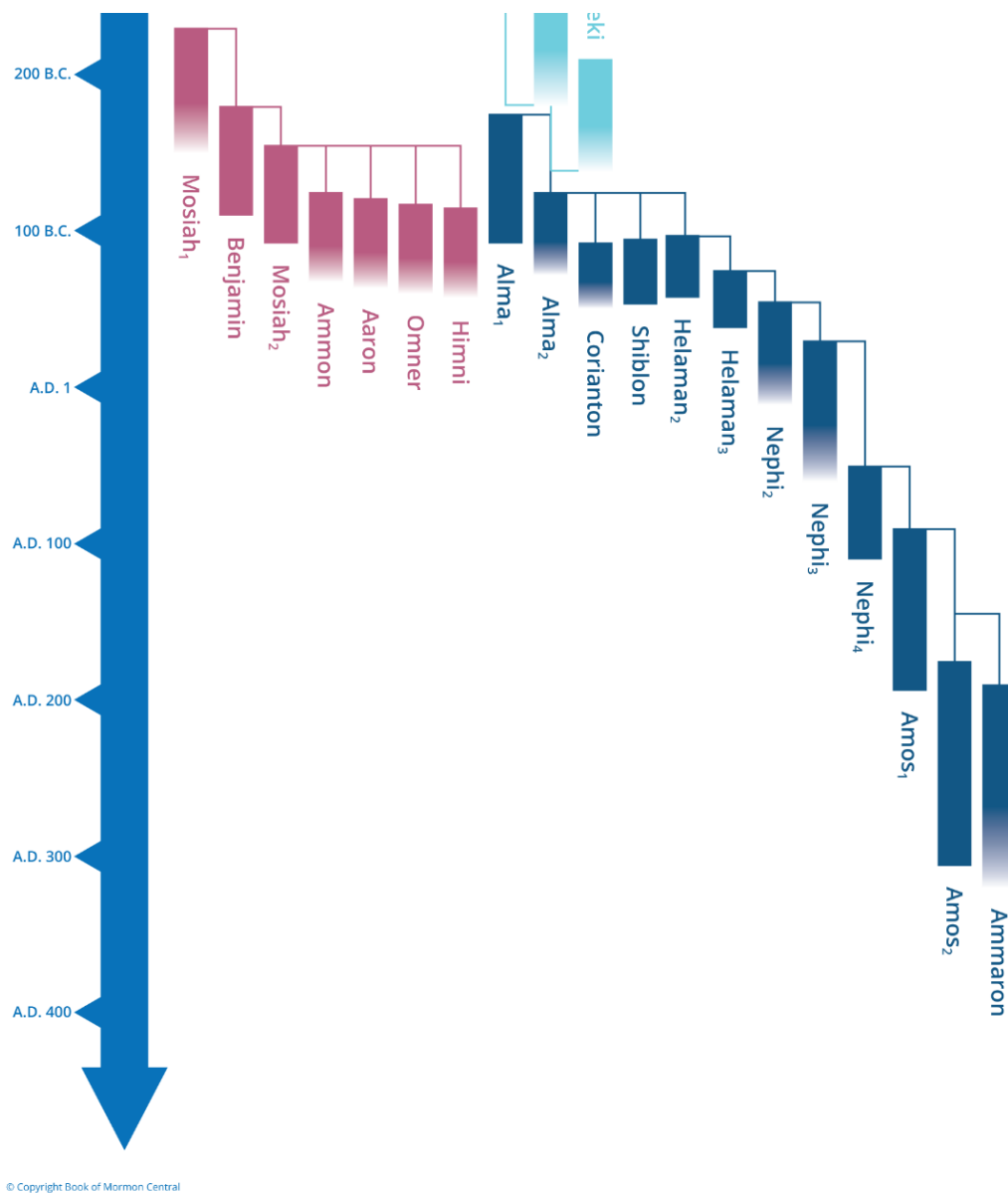


Figure 2 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Life Spans of Book of Mormon Lineages*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, charts 26–28.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Do the Authors on the Small Plates Follow a Pattern?](#) (Jacob 7:27),” *KnoWhy* 74 (April 8, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[The Father’s Command to Keep Records in the Small Plates of Nephi](#),” *FARMS Preliminary Report* (September 1984).

David Rolph Seely, “Enos and the Words Concerning Eternal Life,” in *Jacob Through Words of Mormon: To Learn With Joy*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 4, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1990), 235–250.

Jarom

Jarom 1:1–2 — Jarom, the Son of Enos

The text in the book of Jarom manifests his careful attempt to explicitly perpetuate the tradition of keeping the record according to Nephi’s command. For example, Jarom, the son of Enos, personally wrote on plates (Jarom 1:1) that were “small” (1:2, 14). He distinguished the plates he wrote on from the “other plates of Nephi” which were written by “the kings, or those which they caused to be written” and which contained the records of “[the Nephite] wars” (1:14).

Jarom wrote “a few words” (Jarom 1:1) and wrote “a little” (1:2) in order to keep “the commandment of [his] father, Enos” (1:1). Specifically, Jarom wrote his record “for the intent of the benefit of [his] brethren the Lamanites” (1:2). He chose not to record “[his] prophesying” nor “[his] revelations” because Jarom felt that there was nothing more he could write than what was already written by his fathers before him (1:2). However, Jarom did make a record of the many prophets, priests, and teachers who taught the people “to look forward unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was” (1:11). Jarom ensured the preservation of the Small Plates by delivering “these plates into the hands of [his] son Omni, that they may be kept according to the commandments of [the] fathers” (Jarom 1:15).

The covenant which the Lord made with Enos that the record would survive any Nephite destruction for the benefit of the Lamanites (Enos 1:13, 16) overshadowed Nephi’s and Jacob’s previous stated purpose of the plates—benefiting “our” people. These are subtle and understandable shifts.

Further Reading

John S. Tanner, “Literary Reflections on Jacob and His Descendants,” in *Jacob Through Words of Mormon: To Learn With Joy*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 4, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1990), 251–269.

Omni

Omni 1:1–3 — Omni Keeps the Record as Prescribed

Starting with Omni, the authors' writings on the final sheets of the Small Plates began to be very brief. Undoubtedly, the plates were almost filled. Indeed, Jarom had remarked that the plates were "small" (Jarom 1:2, 14). Nephi's command to Jacob was for him to write "upon these plates" (Jacob 1:2). The plates were unique—they had been made by the hand of Nephi, as Jacob himself emphasized (Jacob 3:14). Making more plates and adding them to the Small Plates collection was, perhaps, unthinkable.

Notwithstanding the lack of space, and in spite of the fact that Omni considered himself a wicked man, he still wrote something in an attempt to satisfy the requirements of Nephi's template for keeping the record, "[B]eing commanded by my father, Jarom, that I should write somewhat upon these plates."

Omni preserved the record, wrote according to command or instructions of his fathers, and passed the record on to his son, Amaron. Although Omni did not write for the spiritual benefit of his people, he stated that he fought "to preserve my people" and, perhaps for Christ's sake, acknowledged that he had not kept the statutes and commandments of the Lord. He touched lightly on history, mentioning vaguely some seasons of peace and others in which the Nephites were embroiled in "serious war and bloodshed." Omni ended his writings with a clear acknowledgement of his duty in keeping the record: "I had kept these plates according to the commandments of my fathers; and I conferred them upon my son Amaron. And I make an end."

Omni 1:4–8 — Amaron Takes Stewardship over the Record

Like his father, Amaron made a minimal effort in complying with the command to preserve and write on the Small Plates. He verified that he would write a "few" things and that he had "delivered" the book to another descendant of Jacob—his brother, Chemish. Amaron made no reference to revelations, preaching, or prophesying in his lifetime, but reported the destruction of wicked Nephites as fulfillment of the prophecy given by Lehi that they would not prosper in the land if they did not keep the commandments.

Omni 1:9 — Chemish, the Brother of Amaron

Chemish was Amaron's brother. Perhaps for this reason (not wanting to add two records from the same generation), Chemish did not do more than witness the fact that his brother had fulfilled the basic responsibilities and obligations of keeping the record. Nevertheless, that which Chemish wrote still contained elements common to the command of Nephi and the words of the others who had gone before him—sufficient to

show that Chemish was also intent upon fulfilling the original instructions of Nephi. Chemish stated, “Now I, Chemish, write what few things I write, in the same book with my brother; for behold I saw the last which he wrote, that he wrote it with his own hand; and he wrote it in the day that he delivered them unto me. And after this manner we keep the records, for it is according to the commandments of our fathers. And I make an end.”

Omni 1:10–11 — Abinadom, the Son of Chemish

Abinadom wrote that he witnessed “much war and contention between my people, the Nephites, and the Lamanites; and I, with my own sword, have taken the lives of many of the Lamanites in the defense of my brethren.” Apparently, Abinadom observed little of spiritual value, and though he made an effort to write, he deferred to the “plates which is had by the kings” for the more predominant history. Abinadom clearly had the instructions for writing in mind, because he added, “I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy; wherefore, that which is sufficient is written.”

Omni 1:12–30 — Amaleki Writes, Then Passes the Plates to King Benjamin

The last person to write upon the Small Plates was Amaleki, the son of Abinadom. In relatively few verses, Amaleki covered a bit of history: “I will speak unto you somewhat concerning Mosiah.” He wrote of the departure of a group of people led by Mosiah from the Land of Nephi and of their arrival in the Land of Zarahemla. He spoke briefly about the origins of the people of Zarahemla “who had come out from Jerusalem” at around the same time that Lehi and his family had left Jerusalem. Amaleki then wrote of Mosiah uniting his people with the people of Zarahemla and of Mosiah’s appointment as their king.

Continuing with the history, Amaleki wrote that later, his brother left Zarahemla with another group of people with the intention of returning to the Land of Nephi. Amaleki had no subsequent knowledge of his brother’s whereabouts. Having no other posterity, Amaleki prepared to give the plates to King Benjamin, son of Mosiah. Quite possibly because he delivered the plates to someone outside of Jacob’s direct lineage, Amaleki wrote more than his predecessors, filling all the remaining space on the plates with his personal writings. In his final words, Amaleki exhorted “all men to come unto God, the Holy One of Israel, and believe in prophesying, and in revelations.” He spoke of the Lord from whom all good comes and expressed his concern on behalf of the people, admonishing them that they might be saved.

Once again, it is apparent that Amaleki completed his record on the Small Plates by using the command of the fathers (the instructions of Nephi and Jacob) as a controlling factor in determining the content and treatment of his text.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Which Nephite King Had the Gift of Interpretation? \(Mosiah 21:28\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 99 (May 13, 2016).

Omni 1:14 — The Mulekites Rejoice Over the Plates

Mosiah took the brass plates with him when he traveled down from the Land of Nephi into Zarahemla. The king, who was named Zarahemla, was “exceedingly” glad to finally see these plates which had the record of the Jews. Since Zarahemla was king, he probably was a descendant of Mulek, with a royal lineage that had attendant royal privileges. He probably did not know much about the details of where he came from, but Zarahemla probably did have knowledge that he was of royal blood and perhaps had knowledge that he was from some faraway place. The people of Zarahemla had lost their language, but that does not mean that they had completely lost all knowledge of their ancestral history.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Should Readers Pay Close Attention to the Mulekites? \(Omni 1:19\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 434 (May 17, 2018).

Omni 1:15-16 — How Did Mulek Travel to the New World?

There are interesting legends and a bit of lore about Mulek—his name and how he arrived on the American continent. The name “Melek” is the word for “king” in Hebrew. It is the opinion of some scholars that several passages in the Book of Mormon which reference the “king” should really be translated as “Mulek” and not “king.” If that is so, we can learn a little bit more about who Mulek might have been. Apparently, Mulek was a son of King Zedekiah. After Lehi left Jerusalem, King Zedekiah, along with his other sons, were taken into captivity by the Babylonians and were killed. However, Mulek was able to slip away somehow. We do not know how he got to the New World. I like to think that Mulek and his guardians found passage on a Phoenician ship. The Phoenicians, at this time, were notorious for their ship-building and sailing skills.

Sidon and Tyre were two major shipping centers in Phoenicia, not far from Jerusalem. These two cities were intense competitors—even enemies. Individuals and nations would not normally have traded or engaged in business with both of these centers of commerce. One of the cities was a trading partner with Egypt and the other a partner with Babylon. Egypt and Babylonia were rival nations and generally were not on good terms, which created the tension between Sidon and Tyre. Lehi probably traded with one or the other of these large shipping centers.

Hugh Nibley pointed out that there may have been a connection between the name of the large river running through the land of Zarahemla and the old world of Jerusalem and Phoenicia. That river was named “Sidon”—the same name as one of two large shipping centers in Phoenicia.

If Mulek was transported to the New World on a ship run by the Phoenicians from Sidon, they may have chosen to name the prominent river in their new land after their place of origin. When the Nephite people of Mosiah met the Mulekites, the land was already called “Zarahemla,” which is a Mulekite name. You would think that the primary river in the region would also be a Mulekite name—but it was not. This fact may be evidence of a Phoenician connection.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Has An Artifact That Relates to the Book of Mormon Been Found?](#) (Mosiah 25:2),” *KnoWhy* 103 (May 19, 2016).

Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “[Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?](#)” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 72–83, 117–18.

Words of Mormon

Chronology of Mormon’s Writings

Mormon was the chief abridger and editor of the full Book of Mormon. Periodically, he added editorial commentaries of his own that were skillfully woven into the texts of the primary authors in that record. Mormon also wrote two books within the Book of Mormon that bear his name (The Words of Mormon and the book of Mormon).

One may ask, “When did Mormon write these particular “words?” Words of Mormon 1:1–11 appear to have been part of Mormon’s farewell address and were among the very last of his writings. How do we know? Right there, in the first verse of Words of Mormon, he stated, “And now I, Mormon being about to deliver up the record into the hands of my son Moroni . . .” Then, in the same verse, Mormon explained that he delivered his abridgement of the plates to Moroni after he, Mormon, had “witnessed almost all the destruction of [his] people, the Nephites.” Verse 2 continued: “[I pray that God may] grant that he [Moroni] may survive,” but “it supposeth me that he will witness the entire destruction of my people.” So, Mormon wrote these passages when it was very close to the end of the Nephite nation, about A.D. 385.

The chart below (Figure 3) gives a chronology of the writings of Mormon. After reviewing the chart, it becomes apparent that Mormon’s sermon on good works and his

epistle on baptism were written at an earlier date and then subsequently inserted into the final record, as Moroni 7 and 8 respectively, by his son, Moroni.

Writings in the Book of Mormon

Writings of Mormon



Reference	Description of Text	Date Written*
W of M 1:1–2	On delivering plates to Moroni	A.D. 385
W of M 1:3–11	On abridging the plates of Nephi	A.D. 340
W of M 1:12–18	Account of Benjamin	A.D. 340
Helaman 3:13–17	On record keeping	A.D. 340
Helaman 12	On human nature	A.D. 341
3 Nephi 5:8–26	On record keeping	A.D. 341
3 Nephi 10:11–19	On searching the scriptures	A.D. 341
3 Nephi 26:8–21	On Christ's visit to the Americas	A.D. 341
3 Nephi 28:24–30:2	On Three Nephites and the gathering of Israel	A.D. 341
4 Nephi	Four generations of history	A.D. 342
Mormon 1:1–6:15	Autobiography	A.D. 384
Mormon 6:16–7:10	Lament over people and testimony to latter-day remnant	A.D. 384
Moroni 7	Sermon on good works	A.D. 334
Moroni 8	Epistle on baptism	A.D. 337
Moroni 9	Farewell epistle to Moroni	A.D. 385

*dates are approximate

Figure 3 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Writings of Mormon*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, chart 20.

The same chart shows that two chapters in Mormon (6–7) contain part of Mormon’s farewell wherein Mormon laments in Mormon 6:17–18, “O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you! Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But, behold, ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss.”

Then, after Mormon wrote about the destruction of his people and lamented their loss in Mormon 6–7, he wrote Words of Mormon just prior to giving the plates to his son, Moroni. Mormon expected that Moroni would then begin his own writings and abridgements. The text in Words of Mormon 1:1–11 contain the final words that Mormon wrote. Very likely, these eleven verses were also the last words translated by Joseph Smith. For greater clarity about the various plates and records that comprised the Book of Mormon, refer to the chart below (Figure 4).

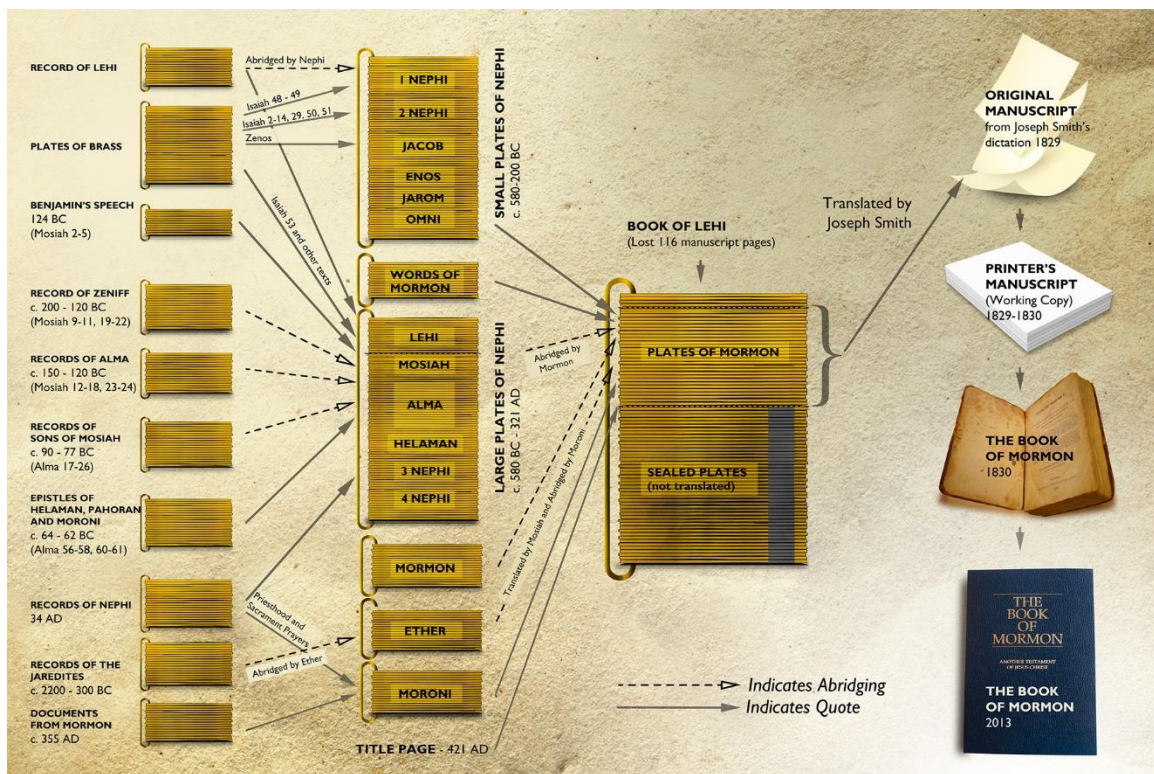


Figure 4 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Book of Mormon Plates and Records*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, chart 13.

Words of Mormon 1:1–11 — Mormon’s Final Words (Prayers for the Grace of God)

In his farewell address, Mormon chose not to speak to us, but to speak to God. Mormon recorded three of his prayers or pleadings with God. It was as though someone approached Mormon and said, “You have three wishes. What do you wish?”

Mormon’s first prayer is recorded in verse 2: “[M]ay God grant that [my son Moroni] may survive them [his people, the Nephites], that he may write somewhat concerning them, and somewhat concerning Christ, that perhaps someday it may profit them.” One of Mormon’s last prayers was to express concern for his son, Moroni. Primarily, Mormon pled with God to give Moroni time to complete the record and to write more about Christ. He did not ask God to give Moroni more time to prove that he and Moroni were actually right and that their stiff-necked brethren were wrong. Mormon’s first wish was that his people may profit by believing in Christ.

Mormon’s second wish is recorded in verse 8: “And my prayer to God is concerning my brethren.” Who were Mormon’s brethren? They were the enemies—the Lamanites and Nephites who had defected and were fighting against him. Mormon was expressing forgiveness for those who had turned against him. Is there a lesson in that for us? Mormon’s prayer continued: “[T]hat they may once again come to the knowledge of God, yea, the redemption of Christ; that they may once again be a delightsome people.”

The third prayer of Mormon is found in verse 11: “And I, Mormon, pray to God that [these records that have been kept so faithfully by so many people, including myself,] may be preserved from this time henceforth. And I know that they will be preserved.”

Why will the records be preserved? Because “there are great things written upon them, out of which [Mormon’s] people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God, which is written.” Mormon was very familiar with the writings of ancient Nephite and Lamanite prophets. He knew that many prophets revealed that we all shall be judged out of those things which are written in the books. There is gravity in knowing that this is the last thing that Mormon says. For more on being judged out of the books which have been written, see 2 Ne. 25:18; 29:11; 33:11, 14–15; 3 Ne. 27:23–27; Ether 5:4.

Words of Mormon 1:1–11 — An Overlap of Two Abridged Historical Records

Words of Mormon is often referred to as “a bridge” between the Small Plates of Nephi and the Large Plates. Even though Words of Mormon is, indeed, a bridge between records, there is complexity involved in the text and differing opinions regarding the structure and make-up of this book.

After a simple reading of the eighteen verses that comprise the text of Words of Mormon, one notices that the first eleven verses (1:1–11) are written using only first-person pronouns. There are twenty-two uses of the pronoun “I,” another twenty-two uses of the pronoun “we,” and one use of the pronoun “us” in these verses. They contain no third-person pronouns. Then, in the remaining verses (1:12–18) only third-person pronouns are used; no first-person pronouns are found in the latter half of the book. There is a significant shift in the narrative half-way through Words of Mormon. It appears that something worthy of attention is happening at the narrative mid-point of Words of Mormon.

Royal Skousen, who has done by far the most extensive work on the manuscripts and texts of the Book of Mormon, thinks that the prophet Mormon personally wrote (not abridged) Words of Mormon 1:1–11 as his final farewell address. Skousen emphasizes that the first-person pronouns in the first half of Words of Mormon and the absence of them in the second half is a clue that something happened. It is important to note that the book prior to Words of Mormon is Omni—the last book included by Mormon from the Small Plates of Nephi. The book immediately following Words of Mormon is Mosiah—Mormon’s abridgement of Mosiah’s reign from the Large Plates.

Remember that the first book on the Large Plates was the book of Lehi. However, Lehi’s record was lost when Martin Harris lost the first 116 pages that were translated from that record, and it appears that a very small portion of what was originally the beginning translation of Mosiah was not lost with those 116 pages.

When Martin Harris took the 116 printed pages from Joseph, he would not have taken a stack of collated printed pages for the Book of Mormon; he would instead have taken a “gather” (Figure 5). A “gather” is made by “gathering” several large sheets of printer’s paper that may appear to be printed out of order, folding the pages in half lengthwise and then tying the pages together with a string. When binding the volume, the gather would be folded or cut in half, resulting in a final stack of pages that are collated in proper order for the volume being printed. A printed volume may be completed in one gather or any number of gathers, depending on the length of the volume. There would have been several gathers that were put together in making the completed volume of the Book of Mormon.

It would have been highly unlikely that what was written on the gather that Harris took ended exactly at the end of the book of Omni or exactly at the end of Words of Mormon. Therefore, there would have been text from the original translation from the Large Plates that Martin Harris didn’t lose. That means that there would have been something

that Martin Harris did not take with him that had already been translated and that remained with Joseph. Maybe it was just a small part—perhaps a few verses.

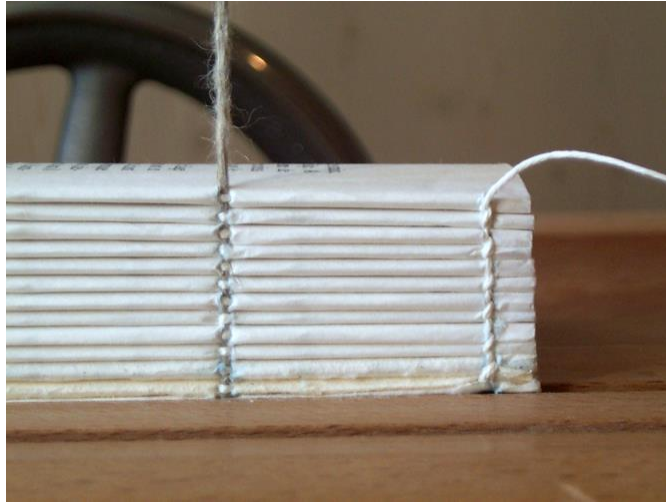


Figure 5 Twelve gatherings being bound in a book. Photo by Colporteur via Wikimedia Commons.

By close examination of the Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Royal Skousen discovered a possible explanation for the shift in narrative from first-person to the third-party account in Words of Mormon. There were two Book of Mormon manuscripts: 1) the Original Manuscript which was written by scribes as Joseph Smith dictated his translation from the golden plates, and 2) the Printer’s Manuscript, which was a copy of the original manuscript made by Oliver Cowdery for use by the printer. We do not have the Original Manuscript of the words of Omni, the Words of Mormon, or the first part of the Book of Mosiah. It would be useful if we did. All we have to work with is Oliver Cowdery’s Printer’s Manuscript. However, what is left of the printer’s manuscript is still very helpful.

Below is a copy of the page from the Printer’s Manuscript made by Oliver Cowdery showing the section from Words of Mormon where there is a narrative change (Figure 6). What is on the Printer’s Manuscript has fascinated textual scholars in the last couple of years. Look at where the text reads, “Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.” This is the last verse of Words of Mormon in printed volumes of the Book of Mormon. After the word “land,” Oliver Cowdery wrote the word “Chapter” and followed that by the Roman numeral III. Then, Cowdery put a little squiggle and wrote, “And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla . . .” This is what we now have as verse 1 from the book of Mosiah. Then, sometime after transcribing the Original Manuscript to create the Printer’s Manuscript, Cowdery

crossed out the Roman numeral III, changed it to a Roman numeral I (Chapter I), and inserted a notation “Book of Mosiah.” This likely indicates that at one point, what was initially called Chapter 3 began with the text that is now Mosiah 1:1. And, what was originally the last part of the original Mosiah chapter 2 (perhaps on page 117 of what was left when Harris took the 116-page gather) was appended to Words of Mormon by Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith after the 116 pages were lost. Thus became the text we have today. In the Preface to the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith spoke of these “one hundred and sixteen pages” that were “stolen and kept from me, notwithstanding my utmost exertions to recover it again.”

Mormon’s actual words may thus end at verse 11. Verses 12–18 were then what remained of the Large Plates translation after Martin Harris took and lost the 116 pages. These seven verses should be read as part of the introductory material initially found in the book of Mosiah.

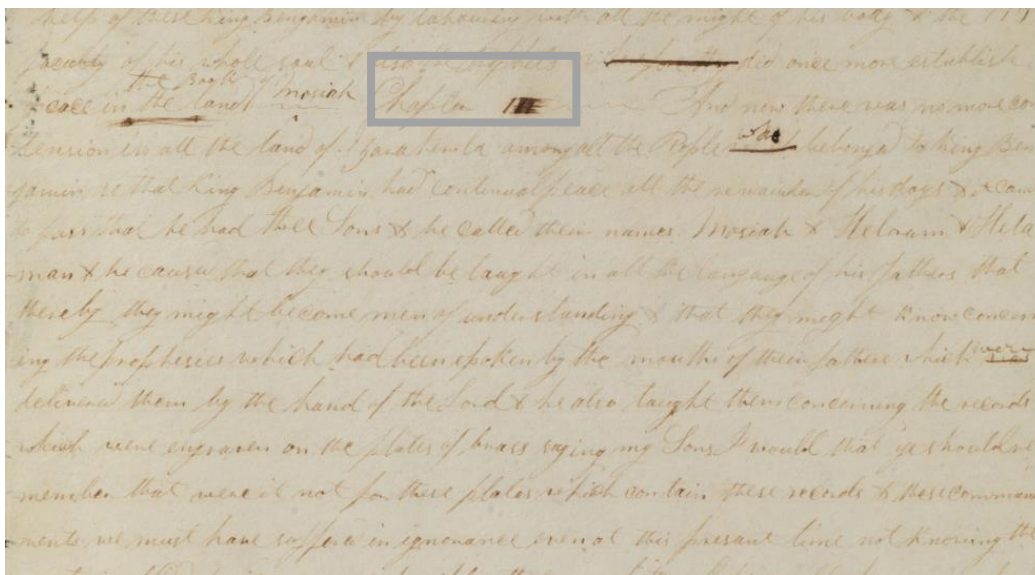


Figure 6 Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, showing where Oliver Cowdery “Chapter III” to “Chapter I”. Image via the Joseph Smith Papers website. <http://josephsmithpapers.org/>.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does the ‘Mosiah-First’ Translation Sequence Strengthen Faith?](#) (Words of Mormon 1:5),” *KnoWhy* 503 (February 22, 2019).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why is ‘Words of Mormon’ at the End of the Small Plates?](#) (Words of Mormon 1:3),” *KnoWhy* 78 (April 14, 2016).

Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, 1923 photostatic copies, p. 117, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed 9 Mar. 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper->

[summary/printers-manuscript-of-the-book-of-mormon-circa-august-1829-circa-january-1830/121](#).

Words of Mormon 1:12–18 — That Which Had Been Translated and Retained

When Joseph Smith received possession of the plates again, after they had been taken back by the Angel Moroni in 1828 because of issues arising from the lost 116 pages that summer, Smith received a revelation concerning how to go forward with the translation process. In D&C 10:41 (emphasis added), the Lord instructed Joseph: “Therefore, you shall translate the engravings which are on the plates of Nephi, down even till you come to the reign of king Benjamin, or *until you come to that which you have translated, which you have retained.*”

The few verses that comprise the text of Words of Mormon give us a bigger picture of the composition of the Book of Mormon. It is really quite remarkable that this, like so many other things, ends up being a very strong confirmation of the accuracy of the Book of Mormon, of its miraculous coming forth, and of the way in which the dictation occurred under difficult circumstances. It is hard enough for us to read the record and figure out what happened. Imagine Joseph Smith simply dictating these segments and putting them all together in the way that they all came through and making good sense. Although the details of how this precisely happened continues to be explored, discussed, and debated, it is textually clear that there actually were two records—the Words of Mormon and the book of Mosiah—that collided at this particular juncture and at the point where Harris lost the 1828 translation of the large plates down to and into the first part of the book of Mosiah.

Further Reading

Jack M. Lyon and Kent R. Minson, “[When Pages Collide: Dissecting the Words of Mormon](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2012): 120–136.

Brant A. Gardner, “[When Hypotheses Collide: Responding to Lyon and Minson’s ‘When Pages Collide’](#),” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013): 105–119. As this topic continues to be discussed, see the [comments](#) between Gardner and Lyon as recently as November 26, 2019.

Royal Skousen, “[Some Textual Changes for a Scholarly Study of the Book of Mormon](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2012): 99–117.

Words of Mormon 1:15 — False Christs among the Nephites

The final section of what is now called the Words of Mormon picks up during the early years of King Benjamin’s reign, when he had to deal with “much contention” and “many dissensions” among his people. Verse 15 states that “there had been false Christs.” The

word “Christ” is equivalent to the word “Messiah” in Hebrew, which means “anointed one.” In other words, “there had been many false [Messiahs]” in the land. It is of interest to note that the two names “Mosiah” and “Messiah” would have been very similar in Hebrew. “Mosiah” is also the way in which the word for “Redeemer” is vocalized in Hebrew. It may have been that King Benjamin had to deal with people claiming that it was their job not just to be a religious leader (a priest or anointed one), but to be a political leader of some kind.

The record goes on to state that “there had been false prophets, and false preachers and teachers” and they were all “punished according to their crimes.” Was it a “crime” to preach falsehoods among the people and to hold oneself out as a “Messiah” to the people? The people of Zarahemla had chosen to live under Nephite law, which was the Law of Moses. Under the Law of Moses, a person could be severely punished for causing dissention by spreading falsehoods and holding oneself out as a prophet when one didn’t have that calling from God. Freedom of religion did not exist in this world—especially when religion was being used for political purposes. During the early part of his rule, King Benjamin had to deal with the formation of sub-groups of people with different religious beliefs and political motives. Benjamin was able to unify his people by creating a unified pluralist society where two groups of people of different political and historical backgrounds were accommodated and could thrive through the making and keeping of a centralizing covenant with God, their Heavenly King. The inspiring peace that King Benjamin was able to accomplish under this unique situation stands as a model for governing in a religiously pluralistic society.

Like King Benjamin, Mormon himself had wrestled with the problem of false prophets, false preachers, and false teachers among his people. He was familiar with dissensions and the stiffneckedness of people. However, Mormon had a much larger population to deal with and probably did not have the benefit that King Benjamin had with “many holy men” and “holy prophets who were among his people” to establish peace in the land. Mormon and his son, Moroni, were among the few lone outliers of remaining righteous leaders among their people.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Did King Benjamin’s Speech Lead to Nephite Democracy?](#) (Mosiah 29:32),” *KnoWhy* 301 (April 17, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Was Mosiah a Type of Christ?](#) (Mosiah 26:12),” *KnoWhy* 104 (May 20, 2016).

CELEBRATING THE RESTORATION

John W. Welch Notes



Day 1: Seeing the Hand of God in History

Twenty-five years ago, I was deeply struck, seeing up close many striking details present in the rise of Christianity two thousand years ago with parallels in the rise of the Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ two hundred years ago. At that time, I was teaching a course at BYU on Masada and the world of the New Testament. At the same, I was editing *BYU Studies* and Church history publications for the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute at BYU.

Fascinatingly, the social and historical developments that set the stage for Jesus Christ have strong counterparts in the cultural and religious developments that prepared the way for the Restoration of the Gospel by Joseph Smith. As I began tabulating these parallels, the case became stronger and more interesting than I had ever surmised. I ended up publishing the following article about these similarities that exist between early Mormonism and early Christianity.

I have spent much of my life studying these two focal points in world history. It makes sense that certain things needed to be in place in order for Jesus to have had even a chance of accomplishing his mission, attracting a committed following, and leaving a lasting legacy. Many of those same conditions also needed to be present in order for Joseph Smith to fulfill his calling, to find converts in large numbers, and leave his indelible impact on the world. Both Jesus and Joseph spoke words that were treasured, written down, and published widely. Both Jesus and Joseph ordained leaders, established an organization that could carry forward after their martyrdoms, only 33 and 38 years after their births.

Down to minute details, these comparisons show that if either Jesus or Joseph had been born 30 years *earlier*, they would have been born in tumultuous times at the beginning of new political regimes, either under King Herod or in the Revolutionary War. Getting even a foothold would have been scarcely possible. Had either of them been born 30 years *later*, they would have been overwhelmed with devastating civil wars, the Jewish War in the 60s or the War between the States in the 1860s. Either way, they could not have accomplished most of what they needed to do. The window was tiny.



Figure 1 Figure of Christ by Heinrich Hoffman and Portrait of Joseph Smith likely by William Warner Major. Images via Wikimedia Commons.

As my article indicates, these unique conditions offer a cumulative case of impressive evidence that the hand of God was at work in these two parallel moments in the history of the salvation of all the world. Four charts (Tables 1, 2, 3, 4) make it easy for readers to scan through the lists of these crucial developments. They began over three hundred years beforehand, preparing the way for the impacts of the long-awaited and foreordained lives of the promised Savior Jesus Christ and of his prophetic Restorer Joseph Smith.

Table 1 Parallels in Preparations and Historical Settings

Early Christianity	Early Mormonism
<p>c. 330 B.C. Alexander the Great spreads widely the new influence of Hellenism and rationalism, Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, Epicurus</p>	<p>c. 300 years before Joseph Smith, rationalism, Renaissance and Reformation widely influential, Copernicus, Columbus, Luther, Descartes</p>
<p>Septuagint Greek version of the Old Testament is translated by c. 200 B.C., becomes accepted as standard by many Jews, translated by 70 scholars into the common daily language, used heavily in early Christian writings</p>	<p>The King James Version is completed in 1611, 200 years before Joseph Smith, becomes accepted as the standard English Bible, translated by 55 scholars into the common daily language, used heavily in Restoration writings</p>
<p>167 B.C. Maccabean revolt against Seleucids in Jerusalem, reign of strict Jews, their descendants become the Pharisees, purists, separatists</p>	<p>165 years before Joseph Smith, Cromwell rebels in 1640, strict Puritans reign, their descendants flee from secularism</p>
<p>Battle of Actium, 31 B.C., Augustus Caesar defeats Anthony and Cleopatra, ushering in a new era of Roman government and society</p>	<p>30 years before Joseph’s birth in 1805, the American Revolution dramatically begins a new era, George Washington defeats the British</p>
<p>The Pax Augusta affords worldwide peace, general civil and individual freedom with unprecedented optimism and unity</p>	<p>United States Constitution and Bill of Rights protects individual freedoms, promotes peace and engenders great optimism and unity</p>
<p>Old aristocratic arrangements overthrown while underlying Roman mores remain in place, period of legal transition, new horizons beckon</p>	<p>Tory ties to England broken while underlying common law and economy remains in tact, period of legal transition, new frontiers beckon</p>
<p>Romans very attentive to their own gods while mostly tolerating the worship of other gods such as Isis, Mithras, a pluralistic religious world</p>	<p>Most states and religious groups very attentive to their own observances while mostly tolerating religious freedom, a pluralistic religious world</p>

Religious freedoms for the Jews are protected by legal decrees by Julius Caesar and others	Religious freedom is specifically protected by bills of rights and constitutional provisions
Opportunity to form private organizations, including funerary collegia, client cults, house churches, business partnerships	Freedom of association is protected, the rise of corporations and trusts allow formation of private religious and business organizations
Expansion of Roman road system, travel becomes common over considerable distances. Paul travels extensively, including trips to Asia Minor, Greece, Jerusalem, and Rome	Opening Cumberland Gap, canals and federal roads allows for explosive mobility. Joseph Smith travels extensively, including 4 trips to Missouri, others to Boston, Canada, and Washington
Mediterranean made safe for sea travel as pirates are eliminated, harbors built	Safety and efficiency of Atlantic crossings allow missionary travel, immigration, piracy controlled
Economic expansion in Judea under Herod the Great produces unprecedented prosperity, independent opportunities, fabulous construction projects, worker dislocations, family and social changes	Economic opportunism blossoms with new markets, financial independence and ability, the Erie Canal, western boom towns along the Mississippi, bringing personal mobility, family and social changes
Roman innovation brought an age of new construction, engineering, and science, building aqueducts, roads, harbors	Industrial revolution brings new age of innovations and inventions, making of steam engines, railroads, machines
Education and literacy is high, even higher than once thought, noticeably among Jews	Education and literacy is widespread and highly valued, converts are educated readers
Greek is spoken as the common language in the eastern empire, a second language in the west	English as a widespread language carried abroad by the expansion of the British empire
Books, parchment production, scrolls, and libraries are more common and available, a blossoming of literature, Horace, Virgil	Printing presses, books, newspapers, and libraries are available in most towns, blossoming of romantic literature, transcendentalism
A time of individual religious choice, particularly between many Jewish sects and	A time of personal religious choice in America, between many churches,

movements, Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, as well as devotees of numerous Greek and Roman gods, Stoics, Cynics, Epicureans, and others	Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Catholics, Quakers, Mennonites, Unitarians, Seekers, Transcendentalists, and others
Religious controversy is bewilderingly common, spontaneous religious questions and arguments especially in Jewish culture	Religious controversy is an ordinary part of public discourse, strong opinions on religious issues mattered to individuals in America
Old religions threatened, for example Artemis cult in Ephesus (Acts 19), old ways becoming expensive to maintain	Old religions are vulnerable to revivals, reforms, new religions offer less expensive and challenging alternatives
Messianic expectation is high, ideal utopian age expected by many groups, religious agitation is high, large crowds come out to see John the Baptist or Jesus	Apocalyptic fervor is high, millenarianism is popular, visionary utopian societies flourish, religious frenzy is high, large crowds gather for revivals throughout the country
Divination, incantations, exorcism, mysticism present in respectable popular culture	Visions, dreams, seers, amulets, supernaturalism present in respectable popular culture
Galilee, an expansion area for Jewish settlement in the first century before Christ	New England, an expansion area for settlement in the eighteenth century
Galilee, stony soil, demanding hard work, harboring revolutionary tendencies, freedom Zealots distrusted	New England, stony soil, hard work, revolutionary independence, freedom advocates disdained
Rise of powerful parties battling for control in the Jewish world, Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots	Rise of political parties struggling for control over state, regional, and federal politics
Christians flee Jerusalem, James (brother of Jesus) killed, Christians dispersed, Peter, Paul and others martyred, nowhere to gather	Exodus of Mormons out of Illinois, Joseph and his brother Hyrum martyred, the Saints trek across the Plains and gather to Zion
Jewish Civil War (4 years long) and destruction of the Temple, A.D. 66–70, about 35 years after the ministry of Jesus	American Civil War (4 years long), devastation of Missouri and elsewhere, 1861–1865, 31–35 years after the organization of the Church

Table 2 **Comparable Foundings: Jesus and Joseph Smith**

Early Christianity	Early Mormonism
Jesus' ministry appears suddenly, is dramatic, innovative, controversial, and polarizing	Joseph Smith's ministry is sudden, dramatic, innovative, controversial, and polarizing
The new religious movement is initiated by angels appearing to Zacharias, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds at Bethlehem; Gabriel appears at least five times	The new religious movement is initiated by angels including Moroni, John the Baptist, Peter, James, John; Moroni appears at least twenty times
The voice of God the Father at baptism acknowledges the Son	God the Father at the First Vision introduces the Son in similar words
Opposition by Satan, temptations of Jesus, expelling devils	Confrontations with Satan and his forces, exposing angels of darkness
The movement grows around a central kinship family, that of Jesus, Mary, John the Baptist, James the brother of Jesus, John	The movement centers on the Smith family, Joseph Sr., Lucy, Joseph, Emma, Hyrum, Samuel, uncles, cousins
Family ties are crucial among the earliest converts: Peter and Andrew; the sons of Zebedee; family of Lazarus, Mary, Martha	Family ties are close among the Smiths, the Whitmers, Knights, Johnsons, Pratts, Snows, and many other member families
Jesus is a remarkable youth, answering the rabbis questions at the temple and teaching in the synagogue	Joseph Smith at young age translates, gives bold new answers to prevailing questions
Memories and sayings are preserved, letters and books are written and kept very early	Extensive record keeping from the beginning, revelations recorded, diaries and minutes kept
Various accounts survive of baptism of Jesus	Various accounts survive of the First Vision
Jesus and Paul preach in the synagogues	Missionaries preach in others' churches

Jesus opposes the temple establishment, runs counter to the prevailing culture	Joseph Smith opposes many democratic themes, runs counter to dominant politics
Moses and Elijah with Peter, James and John on Mount of Transfiguration; Jesus draws strength by association with powerful figures	Appearances of Moses, Elijah, Peter, James and John; Joseph draws strength by connection with powerful past figures
House churches at first, in Capernaum, Thessalonica, Philippi, Corinth	House churches at first, Peter Whitmer farm, John Johnson home
Some teachings not openly shared with all, cast not your pearls or holy things before the dogs (Matthew 7:6)	Ritual teachings kept esoteric, sacred, certain teachings or experiences not openly taught at first
Jesus and the Temple, he always went there when in Jerusalem, taught there daily, healed there, would rebuild the temple	Joseph Smith and the Temple, always concerned about establishing temples in Kirtland, Independence, Far West, Nauvoo
Jesus and missionary fervor, very early, sent out the Twelve and then the Seventy, eventually to remote locations	Joseph and missionary fervor, at time of great risk, sent out the Twelve and then Seventies, eventually to remote locations
New scripture created, Christian texts added to Jewish	New scripture created, Mormon revelations added to Jewish and Christian writings
Bold new practices, some do not last, such as holding property in common	Bold new practices, some do not last, such as united order, wealth redefinition
Great promises of exaltation, entering God's presence and obtaining all, testimonials of benefits in spite of costs	Great promises of exaltation, becoming as God and progressing eternally, testimonials of benefits in spite of costs
Built on ideas found in the basic surrounding culture, parallels can be seen in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls and contemporary writings	Built on words and attitudes in surrounding environment, parallels can be found in the nineteenth-century religious milieu
Cultural continuity with conventional Jewish religion was high	Cultural continuity with conventional Christianity was high

Heavy dependence on the Old Testament, making strong truth claims about the original meaning of old scripture	Heavy dependence on the Old and New Testaments, making strong truth claims about understanding their original meanings
Readapting broad Old Testament themes for Christian purposes	Reworking of biblical themes for Mormon purposes
Claims of power to speak and act with divine authority	Claims of authority to speak and act with divine authority
Pre-creedal statements of belief are fluid, simple	Early articles of faith are fluid, uncomplicated
Cosmic signs, star at the birth of Christ, omen at death of Herod Agrippa	Stars fell in Missouri, 1833, seen as a sign of heavenly import
Prophecy about impending destruction, apocalyptic eschatology (see Matthew 24)	Prophecy about impending millenarian destruction, the last days (see D&C 45)
Miracles of Jesus are impressive and abundant	Miracles of Joseph are important and persuasive
Fears of occult powers are part of the undoing of Jesus after the raising of Lazarus, as seen in the accusation that he was a trickster	The undoing of Joseph Smith is traceable to his claims of access to the supernatural, suspicions that he was a deceiver
Violent crucifixion of Jesus, age 33	Violent shooting of Joseph Smith, age 38
Death of Jesus is caused by the failure of Pontius Pilate to protect him	Death of Joseph is caused by the failure of Thomas Ford to protect him

Table 3 Analogous Apostleships

Early Christianity	Early Mormonism
Uncertainty about immediate apostolic succession in leadership in Jerusalem, Corinth, after the unexpected death of Jesus	Similar uncertainty about immediate apostolic succession in leadership in Nauvoo after the unexpected death of Joseph

Group validation at Pentecost in Acts 2, rapid initial growth, enthusiasm; validation of Peter as successor	Group spiritual outpourings, rapid burst of growth, enthusiasm; validation of Brigham Young as successor
Separation of spiritual and temporal administration by the early apostles in Acts 6	Division of responsibilities between Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods
Joining requires little teaching; membership marked by baptism, Acts 3, 8	Converts join after little time or training; membership marked by baptism
People join from all social and economic groups, but mainly middle class, unaffiliated	People join from all strata of society, but mainly middle class, mobile
Great success comes in territories that have been recently populated, Philippi, Corinth	Great success comes in settling in expansion areas, Western Reserve, Missouri, Nauvoo
Women play important roles in the community, exceeding the opportunities normally afforded in the surrounding culture	Women given important roles, organization, vote, service, exceeding those normally afforded in nineteenth century culture
Great interest in prophecy, foretelling the future	Prevalence of futuristic speech, prophetic predictions
Speaking in tongues in Acts, other gifts of the spirit in Corinth	Speaking in tongues in Kirtland, other gifts of the spirit in Nauvoo
Divisions arise quickly in Corinth and Galatia	Divisions arise soon in Kirtland and Missouri
False apostles reject Paul's authority, apostasy underway	Apostasy of half of the twelve apostles in Kirtland in 1837
Free riders and false prophets are dealt with severely; social costs of membership are high	Nonconformists expelled quickly; distinctive stigmas of membership present entry barriers
Leaders are often imprisoned; Peter, John, Paul in Jerusalem; Paul in Philippi, Caesarea	Leaders are often imprisoned; jails in Richmond, Liberty, Carthage
Paul rises above the rough treatment of the prison guard in Philippi	Joseph rises above the vulgar treatment of prison guard in Richmond

Paul articulates phrases that become elements in enduring statements of faith	Joseph Smith articulates similar statements that become Articles of Faith
Paul travels to Rome to plead his cause and to testify to Caesar	Joseph travels to Washington to set his cause before the President
Letters of Peter, John, James, Jude and Paul become scripture in the New Testament	Joseph Smith's letters are canonized in Doctrine and Covenants 121–23, 127–28
Concerns arise in Thessalonika and Corinth over those who had died before knowing the truth	Concerns arise in Nauvoo over those who had died, such as Alvin, before the restoration of the truth
Great promises, to become sons of God	Great promises, to rise to celestial glory
Earliest priesthood instructions in 1 Corinthians deal with administration of the sacrament	Earliest instructions in the 1830 Articles and Covenants deal with administration of the sacrament
Borrowing of Jewish psalms while writing new Christian hymns	Borrowing of Christian hymns while writing new LDS hymns

Table 4 **Similar Aftermaths**

Early Christianity	Early Mormonism
Ideological opposition through emperor-worship, this-worldliness	Ideological opposition from secularism, atheistic scientism
The end did not come as quickly as assumed (see 2 Peter 3:1–9), people adjusted	The end did not come as expected, people need to adjust to unfulfilled expectations
Jewish Civil War (5 years long) and destruction of the Temple, A.D. 66–70, 35 years after the ministry of Jesus	American Civil War (5 years long) and devastation of Missouri, 1861–1865, 31 years after the organization of the Church

Christians get out of Jerusalem, James (brother of Jesus) killed, Peter goes to Mesopotamia, Christians move to Pella ¹	Mormons get out of Illinois, Joseph and his brother Hyrum killed, the Saints trek across the Plains
Impact of Jewish War on Jewish history, loss of Jewish influence in Roman empire ²	Great impact of 1857 on Mormon history, Mormon isolation in the West
No real gathering place, concentration in certain cities around bishops, Rome eventually becomes central in the West	Gathering to Zion as focus of concentration except for dissenting groups, Salt Lake City becomes central in the West
Struggle against multiple traditions and interpretations of Christ	Struggle against many dissenters and early schismatic groups
Some early Christians stop with the baptism of John (Acts 19:2), do not receive the Holy Ghost through the higher priesthood	David Whitmer and some stop with events of 1829-31, baptism and initial teachings, do not accept the higher priesthood
Sons of Sceva and early Jewish opponents to Christianity (Acts 19:14)	Joseph Smith describes opposing Campbellite pamphleteers as sons of Sceva ³
Cultural baggage brought by converts into local congregations, hellenistic ideas, notions of Roman patronage, honor and shame	Cultural baggage brought by converts into church thinking and writing, influence of Protestantism on Mormon writers
Effect of loss of the Temple in Jerusalem, Christian envy of the temple	Temporary loss of the temple in Nauvoo, continued focus on temples
Memory of Jesus is transmitted by Paul and John to Polycarp and second generation	Memory of Joseph is transmitted by Brigham Young and John Taylor to next generation
Early Christians Polycarp and Ignatius focus on historical facts, later writers on theology	Early Mormons stand more on historicity of founding events, less on theology
Religion is based on narrative theology, not systematic theology	Religious expression is based on episodes and personal experiences, not theory
Docetists are scandalized by supernatural elements in Christ	RLDS and secular Mormons minimize miraculous beginnings of Mormonism

Doctrinal disputes arise very early, alternative teachings abound	Doctrinal disputes and dissenting group form very early
Concern over asserting and establishing orthodoxy in the face of diverse heresies, Gnostics, Jewish syncretists, or secularists	Concern over asserting and establishing orthodoxy as divergent groups arise, Rigdonites, Godbeites, Reorganites
Public concerns and doubts about loyalty of Jews and Christians to the Roman Empire	Public concerns and doubts about Mormons, kingdom building and loyalty to United States
Paul frequently in courts of law, early suspicions and legal trials of Christians in Pontus	Joseph Smith frequently in courts of law, suspicious legal trials of Joseph Smith in New York
Jews paint Christians in poor light, bad public image ⁴	Mormons receive terrible image in the establishment press
Christians are considered to be fanatics	Mormons are considered to be fanatics
Christians are used as scapegoats for great fire of Rome by Nero ⁵	Mormons are used as scapegoats in 1857 U.S. politics
Self-identity of Christians is established by martyrdoms of Ignatius, Polycarp, whose deaths come at crucial moment of failed expectations ⁶	Self-identity of Mormons is established in suffering and martyrdoms, which reinforce the faith at crucial moments of failed expectations
Rise of apologetic and polemical writings as interaction with host culture increases	Rise of apologetic debates as Mormons emerge in early twentieth century
External discourse shifts to internal discourse in the late second century	Some Latter-day Saints talking more in terms of the world in its second century
Epidemics plague Roman empire allowing Christianity to grow more rapidly than the general population ⁷	U.S. Civil War and World Wars I and II allow for population advances of Mormons vis-a-vis the rest of the population
Early Christians find theological meanings for suffering in God's schooling ⁸	The Saints find theological meanings for suffering as valuable human experience

Success of early Christianity is based largely on love and welfare to the sick and needy ⁹	LDS emphasis on charity and welfare, caring for the sick and the poor
Callistus, bishop of Rome, approves just concubinage for Christian women ¹⁰	Mormon practice of plural marriage
Importance of urban centers, urban Christianity in the second and third centuries	Importance of stakes, missionary success in urban settings in modern era
Diocletian's first edict of 303 required confiscation of church property, meetings forbidden, second edict arrested clergy ¹¹	Edmunds Act (1882) leads to the arrest of leaders, Edmunds-Tucker Act (1887) to the confiscation of church property
Edicts requiring all inhabitants of the empire to sacrifice to Roman gods, on pain of death, selectively enforced ¹²	Extermination Order in Missouri, selectively enforced

Further Reading

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

Day 2: Accounts of the First Vision

How many accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision in 1820 are there? Their sheer number can make things confusing. But the below article by Dean C. Jessee can be very helpful in answering this question. Reading the full texts of this whole collection of First Vision accounts was for me a powerful spiritual experience. The impact of these original writings is immeasurable. I recommend reading them slowly, thoughtfully, and at times even out loud.

Dean Jessee is the documentary historian whose work, beginning already in the 1960s, blazed the trail for the full Joseph Smith's Papers project that we now are blessed to have. Dean's article, originally published in *BYU Studies* in 1969, as updated here for Joseph Smith's bicentennial in 2005, gives the complete texts of 8 accounts in Joseph's own first-person voice. It also includes 5 substantial accounts written by witnesses who had no doubt heard Joseph tell of this all-important experience.

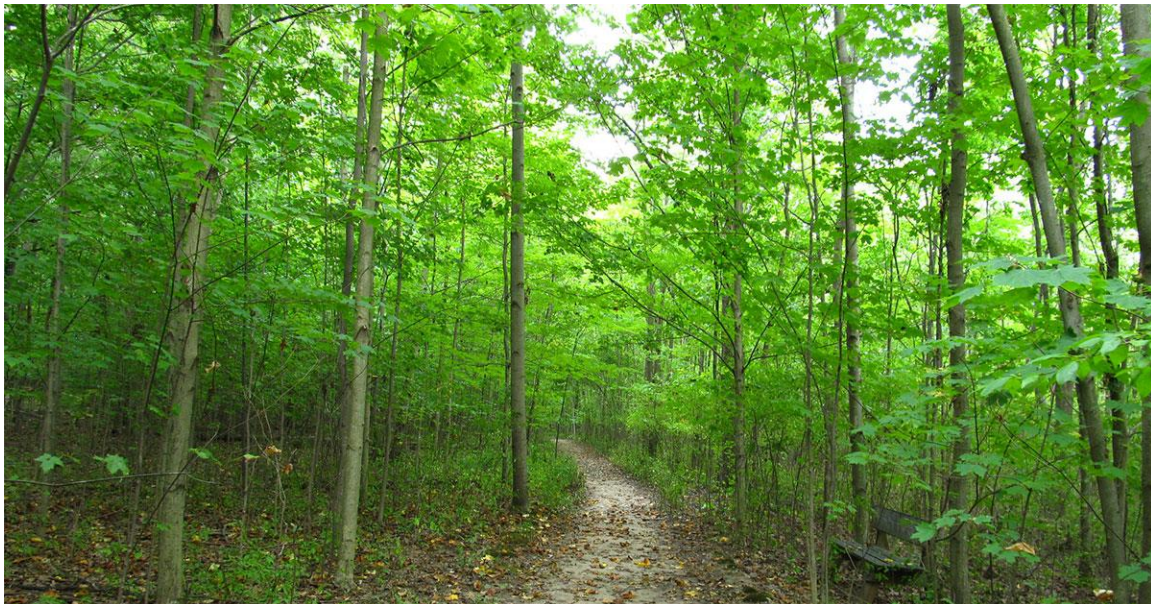


Figure 2 *The Sacred Grove*. Photo by Ken Lund via Flickr.

The Joseph's main account of this stunning event is included in the Pearl of Great Price, which was canonized as scripture in 1880. See Joseph Smith's History (JS-H 1:8-26). Those verses are an extract from *The History of the Church*, which Joseph Smith began dictating in 1838. Thus, it is often called the 1838 account. It is by far Joseph's most familiar account.

All these accounts are commonly referred to by the year in which they were written, such as the 1832 account, or the 1835 accounts, etc. But all of them report things Joseph experienced in 1820. Sometimes people will refer to the "four" First Vision accounts, because the content of those four accounts is most similar. Several of these 13 accounts are also available on <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/>

In addition, personal journals or recollections (not included here) of ten other people have been located, mentioning times when they heard Joseph tell about his First Vision. Although these usually short statements add little to our knowledge of what Joseph saw or heard in 1820, the quantity of these accounts confirms that Joseph spoke fairly frequently, openly, and candidly to a wide range of people, both in private or in public, about his first vision of the living Lord Jesus Christ.

Further Reading

Dean C. Jessee, "[The Earliest Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision](#)," in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, edited by John W. Welch, 1–35. Provo, UT/Salt Lake City: BYU Press/Deseret Book, 2005.



Figure 3 Image from *Ask of God: Joseph Smith's First Vision*. Image via ChurchofJesusChrist.org

Day 3: Differences and Similarities in the First Vision Accounts

The article for today goes farther than any other publication in analyzing the elements mentioned by Joseph Smith in his accounts of his First Vision. The chapter below builds on an article published in 1970 by Professor James B. Allen in the official Church magazine, *The Improvement Era*. This chapter discusses in detail how the differences in these accounts can be understood.

A first step in understanding these accounts is to appreciate the various audiences that Joseph had in mind as he wrote or spoke about this overwhelming experience. This study offers a reader-response analysis for each of these accounts, suggesting how each audience would have heard Joseph's narrative. Usually it is clear that Joseph's style and also the details that he chose to include in each of his tellings were aimed at communicating most effectively with each audience in particular.

Next, this chapter organizes the details in these main accounts. Table 1 tabulates the circumstances or concerns that each account mentions as having played a role in leading up to the First Vision. Also in this table are particular rows helping to date the vision and in comparing the concerns that Joseph expressed in each account.

In Table 2, the details reported about Joseph's quest and struggles in the grove are given. It is interesting to notice that some elements appear in several of these accounts, while other details appear only in a few. Interestingly, there is no particular chronological development evident in these scatter graphs. For example, some elements appear in the early accounts and also in the later accounts, but not in the middle accounts. These differences appear to be result of the various audiences and the lengths of time or space that Joseph had available for each of his tellings.

In Table 3, the data is organized showing what Joseph reported as having seen in each of these accounts. The various accounts do not contradict each other, but each adds to a full and interesting view of all that quite certainly happened in Joseph's original experience itself. Interestingly, no single detail is reported in every one of the accounts. On average, about four of the accounts will mention each of the points about what Joseph saw and asked.

And as seen in Table 4, the messages and information received by Joseph as this vision progressed are displayed. Joseph heard and learned all that a person of his age and with his particular concerns could have asked for, and even more. At least ten different things were learned by Joseph Smith in the First Vision. In addition, he was told many other things that he was unable or told not to write.

Finally, Table 5 processes nine factors in the aftermath of the Vision. Five of the accounts mention only one aftermath, while three of them speak of Joseph being filled with calmness, comfort and peace. Five of them speak of Joseph's interactions with other people shortly following his vision. Most of these efforts met with rejection, if not hostility.

These details all add up. They make sense, even though they were told at various times and to various audiences. They ring true. This is how true witnesses sound. They don't repeatedly give a rehearsed, stock account. They remember and include various details within the overall framework of their memory of what happened. For Joseph, the reality of having two personages appear, exactly like each other, and for God the Father then to introduce his Son Jesus Christ, saying "This is my beloved Son, hear him," was emblazoned upon his soul. This was the heart of Joseph's experience and testimony.

Further Reading

James B. Allen and John W. Welch, "Analysis of Joseph Smith's Accounts of His First Vision," in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, edited by John W. Welch, 37–77. Provo, UT/Salt Lake City: BYU Press/Deseret Book, 2005.

**Table 1: Background Conditions
Mentioned in the First Vision Accounts**

	1832 Smith	1835 Documents	1838 Smith	1840 Pratt	1842 and 1843 Smith	1842 Hyde	1843 Richards	1843 White	1844 Neilbaur
Joseph's age 14 or about 14		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Joseph's age 15 or about 15	✓			✓					
Religious excitement of the period			✓					✓	✓
Wanted to get religion									✓
Joseph's concern for his soul (or future state)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			
His quest for forgiveness of sin	✓								
Joseph's concern for mankind in general	✓								
Confusion or strife among denominations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Insincerity and bad feelings among religionists			✓			✓			
No church built or set up as in New Testament	✓						✓		
His quest to know which church (if any) was right	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Convinced of God's goodness and greatness	✓					✓			
Reason told him there was only one truth				✓	✓	✓			
All could not be right, God not author of confusion					✓				
Not to rely on chance but positive evidence				✓		✓			
His searching the scriptures, James 1:5	*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

*Includes the phrase "no respecter to persons."

Table 3: What Joseph Smith Saw and Asked

	1832 Smith	1835 Documents	1838 Smith	1840 Pratt	1842 and 1843 Smith	1842 Hyde	1843 Richards	1843 White	1844 Neibaur
Appearance of light or pillar of light	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	
Appearance of fire or pillar of fire		✓							✓
Light brighter than the sun	✓		✓		✓				
Above my head		✓	✓						
Light descended from above	✓		✓	✓					✓
Gradually			✓	✓					✓
Flame rested on trees				✓					✓
Light rested on Joseph	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
Light all around		✓		✓	✓				
First one personage in pillar, then another	*	✓						✓	✓
Two personages			✓	✓	✓	✓			
Exactly like each other		✓		✓	✓	✓			
Glory, defies description			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Appearance of many angels		✓							
Joseph asks which church to join or which is right			✓					✓	✓

*Possibly implied; see discussion on pp. 66–67.

Table 4: What Joseph Smith Heard

	1832 Smith	1835 Documents	1838 Smith	1840 Pratt	1842 and 1843 Smith	1842 Hyde	1843 Richards	1843 White	1844 Neilbaur
Father introduced or testified of the Son		✓	✓					✓	✓
Joseph called by name	✓		✓						
Your prayers are answered, special blessing to be given						✓			
Thy sins are forgiven	✓	✓		✓					
Go thy way, keep the commandments	✓								
Jesus described himself	✓								
Join no church			✓			✓		✓	
Do not join Methodists									✓
All wrong, none right	✓		✓						✓
None do good	✓								✓
All in sin, gone astray, broken everlasting covenant	✓						✓		✓
All professors of religion corrupt			✓					✓	
Creeds are an abomination			✓						
All churches teach false doctrine				✓	✓	✓			
Draw near with lips only	✓		✓						
Form of godliness but deny the power thereof			✓						
Forbidden again to join any church			✓	✓					
None acknowledged as his church, kingdom, people				✓	✓	✓			✓
Lord angry, comes quickly	✓								
Gospel fullness promised				✓	✓	✓			

Table 5: Aftermaths of the Vision

	1832 Smith	1835 Documents	1838 Smith	1840 Pratt	1842 and 1843 Smith	1842 Hyde	1843 Richards	1843 White	1844 Neibaur
Lying on his back			✓						
Uncommonly feeble									✓
Joseph filled with love	✓								
Joseph filled with joy	✓	✓							
Joseph filled with calmness, comfort, peace				✓		✓			✓
Ponder in heart	✓								
Lord was with Joseph	✓								
Tried to get others to believe the story	✓		✓					✓	✓
Many tried to oppose Joseph unsuccessfully			✓				✓	✓	

Day 4: Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon

This next study for this week’s review is a detailed, documentary chronology of the events surrounding the translation and coming forth of the Book of Mormon. It is a convincing witness that Jesus is the very eternal Son of God and that God is still a God of miracles.

To say the least, lots of things happened, especially in the short period between April 5, 1829, and June 30, 1829. In all, it is amazing. So much was done, and some many records shed light on so many particulars. In the first 41 pages of “The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon,” I provide a day-by-day factual record. Also included is a detailed, day-by-day chart, published by BYU Studies, showing where in the translation process Joseph and his scribes (mainly Oliver Cowdery) were each day from the beginning of April to June.



Figure 4 Peter Whitmer cabin in Fayette, New York. Photo by runt35 via Wikimedia Commons.

For a further analysis of the question, how long it took for Joseph to translate the Book of Mormon, see my recent article, "[Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon: 'Days \[and Hours\] Never to Be Forgotten,'](#)" *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57 no. 4 (2018): 10–50.

Amazingly, the translation of the Book of Mormon as we now have it took less than 65 actual days of translating. That is a lot less time than you might have thought, or than anyone can actually imagine. Four "anchor dates" solidly pin down the beginning, middle, and ending points in those days, which Oliver Cowdery later said, were "days never to be forgotten." For a reality check, take a few minutes to at least scan and fathom the attached chart, which hopefully is self-explanatory.

Each of the historical facts in "The miraculous Timing of the Translation of the Book of Mormon" is established by sources mentioned in the footnotes or in the document section (quoting 206 documents!) of the longer of these two articles. That collection of primary source documents is 102 pages long. Reading even only a few of these accounts left by people who were closely involved in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, or by others who were involved early enough in this historical development to have heard from these eye-witnesses, can be very moving for anyone, young or old.

I can't think of any other event in world history that matches the accomplishment of translating and bringing forth the Book of Mormon. The amount of consistent and coherent independent statements that document these day-by-day events is extraordinary.

There is surely more here than anyone can read in a day. That is not the purpose here. But everyone should know that this detailed history exists. It is credible. It is impressive. If you feel a bit overwhelmed, that's OK. Just think how Joseph, Emma, Oliver, Lucy Smith, Martin Harris, and the others involved in this daunting task must have felt!

Table 1 Estimated Day-by-Day Translation in 1829

Date (1829)	Possible Chapters Translated	Event
March	Mosiah 1	A few pages translated. The work of translation resumed where it left off after loss of the 116 pages in 1828.
April 5 Sun.		Oliver Cowdery arrived in Harmony, Pennsylvania.*
6		Joseph purchased property from Emma's father.* About this time, D&C 6 was received, directed to Oliver Cowdery as he began serving as Joseph Smith's scribe.
7	Mosiah 2–4	Oliver began working as Joseph's scribe.*
8	Mosiah 5–7	
9	Mosiah 8–11	About this time, D&C 8 was received, directed to Oliver about the power to translate. Compare Mosiah 8:11–16, speaking of King Mosiah's power to translate.
10	Mosiah 12–16	
11	Mosiah 17–20	
12 Sun.	Mosiah 21–25	About this time, Oliver wrote a letter to David Whitmer.
13	Mosiah 26–28	
14	Mosiah 29 and Alma 1–2	
15	Alma 3–6	
16	Alma 7–10	
17	Alma 11–13	
18	Alma 14–17	
19 Sun.	Alma 18–19	About this time, Oliver wrote a second letter to David Whitmer.

20	Alma 20–23	
21	Alma 25–26	
22	Alma 27–30	
23	Alma 31–33	
24	Alma 34–36	
25	Alma 37–38	
26 Sun.	Alma 39–40	About this time, D&C 9 was received (compare D&C 9:14, “a hair of your head shall not be lost, and you shall be lifted up at the last day,” with Alma 11:44 or 40:23).
27	Alma 41–43	
28	Alma 44–45	
29	Alma 46–48	
30	Alma 49–51	
May 1	Alma 52–54	Alma 55–57
2	Alma 55–57	
3 Sun.	Alma 58–61	
4	Alma 62–63 and Helaman 1	
5	Helaman 2–4	
6	Helaman 5–7	
7	Helaman 8–10	
8	Helaman 11–13	
9	Helaman 14–16	
10 Sun.	3 Nephi 1–3	
11	3 Nephi 4–6	
12	3 Nephi 7–10	
13	3 Nephi 11–12	
14	3 Nephi 13–15	
15	3 Nephi 16–18	Restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood.* At this time, Joseph and Oliver went into the nearby woods to pray

		about baptism for the remission of sins, which they had found mentioned in the translation, presumably in 3 Nephi 11:21–12:2.
16	3 Nephi 19–21	
17 Sun.	3 Nephi 22–23	About this time, Oliver wrote a third letter to David Whitmer.
18		About this time, Joseph and Oliver traveled 30 miles to Colesville, New York.
19		Joseph and Oliver returned 30 miles from Colesville. Perhaps at this time, Peter, James, and John appeared to restore the higher priesthood and the power to give the gift of the Holy Ghost, mentioned in 3 Nephi 18:36–38.
20	3 Nephi 24–27	
21	3 Nephi 28–30 and 4 Nephi	About this time, D&C 7 may have been received, speaking about John not tasting death. Compare material in the account about the Three Nephites in 3 Nephi 28:1 (“what desirest thou?” D&C 7:1); 28:9 (“bring souls,” 7:2); 28:2 (“speedily,” 7:4); 28:7 (“never taste death,” “power over death” in 7:2).
22	Mormon 1–4	
23	Mormon 5–7	
24 Sun.	Mormon 8–9	
25	Ether 1–3	Samuel Smith was baptized.*
26	Ether 4–7	
27	Ether 8–10	
28	Ether 11–12	Near this date, Hyrum Smith and David Whitmer arrived in Harmony, Pennsylvania.
29	Ether 13–15 and Moroni 1–4	
30	Moroni 5–8	About at this point, D&C 12 was received, directed to Joseph Knight Sr. (compare 12:8, “full of love,” “faith, hope and charity,” with Mosiah 3:19; Ether 12:28; Moro. 7:1; 8:14).
31 Sun.	Moroni 9–10 and title page*	About this time, D&C 11 was revealed to Hyrum. Compare D&C 11:16 (“my gospel”), and 11:25 (“deny not”) with 3 Ne. 27:21 and Moro. 10:8.

Jun 1		Joseph and Oliver packed and moved from Harmony, Pennsylvania, to Fayette, New York.*
2		Travel to Fayette.
3		Travel to Fayette.
4		Travel to Fayette and unpack. About this time, D&C 10 was finalized, telling Joseph to translate the plates of Nephi (D&C 10:41).
5	Translation resumes with 1 Nephi 1–2	About this time, the voice was heard in Father Whitmer’s chamber authorizing Joseph and Oliver to be ordained elders.
6	1 Nephi 3–6	
7 Sun.	1 Nephi 7–9	About this time, John and Peter Whitmer Sr. were baptized, and D&C 15 and 16 were received.
8	1 Nephi 10–12	About this time, D&C 14 was given for David Whitmer.
9	1 Nephi 13–16	About this time, D&C 18 was received (compare 18:20, “church of the devil,” with 1 Ne. 14:10).
10	1 Nephi 17–19	
11		Copyright form was filed in United States District Court for the Northern District of New York, using the full title page as the “title” of the book on the copyright form.*
12	1 Nephi 20–22	
13	2 Nephi 1–3	
14 Sun.		Oliver wrote to Hyrum.* His letter used some words similar to those in 2 Ne. 9:21–23; Mosiah 5:9–10; and Moro. 8. About this time, David and Peter Whitmer Jr. were baptized.
15	2 Nephi 4–6	
16	2 Nephi 7–9	
17	2 Nephi 10–13	
18	2 Nephi 14–19	
19	2 Nephi 20–24	
20	2 Nephi 25–27	

21 Sun.		About this time, Oliver Cowdery composed the “Articles of the Church of Christ.” This document quotes extensively, verbatim, from the Original Manuscript of 3 Ne. 9:15–16, 18; 11:23–27, 32, 39–40; 18:22, 28–33; 27:8–10, 20; Moro. 3:1–4; 4:1–2; 5:1–2; 6:6; and also from D&C 18:4, 22–25, 31, 34.
22	2 Nephi 28–31	About this time, D&C 17 was received, authorizing Oliver, David, and Martin to obtain a view of the plates (17:2; compare 2 Ne. 27:12).
23	2 Nephi 32–33	About this time, the manifestation of Moroni was given to the Three Witnesses, as prompted by the translation of 2 Ne. 27:12–13.
24	Jacob 1–3	
25	Jacob 4–5	
26	Jacob 6–7	
27	Enos and Jarom	
28 Sun.	Omni Words Mormon	and of
29		In Manchester, New York.* About this time, the Eight Witnesses were shown the plates.
30		By this date, the translation was finished.* About this time, the testimonies of the Three and the Eight Witnesses were written.
July		About this time, the preface to the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon was written. It uses at least nine phrases found in the title page or in D&C 10.

***Bolded texts give historically documentable details. For historical documentation, see pp. 85–118 in “The Miraculous Timing of the Translation of the Book of Mormon.”**

All other dates are estimates, assuming a relatively consistent rate of translation. Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, has 269,510 words in the original Book of Mormon text. The number of days allotted for the translation of each book in the Book of Mormon corresponds proportionally with the percentage of total words contained in each book, except for Sundays, for which fewer words were counted.

Large Plates

	<i>Words</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Mosiah	31,348	11.6
Alma	85,753	31.9
Helaman	20,650	7.7
3 Nephi	28,801	10.7
4 Nephi	1,980	0.7
Mormon	9,483	3.5
Ether	16,720	6.2
Moroni	6,140	2.3
Title Page	268	0.1

Small Plates

	<i>Words</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1 Nephi	25,441	9.4
2 Nephi	29,531	11.0
Jacob	9,212	3.4
Enos	1,177	0.4
Jarom	737	0.3
Omni	1,406	0.5
Words of Mormon	863	0.3

Maximum number of possible days available for the translation of the Book of Mormon from April 7 to June 30:

Mosiah–Moroni:	53 days
1 Nephi–Words of Mormon:	21 days
Total:	74 days

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "[The Miraculous Timing of the Translation of the Book of Mormon](#)," in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, edited by John W. Welch, 79–213. Provo, UT/Salt Lake City: BYU Press/Deseret Book, 2005.

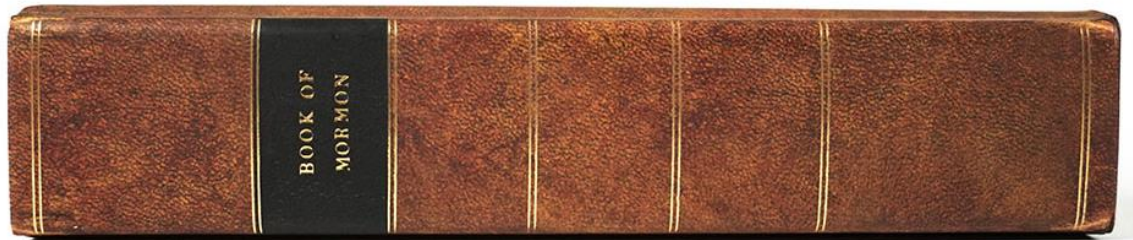


Figure 5 Replica of an 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. Photo by Jasmin Gimenez Rappleye.

Day 5: The Book of Mormon as the Handbook of Church Administration

On the final day of this week, I hope you will take a few minutes to appreciate the array of administrative patterns and guidelines found in the Book of Mormon. While this sacred record contains lots of inspiring doctrines, faithful histories, genuine spiritual experiences, and elegant expressions of profound truths, the Book of Mormon also contains a surprisingly vast array of instructions for the administration of the Church, in the performance of ordinances, regarding the duties of Church members, and much, much more. All of this is for the building up of the Church of Jesus Christ as a faithful and holy community.

As I say in the chapter below, which was published by the BYU Religious Studies Center, the Book of Mormon is truly the Keystone of our Church Administration. It was consulted much more often than people have realized as the first *de facto* handbook of instructions for the Church. As much as possible, it was used by every leader. It was followed by every member. It was read often by Joseph Smith, especially as he supervised the publication of the 1837 and 1840 editions.

It was followed, sometimes deliberately, other times in general, but always in detail and in principle. In it was found the words for the baptismal prayer, and for the administration of the sacrament. In it were found instructions for preparing to serve as missionaries. In it a quorum of twelve disciples was established to carry forth the work and words of the Lord. In it members were exhorted to pray in their families. And much, much more. As

Joseph Smith once said, "The Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion." We owe more to the Book of Mormon in our daily observance of life as Latter-day Saints than we usually are aware.

So, consider the helpful list below. Use it as you follow along in this publication. Think: Where would we as a church be without the Book of Mormon? Where would you be personally without this precious information found only in the Book of Mormon? May this book help us all as we truly strive to embody the will of the Lord Jesus Christ in this amazing era of the Dispensation of the Fullness of Times.

What We Learn from the Book of Mormon about Church Ordinances, Policies, Purposes, Programs and Organization

"Ye know the things that ye must do in my church . . . for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do. Therefore, if ye do these things blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day" (3 Nephi 27:21-22).

The name of the Church of Christ (3 Nephi 27:8-9)

The Doctrine of Christ (3 Nephi 11:31-40)

The Gospel of Christ (3 Nephi 27:13-21)

Acting in the name of Christ (3 Nephi 27:7)

A single prophet-leader (2 Nephi 5; Alma 1; Helaman 7; 3 Nephi 7:25)

A quorum of twelve (3 Nephi 12:1; 19:12), "give heed unto the words of these twelve" (12:1)

Three leaders with exceptional powers (3 Nephi 28:2-12)

Three Witnesses (2 Nephi 27:12; Ether 5:4)

Presiding (Mosiah 26:37; "to preside and watch over," Alma 6:1; 3 Nephi 28:18)

Uniformity, "a regulation throughout the Church" (Alma 6:7; 45:21; 62:44)

The process of making administrative changes (Mosiah 29; 3 Nephi 15:1)

Leaders called of God by prophecy (1 Nephi 2:22); "callings" (Jacob 2:3; Moroni 6:4; 7:2; 8:1)

Dividing the people into 12 groups of about 250 people each (3 Nephi 19:4)

Dividing into groups of 50 per priest (Mosiah 18:18), or seven congregations (Mosiah 25:19-23)

The pastoral duties of church leaders (Mosiah 18:19-23)

Consecration of priests and teachers (2 Nephi 5:26; Mosiah 23:16-18, "just men"; 25:19)

Ordination of priests and elders (Alma 6:1)

Ordination by the laying on of hands (Alma 6:1; Moroni 2:2)

Procedures and actual words used in ordaining priests and teachers (Moroni 3:1-4)

Priesthood authority to baptize (Mosiah 18:13; 3 Nephi 11:19-22)

A higher priesthood authority to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 18:14–17; Moroni 2)

Priesthood after the Holy Order of the Son of God, associated with Melchizedek (Alma 13:1–10)

Faith as the first principle in joining the Church (Alma 32)

Examples of study, prayer, change of heart in conversion (Alma 17–26)

Repentance (Mosiah 4:10; 11; 26; Alma 5; 9; 12; 42; Helaman 7; 13; 3 Nephi 30:2)

Confession (Mosiah 26:9; “did confess their sins and were baptized” Helaman 5:17; 16:1; Moroni 6:7)

Offering of a broken heart and contrite spirit (3 Nephi 9:20; 12:19; Moroni 6:2)

Obtaining and retaining forgiveness (Mosiah 4:26; Alma 5)

Covenant making, remembering, and keeping (Mosiah 5:1–10; Mosiah 18:13; 3 Nephi 18)

Taking upon them the name of Christ (Mosiah 5:10–12; 25:23; 3 Nephi 27:25; Moroni 6:3)

Children cannot repent (Moroni 8:19, 22)

Infant baptism is abhorrent (Moroni 8:20–21)

Only those are accountable who are “capable of committing sin” (Moroni 8:10)

“The gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism” (2 Nephi 31:17)

The words of the baptismal prayer (3 Nephi 11:26–27)

Baptism by immersion unto repentance (Mosiah 18:14–17; Alma 6:2; 3 Nephi 11:26)

Baptizing in the name of Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 18:11; 27:16; 30:2; 4 Nephi 1:1)

Procedures and words used for giving the Holy Ghost (Moroni 2:2)

Numbering members among the people of the church (Mosiah 6:4; 26:35; Alma 6:3; Moroni 6:4)

The administration of the Sacrament (3 Nephi 18; Moroni 6:6)

Disciples bring the bread and wine (3 Nephi 18:1)

The people sit to receive the sacrament (3 Nephi 18:2)

Priesthood holder ordained to break the bread before it is blessed (3 Nephi 18:5)

The priests kneel down with of the Church (Moroni 4:2)

The words of the sacrament prayers (3 Nephi 18:7, 10–11; Moroni 4–5)

Disciples give it to “all those who shall believe and be baptized” (3 Nephi 18:5)

Blessing children (3 Nephi 17:21–24)

Healing the sick (Alma 15:5–11; 3 Nephi 7:22; 17:7–9; 4 Nephi 1:5; Mormon 9:24)

Patriarchal, father’s blessings (2 Nephi 1–4; Alma 36–42)

Gifts of the spirit, deny not the gifts (Moroni 10)

Fasting in private (Mosiah 27:22; Helaman 3:35; Moroni 6:5)

Praying in private (Enos 1:4; Alma 33–34; 3 Nephi 13, 19)
 Praying in the name of Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 18:19, 23, 30)
 Worshiping in whatsoever place one might be (Alma 34:38)
 Living in thanksgiving daily (Mosiah 18:23; Alma 34:38)

Family prayer (Alma 34:21; 3 Nephi 18:21, “pray in your families unto the Father”)
 Parental duties to teach and care for their children (1 Nephi 1:1; Mosiah 24:14–15; Alma 37:35)
 Polygamy allowed only if the Lord of Hosts commands his people (Jacob 2:27, 30; 3:5)

Welfare and giving to the poor (Jacob 2:19; Mosiah 4; 18:27; Alma 1:27; 34:26–29; 35:9)
 Having property in common, consecration (3 Nephi 26:19; 4 Nephi 1:3)
 Tithing (3 Nephi 24:8–10)
 Building Zion, the New Jerusalem, in this land (3 Nephi 21:22–25)
 Moving to new lands, flight into the wilderness (Lehi, Mosiah)

Purposes and conduct of church meetings and worship (Moroni 6)
 Praying together (Alma 6:6; 3 Nephi 19; 4 Nephi 1:2; Moroni 6:5)
 Fasting together (Alma 6:6; 4 Nephi 1:2; Moroni 6:5)
 Singing (Alma 5:9, 26; Ether 6:9; Moroni 6:9)
 Preaching, exhorting, as led by the Holy Ghost (Moroni 6:9)
 Meeting “one day in every week” (Mosiah 18:25)
 Keep the Sabbath day holy (Mosiah 18:23)
 Keeping the commandments of the Lord (4 Nephi 1:12)
 Holding conferences (Mosiah 2–5; Alma 5, 7)
 Administering covenant renewals (Mosiah 5; Alma 5; 3 Nephi 18)
 Voice of the people, common consent (Mosiah 29:25–29; Alma 2:3; 4:16; 27:21–22; Hel. 1:5–8)
 Forgiveness (Mosiah 26:30, “as often as my people repent I will forgive them”)
 Inviting all to hear the word of God (Alma 6:5; “all are alike unto God,” 2 Nephi 26:33)
 Including the children in the congregation (Mosiah 2:5; 3 Nephi 17:25; Moroni 8)

Volunteerism (2 Nephi 26:31, “the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion”)
 Unpaid ministers (2 Nephi 26:31, “if they labor for money they shall perish”)
 Priests “should labor with their own hands for their support” (Mosiah 18:24)
 No priestcrafts, seeking honor, riches and gain (Alma 1:16; Mormon 8:33, 37)

Temples and temple worship (2 Nephi 5:16; Jacob 2:11; Mosiah 2:1; 3 Nephi 11:1)
 Prohibited iniquities, quasi-interview list (2 Nephi 26:32; Alma 1:32; 16:18; Helaman 4:12)
 Disapproval of winebibbing and drunkenness (2 Nephi 15:11, 22; Mosiah 11:15)

Condemnation of abuse of women and children (Alma 14; Morianton beats maid-servant 50:30)

Higher levels of worthiness and holiness required (2 Nephi 9)

White and pure garments (1 Nephi 12:11; Jacob 1:19; Alma 5:27; 3 Nephi 19:30)

“Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God!” (3 Nephi 11:17)

“Anoint thy head, and wash thy face” (3 Nephi 12:17)

Principles of obedience (1 Nephi 22:30–31; Jacob 4:5; Mosiah 5:5, 8; 3 Nephi 12:18)

Sacrifice (3 Nephi 12:19), “pointing to the great and last sacrifice” (Alma 34:14)

Chastity (Jacob 2:28), no adultery (Mosiah 2:13; Alma 30:10; 3 Nephi 12:27–28)

Consecration, dedicate wealth to the kingdom of God (Jacob 2:18–19; 3 Nephi 13:20, 24, 33)

Promised blessings of peace and prosperity (2 Nephi 1:9, 20; Alma 36:1, 30)

The blessing of parents and children (3 Nephi 17:17, 21)

Sins forgiven and sealing powers given (Enos 1:5; Mosiah 26:20; Helaman 10:7)

Overcoming death (“death and hell must deliver up their dead,” 2 Nephi 9:11–12)

Lifted up at the last day (1 Nephi 13:37; Alma 36:33; Nephi 27:22)

Standing before God (Mosiah 16:10; Alma 5:15; Mormon 6:21; 7:6; 9:2; Moroni 8:21)

Eternal Judge of both the quick and the dead (Mosiah 2:27; Moroni 10:34)

Keeping sacred things unwritten and confidential (3 Nephi 28:16)

Not imparting the holy thing to those unworthy or unprepared (3 Nephi 14:7)

Missionary preparation (Alma 17:2–4)

Missionary work (Alma 36:24, “labored without ceasing [to] bring souls unto repentance”)

How beautiful upon the mount, proclaim the gospel (Mosiah 15:10–16)

Patterns of missionary work (Mosiah 11; 18; Alma 4-15; 31-34; Helaman 6; 3 Nephi 27:1)

Companions, two witnesses (Alma and Amulek)

Traveling out as a group, then dividing up (the four sons of Mosiah)

Taking the Gospel to the Lamanites (1 Nephi 13; Alma 17–26; 3 Nephi 20)

Opening the door to the Jews and remnant of Jacob (3 Nephi 21)

Understanding God’s plan for the House of Israel (Jacob 5; 3 Nephi 21–22)

Judging the members, common judges (Mosiah 26:29, “him shall ye judge”)

Church discipline and excommunication procedures (Mosiah 26:32; 3 Nephi 18; Moroni 6)

Three witnesses required in order to excommunicate (3 Nephi 18:28–32; Moroni 6:7)

Reactivate those cast out, encourage them to repent (Mosiah 26:29–30; 3 Nephi 18:28–32)

Teachers and teaching (Jacob 1:19; Mosiah 18:25)

“Trust no one to be your teacher” except a man of God, walking in his ways (Mosiah 23:14)

Remembering and nourishing members by the good word of God (Moroni 6:4, 6)

Teach nothing except what the prophets have spoken (Mosiah 18:19)

Teach with power and authority from God (Mosiah 18:26)

Teaching youth (1 Nephi 1:1; Enos 1:1; Mosiah 1:2; Alma 57:21)

Keeping historical records (3 Nephi 23)

Making annual reports (for example, Helaman 6:6, 13)

Scriptures, keeping and guarding them (1 Nephi 6, 9; Mosiah 1–2; Alma 37:1–18)

Restoring plain and precious things that have been lost (1 Nephi 13:34)

Knowing that people will be judged out of the books which shall be written (3 Nephi 27:25)

Creating new congregational units (Mosiah 25:19, Alma's seven churches)

Giving ecclesiastical units a geographical area (Alma 27:22, the land of Jershon)

Civic duties (Mosiah 29:27, warning if the voice of the people chooses iniquity)

Duty to defend our religion, freedom, peace, wives, and children (Alma 46:12)

Military obligations (Alma 46:20–21) and support those in combat (Alma 27:24)

Forgiving one's enemies three times (Laban episode in 1 Nephi 3–4; see D&C 98:32, 44)

Rather simple conduct of funerals (2 Nephi 4:12; Mosiah 6:5; 29:45–46; Alma 62:52, 63:3)

Cremation disfavored (compare irregularity of death by fire, Mosiah 17:20; Alma 14:8; 25:11)

Church building decoration, not idolatrous, opulent (Mosiah 11:7–10; Mormon 8:37, "the adorning of your churches")

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "[The Book of Mormon as the Keystone of Church Administration](#)," in *A Firm Foundation: Church Organization and Administration*, ed. David J. Whittaker and Arnold K. Garr (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 15–57.

Jan Shipps and John W. Welch, *The Journals of William E. McLellin* (University of Illinois and BYU Studies, 1994), 18–24, discussing the use of the Book of Mormon in early Mormon preaching.

John W. Welch, "Book of Mormon Religious Teachings and Practices," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (1992), 1:201–5.

John W. Welch, "From Presence to Practice: Jesus, the Sacrament Prayers, the Priesthood, and Church Discipline in 3 Nephi 18 and Moroni 2-6," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 120–38.

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- ¹. W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 171.
 - ². Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 226–27.
 - ³. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 99.
 - ⁴. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 178–88.
 - ⁵. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 167.
 - ⁶. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 187.
 - ⁷. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 77.
 - ⁸. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 80.
 - ⁹. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 87.
 - ¹⁰. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 111.
 - ¹¹. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 477–520.
 - ¹². Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 505.

14 Part II

EASTER REFLECTIONS

John W. Welch Notes



Day 1: A Week of Completions

The last week of Jesus's mortal life was a time filled with completions. As His time drew near, He knew that many parts of His mission needed to be drawn fully to conclusion. And by the time that week ended, He had in fact finished all that He had been sent to do and all that was necessary to allow the eternal plan of His Father to succeed.

Prophecies needed to be fulfilled. The week began with his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, fulfilling a host of prophecies, beginning with the coming of the king riding on the foal or donkey (Matthew 21:5–7; in fulfillment of Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9). As the week progressed, Jesus embodied the similitudes that were long before embedded in the celebration of Passover (see Figure 1). The hours on Calvary saw the actualization of prophetic anticipations in Psalm 22, a psalm of King David, who had long before foreseen this Son of David (Acts 2:30–31). The week ended poignantly as the striking prophecies in Isaiah 53 of this Suffering Servant came to pass (see Figure 2), as our Savior went “as a lamb to the slaughter,” so that “with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5, 7).

Passover Prophecy Fulfillment

On the eve of Passover Jews begin to remove all leaven from their houses

After the last supper and betrayal, Christ is found worthy to be "cast out"



Sunset



Sunrise

Leaven must be eaten until midday then it is strictly forbidden

Jesus' preparations for the crucifixion

Slaughter of Paschal lambs begins at midday and continues until sundown

Crucifixion begins at noon
Death occurs at the ninth hour (3 P.M.)



Sunset

Christ's body is entombed

Firstfruit sheaf is cut down and the Paschal lamb is consumed



Sunrise

Paschal Sabbath



Sunset



Sunrise

Early morning, the sheaf of firstfruits is "lifted up before the Lord"

Christ is resurrected, the "Firstfruits of the Dead," and the tomb is left empty

Figure 1 John W. Welch and John F. Hall, "Passover Prophecy Fulfillment," in *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2002), 10-17.

Isaiah 53 and the Messiah

He "shall grow up before him [the Father] as a tender plant" (53:2)
 "As a root [the root of Jesse] out of a dry ground [Israel]" (53:2)
 He will have "no form nor comeliness" (53:2)
 "There is no beauty that we should desire him" (53:2)
 "He is despised and rejected ..., we esteemed him not" (53:3)
 "We [his friends] hid as it were our faces from him" (53:3)
 "We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted" (53:4)
 He will be "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (53:3)
 "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (53:4)
 "He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities" (53:5)
 "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted" (53:7)
 "He was taken from prison and from judgment" (53:8)
 "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief" (53:10)
 "He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death" (53:9)
 "He hath poured out his soul unto death" (53:12)
 "He was cut off out of the land of the living" (53:8)
 They would number him "with the transgressors" (53:12)
 "He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth" (53:9)
 "He opened not his mouth: as a lamb to the slaughter" (53:7)
 "The chastisement of our peace was upon him" (53:5)
 "With his stripes we are healed" (53:5)
 "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:6)
 "For the transgression of my people was he stricken" (53:8)
 "For he shall bear their iniquities" (53:11)
 "He made intercession for the transgressors" (53:12)
 The Father "shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (53:11)
 "His soul [will be] an offering for sin" (53:10)
 "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many" (53:11)
 "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand" (53:10)
 "I will divide him a portion with the great" (53:12)
 "He shall divide the spoil with the strong" (53:12)

elch, Hall, FARMS

Chart 10-15

Figure 2 John W. Welch and John F. Hall, "*Isaiah 53 and the Messiah*," in *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2002), 10-15.

Certain people also needed some final attention. As the Gospel of John tells us, Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha, and He stayed again one last time in their home in Bethany, returning for three or four nights during this week. In previous visits to Jerusalem, Jesus had made friends with important people in Jerusalem, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. While He had left some Pharisees unsettled during his previous visits, no doubt He would have wanted to finish some of those conversations and reconcile with them if at all possible. Perhaps he succeeded, since the Pharisees seem to have taken a less prominent role during this final week, when it was Caiaphas and his Chief Priests, linked with their Scribes and the Elders, who aggressively took the lead (see Figure 3). Meanwhile, the multitudes held Jesus to be a prophet (Matt. 21:46).

People who had rejected Jesus needed a final chance to change their minds and ways, and Jesus fulfilled that need. He personally confronted people who vigorously opposed Him, even to the point that they perceived that he spoke in the parable of the Wicked Tenants against them (Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19). He lamented the impending destruction of Jerusalem, giving the whole city one final prophetic cry, urging them to repent and to come unto His protection, as a hen gathers her chicks (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee who had killed John the Baptist, was given one last chance to rethink what he had done (Luke 23:6–12). The epitome of forgiveness, Jesus even forgave those who knew not what they were doing (Luke 23:34).

Jesus's teaching of the people of Israel also needed to be completed. Teaching them daily in the temple for three days, Jesus completed his climactic series of parables in Matthew 25. There he told the people to be like the five wise bridesmaids in preparing for the Coming of the Lord. He inspired them to be faithful stewards in magnifying the talents with which they had been entrusted by the Lord. He admonished them to be counted among the Lord's sheep, and not the goats, in anticipation of the final day of God's judgment and separation. And He assured them that the righteous who have ministered "unto one of the least of these my brethren" shall enter "into eternal life" (Matthew 25:40, 46).

Jesus also needed to give His apostles one final private session of intense training and love. The week's instruction culminated at the Last Supper. There Jesus and his disciples partook of the covenantal bread and wine of remembrance. Then Jesus delivered a finale of immortal statements: "a new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34), "in my Father's house are many mansions" (14:2), "if ye love me, keep my commandments" (14:15), "my peace I give unto you" (14:27), "I am the True Vine and ye are the branches" (15:5), "for the Father himself loveth you, because you have loved me" (16:27), "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent" (17:3), "for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (17:19), and "that they all may be one; as

thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (17:21). The five incomparable chapters of John 13–17 make a sublime set of readings at the heart of the Easter Week. It is as if Jesus had saved His best doctrinal wine for last.

And, on top of all that, the greatest of His daunting challenges and miraculous victories still remained to be completed that week. His Atonement, His conquest of death, and His Resurrection would be the exquisite conclusion of this week, and he could finally say, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

But as Jesus came to Jerusalem at the beginning of this week, one other final score also remained to be settled. About a month before this final week, Jesus had crossed paths with Caiaphas, the High Priest, the most powerful man in the land of Judaea. The undercurrent of that conflict runs beneath everything else in this climactic week. As the pressures build, that current churns and eventually boils over, in spite of all that Jesus could do or say. That outcome all began with the raising of Lazarus. Symbolically foreshadowing the resurrection of Jesus Himself, the raising of Lazarus from the dead was more than the proverbial last straw. It was the showdown of Caiaphas, the high priest appointed by Roman authorities, and another High Priest, the Son of the very Eternal God (Psalms 110:1, 4; Hebrews 9:11; 10:21).

Flashing back, the week of the first Easter had begun with Jesus's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. On that day, as huge crowds had begun arriving in the Holy City for the coming Passover, many people made a special effort to welcome Jesus. They carried branches of palm trees (John 12:13) and hoped to catch a glance of Jesus. We might wonder, Why? Why had they come? As the gospel of John says, they came precisely because they heard that Jesus, who had raised Lazarus from the dead, was coming (12:17–18). No doubt, they wanted to know if this sensational event had really happened. Some of them probably also hoped to see what Lazarus looked like, after having been raised from the dead. They shouted Hosanna, "Save Now." They were anxious for a complete messianic victory.

The Chief Priests and Their Associates

CHIEF PRIESTS ACTING ALONE

Mt 2:4	tell Herod where Christ should be born
Jn 12:10	consider putting Lazarus to death
Mt 26:14	meet with Judas to arrange for the betrayal and arrest of Jesus
Mk 14:10	meet with Judas to arrange for the betrayal of Jesus
Mt 27:6–7	refuse to return the thirty pieces of silver to the temple treasury and buy the potter's field
Jn 18:35	deliver Jesus to Pilate (acting in conjunction with entire nation)
Mk 15:3–4	accuse Jesus before Pilate
Mk 15:10	deliver Jesus to Pilate out of envy
Lk 23:4	are told, along with people, of Jesus' innocence by Pilate
Mk 15:11	persuade the crowd to ask for Barabbas to be released
Lk 23:23	prevail in asking for Barabbas to be released
Jn 19:6	cry (with their officers) for the crucifixion of Jesus
Jn 19:21	ask Pilate to change the wording of the title on the cross
Mt 28:11	are told by guards of the resurrection and empty tomb
Acts 9:14	give Saul authority to arrest Christians
Acts 9:21	issue authority to arrest Christians
Acts 26:10	had given Saul authority to arrest Christians
Acts 26:12	had given Saul authority to arrest Christians

Figure 3 John W. Welch and John F. Hall, "*The Chief Priests and Their Associates*," in *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2002), 3-9 (Continued below).

**CHIEF PRIESTS ACTING WITH ELDERS (*PRESBYTEROI*), RULERS (*ARCHONTES*),
CAPTAINS (*STRATEGOI*), OR THE SANHEDRIN (*SYNHEDRION*)**

- Mt 21:23 question Jesus in the temple about his authority (elders)
 Mt 26:47 arrest Jesus (elders)
 Mt 26:59 seek false witnesses against Jesus (Sanhedrin)
 Mk 14:56 seek false witnesses against Jesus (Sanhedrin)
 Mt 27:1 take council against Jesus (elders)
 Lk 22:4 meet with Judas and captains to arrange betrayal
 Lk 22:52 arrest Jesus with temple captains and elders
 Mt 27:3 refuse the thirty pieces of silver when Judas tries
 to return them (elders)
 Mt 27:12–13 accuse Jesus before Pilate (elders)
 Lk 23:13–15 are told, along with the rulers and the people, of
 Jesus' innocence by Pilate
 Mt 27:20 persuade the crowd to ask for Barabbas (elders)
 Lk 24:20 with rulers deliver Jesus to be crucified
 Mt 28:12–13 bribe guards to say the disciples stole Jesus' body (elders)
 Acts 4:18 command Peter and John not to speak of Christ (elders)
 Acts 5:24–26 arrest Peter and John and command them again
 (captains)
 Acts 22:30 convene court against Paul (Sanhedrin)
 Acts 23:14–15 hear oath of vigilantes against Paul (elders)
 Acts 25:15 ask Festus to give judgment against Paul (elders)

CHIEF PRIESTS MENTIONED WITH SCRIBES ONLY

- Mt 20:18 Jesus prophesies his betrayal into their hands
 Mk 10:33 Jesus prophesies his betrayal into their hands
 Lk 20:19 offended by the parable of the rejected cornerstone
 Mt 21:15 are displeased at miracles and popularity of Jesus

Mk 11:18	are afraid of his popularity and temple teaching
Lk 22:2	are afraid of his popularity and seek to kill him
Mk 14:1	meet to plot the arrest and death of Jesus
Lk 23:10	accuse Jesus before Pilate
Mk 15:31	mock Jesus on the cross

CHIEF PRIESTS LINKED WITH ELDERS AND SCRIBES

Mt 16:21	Jesus prophesies his suffering and death by them
Mk 8:31	Jesus prophesies his rejection and death by them
Lk 9:22	Jesus prophesies his rejection and death by them
Mk 11:27–28	question Jesus in the temple about his authority
Lk 20:1–2	question Jesus in the temple about his authority
Mt 26:3	meet to plot the arrest and death of Jesus
Lk 19:47	meet to plot the arrest and death of Jesus
Mk 14:43	arrest Jesus
Mk 14:53	assemble against Jesus
Lk 22:66	assemble against Jesus
Mk 15:1	deliver Jesus to Pilate
Mt 27:41	mock Jesus on the cross

CHIEF PRIESTS TOGETHER WITH PHARISEES ONLY

Mt 21:33, 45	hear the parable of the wicked tenants
Jn 7:32	send officers to attempt to arrest Jesus
Jn 7:45–46	listen as officers report that they will not arrest Jesus
Jn 11:47	confer together to discuss arresting Jesus
Jn 11:57	require disclosure of knowledge of Jesus' location
Jn 18:3	send officers to arrest Jesus
Mt 27:62–64	come to Pilate asking for soldiers at the tomb



Figure 4 This third-century glass plate in the Vatican Museum shows Jesus miraculously raising Lazarus and bringing him forth out of the tomb. It shows the strong faith of early Christians in this final and most powerful sign of Jesus's power over death. Photograph by John W. Welch.

At the same time, however, there were other people in Jerusalem who were also hoping to see Jesus, but for a completely different reason. Because of the raising of Lazarus, the Sanhedrin had met a few weeks earlier and had found Jesus worthy of death (John 11:50, 53). When they hadn't been able to locate Jesus, they had issued a public order calling for any information about his whereabouts (11:57). And then, because Jesus had fled to a village called Ephraim and could not be found, the Sanhedrin issued another order, this time for the arrest of Lazarus (12:10). Apparently they hoped that Lazarus might know where Jesus had gone. Perhaps they also wondered if Lazarus had conspired with Jesus to deceive the people. And, indeed, because of the raising of Lazarus, many people "believed on Jesus" (12:11). Having watched Jesus for quite some time (Mark 3:22–26; John 7:12, 47; 9:16, 29), Caiaphas could not allow this rising crisis to gather any further momentum.

Thus, underlying all of the many events of the final week of Jesus's mortal life was the unfinished legal business that was set in motion a month earlier with the raising of Lazarus in Bethany, just over the hill to the east of Jerusalem. Because that remarkable event is reported only in the gospel of John, most studies of the trial and death of Jesus begin with his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, but that omission is short-sighted.

The raising of Lazarus had been big news, and word about it must have spread rapidly. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were fairly wealthy. They were socially well connected. They even had their own private tomb for family burials. Many of the leading Jews had gone out to their home to mourn the death of Lazarus, but instead of mourning, they saw "the things which Jesus did" and some "believed on him" (11:45). Others were dubious, and they went immediately and reported to Caiaphas what Jesus had done. Soon the full Sanhedrin had met to deliberate how to respond.

The report given in John 11:47–57 of this meeting makes it clear that important legal steps were taken and set in motion at that time. Over a dozen words in that report have legal significance. This was not just a theological discussion, but an official legal proceeding. What was their concern? More than just recognizing the fact that Jesus had obviously worked miracles (11:47), they saw his miracles as signs, pointing to something and not just doing good. If those signs or wonders led people to "go after other gods," then such miracles were deemed to be evil, and the law clearly required that the wonderworker be "put to death" (Deuteronomy 13:2, 5).

As the Sanhedrin then discussed the case, some argued, "If we let him thus alone, everyone will believe on him." Others feared that "the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation" (11:48). Here "*the place*" would refer to the temple, and it was especially their duty, under Deuteronomy 12, to protect the temple as the holy place.

Caiaphas, the High Priest, however, had rejected this quibbling over rationales. Saying "Ye know nothing at all," he reasoned that it would be better that one man die "on behalf of" the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed (11:50). John says that Caiaphas did not speak these words on his own personal authority. He acted officially as the High Priest (11:51), as he authoritatively (even if unwittingly) prophesied that Jesus would die for "the people," and not just for the people of Israel, but also so that the scattered children of God could be gathered into one (11:52). These decisive words have a ring of legal finality to them. And the Gospel of John says, "Then from that day forth they took counsel for to put him to death" (11:53). An official legal order was issued that anyone knowing of the whereabouts of Jesus needed to report that information so that he could be captured (11:57). This was not so that he could be convicted (he had already been found worthy of death), but to determine how he should be put to death, and by whom,

whether the Roman procurator or the leaders of the Sanhedrin. The law might also have wanted to give any convict a chance to confess and perhaps to negotiate some settlement. But it was this basic verdict that stands as unfinished behind all that then happens the week beginning with Palm Sunday.

All Jerusalem would have been abuzz about the phenomenal raising of Lazarus, hoping and wondering if Jesus would dare make an appearance in Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover. To stem this tide, the chief priests were prepared to move quickly to apprehend Jesus (with Roman awareness, if not Roman escort), then to sentence Jesus, and get Pilate's consent to publically execute him, all within one final early morning's time.

Thus, as Jesus had walked toward Bethany a month or so earlier to answer the plea of his dear friends to come and heal their dying brother Lazarus, having been previously confronted by legal challenges against his miracle working, Jesus could well have anticipated that, by openly raising Lazarus from the dead so close to Jerusalem, He was effectively setting in motion the final steps leading to His own death. Knowing the risks, both on that previous occasion and equally on Palm Sunday, Jesus generously, lovingly, and willing went forward, having reassured Martha and also the whole world, with the absolutely conclusive knowledge that "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

To be continued . . .



Figure 5 *The Raising of Lazarus, Nativity of Christ Church, Arbanassi, Bulgaria* (photograph by John W. Welch, © 2019; used with permission of the Regional Museum of History of Veliko Tarnovo)

This is one of many scenes that are painted onto the walls and ceilings of a seventeenth-century church in Arbanassi, Bulgaria. Here, viewers see Jesus in the center raising his right hand in blessing, as Lazarus will come forth from the stone-tomb, his burial shroud beginning to unwind. Lazarus has a gold halo, indicating his holy discipleship. He will become known as St. Lazarus. Jesus's left hand appears to be receiving the message that Lazarus had died. The women in black and red are likely Martha and Mary. Behind Jesus are eleven disciples. Presumably Judas is the one not shown. In the lower right, a servant moves away the stone that had covered the entrance to the tomb. In the top-center, the walls around Jerusalem enclose the Temple, with the flaming altar of sacrifice on the left. Caiaphas and three other chief priests or Pharisees are in the middle, with two structures on the right. Being told by eyewitnesses about Jesus's raising of Lazarus in Bethany, Caiaphas will convene the Sanhedrin. They will debate what to do in the face of this miraculous sign that threatens to lead everyone in Jerusalem to follow Jesus. Even miracle workers can be convicted of leading people into apostasy under Deuteronomy 13. And Caiaphas will rule that it is better for Jesus to be executed than for a riot to break out, for

the holy city and temple to be taken away by the Romans, and all the people to be destroyed. An order for the capture of Jesus was sent out. Not finding Him, the Sanhedrin will further rule that Lazarus also was worthy of death, apparently on the allegation of complicity with Jesus in working to deceive the people.

Day 2: “By What Authority?”



Figure 6 The Father's Two Sons, by Jorge Cocco Santangelo. Used by permission of John W. and Jeannie Welch.

None of the actions taken against Jesus by the Chief Priests during his final week would have come as any surprise to Jesus. He knew the hearts, the desires, and the intentions of all the actors in this eternal drama. He had heard their questions and arguments many times before.

Reentering Jerusalem on Monday morning, the day after his Triumphal entry, Jesus made a beeline directly to the temple. He had been there several times before. He was no stranger there (See Figure 7).

Jesus at the Temple

Gabriel there foretold the Lord's coming	Lk 1:17-19
Jesus circumcised there on eighth day	Lk 2:21
Simeon held and proclaimed the Savior	Lk 2:27-35
Anna gave thanks for Jesus' redemption	Lk 2:38
Jesus amazed the elders there at age twelve	Lk 2:42, 46
Tempted at the pinnacle of the temple	Mt 4:5-7; Lk 4:9-12
Regularly went there for Passover	Jn 2:13
Drove out merchants and their sacrificial animals	Jn 2:14-17
Encouraged payment of the temple tax	Mt 17:24-27
Cleansed man at the temple pool of Bethesda	Jn 5:14-16
At Tabernacles declared himself God's emissary	Jn 7:14, 28
There forgave a woman taken in adultery	Jn 8:2-11
Spoke in the treasury about light	Jn 8:12-20
Drove out money changers	Mt 21:12-13; Mk 11:15-19; Lk 19:45
Walked and taught there daily	Mt 21:23; 26:55; Mk 11:27; 12:35-40; 14:49; Lk 19:45-48; 20:1; 22:52; Jn 10:23
Reasoned there with the Jewish leaders	Mt 21:23-23:39; Mk 11:27-12:44; Lk 19:45-48; 21:37
Had his authority challenged	Mt 21:23; Mk 11:27-28; Lk 20:2

Chart 8-12 (1)

Figure 7 Welch, John W., and John F. Hall. "Jesus at the Temple." *Charting the New Testament*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002, chart 8-12. (Continued on next page)

Gave the parable of the two sons on obedience	Mt 21:28–32
Taught of the wicked tenants' rejection of the son	Mt 21:33–46; Mk 12:1–12; Lk 20:9–19
Gave parable of the marriage feast on chosenness	Mt 22:1–14
Was asked about what belongs to Caesar or God	Mt 22:17; Mk 12:14; Lk 20:22
Sadducees asked about marriage and the afterlife	Mt 22:24; Mk 12:19; Lk 20:28
Pharisees asked about the greatest commandment	Mt 22:36; Mk 12:28
Pharisees asked about Christ and the son of David	Mt 22:42; Mk 12:35; Lk 20:41
Jesus warned about the pride of the Scribes	Mk 12:38; Lk 20:46
Saw the widow offer her two mites	Mk 12:42; Lk 21:2
Approved Pharisaic teaching but not action	Mt 23:3
Taught his priesthood leaders to be servants	Mt 23:11
Gave eight woes upon the scribes and Pharisees regarding their exclusivity, long prayers, misleading converts, improper temple oaths, missing the spirit of tithing, having external purity only, outward appearances, and rejecting the prophets	Mt 23:13–34
Mentioned the murder of Zacharias in the temple	Mt 23:35
Lamented over the temple's coming destruction	Mt 24:1–2; Mk 13:1–2; Lk 21:6
Spoke of the return of "the master of the house"	Mk 13:34–35
Used imagery of "my Father's house"	Jn 14:2
Rending of the veil of the temple	Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45
Earliest Christians continue to meet there	Lk 24:53

There he was immediately asked by the Chief Priests and the elders, "By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?" (Matt. 21:23). Understanding this questioning of Jesus is crucial in understanding the reasons behind the main events in the Easter week. Reinforcing the importance of this critical exchange, it is significant that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all recount this episode almost verbatim (Matt. 21:23–27; Mark 11:27–33; Luke 20:1–8).

Jesus had been asked such questions on other occasions before. At the beginning of Jesus's ministry, a group of scribes (lawyers) had been sent up from Jerusalem to Galilee to investigate by what "authority" (Mark 1:27) Jesus was performing his miracles. The legal and religious issue was this: If he had performed miracles by the power of God and to God's glory, his miracles would have been seen as beyond reproach. But if he was doing these miracles "by the prince of the devils" through whom he was "cast[ing] out devils" (Mark 3:22), then Jesus was committing an offense for which he could be put to death. Sorcery, witchcraft, and other forms of working through evil spirits was condemned in several places in the law of Moses. For example, Exodus 22:18 reads, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," and Leviticus 20:27 says, "A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death."

By asking Jesus this very question once again right after his entry into Jerusalem, conspicuously soon after his raising of Lazarus and the opinion of the Sanhedrin that Jesus and Lazarus were worthy of death (John 11:50, 53; 12:10), the Chief Priests and the elders that Monday morning in the Temple were bringing up a persistent problem. They would have been acting with a strong belief that Jesus's many signs and wonders raised serious legal problems as they were leading people to follow him and his teachings.

But curiously, the Chief Priests did not act immediately. In light of the fact that an order had been issued for the apprehension of Jesus (John 11:57), one wonders why they did not arrest Jesus on the spot. The answer is fairly clear. As they tried to lay hands on him to arrest him "in that very hour" (Luke 20:19), "they feared the multitude" (Matt. 21:46; Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19). Likewise they decided that it would be imprudent for them to answer Jesus's question back to them, as He asked them how John the Baptist had received his authority, because they "were afraid of the multitude" (Matthew 21:26; Mark 11:32). They even worried that "all the people will stone us" (Luke 20:6), because the people believed John to be a prophet.

When the chief priests declined to answer Jesus, he chose to speak to them in parables. Before telling them his parable of the Wicked Tenants, he first gave a short parable that is found only in the Gospel of Matthew. I call it the Parable of the Willing and Unwilling Two Sons.

Deeply valuable symbolism is embedded in all of Jesus's parables, and his parable of the willing and unwilling two sons in Matthew 21 is no exception. What does this parable have to do with answering their demand to know: "By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?" (Matt. 21:23). This simple story is about a certain man who had two sons. When asked to go down and work in the vineyard, the

first son initially refused, but then he went. The other son initially said yes (or so it seems), but then for some unstated reason does not go (21:28-30).

While this parable may be useful in parenting, it would seem that, in this context, Jesus may well have been talking in veiled terms about something much more fundamental. Indeed, in speaking about Jesus's parables in Luke 15, Joseph Smith once taught: "I have a Key by which I understand the scriptures—I enquire what was the question which drew out the answer?"¹ Thus, by focusing on the questions asked by the Chief Priests about Jesus's authority, Joseph's key unlocks the deeper meaning of this parable in Matthew 21:28–31.

The following is a shortened version of my chapter about this parable in the collection of essays in honor of Robert L. Millet, *Let Us Reason Together*, published in 2016 by the BYU Religious Studies Center, and also the chapter in John W. and Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation*, published in 2019 by Covenant Communications. In the latter is found this painting by Jorge Cocco (See Figure 6 above, also Figures 8, 9), that illustrates this immortal parable.

Several significant points are included in this instructive story as this parable takes the question of authority into divine and premortal realms. Involved here is no ordinary father, no ordinary vineyard, or any ordinary pair of sons. Bear with me as I explain.

Two sons were asked by *the* father. In the end, it becomes clear that this father is not just their father, but God the Father.² The King James Version chose to supplement the text by inserting the word *his* in italics when Jesus asks, "Whether of them twain did the will of *his* father?" (21:31). Nevertheless, the Greek reads, "Which of the two did the will of *the* father (*tou patros*)?" While it is possible that the definite article here (*tou*) can simply be understood as taking "the place of an unemphatic possessive pronoun when there is no doubt as to the possessor"³ and thus allowing the KJV rendition "*his* father," Jesus's wording here may be significant, referring to "the Father" and not just to their father. The wording echoes Jesus's wording in Matthew 7:21 answering a rhetorical question about who shall enter the kingdom of heaven. The answer: one "who does the will of *the Father* of mine who is in heaven (*tou patros mou*)."³ Thus, the use of the definite article in Jesus's question to the Chief Priests, "which did the will of *the* Father" invites readers to see the

¹ Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 161. See also Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 267–277.

² Arland J. Hultgren, "Interpreting the Parables of Jesus," 637: "It should go without saying that a father can represent God, and so it is."

³ Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1963), §1121.

willing son and his Father in this parable as representing the Father in Heaven and Jesus himself as the one who says “thy will be done” (Matt. 26:42) and who does the Father’s will. The two sons were thus called to serve with authority from God whom they would serve. Those with authority do not take that authority upon themselves but are “called of God, as was Aaron” (Hebrews 5:4).



Figure 8 Study of *The Father’s Two Sons*, by Jorge Cocco Santangelo. Used by permission of John W. and Jeannie Welch.

Next, these two sons were both called to “go” by way of commandment from the father. These invitations came, not as polite requests, but as imperatives, literally, “go [-age] down [hyp-]” (Matthew 21:28, 30). While the word *hypage* can have a number of meanings, including to “go away,” “withdraw,” “depart,” “go forward,” or simply to “go,” its sense always depends on the context in which it is used. Here, if the setting is in the father’s house, the sons are being asked to leave the comforts of home and go work in the fields; if the setting is in the father’s mansion on a hill, or in heaven, then the sons will be going *down*, descending, from there.

Moreover, in being asked to go, the two sons were told when and where they were to serve—today, and in the vineyard—so their authority was specific. The message is that those with authority do not have the option of selecting another time or place. They can either respond with a yes or a no, but they cannot modify the father's request.



Figure 9 Study of *The Father's Two Sons*, by Jorge Cocco Santangelo. Used by permission of John W. and Jeannie Welch.

Beyond these points about the nature of authority, this parable draws its listeners into the heavenly realms. In so doing, this story calls to mind events in the Council in Heaven, where a Father indeed had two very different Sons. There Jesus received his commission and authority from the Father.

These heavenly, primeval overtones are more evident in the Greek text of Matthew than in the Latin Vulgate or in typical English translations. The most widely supported Greek texts *literally* read as follows: "A man had two sons, and going to the first he said, 'Go down this day to work in the vineyard.' He answered, 'Not as I will [*ou thelō*],' but then

reconciling himself to the task he went. Going to the other, he [the Father] said the same. And he answering said, "I, Lord!" And he did not go." The differences between this rendition of the Greek and the usual translations of this text—which is clearly more than a mere fable—may be explained as follows.

The first son initially answered the father's request by saying, "*Ou thelō*," which the KJV translates as "I *will* not" (emphasis added). But *thelō* is not a future tense verb. It does not mean "I *will* not, or *shall* not." *Ou thelō* is a present tense verb, meaning "I don't want to," or "I don't wish to," or "I'd rather not," or, idiomatically one might say, "Not (*ou*) [what or as] I will (*thelō*)."⁴ In Elizabethan English, this could mean "I do not will it," as does the Latin *nolo*. But this is not how modern readers hear this crucial word *will*.⁴ Doing the Father's will (*thelēma*—which is the noun cognate to the verb *thelō*) is a central theme in the Gospel of Matthew leading up to Christ's teaching in this parable and immediately beyond (see Matt. 6:10; 7:21; 12:50; 18:14; 26:42). In Gethsemane, as the Savior reconciled and submitted himself to the will of the Father, he said, "Not my will (*mē to thelēma mou*) but thine be done" (Luke 22:42).

The first son "goes *away*" or "departs *from*" (*apēlthen*) the Father's presence. This verb is translated simply as "went" in the KJV in Matthew 21:29, 30. This word, along with the Father's command, "go *down*" (*hypage*), may call to mind the condescension or incarnation of Jesus leaving his Father's presence. These words were used by Jesus himself in referring to his own going away or departure, as a euphemism for his impending death and descent into the spirit prison: "Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? Because he saith, Whither I go (*hypagō*), ye cannot come" (John 8:22); and "it is expedient for you that I go away (*apelthō*)" (John 16:7).

The onerous burden of the work asked by the Father seems to have given even the ultimately submissive first son ample reason for pause. Perhaps this son knew when he was asked to go down that there were or would be wicked tenants in the vineyard who would have already beaten or killed the servants sent by the landowner-father, and now in desperation the father needed a son to send. No wonder even that first son might need to think things over a bit.

At this point in Matthew 21:29, the KJV reads, "but afterward he *repented*," which might seem unbecoming of the Savior. But the idea that the first son repented of some sin (an idea which is found in the Latin word *paenitentia*, the word used at this point in the Latin Vulgate Bible) is actually not necessarily implied in the little parable. This is because the

⁴⁴ H. W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 729.

Greek word used here is not the ordinary verb used to mean “repent” (*metanoēō*). Instead, the word is *metamelomai*, which does not primarily mean “to repent.” In the Septuagint and in Koine Greek, with rare exception, it means to feel sad about something or to change one’s mind, but not primarily to repent of an offense. In Classical Greek, it means to regret, or simply to change one’s purpose or course of conduct. Thus, translating it as “repented” conveys a different sense and feel. Thus I prefer to translate *metamelētheis* as “reconciling himself” to the task, as the first son submitted his will to serve in the Father’s plan, even shouldering his daunting task and aligning his own will with that of his Father.

At the same time, there was another son. Most manuscripts call him “the other (*ho heteros*),” while some call him “the second (*ho deuterios*).” This son stood in utter contrast to the first. He is more than numerically second; he is of another mind or has some other purpose. He was eager at first, but in the end he would not serve his father.

Significantly when this other son answered, he did not say, “I go, Lord,” as the KJV reads. Here again the King James translators followed the Vulgate, which uses the words “*eō* (I go), *domine* (Lord).” The word “go,” however, is italicized in the KJV because it is actually not present in the strongest Greek manuscripts. In almost all ancient NT manuscripts, the other son simply says *egō, kurie*, “I, Lord.” In ordinary parlance, this might sound something like “Yes, Sir.” But the pronoun *egō* is significant. For this second son, it seems that it was all about his ego. This is the first word he says. He seems caught up with the fact that *he* had been called. In this context, what does this word *egō* entail? “I *what?* Lord.” “I will gladly go?” “OK, I will [*grudgingly*] go?” or “I get to go!?” “I have been chosen!?” “I will do it;” “I want the glory! Lord.” All of these are possibilities. Moreover, the second and only other word in his reply to his father stiffly calls his own father “Lord,” which may well convey less than close personal love or filial devotion. For whatever reason, that son did not go. He was called, but not chosen.

If the first son is identifiable as Jesus, then the second son in this parable can be understood as Lucifer, his brother. For Latter-day Saints, this identification readily calls to mind the scene in the Council in Heaven in which Jesus was given his commission and authority from the Father. While not exactly the same as in this parable, certain similarities stand out. On that occasion the Father asked, “Whom shall I send?” (Abraham 3:27). In the texts we have, Lucifer then responded with a barrage of six first-person pronouns, “Here am I, send *me*” (Abraham 3:27; Moses 4:1), adding “I will be thy son, . . . I will redeem all mankind . . .; surely I will do it; wherefore give *me* thine honor” (Moses 4:1). Jesus, however, simply “answered like unto the Son of Man: Here am I, send *me*” (Abraham 3:27), adding “Father, *thy* will be done” (Moses 4:2). These two responses typify the contrast between the course of self-interested unrighteousness and the way of submissive righteousness in answering a call from God. Because Satan sought to usurp God’s own

honor, glory, power and authority, Lucifer was cast down (Moses 4:2) and, as in Jesus' parable to the Jewish leaders, Lucifer did not go. Whether he was not allowed to go or whether he took himself out of the running, the outcome was the same. In either case it is interesting to note, the Father was apparently open to sending either (or perhaps, in some way, both), if they would be willing to be his agents and to do his will within the scope of the authority and assignment given to them.

As temple priests, it is not unreasonable that the chief priests and elders would have known something from traditional sources about the heavenly council in which an eternal plan was established from the foundation of the world.⁵ That primal event would have been well known to the Savior and possibly to his disciples and to others of Jesus's contemporaries. Indeed, the apostle John knew and testified that the power and authority of Jesus came from the premortal world where Jesus obtained his right to rule on this earth, not to do his own will, but to do the will of the Father. The authority of Jesus was traceable back to "the beginning" (John 1:1), and his judgment was just because he sought to do "the will of the Father" who had sent him (John 5:30).

Moreover, Jesus had taught openly, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38), and at the Last Supper, only a few days after his Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem and his confrontation with the Chief Priests and elders in the Temple, Jesus affirmed to his disciples, "I am in the Father, and the Father [is] in me; the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but [of] the Father" (John 13:10). "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me" (John 17:8).

So, it would not have been out of character or untimely for Jesus to have taken his disciples privately aside as they returned to Bethany after that Monday in the Temple, at the beginning of Easter Week, to tell to them even more about the source and nature of his authority and to explain to them the meanings of this parable of the willing and unwilling two sons.

⁵ They may have known of the pattern of authoritative callings and the heavenly council from several passages, including 1 Kings 22:19–23; Psalms 82:1; 110:3; Isaiah 9:5 LXX; Jeremiah 23:18; Daniel 7:9–14; Amos 3:7; 1 Enoch 12:3–4. See John W. Welch, "[The Calling of a Prophet](#)," in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*, eds. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), pp. 41, 46. Related scriptures may include: Acts 2:23 (Peter's text assumes that his audience on the Day of Pentecost knew something of the idea of God's primordial council and plan [*boulēi*]); 1 Corinthians 2:7 (Paul speaks as well about the wisdom of God that was ordained before the world was), and Alma 13:3 (Alma speaks of priests being "ordained, having been called and prepared from the foundation of the world").

On that Monday, for all who had ears to hear, this parable clearly answered the two questions asked by the Chief Priests: “By what authority do you do all these things, and who gave thee this authority?” As Jesus testified: He was called and authorized by God, his Father. Jesus was chosen because of his willingness to submit his will to the will of the Father. And Jesus was empowered to act in the name of the Father as he came down and did the works of righteousness. This clearly distinguished Jesus from the “other” son and his unrighteous devils and unrepentant workers of iniquity.

And just as Jesus began this final week with this parable in Matthew 21 about his calling in the heavenly council at the beginning of mortal time, he will end his public teachings that week with a final set of parables in Matthew 25 about the judgment at the end of times. Those two bookends that Easter week bracket the whole of the Plan of Salvation, from start to finish.

Day 3: Why Was Jesus Accused of Being a *Kakopoios*?

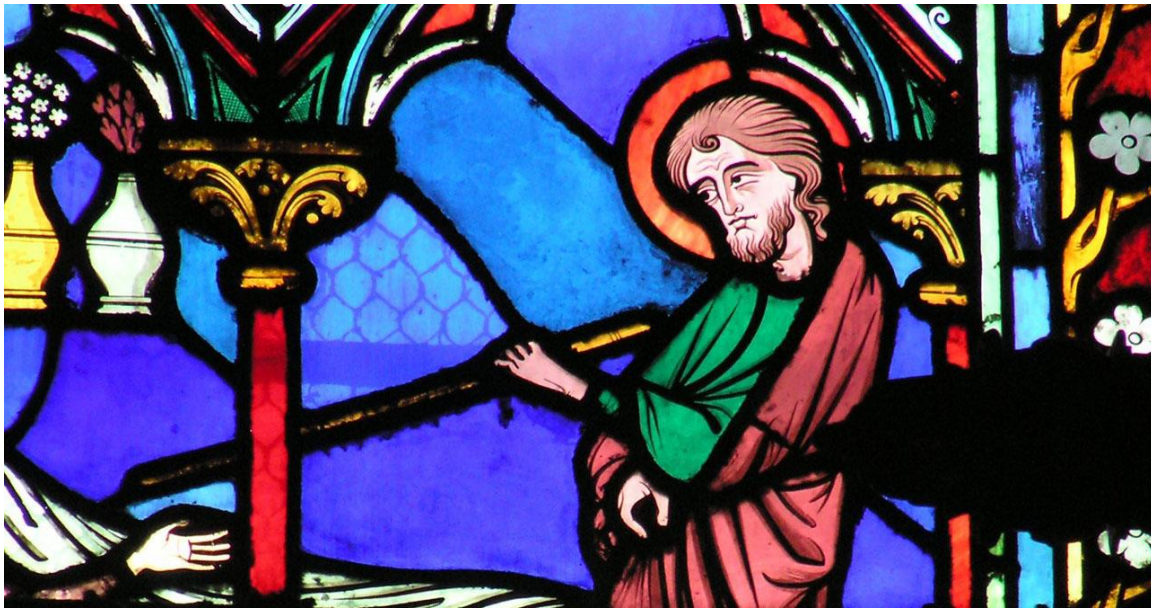


Figure 10 The raising of a sick man with a wand in a stained-glass window in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

Photo by John W. Welch.

People have long wondered, What happened to Jesus after he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane? What kinds of procedures followed, before Caiaphas, members of the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and even Herod Antipas? Were these procedures properly conducted

under either Jewish or Roman law? And of what could Jesus, an innocent man, be accused and convicted? Was he put to death by Romans under Roman law, or by Jews under Jewish law? Was He accused of political offenses or of religious violations?

Definitive answers to such questions have proven extremely evasive and have generated vast amounts scholarly and popular literature. The trial of Jesus is easily one of the most difficult and controversial subjects in the legal history of the world.

Many possible legal issues present themselves to anyone approaching the trial of Jesus. The most crucial question asks, on what specific ground (or grounds) was Jesus convicted? While it was common in ancient law for defendants to find themselves accused of an array of allegations, as indeed was the case in the actions brought against Jesus, John 18:29–30 holds the key for understanding the legal cause of action that was ultimately brought against Jesus by the Chief Priests before Pilate. John says they accused him of being a *kakopoios*, literally “an evil (*kakon*) maker (*poios*),” which the King James translators rendered as “malefactor,” following the Latin “evil (*malus*) done (*factus*; *fictor* = an image-maker, contriver).” A fascinating course of study, which I have pursued for forty years, thus asks, What did it mean in Jesus’s day to be a *kakopoios*, and why would the highest Jewish legal officials have told the Roman ruler that they had found Jesus to be a *kakopoios*?

The following set of notes only scratches the surface of this highly charged historical question. For those interested, here are three of my main publications on this subject. The first is aimed at a general scholarly audience:

John W. Welch, “Miracles, *Maleficium*, and *Maiestas* in the Trial of Jesus,” in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 349–383.

The other two were presented at conferences at BYU:

John W. Welch, “The Factor of Fear in the Trial of Jesus,” in *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior*, ed. Paul H. Peterson, Gary L. Hatch and Laura D. Card (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2002), 284–312

John W. Welch, “The Legal Cause of Action against Jesus in John 18:29-30,” in *Celebrating Easter*, ed. Thomas A. Wayment and Keith J. Wilson (Provo, UT: BYU, Religious Studies Center, 2007), 157–176.

Here I follow the second of these to explain how the Chief Priests focused on the crime of being a *kakopoios* (Greek) or a “maleficus” (Latin), which is translated into the King James English as “malefactor” (King James English) in order to state the main concern of theirs about Jesus that would also be the most potent concern for the Romans.

Of course, Jesus was accused of many things. He was he accused of blasphemy in Matthew 26:65–66; Mark 14:63–64. But if blasphemy alone had been the issue, Jesus should have been stoned, which was the usual required mode of execution for blasphemy (see Leviticus 24:16; Acts 6:11; 7:59). And because Pilate and the Romans would have cared very little about a Jewish accusation of blasphemy, scholars have often concluded that Jesus must have been executed on some other ground.

Some have suggested that Jesus must have been convicted of organizing a military revolt against Rome, since he was called “king of the Jews,” as Pilate had his scribes write on the placard placed above Jesus on the cross. But, it is very hard to see much substance to a claim that Jesus was a treasonous revolutionary. He was an unarmed pacifist, a Galilean peasant who said, “All they who take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Matthew 26:52). When asked by Pilate about his kingship, Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), and it appears that Pilate was satisfied that Jesus posed little, if any, threat to Rome or to the Emperor Tiberias: “I find in him no fault” (John 18:38). Meanwhile, the Jewish law would not have had jurisdiction over a case of treason against Rome.

The solution that I have found most satisfying is found in the Gospel of John. All readers of the New Testament must choose between (a) relying primarily on John and then secondarily on the Synoptics to fill in the gaps, or (b) primarily on the Synoptics and then secondarily on John. In this case and for a number of reasons, I prefer the former.

Besides the fact that John’s report makes impeccable legal sense, John can be trusted as a witness of these proceedings. For one thing, he was there. He was one of the leading apostles, with Peter and James. He was at Golgatha and would have unforgettably known as much as possible about what was happening and why. Indeed, John 18:15 tells us that “another disciple went in” to Annas’s house. More likely, this disciple was John himself, who was thus an eye witness of these legal proceedings. While the Gospel of John is the most theological of the gospels, it is in many ways also historically authentic, as recent scholarship has quite convincingly argued. John’s account is in fact especially in touch with Galilean and Jewish backgrounds of the life of Jesus in ways that relate to the earliest circumstances of Jesus’s ministry.

In particular, John 18:29–30 reports the exchange between Pilate and the Chief Priests as they brought Jesus to the Praetorium: “Pilate then went out unto them, and asked, What legal accusation do you bring against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a *kakopoios*, we would not have turned him over to you” (my translation). The critical question then becomes, what did the Chief Priests mean by *kakopoios*?

Indeed, the Greek work *kakopoios*, which (like its closely related Latin word, *maleficus*), particularly in legal contexts, can mean “magician” or “sorcerer.” To understand how

ancient people generally, and the leaders of the Jewish establishment in particular, would have reacted to Jesus and his miracles, modern readers must understand the positive and negative attitudes of ancient Jews and Romans towards activities that involve the supernatural, divination, conjuring, or magic. Both the Romans and the Jews had strict laws that punished magicians, sorcerers, fortune tellers, diviners, those in contact with spirits, and also miracle workers.

Most relevant to the trial of Jesus is the biblical law that imposes the death penalty on those who use miracles (signs or wonders) to lead people into apostasy (to go after other gods): “If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods . . . that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death” (Deuteronomy 13:1–2, 5). Of course, Jewish law recognized that there were good uses of supernatural powers as well as bad. Jewish attitudes toward magic were mixed. On the one hand there was the famous contest between Moses and Pharaoh’s magicians. And King Saul visited the witch of Endore. But Exodus 22:18 commands, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch [either male or female] to live.” The Jews took magic seriously enough that in order to qualify as a member of the Sanhedrin (according to Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 17a), one was required to be able to distinguish between good miracle working and evil trafficking with ghosts, intoxicating “familiar spirits,” or other gods. Although Jesus’ miracles all produced good results, his opponents could use the legal concerns to attack and prosecute him.

And in addition, Roman law also banned certain uses of magic and divination. Empire-wide decrees adopted in the years 11 and 16 AD, which were issued during Jesus’s own lifetime, elevated suspicions about any rogue invocations of supernatural powers. Roman law and society at that time considered magicians, along with brigands, pirates, robbers, astrologers, philosophers, and prophets, to be enemies of the Roman order. For these people, gods were everywhere, good and evil; and thus they took unseen spirits and demons very seriously as constant potential threats. Especially when combined with *maiestas* (anything that insulted, suborned or threatened the Emperor), failing to punish any such use of supernatural powers would especially make a person “no friend of Caesar” (as the Chief Priests reminded Pilate in John 19:12). And here we can see the main Roman concern that the Chief Priests used to capture Pilate’s attention.

And, although for different reasons, Caiaphas and the Chief Priests also were most concerned about Jesus’ miracle working. While we as followers of Jesus have no reason to think that He ever used his powers to harm anyone, people in Jesus’ day did not know where He would stop. If he could still the storm, then he could cause earthquakes (the most likely way in which could instantly destroy the temple), and his words about the

destruction of the temple were alleged (however wrongly) to be an actual threat against the temple: “We heard him say, I will destroy this temple” (Mark 14:58).

Legal debates had in fact ensued over the miracles of Jesus. People wondered: By whose power does he do this? (compare Acts 4:7). In Mark 3:22, Scribes (legal officials) were brought all the way to Galilee from Jerusalem to give their legal opinion in the case of driving a legion of devils out of a possessed man. People accused Jesus: “He hath Beelzebub [Satan], and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.” What was going on in that case was not a theological debate or a popular news report, but a legal investigation which could have resulted in an allegation with dire legal implications.

This same debate continued in Jerusalem. John 10:19–21 tells us that “there was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; . . . Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?”

As we have discussed previously, the final miracle that tipped the scales against Jesus was the raising of Lazarus. That miracle raised legal issues that could not be ignored, and “from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death” (John 11:53). This unified the two parties that controlled the Sanhedrin: “Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment that if any man knew where [Jesus] were, he should shew it, that they might take him” (John 11:57). And Lazarus likewise, “because by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus” (John 12:10–11).

Seen against this legal background, it is hard to imagine how Jesus’s miracle working would not have been the dominant factor that galvanized the Chief Priests against him. While this factor is occasionally mentioned by commentators, the underlying concern or cause of action is not usually given much attention. The main reason for this disregard is that no formal accusation of *maleficium* appears in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. But the case as reported in John deserves greater weight, attention, and authority. So, let’s take a closer look at John 18:30.

While sometimes the terms malefactor, *maleficus*, *kakopoios*, or *kakon poion* can be understood in a general sense of just being “a bad guy” or “evil doer,” the context here strongly indicates that this term is being used here in a specific way. Here are ten reasons why the word “malefactor” in John 18:30 should be taken as having a technical legal meaning. These linguistic or circumstantial reasons give grounds upon which to conclude that the legal cause of action brought by the Chief Priests against Jesus, as they tried to turn him over to Pilate, was that he was an illegal miracle worker or magician using illicit powers to threaten the public order.

1. *The legal setting.* Ordinary words carry technical legal import when used in a judicial context. English words such as *action*, *motion*, *bench*, or *arise* all have regular meanings in ordinary speech, but they have a legal meaning when they are being spoken in a court, as is the case here.
2. *The legal request.* When Pilate asked, “What sort of *accusation* do you bring against this man?” he was not saying, “What’s going on here?” His words call for a legal response stating a specific cause of action. He would expect the Chief Priests to formulate their reply in terms of recognizable causes of action under Roman law.
3. *The logic of the exchange.* In the synoptic Gospels (of which John presumably was aware), Pilate is said to have asked, “What *kakon* [bad or evil thing] has he done?” (Matt 27:23; Mark 15:14; Luke 23:22). In their discourse with Pilate, if John were to have the Chief Priests simply respond, “Oh, we found him doing *kakon*,” their response would be circular, evasive, and perhaps even insulting. Their answer, that they had found Jesus to be a *kakopoios*, is best understood as being a specific reply and not simply a repetition of the question back to the magistrate.
4. *The strong meaning of the word.* Ancient astrological treatises, magical papyri, and other documents use the word *kakopoios* to describe bad mystical agents. In an emotionally charged setting, such as the hearing before Pilate, speakers or writers do not typically use strong or technical words in a weak sense.
5. *A legal characterization of early Christians.* The early Christians themselves were seen by others as being involved in magic. Suetonius, in his biography of Nero (*de Vita Caesarum*, 6.16) states that Christians in their first century were accused of being involved in *superstitionis novae ac maleficae*, a label that implies legal charges of magic.
6. *Contemporaneous legal prosecutions of other miracle-workers.* Apollonius (who coincidentally was raised in Tarsus about the same time as was Paul) was another miracle-worker in the first century. He was “tried for his life by Domitian,” who accused Apollonius among other things “of divination by magic for Nerva’s benefit,” and his emphasis “on supernatural revelations inevitably led to his being accused of magical practices” on other occasions as well.⁶
7. *Jesus and exorcism and wonder working.* Jesus and his disciples were indisputably depicted as exorcists, the positive implications of which have been thoroughly explored in other contexts.⁷ But if used for improper purposes in an open and notorious fashion, even exorcisms would have produced legal trouble. Carl

⁶ Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics*, 222–223.

⁷ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*; R. Shirock, “Whose Exorcists Are They?” *JSNT* 46 (1992): 41–51; C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1947) ch. 4.

- Kraeling has argued persuasively that people generally said of Jesus that he “has a demon,” meaning that he “has a demon under his control,” a concept commonly applied in the ambient culture to people having access to “the spirits of persons who had died a violent death [such as the spirit of John the Baptist].”⁸ After Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath and was then accused by people in the synagogue, he asked them, “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil (*kakopoiesai*),” and his accusers “held their peace” (Mark 3:4). Obviously, it was unlawful any time to do magical evil on any day.
8. *Use in 1 Peter.* The only other place where the word *kakopoios* appears in the New Testament is in Peter’s first epistle, where it occurs twice, likely referring to a person “guilty of legally defined crimes.”⁹ Peter knew of people calling Christians *kakopoioi*, but he was confident that judges and others would see their good works, glorify God, and convict them not as magicians or “evil makers” but as “good makers” (1 Peter 2:12, 14). Here the label of “evil makers” was intended by outsiders to be deeply pejorative, not just mildly insulting. Even more definitively in 1 Peter 4:13–16, Christians were exhorted to share the suffering of Christ, but not as a murderer, a thief, a *kakopoios*, or as a fourth kind of offender (the specific nature of which is indeterminable). Clustered together with the first two very serious offenses in this list, the word *kakopoios* points to a particular crime of seriously unacceptable magnitude.
 9. *Early Christian attestations.* Some early Christians, such as Lactantius in the late third or early fourth century, openly acknowledged that the Jews had accused Jesus of being a magician or sorcerer.¹⁰ Christians did not answer by arguing that this word in John 18:30 should be understood in some weak sense. They answered by arguing that the astonishing miracles of Jesus were acceptable because the prophets had predicted them.
 10. *Confirmations from early Jewish sources.* Evidence of Jewish opinion (also around the third century) comes from the following passage from the Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 43a: “On the eve of the Passover Yeshe [the Nazarine] was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery

⁸ C. H. Kraeling, “Was Jesus Accused of Necromancy,” *JBL* 59 (1940): 153–157.

⁹ J. H. Elliott, *1 Peter* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 468. When Luke calls the two other criminals crucified with Jesus “malefactors” (Luke 23:32), the Greek word he uses is *kakourgos*, not *kakopoios*. Luke’s word refers to “robbers,” and it must mean something different to Luke than what *kakopoios* means to John, or else we must imagine that the Jews in John 18:30 were accusing Jesus of being a “robber,” an allegation that lacks any plausible basis.

¹⁰ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 5, 3; in *Patrologia Latina* 6.560–561.

and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favor he was hanged on the eve of the Passover." Notice that the raising of Lazarus and the Sanhedrin trial led by Caiaphas in John 11:47–57 would have happened about forty days before Passover.

Ultimately, however, even Pilate found no such cause of action (or any other) against Jesus, and so he held: "I find in him no fault," or in other words "I recognize no legal cause of action against him" (John 18:38, my translation). Pilate was satisfied that Jesus of Nazareth had not yet broken any Roman law. But obviously Jesus had extraordinary powers, and one can see that some might have seen that as possibly being turned in some way against Rome or Tiberius Caesar. Thus, Pilate was apparently fearful enough about the situation that he was willing to allow the Chief Priests to move ahead, accompanied by Roman soldiers who were going to crucify two others that morning in any event.

All of this textual and contextual analysis is corroborated by the fact that, during the next hundred years, his having been a miracle worker and wonder worker was seen as a dominant part of Jesus' public reputation. This is evident from the writings of Josephus, both in Greek and Slavonic. For example, the Slavonic version of Josephus states: "And [Pilate] had that *wonder-worker* brought up, and after instituting an inquiry concerning him he pronounced judgment: 'He is [a benefactor, not] a malefactor, [nor] a rebel, [nor] covetous of kingship.' [And he let him go; for he had healed his dying wife.]"¹¹

Moreover, the earliest extant Christian art offers further witness of the popular reputation that Jesus had as a wonder worker, not only among his detractors, but also his followers. Pre-Constantinian images of Jesus depict him as a miracle worker more often than in any other pose. The most common compositional element of these images shows Jesus holding a rod or wand, representing the divine power with which he performs his supernatural feats. It would be several centuries after the death of Christ before the cross or the passion narratives became main subjects of Christian art.

Instead, the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1–43), the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:22–43; Luke 8:41–56), the miracles of loaves and fishes (Mark 6:38–44; 8:5–19; Matthew 14:17–19; 15:34–36; Luke 16:9–10; John 6:9–13), and the turning water into wine (John 2:1–11) were the most popular narratives in the ministry of Jesus that were depicted in the first

¹¹ Josephus, War IV-VII, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), pp. 648–650 (brackets retained as included in this translated source; emphasis added).

few centuries.¹² As one scholar has noted, “To such Christians, the life of Christ consisted simply of a series of miracles.”¹³ And in depicting these miracles, Jesus touches the body of the deceased, the loaf-filled baskets, and the water-filled amphora with a wand, symbolizing his divinely wondrous powers.

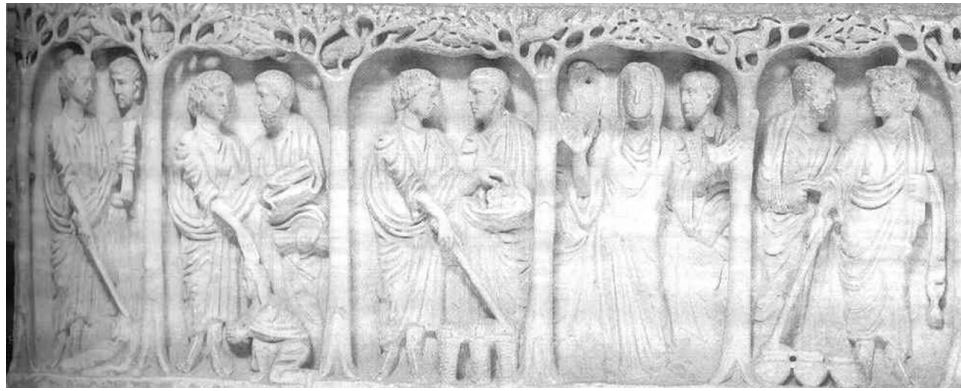
Although found in several locations, the majority of these images are found in the Christian funerary sculptures or paintings in the Roman catacombs—a 12-mile underground labyrinth of niches, alcoves, and passageways beneath Rome. In that iconic burial place, graves were often decorated with religious motifs, sometimes quite elaborately. The resurrection of the deceased was metonymically promised by scenes of the miracles of Christ, as well as by the sign of Jonah being rescued from the whale, and the divine deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace.

Ancient artists often added the detail of Jesus holding a staff or a wand in depicting the Gospel miracle stories (See Figures 11, 12, 13). This was because of the popular correlation of wands with magicians. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, for example, Circe—the magician daughter of Helios—is depicted working her magic with a wand when she transforms a group of people into pigs. In Roman mythology, Mercury was one of the gods who escorted souls to and from the afterlife. Just as Mercury is depicted holding his golden wand to lead the dead back to life, so to Jesus is shown supernaturally bringing people back to life with a wand or staff representing His divine power.¹⁴

¹² See Thomas F. Matthews, *The Clash of the Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, Rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 54–91; and Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 64–93.

¹³ Matthews, *Clash of the Gods*, 59.

¹⁴ For Circe, see *Odyssey* 10.293, 388; *Virgil Aeneid*, 7.189–91; *Ovid, Metamorphoses*, 14.278, 413. For Mercury, see *Odyssey*, 24.1; *Virgil, Aeneid*, 4.242; and *Prudentius, Contra Symachum*, 1.89–91 all cited in Matthews, *Clash of the Gods*, 58–59. I thank Josh Probert for his research on early Christian art.



*Figure 11 A family sarcophagus showing series of miracles of Jesus with a wand, for men, women and children.
Photo by John W. Welch.*



Figure 12 A gold-leafed glass plate of Jesus changing water into wine with a wand. Photo by John W. Welch.



Figure 13 A clear glass plate with etching of Jesus raising Lazarus. Photo by John W. Welch.

Thus, one may wonder why the factor of fearful magic has not been emphasized previously in scholarly or religious literature about the trial of Jesus. I would suggest at least three main reasons:

First, few secular scholars want to allow that the miracles of Jesus really happened. And if they did not happen, of course, they could not have been a factor in the historical trials of Jesus before the Sanhedrin and Pilate. But if those miracles *did* happen, it is hard to see how they could not have been a dominant factor in the case of the Chief Priests against Jesus of Nazareth.

Second, faithful Christians today, of course, generally do not want to associate the innocent Jesus with any suggestion that he was a trickster. But the New Testament itself invites readers to recognize the difference between good miracles and bad magic. The difference is definable by results. Jesus himself said, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20), and convincingly asked, "Can Satan drive out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand" (Mark 3:23–24). Thus, Christians should celebrate, not shy away from the miracles of Jesus.

Third, critical scholars in the twentieth century gave more historical weight to the accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke than to those in John. But in light of the fact that all three of the synoptic gospels report that Pilate asked, "What *kakon* (evil) has he done?" (Matt 27:23; Mark 15:14; Luke 23:22), the formulation by the Chief Priests of the legal cause of action against Jesus in John 18:30 becomes all the more significant. The charge that Jesus was a *kakopoios* (a *malificus*, magician, or wonderworker) raises a connecting ground, not only between all four New Testament Gospels, but also between the Jewish leaders and their Roman procurator.

Of course, it would help if the world accepted the Book of Mormon, which long ago revealed that even after all his mighty miracles "they shall consider him a man, *and say that he hath a devil*, and shall scourge him, *and shall crucify him*" (Mosiah 3:9). It seems to me, as the Book of Mormon makes quite clear, that it was his miracles that lead to Jesus's scourging and crucifixion. His mighty miracles forced the issue, then as now, requiring people to ask, By what power did Jesus do these things? If by the power of God, then he should be believed, accepted and followed; but if by the power of Beelzebub, then he should be feared, discounted and eliminated.

Jesus certainly came with power. He was the creator of the world. He was good enough, wise enough, and powerful enough to bring to pass the salvation, immortality, and eternal life of all mankind. If he could raise Lazarus from the dead, he could control many other life and death situations, in this world and in the world to come. His powers were also sufficiently in control of all that needed to happen as he came into this world and as he went out of it (see John 10:18). He came to win the cosmic battle against death and hell, to engage the powers of evil, to drive out devils from paralytics and demoniacs, to heal the sick, to overwhelm despair with hope, to raise the dead, and to cast Satan eternally out. This makes one wonder: How, indeed, could he do all of this and *not in some opposing minds* find himself seriously accused of dealing with and in the realms of the preternatural?

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "Miracles, *Maleficium*, and *Maiestas* in the Trial of Jesus," in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 349–383.

John W. Welch, "The Factor of Fear in the Trial of Jesus," in *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior*, ed. Paul H. Peterson, Gary L. Hatch and Laura D. Card (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2002), 284–312

John W. Welch, "The Legal Cause of Action against Jesus in John 18:29-30," in *Celebrating Easter*, ed. Thomas A. Wayment and Keith J. Wilson (Provo, UT: BYU, Religious Studies Center, 2007), 157–176.

Day 4: Why Jesus Was Put to Death?



Figure 14 *Behold the Man!* by Mihály Munkácsy, 1896.

For reflection especially on the day remembered among Christians as “Maundy Thursday,” the day of the Last Supper and when Jesus was arrested, I invite you to consider some of the perspectives that Latter-day Saint insights add to our understanding of the complex question: Why was Jesus killed?

The Need for Humility

Latter-day Saints in particular, but all people as well, know the importance of approaching the subject of the trials and death of Jesus with humility and cautiousness. It will long remain impossible to give a definitive description of all that happened on these final days and in what is called the trial of Jesus. Too little is known today about what was said and done. The laws and procedures that normally should have been followed in Jerusalem at that time remain in many ways obscure. Moreover, Jesus’s case was hardly normal in any legal, political, or spiritual sense. And too little is known about all that happened or did not happen so long ago in order for any modern person to speak with any degree of particularity and certainty about all questions surrounding this case.

As Elder Bruce R. McConkie has wisely said, “There is no divine ipse dixit, no voice from an archangel, and as yet no revealed latter-day account of all that transpired when God’s own Son suffered himself to be judged by men so that he could voluntarily give up his life upon the cross” (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah* [Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1981], 4:142). All who approach this subject and ponder the heart-wrenching

twists and turns in the unfolding of the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus should take care to be humble, less dogmatic and certainly less judgmental, concerning this vast subject than people tend to be, both intellectually and spiritually.

Accepting Perplexities

Latter-day Saints can also appreciate the fact that many things make it hard to be definitive about why things happened the way they did in the so-called trial of Jesus. Many things contribute to our perplexities. For example, we would like to know more about the legal rules that were normally followed by the Sanhedrin in Jesus' day. While much is known about Rabbinic law from the Talmud, the Talmud was written later, from the second to the fifth centuries, by the Pharisees or their successors, and so the Talmud presumably reflects the rules preferred by the late Pharisaic movement. Moreover, the Pharisees were not in control of the Sanhedrin at the time of Jesus. The Sadducees were decidedly in the majority in that body of seventy-one voting members. While we know that the Sadducees and Pharisees differed on a number of points of law, little is known about what the Sadducees believed on many issues, since they and their writings did not survive the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

We also wonder: Did or did not the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem have the authority to execute anyone at the time of Jesus? All that we are told is that the Chief Priests said to Pilate, "To us is *not* allowed to kill *no one*," as the Greek in John 18:31 somewhat ambiguously reads. But it is not known why they lacked such authorization, or why they would say this to Pilate in this way. Several possibilities come to mind. Perhaps they said this to show deference to Pilate's ultimate political power and authority. Maybe the Sadducees had reached an understanding with their Roman overlords that they would not take any action—even though it was within their traditional right to do so—without first consulting with Pilate. And perhaps their deference toward Pilate helped them get his ratification for their intended action, even if he did not take over the case entirely, particularly according to John.

And, in any event, it would appear that Jewish people under Roman governance did have some power—or at least took the power on some occasions—to punish and even execute people, as we see in Herod Antipas's beheading of John the Baptist, or in the attempt to stone Jesus in Nazareth on a local charge of blasphemy in Luke 4, or in the case where people were testing Jesus on the impending stoning of the woman taken in adultery in John 8, or in the execution of Stephen by the Sanhedrin in Acts 7. None of these cases involved Roman authorities. Thus, it is hard to speak with any degree of certitude about the technicalities, especially any alleged illegalities, in the proceedings involving Jesus.

Latter-day Saints can also appreciate the perplexities that arise in earth-shaking moments. Although the reasons behind the death of Jesus and causes of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith were very different, they can be compared. Latter-day Saints can well imagine the turmoil, angst, haste, and commotion surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus, because they relate to the abruptness and confusion involved in the week when Joseph Smith was killed. Unusual situations and cases such as these do not lend themselves to simple explanations.

Parenthetically, some Protestants in the late nineteenth century so exaggerated the alleged illegalities in the execution of Jesus that, instead of increasing sympathy for Jesus or provoking outrage over the way He was treated, that approach actually backfired. Many people in the early twentieth century concluded that if the trial of Jesus was such a fiasco or travesty of justice then maybe it simply had to be a myth and was not historical at all.

Much confusion arises in cases such as this from the array of different accounts that begin circulating about these high-profile and high-stakes cases. Even within the four New Testament Gospels, as we have seen, there are significant differences in what they chose to report. John's account is very different from the accounts in the synoptic Gospels, and even between the three Synoptics significant legal differences exist. Harmonizing these four Gospel accounts is possible, but in the process one should not ignore their different purposes. Those considerable differences are conveniently displayed in two charts (See Figures 15, 16), first comparing the purposes of each of the Gospels in general, and the second then enumerates distinctive elements in each of their approaches to the trial of Jesus in particular.

Latter-day Saints are usually not troubled by the technical differences between these four New Testament accounts, but some people are. Some Jewish writers, especially, have taken great interest in how these texts are to be interpreted, because the trial of Jesus has been a major cause of antisemitism over the ages. In response to the antisemitism which fueled the Holocaust, Jewish scholars especially in the 1950s and 1960s passionately argued that the Jews had nothing to do with the crucifixion of Jesus and therefore that the Romans must have been completely responsible.

But, in contrast, we as Latter-day Saints find less drastic ways to accept various versions of important scriptural narratives that do not always agree with each other. Not only do we live with, but we are enhanced by, four differing accounts of the Creation (Genesis 1, Genesis 2, Moses 3–5, Abraham 4–5, and the temple endowment), three distinct versions of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7, 3 Nephi 12–14, and JST Matthew 5–7), as well as the several accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision.

Purposes and Approaches of the Four Gospels

MATTHEW

Purpose

To show that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the King of Israel, who will restore Israel, the children of Abraham, and royal tribe of Judah

Manifestations of this approach

1. Jesus is born King of the Jews
2. Baby Jesus is visited by Magi from the East
3. Jesus is presented as a new Moses, a new lawgiver
4. Jesus sends twelve disciples to the lost of Israel
5. Jesus fulfills many Old Testament prophecies

LUKE

Purpose

To show that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind, bringing salvation on earth to the sons and daughters of Adam through his redemption

Manifestations of this approach

1. Jesus is born in humble circumstances
2. Baby Jesus is visited by shepherds from the hills
3. Jesus is presented as wise child prodigy
4. Jesus sends seventy disciples to the nations
5. Jesus gives many universal, conciliatory parables

MARK

Purpose

To show that Jesus is God here and now on earth, coming in a prophetic mode with divine powers over spirits and forgiveness of sin

Manifestations of this approach

1. No account of the birth is given
2. Jesus is visited by the Spirit of God descending like a dove
3. Jesus is told, "Thou art my beloved Son" (1:11)
4. Jesus' disciples are very slow to understand
5. Jesus performs many powerful miracles

JOHN

Purpose

To show that Jesus is God forever on earth and in heaven, the great I Am, the image of the Father and his eternal love

Manifestations of this approach

1. Jesus is the Creator of the world
2. John the Baptist knew the Lamb before his baptism
3. Jesus is presented as the light and life eternal
4. Many disciples walk no more with Jesus
5. Jesus is in control of all from beginning to end

Features in the Four Approaches

MATTHEW: Israelite Features	MARK: Power Features	LUKE: Populist Features	JOHN: Eternal Features
Twelve legions of angels (compare the twelve tribes of Israel)	When the ear is cut off and healed, no words, just actions	Concern about lowly servant, healing his ear	Foreknowledge of the actions of Judas
Jesus is taken directly to high priest, adjudicator of Jewish law	They arrest Jesus under heavy guard	The arresters blaspheme Jesus (the popular world rejects Jesus)	Concern over impurity in Praetorium
False witnesses testify (compare witnesses against Naboth)	False witnesses are powerless	No actual accusation until before Pilate (making it a public affair)	Concern over who has power to deliver
Jesus shows respect for the Jewish Temple with power over it	Jesus said, "I will destroy this temple"	Allegations involve ordinary public offenses: he stirs up the people	God as king? "We have no king but Caesar"
Focus on blasphemy, violation of Jewish law	Jesus responds powerfully, "I am"	Herod's soldiers play games	"My kingdom is not of this world"
Israelites willing to take responsibility: "His blood be upon us"	Those with power move against Jesus, all condemning Jesus	Women are mentioned; Jesus prophesies to them	"For this cause came I into the world"
When the earth shook, dead Israelites arose	Guards beat Jesus	Jesus asks the Father to forgive those who crucified him	Casting of lots, thirsting, side pierced; all fulfilled prophecy
	Crowd is very demanding, threatening riot	The robber on the cross invited into paradise	Jesus said, "It is finished"
	Roman soldiers mock Jesus' power	The crowd beats their breasts	
	Joseph of Arimathea, a powerful member of the Sanhedrin, mentioned		

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Chart 10-1

Figure 16 Welch, John W., and John F. Hall. "Features in the Four Approaches." *Charting the New Testament*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002, chart 10-1.

The Perils of Judging Intentions

A problem in many interpersonal relationships is determining another person's intent. Why did any people involved with the death of Jesus do what they did? What did they intend? *What* were their motives?

Even today, the greatest challenge in modern courts of law is trying to prove a person's intent. Scholarly prudence and Christian charity behoove us to withhold casting aspersions. As Jesus asks of us: "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7:1). Having been misunderstood often enough, Latter-day Saints, of all people, should follow a cautious, sensitive approach as we attempt to ferret out the motives of Caiaphas, the Chief Priests, Judas, Herod Antipas, or Pontius Pilate.

Indeed, one may scan the four New Testament Gospels and find precious few explicit indications of what actually motivated any of these people. We may guess, of course, but our guesses are speculations. We may attribute to these people a wide range of political, commercial, social, personal, religious, or legalistic motives; but in most cases the motives that seem the most plausible to us stem, to a large extent, from our own predilections and presentisms.

Thus, for example, some scholars of the 1970s were quite confident that Jesus was executed as some kind of supposed guerrilla warrior, while post-Holocaust Jewish scholars of the 1950s argued that Caiaphas and his temple guards actually took Jesus kindly intending to offer him protective custody and to warn him about the Romans who were out to get him. Such theories and many others like these are mostly in tune with the needs and angsts of the people who propound them.

Latter-day Saints are not immune from such inclinations to ascribe motives. According to Ernest L. Wilkinson in 1966, the cause of the atrocious death of Jesus was none other than the concentration of "legislative, executive and judicial powers ... in one unit, ...in the Great Sanhedrin," in which Wilkinson expressly saw the ominous specter of Communism in the midst of the Cold War and the tensions over the Berlin Wall.

More commonly, Latter-day Saints assert that Israel's judges were motivated by hate. In 1915 the work of James E. Talmage portrayed the Sanhedrists as being galvanized against Jesus by "malignant," "inherent and undying hatred" (James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 627, 637). At that time, the Latter-day Saints themselves were battle-weary from repeated attacks and challenges over the previous 80 years, and so that strong language is understandable. But the word hate is actually not found in any of the New Testament narratives of the trial of Jesus per se.

Specifically regarding the motives of those few, particular Jews, Matthew and Mark only say that Pilate could tell “that the chief priests had delivered [Jesus to him] out of envy” (Mark 15:10). But even that is hearsay. And how did anyone know what Pilate was really thinking? In any event, the word envy is not particularly antagonistic. It connotes jealous resentment of someone else’s wisdom or good fortune, but it would usually take more than this common human emotion to amount to a case of lethal hatred.

Some people see Pilate as a weak, incompetent, middle-management functionary who had recently lost his power base in Rome, who was easily intimidated, and who was manipulated by his wife. But this same Pilate, who usually resided in Caesarea (See Figures 17, 18, 19) and may have been cautious in handling Jesus in Jerusalem, still held in his hands the highest legal power of Rome in the area.



Figure 17 Caesarea Maritima, the usual residence of Pilate. Photo by John W. Welch.



Figure 18 Caesarea Maritima, the usual residence of Pilate. Photo by John W. Welch.



Figure 19 Caesarea Maritima, the usual residence of Pilate. Photo by John W. Welch.

Pilate had not hesitated on other occasions to assert himself, even with military force, against even minor provocations. Having tried in several ways to get the Chief Priests to drop their complaint against Jesus, Pilate saw that nothing was working and “that rather a tumult was made” (Matt. 27:24). Physical violence—a riot—was erupting. When he tried to placate the crowd by giving them Barabbas as a “secure pledge,” Pilate may have acted out of desperation, fear for his own safety, or equally out of hope that the crowd would disperse and leave Jesus and others alone. In fact, in the Joseph Smith Translation, Pilate tells the Jews to leave Jesus alone: “See that ye do nothing unto him” (Matt. 27:20 JST). For additional clarifications of the intentions of Pilate and others in the arrest of Jesus, in his exchange with Pilate, and in events on Calvary, the following chart (See Figure 20) displays ten further additions provided by the Joseph Smith Translation.

Speaking of public antipathy and the lack of tolerance generally, Latter-day Saints readily note that the Gospel of John goes so far as to make it clear that the world (not just Pilate or the Chief Priests) would misunderstand, reject, and *hate* Jesus, just like the world would also hate all of his true disciples. Jesus said: “But me [the world] hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil” (John 7:7); “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18), for “I am not of the world” (John 17:14). In the cosmic conflict presented in the Gospel of John, this worldly hate of truth is the theological opposite of divine love. That antipathy broadly provides a legal motive for killing Jesus, but these statements more readily apply to all people, both then and now, who reject Jesus and his Gospel in any way, physically as well as spiritually.

Unique Information or Features in the JST

1. Jesus healed the servant's ear by touching it *with his finger* (Compare Mk 14:47; 14:53 JST).
2. The disciples fled *because they heard this saying* (Mk 14:50; 14:56 JST).
3. The young man who fled was a *disciple* (Mk 14:51; 14:57 JST).
4. The young man who fled *saved himself from the arresters* (Mk 14:52; 14:57 JST).
5. Jesus answered Pilate, "*Thou sayest truly; for thus it is written of me*" (Mt 27:11; 27:12 JST).
6. Jesus answered Pilate, "*I am, even as thou sayest*" (Mk 15:2; 15:4 JST).
7. Pilate's wife had a *vision* (Mt 27:19; 27:20 JST).
8. Pilate told the Jews, "*See that ye do nothing unto him*" (Mt 27:24; 27:26 JST).
9. Golgotha means "*place of burial*" (Mt 27:33; 27:35 JST; Mk 15:22; 15:25 JST; Jn 19:17; 19:17 JST).
10. In his words from the cross, Jesus expressly forgave only *the soldiers* who crucified him (Lk 23:34; 23:35 JST).
11. Pilate *himself* wrote the title, "*King of the Jews*" (Mt 27:37; 27:39 JST; Mk 15:26; 15:29 JST).

The question, Of what crime was Jesus accused?, also has no simple answer. As mentioned in the previous discussion of *kakopoios*, many other accusations were also heaped upon Jesus. Each accusation would have been made for a different purpose and with a distinct intent and desired outcome. The charges against Jesus included blasphemy, sedition, encouraging tax protesters, and declaring himself a king, but none of these really stuck or would carry the day. And in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked his arresters why they came after him as if he were a robber. Such outlaws were given no legal rights, let alone a warning or any statement of the charges being brought against them. Even Pilate had to ask, “What is it these men accuse you of?” No one ever gave a straight answer. The Gospels in the end simply say that he was accused of “many things” (Matthew 27:13; Mark 15:3–4; emphasis added).

All this leaves the matter of intent intentionally vague. This should also remind us that precise, modern pleading practices were not followed in ancient courts and that precise assignments of intent in Jesus’ case are perilous.

Just about everything in the situation surrounding the death of Jesus was complicated. It is no wonder that uncertainty was a common reaction of the people to Jesus. Indeed, in reaction to Jesus’ speech in Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles, John says, “There was a division among the people because of him” (John 7:43). “Some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people. Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews” (John 7:12–13).

A Theater of Fear

This last point in John 7:13, about even the populace being afraid, brings up again further reflection on the pervasive sense of fear on the part of lots of people relating to Jesus. When people get confused, they often become afraid. When they become afraid, they act irrationally. Although the factor of fear is rarely mentioned by New Testament commentators, fear provides the driving emotion that best explains the irregularities, the vagaries, and the urgencies of the trials of Jesus. In understanding the intentions of these actors, fear played a much larger role than people have stopped to realize. And sooner or later, just about everyone in this Easter Week picture is afraid.

People who were sympathetic to Jesus were afraid of the Jewish leaders. The Disciples fled from the scene of the arrest out of great fear. Even the powerful Joseph of Arimathea kept his loyalty to Jesus secret “for fear of the Jews” (John 19:38).

The Chief Priests also were deeply afraid. They worried that if Jesus became too popular, the Romans would come and take away “our place [the holy city, the Temple, or the land] and nation” (John 11:48). But more than fearing Pilate, they feared Jesus. Mark 11:18

clearly states that after Jesus denounced the Temple as a den of robbers, they “sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him.”

Their scheme to destroy him, however, seems to have gone quickly awry. After he was arrested, Jesus was treated like a hot potato, being passed quickly from one hand to another—hands “of *frightened* subordinates whose plans had gone astray,” as Dallin H. Oaks, then a law professor, wrote in 1969—with no one wanting to take the rap for either his death or his release.

They were not the only ones who were frightened of Jesus. When Pilate heard the words “he has made himself the son of God,” his reaction was fear. John states that Pilate “was the more afraid” (John 19:8). Even Herod Antipas was said to fear the crowd.

Moreover, Golgotha, that scene of gruesome death, became a theater of fear. The centurion and those with him, when they felt the earth quake, “feared exceedingly” about what they had done. Anxiety and phobias are everywhere in this story—far more than people usually think.

And it bears recalling, Latter-day Saints can relate. They are not unacquainted with fear, either historically or in today’s highly charged atmosphere. The book of Doctrine & Covenants speaks often of the realities of fearful situations (D&C 1:7; 63:6), saying that fear will seize upon the wicked (45:74; 63:16). The Lord admonishes people to fear and revere only him, and that because of fear, blessings will be lost (67:3), especially when one fears public pressures or what society might do (60:2). Knowing absolutely the reality and the magnitude of what was at stake with the trial and death of Jesus, Latter-day Saints can appreciate poignantly the level of fear that surrounded all that happened as the crucifixion of Jesus drew close and then to a close.

A Fear of Power

Although the followers of Jesus accepted his miracles as manifestations of divine power, those who did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God found His wondrous works fundamentally disturbing. Indeed, a common reaction to *all* of the miracles of Jesus was fear, for if Jesus worked not by the power of God, he must have been possessed by “Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils” (Mark 3:22).

In Matthew 9 we read that Jesus healed a man who had been paralyzed by some kind of stroke. The King James Version of the Bible says that when the people saw this “they marveled.” But the original Greek says that “they were afraid” (Matt. 9:8). When the multitude saw Jesus raise the son of the widow in Nain and heard the young man speak, their reaction again was sheer terror: “And there came a fear on all,” as Luke 7:16 reads.

Fear of the extraordinary powers of Jesus, which nonbelievers saw as coming from the realm of the occult, explains much of what transpired in his trials.

But even the faithful are struck with awe when they find themselves in the personal presence of a divine being. And indeed, personal manifestations of miracles or the glorious appearance of supernatural beings would probably evoke fear in most of us. Joseph Smith's first reaction, as he felt the power of darkness nearly overwhelming him and then saw the burning pillar of fiery light descend upon him in his First Vision, was fear.

Likewise, the first words of an angel to Zacharias were "Fear not." Mary also was told by Gabriel, "Fear not" (Luke 1:30). As were the shepherds in the fields as well. Even the apostles ran from the angel at the tomb, trembling, "for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8). When those disciples had assembled, the resurrected Lord's first words to them needed to be, "Be not afraid" (Matthew 28:10).

And then, imagine the anxieties involved in trying to arrest Jesus. The Chief Priests could not have undertaken this venture lightly and must have steeled themselves against the unexpected. Jesus was known to have amazing powers. In his law-giving, Jesus had presented himself as a new Moses, and the Chief Priests were well aware of what Moses had done to Pharaoh and his army. Some of the Chief Priests had been involved in the attempt to stone Jesus when he "hid himself . . . , going right through the midst of them," and escaped undetected (John 8:59). With Jesus known as something of an escape artist, people had their hands full planning to take him at night and at the height of his power. It is no wonder they needed to enlist the assistance of Judas, one of his closest followers.

Thus, they may well have wondered, if Jesus had the power to command loaves and fishes, to still the waves, to wither fig trees, and to order evil spirits, what powers might he use in defense of himself and his apostles? The raising of Lazarus—which had occurred just a short time earlier and in Bethany just on the other side of the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem—had brought Jesus' powers close to the Holy City. It was then that the Chief Priests and Pharisees gathered in a council and said, "What do we [do]? for this man doeth many miracles" (John 11:47). As discussed previously in these Reflections, that disclosure confirms the deep root of their concerns, that Jesus was a miracle worker. If his wonder workings were not miracles from God, the only other choice was that Jesus had to be some kind of trickster. Coupling these powers with what they considered to be his curse upon the Temple itself (Mark 14:58) yields a potent formula for trepidation and the need to strike quickly.

Even at his arrest, Jesus continued to call upon his miraculous powers. Jesus told Peter, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53); and when Peter cut off the ear of the high

priest's servant, Jesus "touched his ear, and healed him" (Luke 22:51). Anyone in the group of arresters hearing or seeing these things must have been stunned. Moving forward must not have been easy for them.

Supernatural factors continue to play a dominant role up to the end of Jesus' life. People witnessing his crucifixion wondered if Jesus could save himself; they waited to see if the miracle-working Elijah would rescue him from the cross. Although that did not happen, the rocks split apart, graves opened, and holy spirits came forth out of the ground after Jesus's death (Matthew 27:51–53).

Behind everything lurked a strong, albeit misplaced, undercurrent of fear of unseen powers. For Latter-day Saints, this reaction to the miracles of Jesus comes as no surprise. In a significant revelation found in the Book of Mormon, an angel announced to King Benjamin that Jesus Christ would go about "working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, [and] cast[ing] out . . . evil spirits" (Mosiah 3:5); but "even after all this they shall consider him a man, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him" (Mosiah 3:9). From the Book of Mormon, one may well see his extraordinary power as the proximate or precipitating cause of the death of Jesus.

It was not so much that Jesus posed some kind of political threat, and it was not that some people disagreed with his doctrines, but rather that certain key people considered him to be of the devil. Latter-day Saints can relate. In 1879 an article appeared in the Latter-day Saints' *Millennial Star* comparing the death of Jesus to that of the Prophet Joseph Smith. In both cases, the "chief crime was that he obtained revelations from heaven." In both cases, divine power had been mistaken for some kind of unacceptable contacts with the supernatural.

Political Nervousness

The fear of power united the Pharisees, the Chief Priests, and Pilate. Otherwise political enemies, they were brought together by their mutual, political nervousness.

Indeed, the Pharisees were nervous to the bitter end that Jesus, whom they called a "deceiver" or a "trickster" (*planos*), would indeed rise after three days, as he had prophesied. They worried that this, his last "trick" (*planē*), would be worse than his first (Matt. 27:64). The word *planos*, in other early texts such as the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Sybilline Oracles, can indeed mean especially one who deceives through evil powers or spirits and thereby fools even the elect and powerful through nature miracles, including churning up the sea or raising the dead. Obviously, being a *planos* could raise serious political as well as religious concerns.

Expanding on the previous discussion of the word *kakopoios*, concerns about numinous powers could easily become a matter of public concern. While certain forms of divining

were not necessarily problematical under Jewish or Roman law—for example, people such as Simon the Magician (see Acts 8:9) and Theudas, another wonder worker (see Acts 5:36), seem to have walked the streets freely—when incantations, spells, or curses were used for improper purposes, political leaders become nervous, and the users of such powers could be severely punished (see, for example, the case of the sorcerer, Bar-Jesus, before the Roman governor Sergius Paulus in Cyprus, in Acts 13:6-11).

These extraordinary powers could destabilize the ruling order. Such behavior could be punished by death under Jewish law (see Lev. 20:27). Deuteronomy 13:1 made it an offense worthy of death to use signs or miracles to pervert or lead people into apostasy, as Caiaphas in John 11 had already determined. Roman law also outlawed certain forms of spell-casting or divination and made them punishable by death. In A.D. 11, Augustus Caesar himself issued an edict forbidding people from prophesying about a person's death. Such conduct had apparently become a serious political and social problem in the Roman world. The main thrust of Augustus's decree was to expand the law of *maiestas* (treason), which had long punished people who harmed the state by actions. Now it was made to include treasonous divination, especially augury directed against the imperial family. This "empire-wide imperial legislation circumscribed astrological and other divinatory activities everywhere," and we know of about one hundred trials for *maiestas* coming from the time of Tiberius alone.

This is not to say that Jesus was crucified for predicting the death of Tiberius Caesar or anyone else, but it may give another reason why the Chief Priests thought they could get Pilate to take action against Jesus. If Jesus—who had been born under an unusual star and visited as an infant by magi (astrologers or sign-readers) from the east—spoke evil predictions against the Temple and against the survival of the Jewish nation, and even prophesied about his own death, perhaps his next target would be to cast spells on Caesar. If that were to happen, letting Jesus go would certainly make Pilate no friend of Caesar. As their final argument, the Chief Priests asserted that anyone who made himself a king necessarily "speaketh against Caesar" (John 19:12). All this looks like an effort to make allegations of *maiestas* or high treason.

And it is ironically painful that the main charge on which the Prophet Joseph Smith was held in Liberty Jail in the winter of 1838–1839 and in the Carthage Jail on June 27, 1844, was also a trumped up charge of treason.

Later Roman law would even specify that the punishment for enchanters or spellbinders was crucifixion. That was the same punishment given to bandits, brigands, traitors, rebellious slaves, and others whose deviance threatened the government's power and the *Pax Romana*. This underlying concern disrupting the public order would especially

explain the puzzles of crucifixion and the lack of legal formalities in the trials of Jesus after his arrest.

And since the publication of the Temple Scroll from the Dead Sea in the 1970s, scholars now acknowledge that hanging on a tree (or crucifixion) could serve not only as a Roman mode of execution but as a Jewish remedy as well. In a notorious case a century before the time of Jesus, 80 witches were hung (or crucified) in Ashkelon without proper trials, because the Jewish court saw the matter as a state emergency.

Ultimately, of course, Pilate found no legal cause of action here, because Jesus claimed that his kingdom had nothing to do with Caesar's world, and Pilate was satisfied that the man from Nazareth had not broken any Roman law. But Pilate was still worried enough by the unsettling threats of widespread riot or tumult that he was willing to take some action to try to control the situation and to go along with Jesus's accusers.

To be concluded . . .

Further Reading

An earlier version of these reflections was published as John W. Welch, "Latter-day Saint Reflections on the Trial and Death of Jesus," *Clark Memorandum* (Fall 2000): 2–13.

Day 5: Ultimately Who Killed Jesus?

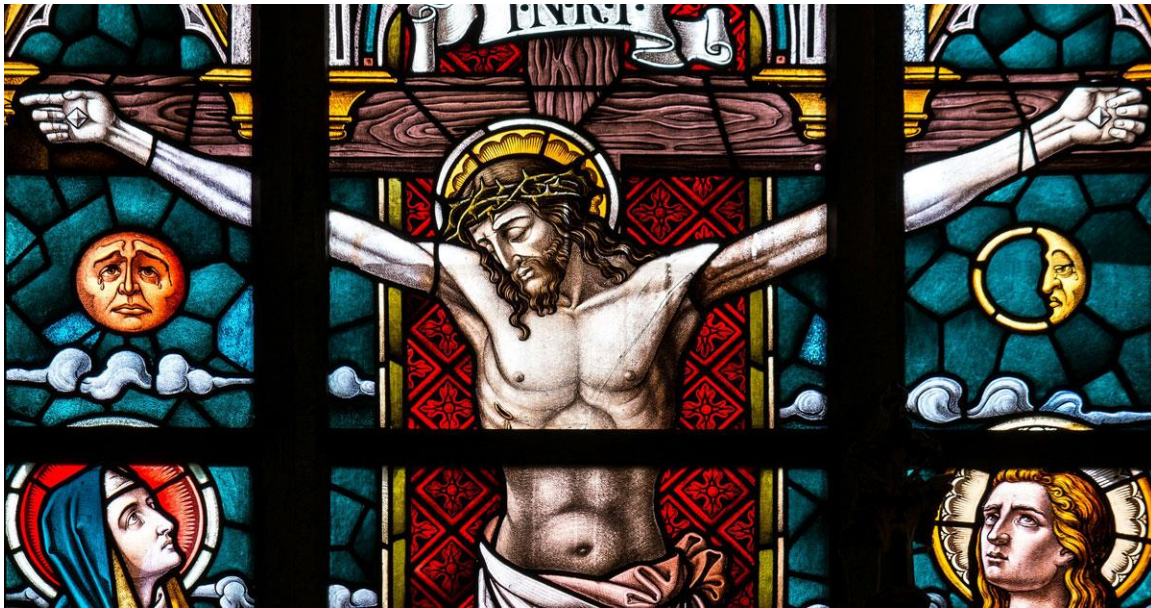


Figure 21 Image by Thomas B. via Pixabay.

The Power of Apostolic Eyewitness Testimony

We now turn to the often-asked question: Who killed Jesus? The answer is not simple, and we can now better appreciate that lots of people were involved in all of this, each in their various way.

To answer this question, we must reflect again on which of the four Gospels one should favor, for on this point in particular the different Gospels emphasize different answers to this question.

In giving weight to statements of all kinds, Latter-day Saints generally favor the words of the highest priesthood authority. In this case, that New Testament person would be the apostle John. Along with Peter and James, John the Beloved was one of the three highest ranking apostles. Matthew was one of the Twelve, but Mark and Luke were not.

Moreover, people most often find great credibility in the testimonies of eyewitnesses. It is not clear how Mark and Luke learned the details that they reported. Luke was clearly not present for any of the proceedings surrounding Jesus' trial and death. It is true that Mark may have learned some things from Peter, but after the arrest of Jesus, Peter "followed [Jesus, being only] afar off" (Matt. 26:58); Peter stayed outside the door of Caiaphas' palace, hoping and needing to remain unrecognized. The apostle Matthew would have been close to many of these events, but he never says so.

The apostle John, on the other hand, was personally present for the duration of these developments. John appears to have been the disciple who "went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest" (John 18:15), right after the arrest in Gethsemane. And then in the Praetorium, John evidently heard the exchange between Jesus and Pilate, which John reports. John was also there at Golgotha when Jesus entrusted his mother Mary into his care (John 19:26–27). Of the spear thrust, John testified: "And he that saw it bare record [gives solemn testimony], and his [testimony] is true" (John 19:35). In this affirmation, John distinctively speaks of himself as the one who saw, claiming for himself special status. Latter-day Saints, therefore, take John's witness seriously.

This is especially so because with John's report of the trial of Jesus is supported and reinforced by the Book of Mormon. A key element in Latter-day Saint doctrine is the knowledge that the sacrifice of the Savior was promised and foreordained from before the foundation of this earth, as is taught in the words of Lehi, Benjamin, Abinadi, and Alma. Likewise, for the apostle John, the death of Jesus was a foregone conclusion from the beginning. It had to happen. It was supposed to happen. "For this cause came I into the world" (John 18:37).



Figure 22 Steps going from the High Priest Caiaphas' residence to the old city in Jerusalem. Photo by John W. Welch.

John particularly wants his readers to understand that Jesus was not killed because of some offense against the Temple or its economy, as many people conclude (especially by giving preference to Mark). But here John is particularly interesting. Unlike Matthew and Mark, the apostle John does not have Jesus ever say either that he is able to or that he actually will destroy the Temple. Rather, John 2:19 reads, “[If you] destroy this temple, . . . in three days I will raise it up.”

People have also long puzzled over the distance that John puts between the cleansing of the Temple and the death of Jesus. For John, the cleansing occurs at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry (see John 2:13–17), not the day after his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Why does John place it there? One reason is to introduce from the beginning Jesus' prophecy of his death and bodily resurrection. Another is to show Jesus working at an already cleansed temple, where he went often throughout his ministry.

Even in discussing the Synoptic accounts, it is something of a misnomer to speak of “the trial” of Jesus. There was a hearing of some kind, and perhaps an inquiry or attempted deposition, and then the voicing of an opinion of how things “appeared” (as the Greek

reads in Matthew 26:66 and Mark 14:64). But it is hard to see any formal trial and verdict occurring in the early hours of that morning. Something different and much bigger was going on here.

Latter-day Saints understand that Jesus, the Holy One, was innocent of any crime. Indeed, in John's good news, Jesus was not convicted of anything by Pilate. In John, rather than actually convicting Jesus after his arrest, the Chief Priests simply move ahead on the strength of the prior decision of the Sanhedrin in John 11:50 that Jesus should be put to death, on the ground that it would be better for one man to perish than for the entire nation to be destroyed.



Figure 23 Potential site of the tomb of Lazarus in Bethany.
Photo by John W. Welch.

Latter-day Saints agree with John that an innocent Jesus died for the whole world, for all mankind, and that the whole sinful world, therefore, in a significant sense brought about the need for the death of Jesus. To drive this point home, in John's account Jesus was arrested, not by just a group of men with torches, as the synoptic Gospels report, but by a cohort of soldiers, Pharisees, and servants of the Chief Priests (see John 18:3), as well as a commander or chiliarchos (see John 18:12), who may be a Roman officer. In other words, the whole world was symbolically there.

This seems particularly consonant with another important revelation found in the Book of Mormon. Nephi prophesied: "And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, [smite him

and spit upon him] and he suffereth it, ... because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards [all] the children of men" (1 Nephi 19:9).

Responsibility of the Chief Priests

If one needs to find the precipitating culprit in all of this, the prime and persistent movers in the final actions against Jesus were probably only the members of the relatively small group of Chief Priests under the control of the High Priest Caiaphas. They were the most powerful and best known officials of Jerusalem. An interesting pattern emerges by

carefully examining every reference to these Chief Priests, as found in the chart that was introduced in the discussion on Day 1 above.

In particular, it was the Chief Priests and Scribes whom Herod asked about the birthplace of the Messiah. When Jesus prophesied about his death in Matthew 16:21, he mentioned only the Chief Priests, Elders, and Scribes as being involved. It was the Chief Priests and Elders who in the Temple questioned Jesus about his authority. The Chief Priests alone sought Jesus's death after the raising of Lazarus. Judas betrayed Jesus to the Chief Priests. The Chief Priests alone demanded Jesus's death before Pilate in Mark 15:3; and in the end, it was the Chief Priests who wanted the placard on the cross to read, "He said, I am King of the Jews" (John 19:21).



Figure 24 Bas Relief sculpture in the Church of All Nations near Gethsemane. Photo by John W. Welch.

Fourteen times in the Gospels and four times in Acts, the Chief Priests act alone against Jesus or against his disciples. Eighteen other times, they act together with the Elders, rulers, captains, or the Sanhedrin. Twenty-one times they are associated with the Scribes. Clearly the Chief Priests and these associates of theirs are the main driving force behind the arrest and execution of Jesus. The Pharisees often debated Jesus and were verbally

denounced by him, but they are mentioned much less often, and they lacked the political muscle of the Sadducean Chief Priests, whose party had a solid majority in the Sanhedrin. It is not hard to see this small group of Chief Priests as the one consistent force that agitated and militated against Jesus and his disciples. Their crowd was not large. Certainly the crowd outside Pilate's administrative office in Jerusalem did not include all the Jews.



Figure 25 View of an olive grove. Photo by John W. Welch.

This subtle but important point is consistent with a significant passage in the Book of Mormon. In 2 Nephi 10:5 it clearly says that it would be “because of priestcrafts [in other words, because of a group of priests interested in trafficking in religion and politics for power and money] and [because of] iniquities, [that] they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that he be crucified.” The Book of Mormon clearly does not implicate or condemn all Jews.

In this regard, we should also remember the testimony of Paul. As a student of Gamaliel, Paul would have been well informed about legal events in Jerusalem, and he adds an important corroboration to this Book of Mormon position. The words in 1 Thessalonians 2:14–15 speak of Jews who killed Jesus. The punctuation in this verse is crucial. Should it

read “the Jews who killed Jesus,” with no comma between “Jews” and “who” (thus meaning “the particular Jews who killed Jesus”), or should it read “the Jews [comma] who killed Jesus” (thus grammatically saying that “the Jews [all of them] killed Jesus”)? This comma question involves the most famous punctuation mark in the world; when a comma is inserted here, it is known as the “antisemitic comma,” because it operates grammatically to blame all Jews. But based on the Greek construction of this sentence, no punctuation mark should be there, and thus Paul spoke here only of “those particular Jews who killed Jesus.”

Indeed, many Jews accepted Jesus. Peter was a Jew. Mary was a Jew. John was a Jew. Most of Jesus’s early disciples were Jews. Those in the crowds on Palm Sunday were no doubt all Jews. The number of those who rejected Jesus was far fewer. On this point, Pope Benedict XVI has similarly said, “In John’s Gospel this word [the Jews] has a precise and clearly defined meaning: [John] is referring to the Temple aristocracy.”¹⁵



Figure 26 Hell bone of a crucified man from the first century A.D. in the Israel Museum. Photo by John W. Welch.

Still, No One to “Blame”

Finally, especially for John, Jesus was in full control from the very beginning to the very end. At the outset of his ministry, Jesus spoke of his death even to prominent Jewish leaders and others outside his circle of disciples. Speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus said,

¹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth Part Two: Holy Week* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2011), 185.

“Even so must the Son of man be lifted up” (John 3:14). Consistently throughout his writing, John reports the death of Jesus with Jesus knowing exactly what was required to carry out the plan. When his hour had come, Jesus knew and “bowed his head, and handed over his spirit” (according to the Greek in John 19:30). I find it significant that this same word is used three times in the story: when Judas betrayed or handed Jesus over to his arresters; when the Jews handed Jesus over to Pilate; and when Jesus handed over his spirit to God. For John, we must never forget that it is God who is voluntarily, purposefully, and knowingly dying as planned.

With this as background, and knowing that much more work still remains to be done, we can now cautiously offer an answer to the question, Who was responsible for the death of Jesus? For John and for Latter-day Saints it would appear that, in reality, the whole world killed Jesus. As Nephi also prophesied, the whole “world” would kill their God (1 Nephi 19:9). And if it is so that everyone was effectively responsible, then, in an important sense, no one was responsible or to blame. And, even if someone specific were to blame, that would seem quite irrelevant for John, the apostle of love.

Of course, iniquity played its part. But, ironically, the Greeks, for whom the gods could be found just about anywhere, were quite accepting of miracle workers as well as the idea that some mortals might have existed who were partially of divine parentage.

The Jewish legal system, however—with its prohibitions against idolatry and polytheism—effectively made the Jews (as the Book of Mormon says) the only ancient culture on earth that could have worried enough about miraculous conduct to have reacted with such categorical hostility and to have “stumbled” against the very presence of their God in their midst, as Jacob says (Jacob 4:15). In 2 Nephi 10:3–6, Jacob wrote that it was “expedient” —meaning pragmatically effective, “tending to promote some good end or desired purpose, expeditiously, quickly, and profitably” —that Jesus “should come among the Jews,” for “thus it behooveth [or was fittingly necessary for] our God.”

Jacob identified that Old World location as “the more wicked part of the world,” with “more wicked” being a comparative between two places. From Jacob’s point of view, the question was whether Jesus should come to the Old World Lehi had left or to the New Land of Promise. His answer was, to the Old, for its inhabitants would be more wicked than Lehi’s posterity. He further explains, “And there is none other *nation* on earth that would crucify their God.” I would hasten to emphasize that Jacob’s statement views this conduct in collective terms. It does not infer that all individuals in that body necessarily agreed with their national leaders on this action. Thus, it should also be noted that Jacob’s broad condemnation of the Jews of Jesus’s day should not be seen as an endorsement of

antisemitism. Indeed, the Book of Mormon explicitly prohibits the persecution of the Jews (see 3 Nephi 29:8; cf. 2 Nephi 29:4–5).

Continuing on, Jacob concludes, “For should the mighty miracles be wrought among other nations they would repent, and know that he be their God” (2 Nephi 10:4). Indeed, accepting Jesus might have been easier for people in other cultures that were more accepting of miracles and divinely embodied beings, but then the promises made to that nation, as well as the need for the death of the Redeemer who alone could descend below all things, including death, and then rise to be eternally in and through all things, would go unfulfilled, unrealized, and frustrated.

Ultimately there may well have been grievous miscarriages of justice in the treatment of Jesus, but Latter-day Saints have many reasons not to think of the death of Jesus primarily in that pathetic way. Neither the apostle John nor Lehi’s son Jacob wanted people to think of the death of Jesus that way. Latter-day Saints do not see Jesus as a victim but as the victor. His death was supposed to happen. It was not a mistake. It had to happen. It was agreed to happen.



Figure 27 View of a potential candidate for Golgotha. Photo by John W. Welch.



Figure 28 Photos by John W. Welch of the Garden Tomb, a possible site for the resurrection.

And perhaps for this very reason, God in his mercy does not come out and place blame on any single person or any particular group of people. Perhaps this is why the writers of the New Testament Gospels left things so ambiguous. They could have been much clearer

about why Jesus was killed and about who killed Jesus if they had wanted to be. But that was not their point. Even in the case of Judas, we do not know what really motivated him. Was he intending or hoping for a different outcome? Things certainly did not turn out the way he expected.

In the final analysis, most people involved had no idea what was really happening and what they were actually doing. Speaking seven weeks later to those very people in Jerusalem who had killed “the Prince of life,” Peter said: “I wot [I know] that *through ignorance* ye did it, as did also your rulers” (Acts 3:15, 17, emphasis added).

Jesus forgave people as he hung on the cross, forgiving whom he willed and would. And of Latter-day Saints, the Lord requires that we, on our part, should “forgive all” people (D&C 64:10). Whereas God will judge, we are to “judge not” (Matthew 7:1; 3 Nephi 14:1). Placing blame is not part of this picture.

Masterfully understating all that had happened and all that He had suffered, all that Jesus humbly said as he spoke out of the darkness to the Nephites was this: “I came unto my own, and my own received me not” (3 Nephi 9:16).

Let us not forget that we also reject and crucify Jesus anew whenever we partake of the world and its dark judgmental ways.

By reflecting carefully, cautiously and clearly on the events and causes leading up to the death of Jesus, one may more surely agree, and believe, and know that he is indeed the Son of God, of whom the Book of Mormon and all the holy prophets have ever testified.

In his first general epistle, the apostle John concluded: “And we know that the Son of God is come,” for “we have heard, . . . we have seen with our eyes, . . . and our hands have handled,” “and he hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 1:1; 5:20).¹⁶ Indeed, many people, on at least 20 occasions, likewise have seen the resurrected Son of God and have so testified. The following, final chart conveniently details these witnesses, including their names (as far as are known), scripture references, date or time, place of appearance, a summary of what transpired, and other items of interest. Combining all these very personal appearances together with the times when the resurrected Lord appeared more publically to 500 brethren in the Old World (1 Cor. 15:6), to 2,500 men, women, and children in the Nephite city of Bountiful (3 Nephi 1:1, 15; 17:15),

¹⁶ An earlier version containing several of these final Latter-day Saint reflections was published in John W. Welch, “Latter-day Saint Reflections on the Trial and Death of Jesus,” *Clark Memorandum* (Fall 2000): 2–13.

and additionally in modern times to Joseph Smith and others in New York and Kirtland, Ohio, the Resurrection becomes one of the most witnessed miracles of all the supernal wonders performed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

To this I add my personal testimony. I have been privileged to visit many of these sites. I have felt at those locations, and on many other occasions, the Holy Ghost warmly confirming to my heart and soul the truthfulness of the empty tomb and of the reality of the victorious ascension of Jesus Christ. I gladly add my personal witness that Jesus truly rose from the dead on that first Easter morning. All of that truly was, and still is, the amazing work of my true and living Savior, the Divine Redeemer, who graciously fulfilled the eternal will of His—and of our—Father who is in Heaven. I wish you a happy and fully gratifying Easter.





Figure 29 Pictures of the Christus statue by Thorvaldsen in Copenhagen, Denmark. Photo by John W. Welch.

Witnesses to the Resurrection

PERSONS VISITED	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	DATE OR TIME	PLACE OF APPEARANCE	WHAT TRANSPIRED	ITEMS OF INTEREST
Mary Magdalene	Jn 20:1–18	Resurrection, early morning	At the tomb of Jesus Christ	Mary talked with Jesus; she did not recognize him at first but was soon convinced it was him.	
Other women	Mt 28:1–10	Resurrection day, early morning	Somewhere between the tomb and Jerusalem	They held Jesus by the feet and worshiped him.	
Two disciples	Mk 16:12–13; Lk 4:13–32	Resurrection day, afternoon	On the road to Emmaus	They walked, talked, and ate with Jesus, not recognizing him until he broke bread. Their hearts burned within them.	The hymn "Abide with Me; 'Tis Eventide" (<i>Hymns</i> , no. 165) recalls this event.
Simon Peter	Lk 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5	Sometime on the day of the resurrection	Not specified	Not specified	
Ten of the Twelve	Lk 24:36–53; Jn 20:19–24	Resurrection day, evening	A room with shut doors somewhere in Jerusalem	Jesus invited them to handle him so they would know that he had flesh and bone. He ate fish and honey before them.	Although Lk 24:33 refers to "the eleven," it seems certain that neither Judas nor Thomas was present.
Eleven of the Twelve	Jn 20:26–31; Mk 16:14	Eight days after the resurrection	Apparently the same room as above	Jesus showed Thomas his hands and his side; this was convincing evidence for Thomas.	
Seven of the Twelve	Jn 21:1–14	Morning, at a time subsequent to the episode with Thomas	On the shore of the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee)	After the seven had fished all night and caught nothing, Jesus gave them directions from the shore; they caught a multitude of fish. They recognized him and went to shore. He ate with them.	This is similar to the first draught of fishes (see Lk 5) that accompanies Jesus' call of Peter and others to the ministry.
Eleven of the Twelve	Mt 28:16–20	Not specified	A mountain in Galilee, by previous appointment of Jesus Christ	Jesus appeared to them on the mountain. They talked with him and worshiped him.	
More than 500 brethren	1 Cor 15:6	Not specified	Not specified	No information	This visitation probably took place in Galilee.
James	1 Cor 15:7	Not specified	Not specified	No information	

Chart 10-18 (1)

Figure 30 Welch, John W., and John F. Hall. "Witnesses to the Resurrection." *Charting the New Testament*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002, chart 10-18.

MOSIAH 1–3

John W. Welch Notes



Introduction: Who Wrote the Book of Mosiah and Why?

As readers open up the first page of the book of Mosiah, they enter a whole new part of the Nephite record. Having enjoyed the Small Plates of Nephi with their first-person accounts, prophecies and explanations of Nephi, Jacob, and Jacob's descendants, readers enter the world of the Large Plates of Nephi and other records that have been organized into the series of books named after Nephite leaders, from King Mosiah, to Alma the Younger (who was both the chief judge and high priest), Alma's son Helaman (high priest and leader of the stripling warriors), Alma's grandson Helaman, Alma's great-grandson Nephi, on down until the records were entrusted to Mormon. Mosiah, Alma, and Mormon all may have played roles in shaping the book of Mosiah. And thus, the questions, "Who wrote the book of Mosiah?" and "Who put this book together, and why?" are fascinating to ponder.

The overall structure of the book of Mosiah is interesting. It begins with the great and righteous King Benjamin. Then, in the very middle of the book, we encounter the lethal showdown between the prophet Abinadi and the wicked King Noah, together with the conversion of Alma the Elder, who at that time was still a young man. The book ultimately ends with the Nephites getting rid of kingship altogether. The book of Mosiah seems to be deliberately constructed in order to prove the point that kingship is a good system when the kings are like Benjamin but a bad system when they are like Noah.

That much appears obvious enough. But one still may ask, who wrote this book? It seems that Mormon probably did not abridge the text of this book very much, if at all. At least that's my view. When we read Benjamin's Speech, for example, the voice, the vocabulary, and the vision do not seem to reflect any of Mormon's personal influences.

Alma the Younger, however, strikes me as a main candidate who may have assembled the underlying pieces to create the book of Mosiah. He had access to all the records. He became the Chief Judge, and he would have needed to explain how he got there. After all, he was not even born in Zarahemla. So, how had he become the Chief Judge, the High Priest, and the Commander-in-Chief of the army in the land of Zarahemla?

Mosiah's four sons probably had little to do with the creation of this book. They had been away for fourteen years on a mission which, from a political perspective, looks like a voluntary exile. Although they were still the sons of Mosiah, they were no longer heirs-apparent. In Zarahemla, shortly after Alma became the leader, there arose the king-men who wanted to bring kingship back. Alma the Younger almost lost his life in the ensuing war, as he personally defended and solidified the new political system. So it is unlikely that Ammon or any of the other sons of Mosiah would have written this book after they returned from their fourteen-year mission, long after the death of their father.

Assuming that Alma the Younger was the compiler of this book, other questions yet remain. Why would he have included certain episodes? Why were certain stories told, and why were they told in the way that they were? Alma would have been personally interested in the story of his father's conversion, knowing that Abinadi was speaking the truth. Alma the Younger admired King Benjamin for many reasons. Just as Benjamin was visited by the Angel of the Lord, so was Alma. And Alma the Younger had a special interest in the four sons of King Mosiah. These were his friends growing up. Together, their lives were changed as they became disciples of Jesus Christ.

The book of Mosiah was assembled from several independent documents, and its stories are not presented in chronological order. In fact, the showdown between King Noah and Abinadi (embedded in a first flashback in Mosiah 9–22) probably happened 20 or 30 years earlier than the end of King Benjamin's life. Another flashback in Mosiah 23–24 is based on a record of Alma the Elder about the deliverance of his people from afflictions they suffered before finding their way into the capital city of Zarahemla. So readers of the book of Mosiah are not given a normal, sequential history. And, indeed, several thematic threads run through this multi-layered and multi-voiced text. Yet the book is held together coherently by the indelible interests and urgent tasks borne by Alma the Younger (Figure 1).

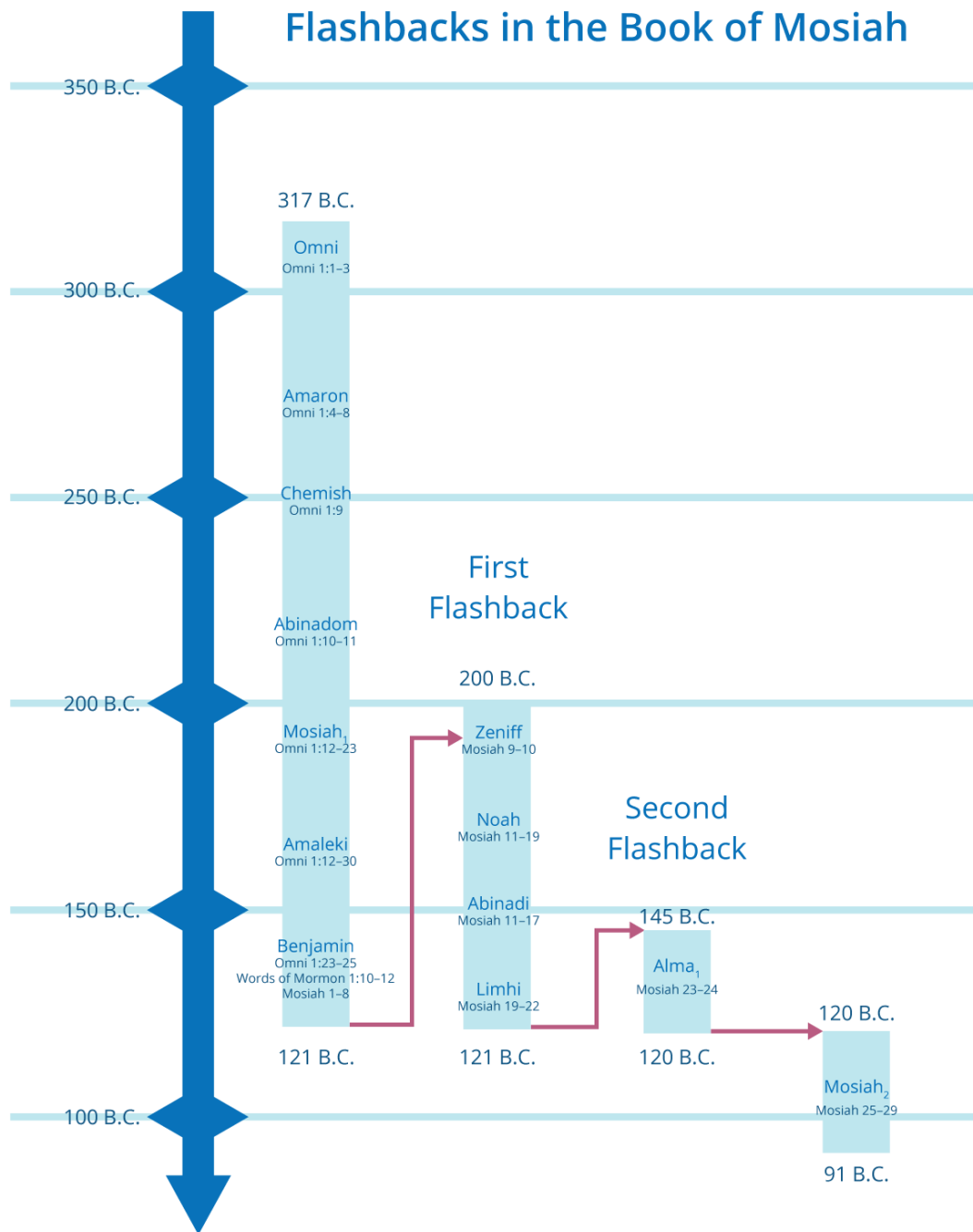


Figure 1 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "Flashbacks in the Book of Mosiah." In *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, chart 29.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 140–145.

Gordon C. Thomasson, “Mosiah: The Complex Symbolism and Symbolic Complex of Kingship in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (1993): 32–36

Mosiah 1

In this chapter, King Benjamin was mostly speaking to his sons, particularly to Mosiah, who was about to be crowned to succeed his father. Mosiah was asked to call an assembly in which King Benjamin would address all his people, declare Mosiah as his successor, and renew the covenant of God with this people. Thirty-three years later, Alma the Younger would succeed King Mosiah as Alma became the first Chief Judge and High Priest of the diverse land of Zarahemla.

Mosiah 1:1 — Was There Contention among the Nephites?

The book of Mosiah begins by stating that there was “no more contention” but “continual peace” (Mosiah 1:1). For the book to begin this way, the implication is that there had been serious problems with disunity in the Land of Zarahemla prior to this time (indeed, see Words of Mormon 1:12). Many Mulekites and a few Nephites lived in Zarahemla. Even counting all of the Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites together, there were still more Mulekites than Nephites, as Mosiah 25:2 makes clear. This mixed population had needed to fight off Lamanite armies. False Christs had arisen, and Benjamin had to “shut their mouths” and punish false prophets and dissidents. These challenges long persisted in that region. While Benjamin’s power was challenged by some of his subjects, he labored tirelessly with his whole body and soul to reestablish peace throughout his land (Words of Mormon 1:12–18).

How was it that Benjamin’s father had become king in Zarahemla in the first place? In ancient America and in other parts of the world, it was common enough for an outside manager to be brought in to take care of local political and managerial jobs. When people from within the city were deciding who got certain privileges, it could engender hard feelings, so an outside person was sometimes brought in to rule the city for ten years or so. The decisions of such an administrator may have angered some, but they figured that he would be moving on. This was a common enough practice that Professor John Sorenson has speculated that when Mosiah₁ came from the Land of Nephi, he was welcomed as a leader because he had records, language, wisdom, and administrative

experience. However, after some time had passed, the older, indigenous population may well have tired of being ruled by an outsider. Mosiah₁ had certainly ensconced himself and his son, King Benjamin. But a generation after Benjamin's death, and after King Mosiah₂ had stepped down and died and the reign of the judges replaced the monarchy, a group of people called *king-men* stepped forth who wanted the kingship back. One such alternative heir-apparent might well have been a descendant of Zarahemla, whom the Amlicites gladly sponsored.

In any event, these pressures show that, while there were persistent hard feelings to deal with, King Benjamin and his son Mosiah were still able, for the most part, to unite these people. We should not pass lightly over this achievement. It was a major accomplishment, as these kings called upon every possible tool of law, ethics, oratory, prophecy, doctrine, and covenant-making to preserve and protect their people.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Should Readers Pay Close Attention to the Mulekites?](#) (Omni 1:19)," *KnoWhy* 434 (May 17, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Did it Mean to be 'King Over All the Land'?](#) (Alma 20:8)," *KnoWhy* 128 (June 23, 2016).

John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013), 362–380.

Mosiah 1:10 — King Benjamin Asks Mosiah to Gather His People

In chapter 1, after Benjamin had grown old, he called his sons together and ordered that a proclamation should go out to gather all the people "on the morrow," at the temple. Accordingly, the people gathered for Benjamin to conduct a marvelous covenant-making ceremony, including the popular recognition of Benjamin's son as the new king. Many preparations would have gone into all of this, as people came from the outskirts, bringing their families, provisions, and shelters. It would have been normal for many preparations to have been made before the final call-to-order was sent out the day before this important formal coronation was to begin. Benjamin's speech is so finely crafted, organized, and word-smithed that it does not read like an extemporaneous talk. At the same time the tower was being erected, some copies of his speech could also have been prepared, anticipating the need and benefit of having a copy of this impressive text for each family.

Mosiah 2

The Nature of King Benjamin's Speech

The first embedded text that readers encounter in the book of Mosiah is the remarkable speech of King Benjamin, including its prelude and aftermath (Mosiah 1–6). When we are reading King Benjamin's speech, we are reading his actual speech, not a later abridgement by Mormon. This masterful oration is simultaneously a coronation speech, a classic farewell speech, a prophetic speech, a covenant ritual text, and a literary wonder. Mormon would no sooner have touched a classic text like this than any one of us would edit Lincoln's Gettysburg Address or Elder Bruce R. McConkie's final testimony. Benjamin's text became a type of constitution for the Nephite nation, being cited authoritatively on many occasions (for example, the five crimes established in Mosiah 2:13 are echoed precisely in Alma 30:10).

Helaman's Quotation of Benjamin	
Mosiah 3:18	Helaman 5:9
But men drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children, and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and	O remember, remember, my sons, the words which king Benjamin spake unto his people; yea, and remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only
through the atoning blood of Christ	through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ
the Lord Omnipotent	who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world

Figure 2 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "Helaman's Quotation of Benjamin." In *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, chart 104.

When we read the scriptures, we can assume that each word was put there for a reason. Modern paraphrases are helpful but are created at some peril. Every word in King Benjamin’s speech rewards careful attention. The entire speech is worth memorizing. It can be recited in about thirty minutes. It is one of those few amazing, inspiring, classic, historical speeches that deserve verbatim prominence in our minds.

What Is Significant about King Benjamin’s Speech?

We call this lengthy passage of scripture King Benjamin’s *speech*. Others have called it an *address* or a *sermon*. It could also be called King Benjamin’s *ritual text* or maybe King Benjamin’s *revelation*, or *covenant text*.

It is unlike a modern General Conference talk in several ways. Most Conference talks are shorter, and most do not pause for ceremonial actions. This speech is segmented into seven units, and King Benjamin added “Amen” at certain points along the way. Did something happen between each “amen” and the next segment?

In the book called *Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* which Stephen Ricks and I put together, several comments address the significance of the fact that these words were delivered at the temple in Zarahemla. As readers pay attention to temple-related words there, they discover that these temple elements run throughout the text. One serious reader, Paul Hyde, has identified 132 elements that identify it as a temple address. Elder Neal A. Maxwell has seen Benjamin’s text as a “manual for discipleship,” establishing “the mysteries” by way of covenant (Mosiah 2:9), establishing loyalty to the laws of obedience, submissiveness, meekness, consecration, and loving kindness.

All readers of this text should note that Joseph Smith, at the normal rate of translation, did not have more than about a day and a half to bring forth this text. It is not as if Joseph could say, “I know that I need to write one of the greatest religious speeches ever given in the history of the world, so I will take several weeks or months to work on this.” Speakers will labor long and hard over speeches of this magnificence, and certainly King Benjamin must have done so as well. Joseph did not have that luxury. When asked how he could do this, Joseph always answered, “by the gift and power of God.”

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Is the Timing of the Book of Mormon’s Translation So ‘Marvelous’? (2 Nephi 27:26),” *KnowWhy* 506 (March 15, 2019).

John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds. “Appendix: Complete Text of King Benjamin’s Speech with Notes and Comments,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 509–510.

Neal A. Maxwell, "King Benjamin's Sermon: A Manual for Discipleship," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 1–21.

King Benjamin's Speech: A Great Oration

It is powerful to compare King Benjamin's speech to the greatest orations of world history. While I was in high school and college I read the speeches (in Latin and Greek) of many of the classic ancient orators. I also became aware of handbooks that were used in American schools to teach the art of oratory. Giving a great speech was an art. Who were the most impressive orators in the history of the world? Pericles reputedly gave the famous funeral speech during the Peloponnesian War. Demosthenes, Lysias, Cicero, and Seneca the Elder were renowned Greek and Roman orators, public speakers, and lawyers of antiquity. Many of their speeches and orations have been preserved, analyzed, and used as models for great talks. In my chapter entitled "Benjamin's Speech: A Masterful Oration," I identify twelve key qualities that rhetoricians readily agree are commonly found in the greatest of orations in world history. While great speeches often have six or seven of these, all twelve are present in King Benjamin's speech. For example:

Great orations are said to transcend the moment and capture the entire spirit of an age. They are able to distill where a nation has come from, to look ahead into the coming generations, and to capture and embody the spirit of where they stood as a people at that time. King Benjamin certainly does this in many ways.

A great oration is dramatic. It is out of the ordinary and not routine. Benjamin's people came and pitched their tents. They were all waiting and wondering what was going to happen next. This drama adds to the experience of the people. More than that, great orators are able to capitalize on that moment. They do not disappoint. When the people leave, they have truly experienced a marvelous, memorable occasion. There is a solemnity about it, and this too characterizes Benjamin's speech.

A great oration is absolutely sincere, with no pretense. Consider Abraham Lincoln. The simple Gettysburg Address captures and distills the agony of the thousands of Americans who died fighting each other at that small Pennsylvania crossroads. "May they not have died in vain." The memory of that speech helped to re-launch the United States as a nation. There was no pretense there. President Lincoln was not saying those words so he would get reelected. This was absolute sincerity.

The sincerity of Benjamin is even more impressive to me because of what he does not say. Nowhere does he say, "I am so glad that I was able to lead you. Remember when

we fought and I had the Sword of Laban and we defeated all those enemies!" He does not talk about all the great work that he has done for the people over the decades. He simply says, "I have been suffered to spend my days in your service" (Mosiah 2:11–12). There is no self-boasting here. Benjamin is humbly saying, "Farewell."

A great oration delivers eternal truths uttered with disarming humility. King Benjamin knows how to speak of himself as not being even as much as the dust of the earth. His concern about the little children is another mark of humility.

A great oration has a voice of pure authority. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "I do not know any kind of history ... to which people listen with more interest than to any anecdote of eloquence. ... It is a triumph of pure power." As you read King Benjamin's speech, the power of his words, drawn from personal experience and revelation, rivet down the points that he wanted made. They reflect the angelic source from whence they came. His whole presence as king bespeaks dignified authority at every level.

A great oration is purposeful and effectively organized. Speaking of Cicero, the paragon of Roman orators, Sherwin Cody's handbook on the world's great orations has said: "He dazzles us with the brilliancy of his rhetoric. His words roll out in perfect oratorical rhythm, his periods are nicely balanced, his figures of speech and his choice of words beautifully artistic, singing through the mind like music and enchanting the ear." Those words describe Benjamin's speech just as well as Cicero.

A great oration gives unmistakable instructions to ensure success. For example, King Benjamin's speech gives clear instructions on how to put off the natural man. He says to be humble, submissive, meek, patient, full of love, and so forth. He does not just say, "Well, put off the natural man!" He says, "Here's how you do it." It is beneficial to watch for how many times King Benjamin will use this oratory method.

Great oratory also produces a compelling presentation of ultimate human choice that propels people to critical action. King Benjamin does that too, concluding with his comment, "if you believe all these things see that ye do them" (Mosiah 4:10).

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "Benjamin's Speech: A Masterful Oration," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 55–88.

John W. Welch and Daryl R. Hague, "Benjamin's Sermon as a Traditional Ancient Farewell Address," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 89–117.

Mosiah 2:2 — The People Had Multiplied in the Land

Professor John Sorenson believes that the population of a capital city, like Zarahemla, around 124 BC would have been about 25,000 people. While that number is not very remarkable today, what would it have been like to have a city of that size in the ancient world?

At the end of King Benjamin's speech, what did the people do? They entered into a covenant and then recorded the names of those who did so (Mosiah 6:1). They apparently did not write down all the names of everyone in the land, just the ones entering into the covenant. A full census could have been taken another time. But since a new king was being enthroned, he needed to know whom he could count on and over whom he had direct responsibility and loyalty. Keeping records of such covenants was an important but difficult sacred practice.

Mosiah 2:3–4 — The People Gathered and Offered Sacrifices

Every seventh year, all Israelites—men, women and children (it is important to note that there are children here too)—were required to come to the temple in Jerusalem on the Feast of Tabernacles, where sacrifices would be made, the law would be read, and they would then renew the Mosaic covenant. There are examples of these covenant renewal assemblies in Joshua 24 and in other places in the Old Testament, such as the book of Nehemiah.

These background details help give readers some clues as to what was most likely happening here. Because Benjamin had been on the throne so long, this is likely the first time that many of these people had witnessed the coronation of a king. However, it would not have been the first time that the people would have renewed their covenants (Figure 3).

Mosiah 2:4 — Was This a Year of Jubilee?

In Israel, the Jubilee was to happen regularly once every fifty years. In the rest of the ancient world, when a new king was crowned, he would issue an edict forgiving all old debts, enshrining new laws, and so forth. If you were a creditor in that world, you lived not knowing how long the king's life would last. The Israelite system provided stability, especially when thirty or forty years still remained before the next Jubilee. While some have wondered if the Jubilee Year was only an ideal part of the law, something that only anticipated a future Messianic Law, I believe that at least some parts of the Jubilee Law were needed to be observed as a corrective for restraint of long-term indentures or debt servitude, for inflation, and other sorts of inequities.

King Benjamin's Coronation of Mosiah

Israelite Pattern	Book of Mormon Parallel or Adaptation
The Sanctuary Was the Site of the Coronation	All the people gathered at the temple at Zarahemla, the site chosen for Benjamin's address to the people and for the consecration of his son Mosiah as king (Mosiah 1:18) Mosiah was then presented to the people in the public gathering at the temple (Mosiah 2:30)
The King Stood on a Royal Dais, Platform	Benjamin constructed a tower from which he spoke to the people gathered (situated in tents) at the temple (Mosiah 2:7)
Installing in Office with Insignia	Benjamin gave Mosiah the official records of the people (the plates of brass and the plates of Nephi), the sword of Laban, and the miraculous Liahona (Mosiah 1:15–16) King Mosiah was known to possess "two stones" (Mosiah 28:13)
Anointing	Benjamin consecrated his son Mosiah to be a ruler and a king over his people (Mosiah 6:3)
Presentation of the New King	Mosiah is presented to the people as their king (Mosiah 2:30) The people responded by accepting the king's declarations (Mosiah 4:2; 5:2–4)
Receiving a Throne Name	A royal name was given to the rulers over the Nephites (Jacob 1:10–11) Benjamin revealed to all his people a new name at this coronation (Mosiah 3:8)
Divine Adoption of the King	By covenant, all the people became God's sons and daughters on his right hand (Mosiah 5:6–12)

Figure 3 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "King Benjamin's Coronation of Mosiah." In *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, chart 85.

Based on several phrases which King Benjamin uses, many of which can also be seen in the main jubilee text in Leviticus 24 and 25, a case can be made that Benjamin timed his speech to be given during a Jubilee year for the Nephites. This explains why Benjamin talks so much about not allowing slavery, about indebtedness and forgiveness, and why King Benjamin would go on to live and serve as a co-regent for three additional years

after the coronation of his son. The observance of a jubilee would be an ideal time for such a solemn and thankful occasion.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Did Alma Wish to Speak 'with the Trump of God'? (Alma 29:1)," *KnoWhy* 136 (July 5, 2016).

Mosiah 2:5–6 — Why Are the Tents Important at King Benjamin's Speech?

A prominent Israelite festival was the Feast of Tabernacles, sometimes referred to as the feast of tents or the Feast of Booths. At that festival, everyone would come with their families. This was different than the men going to get the sacrifice for the Passover. At Tabernacles, the entire family would come, and their men, women, and children would sit in a booth—a *sukkah*—that had been created to remind them that their ancestors had dwelt in tents as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. These tents have significance. At the Feast of Tabernacles, once every seven years, the law was read, and the people renewed their covenant to keep the Law of Moses.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Did the Nephites Stay in Their Tents During King Benjamin's Speech? (Mosiah 2:6)," *KnoWhy* 80 (April 18, 2016).

Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 148–223.

Hugh W. Nibley, "Assembly and Atonement," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 148–223.

Mosiah 2:9 — King Benjamin Caused His Words to be Written

Anticipating that many people would be present to hear his speech, he wrote his words and they were given to the people. Thanks to this unusual situation, we can be confident that Benjamin's exact words have been preserved. Many copies existed. Benjamin's words will be quoted by Nephite leaders and prophets for the next 125 years. Mormon and Moroni probably still studied it in school, as they were taught the demanding tasks of being archivists, scribes, abridgers, and prophets in their own right.

But what could Benjamin's speech have been written on? The most common material that people in ancient America wrote on was bark, especially fig bark. It was pliable, and they would pound it flat and make really quite a durable writing substance like a heavy stock paper. We have only a few of these codices. One happens to be a big fold-out

manuscript I saw on display in Dresden, Germany. There are only a few of these that have survived out of probably millions of Mayan texts that were in existence when the Spaniards came. They thought these were all pagan texts, and maybe they also made good fire kindling when it got cold, but they all went up in smoke. We can only imagine what we would know about those cultures had many more codices survived. The use of this writing material was standard operating procedure from the Incas in the south and up through Mesoamerica. These manuscripts were not easy to produce, but many were given out to preserve the memory of this singular occasion.

Mosiah 2:9 — King Benjamin Exhorts the People to Not Trifle with His Words

As we worship, especially in the temple, we should remember King Benjamin's exhortation at the opening of his speech. He tells the people to no trifle with his words. Sacred words are serious and are not to be taken lightly. He continues by telling them he wants them to *hearken* unto his words, which means more than just to listen. He added these three things: "and open your ears that ye may hear, and your hearts that ye may understand, and your minds that the mysteries of God may be unfolded to your view." He wants people to engage with their full mental and spiritual faculties, to pay attention and to obey in every way possible.

Mosiah 2:12–13 — King Benjamin Kept the "Law of the King," Outlawed Slavery, and Required Obedience to Public Law

When Benjamin affirms that he has not sought to accumulate gold or silver, he is certifying that he has kept the requirements of Deuteronomy 17:14–20, which limit the power of the king in ancient Israel (Figure 4). Kings under the law of Moses needed to read the law, fear the Lord, do all the words of God's law, and not lift his heart up above his brethren. Benjamin went out of his way to say that he was no better than anyone else and that he too was "of the dust" (Mosiah 2:26).

Slavery was an acceptable part of the Mosaic Law. But every seventh year, the Hebrew slaves had to be let go. King Benjamin went even further, prohibiting slavery among any of his people. The reason for this was because his people all belonged to God, their Heavenly King (2:18–21). If they are servants (or slaves) to God, it would be unseemly for them to be held as slaves by anyone else.

Benjamin also certified that he had not allowed people to murder, plunder, steal, commit adultery, or any manner of wickedness (2:13). This is a shortened form of the second half of the Ten Commandments, rules that pertain to the establishment of public law and order.

Benjamin and the Law of the King

	Deut.	Mosiah
The Lord shall choose him	17:15	1:10; 2:30
He shall be one of thy brethren	17:15	2:11
He shall not return the people to Egypt	17:16	3:14
He shall not multiply to himself silver and gold	17:17	2:12
He shall have a copy of the Law	17:18	1:3
He shall read the Law all his days	17:19	1:7
He shall fear the Lord	17:19	2:37–40
He shall keep all the Law	17:19	1:5; 5:5
His heart shall not be lifted up above his brethren	17:20	2:26
He shall turn not aside to the right hand or left	17:20	5:8–10
His days shall be prolonged in the kingdom	17:20	2:31

Figure 4 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "King Benjamin and the Law of the King." In *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, chart 125.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How is the Use of Deuteronomy in the Book of Mormon Evidence for its Authenticity?](#) (1 Nephi 4:34)," *KnoWhy* 428 (April 27, 2018).

Taylor Halverson, "[Deuteronomy 17:14–20 as Criteria for Book of Mormon Kingship](#)," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 24 (2017): 1–10.

Mosiah 2:18–19 — Benjamin Teaches His People to Serve and Thank Their Heavenly King

One of the wonderful things about King Benjamin is that he does not require anyone to do anything that he has not been willing to do himself. Earlier in the chapter, he told the people that he had served them, with all his "might, mind and strength" (2:11). The scriptural exhortation to love God with all of your might, mind, and strength is in several biblical passages that King Benjamin, who knew the scriptures well, would have known (see, for example, Deuteronomy 6:5; 30:6; Proverbs 2:2). He brilliantly transforms that requirement to say, in essence, "I know that I am commanded to love God with all my heart, might and mind, but, you know, I have loved you and served *you* with all my heart, might and mind." He is telling them, "I am your king and God has put me in as king, but I love *you* as much as I have loved God." And thus, he will turn around and tell them that the same opportunity and reality applies to them as well: "And when you are in the service of your fellow beings you are only in the service of your God" (2:17).

And thus, "if I, whom ye call your king ... do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King!" (2:19), because I have only been in the service of God, and he has "kept and preserved" us from day to day, lending us breath, that we might live (2:21). And thus all thankful praise should be directed toward Him. This is not only logically coherent, but also ethically right and spiritually fulfilling.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Are Acts of Service Related to Wisdom?](#) (Mosiah 2:17)," *KnoWhy* 308 (May 3, 2017).

Mosiah 2:17, 24 — When We Serve Others, We Are Merely Serving God

To understand Benjamin's full point here, the key word is *only*. This word does not just mean *only* or *solely*. It also means *merely*. So, what is King Benjamin trying to tell his people? He wants them to remember that when you serve God, he immediately blesses you, and thus, you do not get out of His debt that way. While it is a good thing to serve God (especially so you can know the voice of the Master whom you have served, 5:14), in reality, when you are in the service of other people, you are still only—*merely*—in the service of God (2:17). And thus, neither King Benjamin nor anyone else has reason to

boast, even if one serves God exclusively, with *all* of one's whole soul (2:21). This is because, as Benjamin says, God always immediately blesses you (2:24).

Mosiah 2:15, 27 — Benjamin Wants to Stand before God with a Clear Conscience

Above all, Benjamin wants to return to God with a clear conscience and with his garments pure, not stained by the blood of his people (2:27–28). At the beginning of his speech, Benjamin had similarly said that he wasn't speaking to the people "this day" that "I might thereby accuse you," but so that "I can answer a clear conscience before God" (2:15).

Mosiah 2:11, 28 — Benjamin States and Restates the Purposes of Their Gathering

Finally, in conclusion of this first section of his speech, just as he had begun by telling his people that he had been consecrated by his father to be king and had been kept and preserved by God's matchless power (2:11), Benjamin ends by returning to these same points. He notes that "the Lord God doth support me, ... that I should declare unto you this day, that my son Mosiah is a king and a ruler over you" (2:30).

As will become clear as we carefully read this beautifully composed speech, Benjamin's words separate into seven sections, as do many of the Psalms, and as does the Gospel of Matthew. Some scholars have referred to this as a "menorah pattern," echoing the seven-branched configuration of the menorah in the Temple. And in this connection, we recall that Benjamin's speech and Mosiah's coronation was held surrounding the temple.

Further Reading

Corbin Volluz, "A Study in Seven: Hebrew Numerology in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2014): 57–83.

For the most detailed discussion of the many chiasmic levels and structures in Benjamin's Speech, see John W. Welch, "Parallelism and Chiasmus in Benjamin's Speech," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 315–410. On this first section in particular, see pages 329–336. Each subsequent section is also displayed and discussed in detail in this book chapter.

Mosiah 2:28–30 — King Benjamin Declares Mosiah to be His Successor

In Mosiah 2:29–30, King Benjamin stated, "I say unto you that I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together, that I might declare unto you that I can no longer be your teacher, nor your king; For even at this time ... I should declare unto you this day, that my son Mosiah is a king and a ruler over you."

That is an official proclamation announcing the new king. At this point, there may have been some kind of investiture, where Mosiah would come up and perhaps be given the brass plates, or the Sword of Laban. After some interruption, King Benjamin resumes in verse 31 with the words, “And now, my brethren.”

In most successions from one king to another, what happens? The king dies and his sons fight over who is going to be the next king. It is very unusual for a king to appoint a son while the king is still alive. Now, there will be a co-regency for the next three years, with Benjamin and his son working together. At that point, King Benjamin will die, but in the meantime, he has provided for a smooth transition from himself to Mosiah, and Mosiah will successfully reign for thirty-three years without war or disruption, as far as we know.

Further Reading

Stephen D. Ricks, “Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 233–276.

Mosiah 2:31–41 — How Is the Next Section of Benjamin’s Speech Organized?

In this second part of his speech, Benjamin promises his people temporal blessings that will come from obedience (2:31), condemns willful rebellion against God (2:32–33), stresses the accountability of the people (2:34–36), once again condemns willful rebellion against God (2:37–39), and finally promises his people eternal blessings that come from obedience (2:40–41). This section acts as a coda following the installation of Mosiah as the new king. Its central section holds the people accountable, insisting upon their obedience and loyalty to the new king, who stands as an intermediary between the people and their Heavenly King.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “Parallelism and Chiasmus in Benjamin’s Speech,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 315–410.

Mosiah 2:32–33 — What Does the Term “Listeth to Obey” Mean?

Why does King Benjamin believe that the Atonement is necessary? There are many answers to that question, but among them is the simple fact that we are sinful. He clearly talks about mankind’s sinful nature and that if we *list* to obey—or lean towards—the evil spirit, we are likely to fall into the state of rebellion against God that he advises us so much against. We are in a state of nothingness from which the Lord alone can elevate us. We are dust, we are created as and from the dust. If we are going to be exalted and rise above this mortal state, then the Atonement will be necessary to make that possible.

We are dependent on it. The unifying power of the At-one-ment holds this world together, and King Benjamin talks about the many ways we depend upon God.

Mosiah 2:40–41 — King Benjamin Calls upon All of His People to Choose Happiness

In Mosiah 2:40, King Benjamin says: “O, all ye old men, and also ye young men, and you little children.” In Israelite culture, for some legal purposes, the world was grouped into old men, young men and children. With a life expectancy of roughly about forty, these three categories roughly break down into 10, 20, and 30 years of age. King Benjamin wants the elderly, the young adults, and the youth to consider the blessed and happy state of all those who keep the commandments of God.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can the Book of Mormon Strengthen Marriages and Families?](#) (Jacob 3:7),” *KnoWhy* 302 (April 19, 2017).

Mosiah 3

Mosiah 3:2–5 — King Benjamin Was Visited by an Angel and Quotes His Words

Section 3 of Benjamin’s Speech runs from Mosiah 3:2–10. These verses seem to be the very words that an angel of the Lord had spoken to Benjamin one night about the coming of Christ. The text does not say how many days or nights beforehand this visitation had occurred. The angel had awakened Benjamin, presumably at night, “And he said unto me: Awake; and I awoke, and behold he stood before me” (3:2).

The first words that the angel spoke to Benjamin were “For the Lord hath heard thy prayers, and hath judged of thy righteousness, and hath sent me to declare unto thee that thou mayest rejoice; and that thou mayest declare unto thy people, that they may also be filled with joy” (3:4). Above all, Benjamin wants all people to know that the Atonement is filled with joy. In the world, there is misery and sorrow, but the one thing that makes this life bearable and something we can enjoy to the fullest is the knowledge of the Atonement.

These teachings come from the angel. Whether they are all of the angel’s precise words is not known, but Benjamin has learned and reports the true essence of these things from the angel. Humans don’t receive messages like this one very often, so when such information is conveyed, we ought to take special note, with heed and diligence, listening carefully to what is said. Notice that the messenger from the Lord said, “Awake!” and Benjamin awoke. And the angel said again, “Awake and hear!” (3:3).

Wakefulness is an important thing. With it, King Benjamin was able to hear and understand all of the teachings about the Atonement that were then delivered to him.

It is possible that Benjamin timed his gathering to coincide with the season of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. In Jerusalem, people wanted their High Priest to be fully conscious of everything, as he prepared to perform the most important sacrifices of the year on the Day of Atonement. To keep him focused and not to have any debilitating thoughts, the High Priest was kept awake the night before. Interestingly, Benjamin had been praying and was awakened, so he could understand all of these teachings about the Atonement that he then delivered to his people.

Mosiah 3:5 — The Christ Will Be Recognized by His Miracles

Chapter 3 is the doctrinal heart of Benjamin’s Speech. It’s all about the Atonement. The first thing to recognize is the atoning Savior Himself. The angel assures Benjamin that people will know this Redeemer when he comes. He will look like a man and will dwell in a tabernacle of clay, but he will come with powers beyond anything normally seen: “working mighty miracles, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases” (3:5).

Among the Dead Sea Scrolls—and this is discussed in this connection in the book, *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, composed and edited by me and Donald Parry—there is a text, 4Q 251, that was unknown until just a few years ago. This Jewish text, written in the 1st Century BC, says: “When the Messiah comes, he will heal the sick, make the blind see, raise [or resurrect] the dead, and to the poor announce glad tidings.” And another fragment (4Q 541) from that same cave reads as follows: “They will utter many words against him and an abundance of lies.” So this was an expectation among some Jews, and here you have the Nephites also knowing this around 124 BC. So that we might recognize the power of the coming Lord, a number of things are given to let people identify this person. When Jesus came working all of these miracles, it’s not just that he was doing amazing things, but he does them so that people will know and identify who has come. Of course, the people of the Book of Mormon will also have some of these things happen in their presence, when Jesus appears after the resurrection and says, “Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them” (3 Nephi 17:7). He has raised himself from the dead, and others will be raised from the dead. So all of these signs which Benjamin told the people will be a confirmation to them in their land, as well as to all people, that they might be convinced that Jesus was the Christ, the Eternal God, and how to embrace His Atonement.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Christ Perform Miracles? \(Mosiah 3:5\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 508 (March 28, 2019).

Mosiah 3:7–11 — President John Taylor on the Atonement of the Savior

John Taylor wrote the book *Mediation and the Atonement* when he was President of the Church. It was one of his main contributions as president. He wanted the Saints to understand the Atonement, and his book is a classic. For inclusion in *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland wrote the [article on Atonement](#), but Elder Holland humbly told us as the editors, "I can't do any better than just to quote John Taylor."

Here is one of President Taylor's comments:

The Savior thus becomes master of the situation—the debt is paid, the redemption made, the covenant fulfilled, justice satisfied, the will of God done, and all power is now given into the hands of the Son of God—the power of resurrection, the power of redemption, the power of salvation He becomes the author of eternal life and exaltation. He is the Redeemer, the Resurrector, the Savior of man and the world. (p. 171)

And here is another comment, from a different chapter:

... in some *mysterious, incomprehensible* way, Jesus assumed the responsibility which naturally would have devolved upon Adam; but which could only be accomplished through the mediation of Himself, and by taking upon Himself their sorrows, assuming their responsibilities, and bearing their transgressions or sins. In a manner to us *incomprehensible* and *inexplicable*, he bore the weight of the sins of the whole world; not only of Adam, but of his posterity; and in doing that, opened the kingdom of heaven, not only to all believers and all who obeyed the law of God, but to more than one-half of the human family who die before they come to years of maturity, as well as to the heathen, who, having died without law, will, through His mediation, be resurrected without law, and be judged without law, and thus participate, according to their capacity, works and worth, in the blessings of His atonement. (p. 148–149; emphasis added)

As President Taylor undoubtedly knew, King Benjamin said many of the same things: "Believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend" (4:9). We can know many things. We can understand the symbolism, we can understand the fulfillment of prophecy, we can understand that it's real and we can feel its reality, but the eternal economy in all of this, we cannot fathom.

Mosiah 3:7 — Focusing on the Atonement of Jesus Christ

In this third section of his speech, Benjamin explains that the Lord shall suffer temptations and pain of body, hunger, thirst and fatigue, even more than a man can suffer. There are limits to our physical suffering—the body will check out at a certain extreme point. But perhaps there are not such limits to spiritual suffering, for Jesus would suffer more than a mortal could suffer. The angel says that Jesus would suffer so intensely that blood cometh from every pore (3:7). Symbolically, his blood is sprinkled from his body on all the world as he is performing that Atonement, much like the high priest did on the Day of Atonement as he sprinkled the sacrificial blood on the altar and on the people.

Jesus voluntarily offered to do this in the pre-mortal realm, and he carried through with it. The most amazing part of all of this—on top of all the pain and suffering—is that at any time, even after he said “Not my will but thine be done,” he could have checked out or called down the powers of heaven to intervene on his behalf.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Did Jesus Bleed from Every Pore? \(Mosiah 3:7\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 520 (June 13, 2019).

Mosiah 3:8 — King Benjamin Reveals to His People a Glorious Name of Jesus

One of the great purposes of this whole assembly is for King Benjamin to give his people a new name “by which they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem” (Mosiah 1:11). The name is “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning” (3:8). This elaborate name of Jesus contains ten nouns. It describes not only Jesus personally, but His role as creator of all things from the beginning. In the ancient world, when a king was crowned, he would receive a set of coronation names or titles that accompanied his given name. For instance, Roman Emperors bore honorific and religious titles of glory, victory, and so on. Here, in this coronation setting, King Benjamin is recognizing the Savior as their heavenly king. Before the seventh section in Benjamin’s speech, all of his people will enter into a covenant whereby they took upon themselves the revealed name of Christ (5:8), that never should be blotted out (5:11). Thereby they become spiritually reborn as his sons and daughters (5:7).

This expanded covenant name would be remembered and used again in the Book of Mormon. In Helaman 14, Samuel the Lamanite stood on the walls of this same city of Zarahemla and prophesied again of the coming of Christ. In Helaman 14:11–12, he says, “for this intent have I come up upon the walls of this city, that ye might hear and know of the judgments of God which do await you because of your iniquities, and also that ye

might know the conditions of repentance; and also that ye might know of the coming of [1] Jesus [2] Christ, the [3] Son of [4] God, the [5] Father of [6] heaven and of [7] earth, the [8] Creator of [9] all things from the [10] beginning; and that ye might know of the signs of his coming, to the intent that ye might believe on his name.” Samuel’s precise recitation and invocation of this holy name, reminding the people of Zarahemla to repent, may especially have pushed his recalcitrant audience over the edge. No wonder they tried to kill him when they could have just ignored him.

Samuel’s Quotation of Benjamin	
Mosiah 3:8	Helaman 14:12
And he shall be called	And also that ye might know of the coming of
Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning;	Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning;
and his mother shall be called Mary.	and that ye might know of the signs of his coming, to the intent that ye might believe on his name.

Figure 5 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. “Samuel’s Quotation of Benjamin.” In *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, chart 105.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Benjamin Give Multiple Names for Jesus at the Coronation of his Son Mosiah?](#) (Mosiah 3:8),” *KnoWhy* 536 (October 17, 2019).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did King Benjamin Say That His People Would be Sons and Daughters at God’s Right Hand?](#) (Mosiah 5:7),” *KnoWhy* 307 (May 1, 2017).

Mosiah 3:9 — Jesus Will Be Crucified Because People Will Say He Has a Devil

Even after all that Jesus would do, some people would try to explain his miracle-working in a secular way. They will “consider him a man,” not a god. But then how can they account for his supernatural, miraculous deeds? They will “say that he hath a devil.” Under the Law of Moses, miracles were viewed with caution. Judges needed to ask, “By what power or authority was this miracle performed?” (see Mark 3:22; Matthew 21:23).

Roman law also strictly prohibited magic and spell-casting. If these things were by the power of the Devil or evil forces, ancient judges were ordered, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” (Exodus 22:18). Anyone, male or female, could not use magic, miracle-working, or sign-giving to lead people to worship or follow some other god or way (Deuteronomy 13:1–4). Such conduct in Israel was seen as violating the first and greatest commandment, loving and having only the Lord as God, and the death penalty was to be enforced very seriously (Deuteronomy 13:5, 8–11). In Roman law, it was associated with treason, the most serious of all crimes. Benjamin’s prophecy explains best why Jesus was rejected and killed. More than any other single text, this passage has informed all my years of study of the trials and death of Jesus.

Mosiah 3:11 — The Atonement Will Automatically Cover Three Types of Sins

Section 4 of Benjamin’s speech (3:11–27) discusses the doctrinal theology and the religious behaviors that are consistent with repentance and the transformation that comes with the Atonement.

In Section 2 of his speech, Benjamin made it clear that people must repent of their own sins and not remain and die an enemy to God (see, for example, 2:38). This will allow the Atonement to make it possible for people to “dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness” (2:41). As he turns to the legal, religious, and practical operations of the atoning blood of Christ, Benjamin now conveys additional important information that certain transgressions or human conditions will be automatically covered by the “infinite and eternal” Atonement, as Amulek will later call it (Alma 34:15). King Benjamin first tells his people that the Atonement is guaranteed to cover three things:

1. **“His blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam”**
Christ’s atoning blood covers the direct effects of the Fall. As Lehi declared, “the Messiah cometh in the fullness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall” (2 Nephi 2:26–27). Similarly, the Apostle Paul was aware of this doctrine and taught, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians. 15:22). The New Testament talks about Jesus as the *second Adam* because Christ counters the effects of the first Adam. King Benjamin understood this too. Thus, we believe that we will be punished for our own sins and not for Adam’s transgressions (Article of Faith 2).

2. “His blood atoneth ... [for those] who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them”

Many people who have lived, have not known the general will of God concerning them. They did not know the plan of God, the plan of redemption, or the plan of mercy, and how to obtain these blessings. They have done things that were wrong and they felt were wrong, but they died not knowing what they should do to reconcile with God concerning that matter. The Atonement will cover all of that as well.

3. “His blood atoneth ... [for those] who have ignorantly sinned”

This third type of sin is somewhat different from the second in Benjamin’s list. This category refers to *specific* things that people have consciously done but were unaware that what they were doing was actually against some point of the law, or involved some particular impurities that they may have come in contact with, not knowing that they had inadvertently contravened a law that they knew full well. The phrase “ignorantly sin” probably seems strange to modern Christian readers. Isn’t sin coming out in open rebellion against God, consciously going against His will. Yes, but while that is generally the case, in fact, it is also quite possible to do something deliberately while being mistaken or completely unaware that doing so actually contravenes a law of God or has unintended consequences that are damaging or have the effects of distancing us from God or other people whom we should love.

In Numbers 15:27–29, the Law of Moses actually makes provisions for covering such “*ignorant sins*.” For instance, someone could unconsciously or accidentally contract impurity or do something while not aware that it was in violation of the Law of Moses. If so, it was considered to be an “ignorant sin.” How would such a sin be taken care of? Perhaps the person was completely unaware that it had even happened. How would then one repent of it, or know to go to the temple and make a sacrifice for it? Actually, that was one of the things that was covered under the Law of Moses on the Day of Atonement. The High Priest’s sacrifice on the Day of Atonement would cover all of the sins and transgressions that had been committed ignorantly.

We don’t think about such accidental matters as sins any longer, but in Benjamin’s day they did. Maybe we should be grateful to Jesus Christ for having taken care of all such things, so that we need not be troubled or afraid on this account.

Mosiah 3:14–15 — The Day of Atonement Was a Type of Christ’s Atonement

King Benjamin then explains in Mosiah 3:14–15 that the Lord gave the people many things in the Law of Moses that were types and shadows of things to come. This was to aid them in recognizing the Messiah when He came. For example, the very Day of Atonement is a type and shadow of the Atonement of Jesus Christ in many ways. The

holy name of Jehovah (YHWH) was an important part of the Day of Atonement. It was so important that the Rabbis tell us that this sacred name could not be spoken out loud on any other day. But it needed to be spoken on the Day of Atonement, and it could only be spoken ten times, a perfect number of times. When one counts the number of times that King Benjamin’s speech contains the compound phrases “Lord God,” “Lord Omnipotent,” or “Lord God Omnipotent,” there happen to be ten of them. This bears witness to us that the Lord is perfect, and that through our following Him He “may seal [us] His” (5:15).

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “Counting to Ten,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 42–57, 113–114.

Mosiah 3:13–15 — How Does the History of the Nephites Differ from that of the Israelites?

We are fortunate to have in the Book of Mormon—and this is something that we do not have in the Bible—a decade by decade walk with groups like Benjamin and his people who were making the transition from following the Law of Moses up to the time when they were prepared and ready to receive Christ. In this history, we see the Lord sending holy prophets and guiding them step by step (3:13). They were given basic rules along with sublime promises under the law of Moses (3:14), as well as types and shadows (3:15) for those who would understand and not look beyond the mark.

The testimony of Christ is not a light switch that just gets turned on and off. There is a process of transition, and steps are taken to prepare these people. The Lord was heavily invested in this project. He had promised many things to Lehi and Nephi. They had done everything that he had asked them to do. Yet, at several junctures in Nephite history, it becomes perilously close to not working. The Nephites could vanish as quickly as had the Jaredites, and so, at this point, King Benjamin is giving these people a deeper understanding of the Atonement and a deeper understanding of their relationship with God so that they can be prepared and ready.

Further Reading

Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 174–183.

Mosiah 3:18–19 — The Natural Man Is an Enemy to God

King Benjamin’s speech has an overall chiasmic structure. It is organized into seven sections (Figure 6).

Overview of Benjamin's Speech

Supporting Elements in Mosiah 1–6

Preparations (1:1–2:8)

Successor named and new name to be given; people gathered but not yet numbered; tower constructed

First Interruption (2:29–30)

Coronation proclamation

Second Interruption (2:41–3:1)

Remember, remember, the Lord has spoken; Benjamin calls again for attention

Third Interruption (3:27–4:4)

Thus has the Lord commanded, amen; the people fall to the ground and confess; atoning blood is applied; joy and remission; Benjamin begins to speak again

Fourth Interruption (4:30–5:6)

Remember, and perish not; covenant response of the people; Benjamin accepts their covenant

Final Acts (6:1–3)

Names recorded of all who accepted the name; Mosiah consecrated; priests appointed; people dismissed

Words of Speech in Mosiah 2–5

A. All are indebted to God (2:9–28)

God is the heavenly king; God has physically created and sustains all people; people should serve and thank God; the hope of exaltation after death

B. Consequences of obedience or disobedience (2:31–41)

Obedience brings victory and prosperity (compare Leviticus 26); prohibition of contention; rebellion and disobedience bring pain and anguish; all are eternally indebted to Heavenly Father

C. The angel's testimony of Christ's deeds (3:2–10)

The Lord Omnipotent will come down in power and goodness; the sacred name of God; the suffering and death of Jesus Christ

D. Sanctification by the atonement of Christ (3:11–27)

The only possibility of reconciliation; putting off the natural man and becoming a saint; people will be judged according to their works

C'. Benjamin's testimony of God's goodness (4:4–12)

God is good, patient, long-suffering; believe in God; God is all-powerful, loving, and glorious; call upon the name of the Lord daily

B'. Righteous behavior of the redeemed (4:13–30)

Living in peace and social order (compare Leviticus 25); prohibition of contention; because God imparts, all must give to those in need; avoid guilt and sin

A'. The sons and daughters of God (5:6–15)

God has spiritually begotten you this day; the only head to make you free from debt; excommunication upon breach of obligations; covenant people know God by serving him; the hope of exaltation after death

Figure 6 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "Overview of King Benjamin's Speech." In *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, chart 87.

Section 4 is the middle, and the middle of that middle is this chiasmic centerpiece in Mosiah 3:19 (Figure 7):

a For the natural man

b is an enemy to God, and

c has been from the fall of Adam, and

c' will be, forever and ever, unless he

b' yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and

a' putteth off the natural man."

This was the second chiasm I found in the Book of Mormon, on the morning of August 16, as a missionary in Regensburg, Germany. The first was in Mosiah 5:10–12. Having found that one at the end of Benjamin's Speech, I immediately went back looking to see if Benjamin had used chiasmus elsewhere. Indeed he had.

Chiasmus in Mosiah 3:18–19

except they *humble* themselves

and become as little *children*, and believe that

salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the *atonement*

blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.

For the *natural man*

is an enemy to *God*,

and *has been* from the fall of Adam,

and *will be*, forever and ever,

unless he yields to the enticings of the *Holy Spirit*,

and putteth off the *natural man*

and becometh a saint through the *atonement of Christ the Lord*,

and becometh as a *child*,

submissive, meek, *humble*, patient, full of love, willing to submit to

all things

Figure 7 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "Chiasmus in Mosiah 3:18–19." In *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, chart 130.

This passage, exhorting us to “put off the natural man and become a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and become as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him,” is one of the most frequently quoted passages in the Book of Mormon in General Conference (see the [LDS Scripture Citation Index](#)). We as a people have sensed that that is the lynchpin of King Benjamin’s speech.

The structure and organization of this speech bears out that centrality. This speech has been carefully orchestrated. These words are virtually the dead center, the pivot point, of Benjamin’s entire speech. The focus of everything is right here, so we get not only Benjamin’s direct statement of its truth and importance, but we also get indirectly this structural verification. Indeed, one can count 2467 words before this perfectly central verse, and 2476 words after it. This is the logical and literary epicenter of King Benjamin’s entire speech and also of the glad tidings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Was Chiasmus Discovered in the Book of Mormon?](#) (Mosiah 5:11),” *KnoWhy* 353 (August 16, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did King Benjamin Use Poetic Parallels So Extensively?](#) (Mosiah 5:11),” *KnoWhy* 83 (April 21, 2016).

MOSIAH 4–6



Overview

In these three chapters, readers continue and complete King Benjamin's incomparable speech. While Mosiah chapters 1–3 are filled with reports of preparations for Benjamin's solemn assembly, his declarations about his own kingship, his son's coronation, and prophecies about the promised coming of and atoning powers of Jesus Christ, the Heavenly King, Mosiah chapters 4–6 deal with the response of the people to Benjamin's words, as they express their willingness to enter into a covenant with God, as Benjamin instructs them concerning their obligations under that covenant (chapter 4), as they then actually enter into that covenant (chapter 5), and as their names are recorded as being bound under this covenant with God, as well as with their new mortal king, God's servant on earth (chapter 6). Not only is King Benjamin's speech masterfully organized and literarily cohesive, but it is ceremoniously cohesive and ritually rich. All six chapters in Benjamin's speech must be read together as one great whole, in spite of the verse breaks and chapter divisions necessarily helpful for convenient referencing.

Mosiah 4

Mosiah 4:1 — The People Fell to the Earth

At this point, a little over halfway through his speech, when King Benjamin looked around, he found that his people had all fallen "to the earth." There was a big crowd, and we may wonder why they all had responded with the same physical response and all at the same time. The text says that the fear of the Lord had come upon them. The word for "to fear" and the word for "to revere" are related. In this context, the people's

fear most likely refers to a deep, powerful reverence for God, as when someone is a God-fearing person. Of course, the fear may also have been connected with the power that they knew the Lord had to administer eternal justice. They could also have been afraid because of their inadequacies and the seriousness of the covenant into which they knew they would soon be entering.

In Jerusalem, on the Day of Atonement, when the people heard the sacred name of the Lord pronounced by the High Priest, they fell down as if they were in the Lord's sacred presence. Similarly, in Lehi's dream, the people fall down when they reach the Tree of Life and partake of the fruit: "... and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and *fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree*" (1 Nephi 8:30). There were four groups of people that had worked their way to the Tree of Life. Three of the groups either do not make it or soon fall away. Those who stay faithful are the ones who fall down when they get there, and make themselves as humble as the earth. Talk about being *humble!* When we as modern people bow down, we typically just bow our heads, but the ancient people bowed their bodies. When they came into a divine situation or into the presence of a great ruler, like a king or emperor, they would prostrate themselves in front of that person.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did the People Fall Down at the Feet of Jesus?](#) (3 Nephi 11:17)," *KnoWhy* 202 (October 5, 2016).

Mosiah 4:2 — The People Cried Out with One Voice

"And they all cried aloud with one voice." How did this happen? This was most likely a coronation-affirmation or covenant-making ritual, and the people may well have known what they were supposed to say in this situation. That does not mean that they were not sincere in what they were doing. This was not just some kind of prepared, mechanical ritual. For example, when we go to a temple dedication, we do the Hosanna Shout, and we all know what we are supposed to say, but since you know that you only say or do that under certain circumstances it has a lot of meaning for us.

It was a similar thing among King Benjamin's people. When they were saying, "Oh have mercy and apply the atoning blood of Christ," they were saying, in effect, "We want that blood to be sprinkled on us and to purify us," just as the High Priest traditionally would make the all-important atoning sacrifice on the Day of Atonement and then sprinkle purifying blood on the altar of the temple. They had just been told that the only way to overcome the natural man is through the atoning blood of Christ, so they especially wanted that blood applied to them. A similar covenant-making episode and vocal

response from the people is found when Joshua and his people made a covenant with the Lord (Joshua 24:16, 21–26).

As was mentioned in connection with Mosiah 2:5 in the previous week’s discussion, the fact that each family was sitting in their tent with the door open to the temple, links Benjamin’s speech with the Feast of Tabernacles. That was the traditional time for the coronation of kings in ancient Israel. In addition, the Day of Atonement, which was the highest and holiest day of the year on the ancient Israelite calendar, came on the tenth day of the seventh month, with the week of tabernacles following right afterwards, ending with a day of great joy and rejoicing for the teaching (torah) of the Lord.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How the Law of Moses Teaches about the Atonement](#) (Alma 34:14),” *KnoWhy* 424 (April 12, 2018).

Hugh W. Nibley, “[Assembly and Atonement](#),” *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 119–145.

Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “[King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals](#),” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 147–223.

Mosiah 4: 3 — The People Desired and Received a Remission of Their Sins

In Latter-day Saint temples, initiates are washed, anointed, and purified. Although, at that point, we do not stand in the presence of God, we are preparing to enter into a covenant with God, and because we are entering into a relationship with God, we must be pure in order to even be in that close proximity with the divine. So, this word *pure* in the statement, “That our hearts may be *purified*,” in the middle of verse 2, similarly indicated the people’s willingness at that point. Their desire to do this showed that they were ready to do what would be coming next. They were prepared to enter into, or to renew, the covenant. They desired the benefits of the Atonement, becoming pure again and reunited with God in mind, body, and spirit. They knew that the Atonement had been prepared from the foundation of the world and also that salvation could only come through its sanctifying power. They were then filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins and peace of conscience. That feeling of having a clear conscience before God, knowing that you have done what you could and then continuing with faith in Jesus Christ, is the sweet blessing of the Holy Ghost accepting of our sacrifice and commitment to obey.

Mosiah 4:4, 1 — Remember Your Nothingness Compared with the Great Goodness of God

As Benjamin began again to speak to the people, he calls them to attention (4:4) as he had before (2:9), and then delivers to them the fifth section of his speech (4:5-12). This section begins and ends with a clear statement of the need for us to remember our “nothingness” (4:5 and 11). We don’t hear this kind of negative talk about ourselves very often from our Church leaders. It can make us feel uncomfortable. However, it is certainly true. But the point is not that we are truly nothing in an absolute or potential sense, but when we are compared in our present state and condition with the great goodness of our God, we must bow and confess, “O Lord, my God, how great thou art!” In his talk *“You Matter to Him”* (from the 2011 general conference), President Dieter F. Uchtdorf similarly taught,

But even though man is nothing, it fills me with wonder and awe to think that “the worth of souls is great in the sight of God.”

And while we may look at the vast expanse of the universe and say, “What is man in comparison to the glory of creation?” God Himself said we are the reason He created the universe! His work and glory—the purpose for this magnificent universe—is to save and exalt mankind. In other words, the vast expanse of eternity, the glories and mysteries of infinite space and time are all built for the benefit of ordinary mortals like you and me. Our Heavenly Father created the universe that we might reach our potential as His sons and daughters.

This is a paradox of man: compared to God, man is nothing; yet we are everything to God. While against the backdrop of infinite creation we may appear to be nothing, we have a spark of eternal fire burning within our breast. We have the incomprehensible promise of exaltation—worlds without end—within our grasp. And it is God’s great desire to help us reach it.

This beautiful explanation captures the same inspired encouragement and urgency that pervades King Benjamin’s desires for his people.

Further Reading

Dieter F. Uchtdorf, *“You Matter to Him,”* *Ensign*, November 2011, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

Mosiah 4:9–10 — Instructions to Believe in God

In verses 9 and 10, Benjamin gives his people a powerful set of ten instructions! And how needed these mandates still are today. (1) First of all, we must believe that God exists. (2) Next, we need to trust “that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth.”

Yet it is not enough to simply know that he created all of this. (3) We have to believe “that he has all wisdom” and that he has a plan for us individually and collectively. (4) Furthermore, we must believe that he has “all power, both in heaven and in earth” to carry out his plan, and if he does, then (5) we have to believe that we cannot comprehend all that God comprehends. We cannot figure it all out alone.

This is sort of like King Benjamin’s own Articles of Faith: “Believe, believe, believe, believe, believe.” They and we must believe certain inevitably true things about ourselves and about God.

Does this mean there might be questions to which we do not know the answers? As much as we may hate to admit that we don’t know everything, the answer is, “Yes there are many things we do not yet know!” How do you think Benjamin learned that there were things he didn’t know, and even that his people didn’t know? At least in part, he surely learned this from his experience with the angel. He had just an experience that went way beyond normal, and whatever he knew before, he certainly now knew that man cannot comprehend all things.

Knowing that there are a lot of things we don’t know, we may wonder what to do next. And what did Benjamin say next? There was another set of five things for them (and us) to do. Once we know that we do not know everything that God can comprehend, we must (1) believe that we have to repent of our sins, and (2) we must forsake them. It is not enough to repent; we must also forsake, leave them behind, leave them to wither. This will bring us to the next step, (3) humbling ourselves, and then (4) asking sincerely for forgiveness and things we need and truly desire in order to repent. This is so that God can give them to us. Among other things, he will give us the knowledge we seek. God can and will forgive us but only if that is what we desire. Benjamin’s people wanted the atoning blood of Christ to be applied to them so they could be purified and forgiven. We also have to desire this and seek for it. And then, in the end, Benjamin requires that, if we believe all these things, (5) see that ye do them. These five imperatives match Benjamin’s previous five requirements of what we must believe. Benjamin understood that belief without doing is dead.

Mosiah 4:12, 26 — Retaining a Remission of Sins

After Benjamin’s five “believe” statements and five “repent” statements (4:9–10), he added two “knowledge” statements (4:11), he followed it with two mentions of the word “remember,” particularly that we must “retain in remembrance” what God has done for us (4:11). It is not enough to know something; you can forget it next week. We must not only know it and remember it, but always *retain* it in remembrance. Notice how Benjamin has moved from one thought to another. He did not use a simple repetition; he

Repentance and Obtaining Forgiveness

Recognize that an attitude or action is out of harmony with God's will

Remorse, feel genuinely sorry with a broken heart and contrite spirit

Resolve and truly desire to make a permanent change

Report, confess sins to the Lord or bishop and talk with people whom you trust

Rely on the merits and mercy of God and put yourself in his hands

Respond to priesthood guidance

Request forgiveness from the Lord

Receive God's gift of forgiveness

Restitution, repair all possible damage to relationships with God or man

Renew your life through a realization of redemption

Reform your conduct by adopting new patterns of behavior

Reciprocate by forgiving others

Retain a remission by giving generously to those in need

Reinstatement in the household of faith by making new commitments

Repeat the resolve, especially during the sacrament

Rejoice, expressing thanks to God and testimony to others

used elevation of the thought as it went along. He was guiding people step by step. He moves here from having believed, then done, then known, and then remembered, then humbled ourselves, then called on the name of the Lord daily, and at that point you shall rejoice and be filled with love. This will allow us to “retain a remission of our sins,” grow in the knowledge of the glory of God, and then to know what is just and true. We achieve this goal one step at a time, and Benjamin marvelously sets out the step-by-step sequence. All of this is so that we can obtain a remission of our sins.

And remember that *remembering* in this sense is not just a matter of remembering intellectually. We truly remember when we remember *to do* certain things. And thus, toward the end of the next section of his speech, Benjamin will return again precisely to the idea of retaining a remission of sins (see 4:26). When I was a bishop, a girl who had transgressed—not terribly, but it was very troublesome to her—came to me, and she tried to repent. She kept coming back, and I would give her some ideas and she would feel better. Then she would come back two weeks later feeling bad again. She wondered why those bad feelings kept coming back. Benjamin’s words came to my mind, and I realized that her problem was that she had not *retained* a remission of her sins. I had never heard anyone talk about this step in the repentance process; but I had recently had Benjamin on my mind. So we read out loud Mosiah 4:26, together with its injunction to “retain” a remission of sins by giving to the poor, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and administering to their relief both spiritually and temporally. This additional step is actually a step in the repentance process. When we think of the R’s of repentance, certainly *retain* is one we should add.

That was a “Benjamin moment” for me, in which these words took on powerful life and meaning, impelling us to go and do something. We set out some things that she was going to go do, and two weeks later she came back to my office and said, “Bishop, it has worked! I feel totally different.” I told her to keep at it in order to always retain that remission. Benjamin has given us really profound guidance.

Mosiah 4:13–30—The Elements of a Covenant-Making Ceremony

At this point, we enter into Section 6 of Benjamin’s speech.

What happens next in a covenant-making context? In the book *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”* there is a chart (Figures 2, 3) that shows that treaties or covenant-making ceremonies as they are called in the ancient world, had several common elements.

Treaty-Covenant Pattern

in the Old Testament and Benjamin's Speech

Elements	Exodus 19:3b–8	Exodus 20–24	Deuteronomy	Joshua 24	Mosiah 1–6
Preamble	19:3b	20:1	1:1–5	24:1–2a	1:1–2:9a
Antecedent History	19:4	20:2	1:6–3:29	24:2b–13, 16b–18a	2:9b–21, 23–30
Terms of the Covenant	19:5–6	20:3–23:19	4–26	24:14, 18b, 23	2:22, 24b, 31–41; 4:6–30
Formal Witness	19:8	24:3	31:19	24:16a, 19a, 21–23	5:2–8
Blessings and Curses	19:5	23:20–33	27:9–28:68	24:19b–20	3:24–27; 5:9–15
Recital of the Covenant/ Deposit of the Text	19:7	24:4–8	27:1–8; 31:9, 24–26	24:25–27	2:8, 9a; 6:1–3, 6

Figure 2 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Treaty-Covenant Pattern in the Old Testament and Benjamin's Speech," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 100.

First, in the recording of ancient covenant or treaty making ceremonies, there was typically some kind of historical preamble. Then there was a discussion about the antecedent history involving how the people got to where they were, and what the relationship had been between the parties who were going to enter into the covenant. Benjamin gave that antecedent relationship in chapter 2 where he spoke of how mankind was created out of the dust of the earth. God created everything, and that is part of their relationship.

Benjamin’s and Mosiah’s Covenant Ceremonies Compared with Old Testament Rituals

Elements	Exodus 24	Joshua 24	1 Samuel 10	Mosiah 1–6	Mosiah 25
Leader	Moses	Joshua	Samuel	Benjamin	Mosiah
Assembly	read in the audience of the people (v. 7)	gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem (v. 1)	called people together unto the Lord at Mizpeh (v. 17)	the people gathered themselves throughout all the land (2:1)	caused that all the people should be gathered together (v. 1)
Legal Document	book of the covenant (v. 7)	set them a statute and an ordinance (v. 25)	manner of the kingdom (v. 25)	my, my father’s, my son’s, and God’s commandments (2:31)	
Public Reading	read in the hearing of the people	said unto the people (v. 22)	told the people the manner of the kingdom (v. 25)	opened his mouth and began to speak (4:4; cf. 2:9)	read and caused to be read (v. 5)
Writing	wrote all the words of the Lord (v. 4)	wrote the words in the book of the law of God (v. 26)	wrote it in a book (v. 25)	words which he spake should be written (2:8)	
Cultic Act	built an altar (v. 4)	took a stone and set it under an oak by the sanctuary of the Lord (v. 26)	laid it up before the Lord (v. 25)	sacrifices and ordinances according to law of Moses (2:3); names recorded (6:1)	baptism (v. 17)

Figure 3 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, “Benjamin’s and Mosiah’s Covenant Ceremonies Compared with Old Testament Rituals,” in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 101.

Then the terms of the covenant were stated in a contract mode. There were witnesses who wrote the names of the people entering into the covenant (we will address this later in the sixth chapter of Mosiah).

Next there were blessings and curses—blessings if the parties kept the covenant, and curses if they did not. And finally came time to write and deposit the covenant, making it a permanent, written record that people could keep and remember.

This pattern of covenant making is followed quite strictly in Benjamin’s speech. In section 6 of the speech (which is Mosiah 4:3–30), we find the stipulations with some of the promises of rewards for obedience and some of the curses if they did not keep the covenant.

Further Reading

Stephen D. Ricks, “Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 233–276.

Mosiah 4:13, 28—Render to Others What They Are Due

The first requirement is to have no thought or desire or “mind to injure one another” (4:13). Wrong doing begins with wrongful thinking.

Next we must “live peaceably” (4:13). We must seek peace. Peace does not just happen. It must be created, desired, worked for, and maintained.

And third, Benjamin taught that if people have done good things to us, we must reciprocate and “render to every man according to that which is his due” (4:13). This may involve paying compensation, or extending human dignity, or giving verbal praise and recognition for what they have done. “Rendering” is a very powerful concept. It means to “rend,” to “tear open” and give generously and willingly. One of my granddaughters has been babysitting for a young mother in our stake who has been very grateful for what my granddaughter has done, and she has abundantly and sincerely praised her for her being able and willing to take care of these little children. My granddaughter goes over there voluntarily. She loves going over and helping because she is getting this positive praise. It has had a powerful effect on her whole personality, even giving her confidence in what she is doing in school and a lot of other things. She gets paid a little bit for the babysitting, but she does not go for the money. She goes for the praise and kind recognition for the service she has given.

Toward the end of this section of his speech, Benjamin returns to this theme. In Mosiah 4:28, it is interesting that he specified that an individual had to return the *thing* that he or

she had borrowed. In ancient Mesopotamian laws dealing with loans, if someone borrowed a cow or an ox to do their plowing, or borrowed a donkey, a borrower could not just give another donkey. They had to return the very animal that they borrowed, and that helped to preempt arguments about equivalent value and things like that. Thus, if they borrowed something, they needed to give back the actual thing. Benjamin's people, likewise, were probably not very far advanced financially. No ancient society had what we would call banks or mortgage companies. They had weights and measures for handling sales at the market place, but most didn't have currency. Thus, it is interesting that Benjamin wanted people to be precise in their paying back of anything that they owed someone else.

But the point here is not just that we give it back. Benjamin wants to be sure that there are no arguments, no disputations, but that by giving back "according as he doth agree," that person avoids committing sin himself and also prevents an argument that might lead your "neighbor to commit sin also" (4:28).

Mosiah 4:14–15 — Teach the Children the Laws of the Covenant

Once they had learned how to deal with property and deal with neighborly relations, the next thing they had to do was to look after the family. Benjamin taught his people, and consequently us, that they were to teach their children the laws of God. They could not be worthy to enter into this covenant if they would not agree to teach the children the laws of the covenant. Building righteous homes is a crucial part of entering into that covenant.

This requirement—that parents who enter into the covenant have to be willing to agree to teach their children these principles—is also found in Deuteronomy 4:9, where Moses is promulgating the covenant with all of Israel. He said, "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons," and at the end of Deuteronomy 4:10, he said, "That they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children."

Also, two chapters later, in Deuteronomy 6:6–7, it says, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Alma used the same phraseology. He knew this because it was in the Law of Moses which they were living strictly. Deuteronomy 6:8–9 continues, "And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt

write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates," so that as people came in and out of the house, they would remember those "words".

Do you think that Benjamin knew Deuteronomy? I think so. It was a covenantal restatement of the law of Moses. Benjamin was clearly aware of Deuteronomy 17 and the paragraph of the king, which he paraphrased in Mosiah 2. Now he turns to family duties as an integral part of his royal covenant.

Did Benjamin recognize that parents teaching their children is an implicit part of the covenant? We could think that this statement was just a random moralizing comment by Benjamin. But here Benjamin is doing more than giving nice advice. He has already mentioned that Christ's Atonement embraces the eternal welfare of little children (Mosiah 3:16–17, and now he adds: "Not only shall we all be happy at home," but children need to be raised in righteousness. They are part of the covenant too. Much depends on their condition and future faithfulness, and so there is a lot going on here.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Did Alma Counsel His Sons During the Passover?](#) (Alma 38:5)," *KnoWhy* 146 (July 19, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Does the Book of Mormon Teach about Families?](#) (Mosiah 25:12)," *KnoWhy* 382 (November 16, 2017).

Mosiah 4:16–26 — Give Freely So That You Can Be Freely Forgiven

As a central requirement of his covenant text, Benjamin next turned to the need to give to the poor: "Ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; . . . ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish" (4:16).

Again, Benjamin has the covenant text of Deuteronomy in mind. Deuteronomy 15:7–11 says, "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely *lend* him sufficient for his need, in that which he *wanteth*" (15:7–8).

Likewise, Benjamin says that we are to supply those in need "according to their *wants*" (4:26). What does the word *wants* mean in this context? Nowadays, *to want* often means *to desire*, but in Old English it meant *to lack* something. That was what the King James translators were communicating with the word *wanteth* in Deuteronomy 15:8. Notice also that Deuteronomy speaks here of loaning, or lending, and that Benjamin does this also (Mosiah 4:28).

Deuteronomy 15:9 then cautions, “Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying ‘Lo, the seventh year, the year of release, is at hand.’” What the book of Deuteronomy is worried about is that people would remember that once every seven years all debts would be forgiven, so in the sixth year, they may be reluctant to loan anything, because if it were not yet payed back, the debt would be cancelled and the borrower would then be excused. The law said that they could not use that as an excuse. Benjamin also addresses the problem of people judging the poor and rationalizing or making excuses so that they do not feel obligated to give to the poor (Mosiah 4:17, 22), but rather “turn him out to perish” (4:16). But anyone who makes such excuses “perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God” (4:18).

Moreover, Deuteronomy 15 goes on to say, “Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou putteth thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore, I command thee, saying, Thou shalt *open thine hand wide* unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land” (15:10–11). As one member of the class commented: “Unfortunately, sometimes, our giving comes with measurement. *Good* is to give. *Better* is to give without measuring.” All this is a part of the covenant, and just as teaching our vulnerable children is a part of the covenant, Benjamin spoke equally about ministering to the poor who are always at great risk.

Underlying all of Benjamin’s covenant stipulation of generosity is the logic of talionic justice (Deuteronomy 19:19). It is right and fair to get back what we have given out, eye for eye, “for that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored,” good for good, mercy for mercy, and evil for evil (Alma 41:13–15).

This all makes logical sense as well as theological certitude: For “if God ... doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another” (Mosiah 4:21). Since Benjamin’s people had just asked God to be forgiven, blessed, and purified (4:2), it would be unbecoming of them as beggars unto God not to remember equally the poor and to give to those who put up their petition to them for relief (4:20).

Mosiah 4:26 — What Does it Mean to Walk Guiltless before God?

We know that we can be forgiven and change our lives, but if we do not act according to and consistent with the covenant that we entered into, it is as if we had not been forgiven in the first place. Seeing King Benjamin’s Speech as a “manual for discipleship,” Elder Maxwell has taught, “Much emphasis was given by King Benjamin to retaining a remission of our sins (Mosiah 4:26). We do not ponder that concept very much in the church. We ought to think of it a lot more. Retention clearly depends on the regularity of

our repentance. In the church we worry, and should, over the retention of new members, but the retention of our remissions is cause for even deeper concern.”

Further Reading

Neal A. Maxwell, “A Manual for Discipleship,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 16.

Mosiah 4:27 — Do Not Run Faster Than We Have Strength

King Benjamin ended by saying that they should not try to do more than they were able. They (and we) should do all this in wisdom and order, “for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength” (4:27). Benjamin appears to have been conveying the idea that we do not necessarily need to give in order to provide for luxuries, but we do need to be concerned about essential needs. That is exactly what the welfare program of the Church does. In Benjamin’s day, they did not have a formal church welfare program, so the king needed to set up a system to provide and care for the needy, as Deuteronomy 15 required. The people were required to fill the needs on an individual basis.

Mosiah 4:30 — King Benjamin Expected His People to Commit His Words to Memory

Ancient people used their brains differently than we do. We rely on books, programs, and aids (e.g. scripture apps with search functions) whereas many ancient people had most of the scriptures committed to memory. When Benjamin said, “Remember, remember, O man,” he meant, “Remember my words; memorize them.” I know that it was not so long ago that Joseph Smith and the boys, when they rode from Kirtland to Missouri, would memorize and recite scriptures and many of them could recite the whole New Testament as a result. It was not long ago that entrance to some Islamic universities required applicants to know the whole Quran from memory. In the 18th century, entrance to colleges like Harvard and Yale required students to be able to sight-read and translate Greek and Latin classic. For years, Jewish boys were expected to know the Talmud by heart for their Bar Mitzvah. That is what the human brain is capable of.

In the year 2000, I was teaching an honors BYU Book of Mormon class, and for the last six weeks of the semester we were studying King Benjamin. The requirement was for them to memorize the entire speech. I had them perform it in groups where they could do it like a Greek chorus, but I also assigned them to do certain parts by themselves. It is possible to recite this whole talk in 35 minutes. Eleven years later, I still got reports from the students that it was the best thing they did at BYU.

Further Reading

Steven L. Olsen, “Memory and Identity in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 2 (2013): 40–51.

Louis Midgley, “The Ways of Remembrance,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 168–176.

Louis Midgley, “‘O Man, Remember, and Perish Not’ (Mosiah 4:30),” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 127–129.

Mosiah 5

Mosiah 5:2 — No More Desire to Do Evil

The people then say to Benjamin that their hearts had been changed. In what way were their hearts being changed? What were the consequences that came from this great experience? The answer: They had no more desire to do evil. That is a great effect! Having “no more disposition to do evil” may be the greatest evidence of the “mighty change of heart.” We can test ourselves in that way. We can ask ourselves how we are doing in not even considering or wanting to commit sins.

Mosiah 5: 3–4 — A Tribute to a Great Leader

These two verses are a beautiful tribute to King Benjamin. How he would have loved to hear these words, not because they were praise of his kingship, but even more so because he had succeeded in the one thing he wanted to really accomplish.

He was at the end of his rule, and they were thanking him. At the beginning of his speech, he mentioned rendering thanks and praise with their whole hearts (2:20), and so when the people said it was because of their faith in what the king had taught them that they had this great knowledge, it was more than just a nice recognition. Their words arose from a generosity that comes with the experience of conversion and when we think more of what other people have done for us than what we have done for them.

Do we admire and have faith in our Church leaders? Is it not important to recognize that it is because of the things that our prophet “has spoken unto us” that “has brought us to this great knowledge?” Let us personalize this. We can read what they did, but do we do the same things whenever we have this mighty change and feel wonderful blessings in our lives?

What about this “exceeding joy whereby we do rejoice?” This is another consequence. Rejoicing with such exceedingly great joy feels more than just *good*. It is not a matter of “Umm, that was pretty nice.” There was much joyous celebration going on among Benjamin’s people.

And as a result, Benjamin took the old things that were limited and only applied to the king, all those royal prerogatives, and opened them up and extended them to all his people. Although some of them are just symbolic things, what Benjamin gave his people were essentially royal privileges. For example, it was normally only the king that was brought up from his humiliation to be ritually raised up and crowned as the new king. Benjamin said that we are *all* of the dust and we are *all* humiliated, but then we are *all* elevated. To us that sounds indeed like a very generous thing, but more than that, from their frame of reference, now they were all actually putting themselves in the position that the king was normally in. Usually in an ancient Israelite coronation, the king was ritually adopted by God as his son and on that day He had ritually begotten the new monarch and pronounced, “Thou art my son” (Psalms 2:7). Benjamin’s people would now all become God’s sons and daughters (5:7). And in addition, they were all going to come away from this ceremony with a new name (3:8; 5:8), while normally there was only one person who came away from a coronation with the new name, and that was the new king. In so many ways, Benjamin was helping all his people to see themselves in a different way. They were not yet ready for democracy, with all people having the duties of the governors, but a generation later, they would be ready as a people to take that political step (Mosiah 29). That is something that could be, and has been to some extent, studied in much more depth.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did King Benjamin Say That His People Would be Sons and Daughters at God’s Right Hand?](#) (Mosiah 5:7),” *KnoWhy* 307 (May 1, 2017): “The application of these royal enthronement texts to the people themselves—making them all potentially kings and queens, sons and daughters at the right hand—makes Benjamin’s speech utterly revolutionary. In Israelite thought, Benjamin was already a royal son who was already at the right hand of God, as Mosiah soon would be. Benjamin instead taught the people about the truly royal Son and how this Son’s Atonement made it possible for all of them to become His sons and daughters and be enthroned with this Son at God’s right hand.”

John W. Welch, “[Democratizing Forces in King Benjamin’s Speech](#),” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 110–126.

Mosiah 5:5 — Willing to Enter into the Covenant

When the people were entering into the covenant, they were instructed that they must answer the king by saying essentially that they were willing to enter into this covenant, and we are doing this voluntarily because our desires are there. We are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will and to be obedient to his commandments, and also to keep the commandments given to us by the new king.

Where do *we* manifest our willingness? Where does the word *willingness* come into our covenantal renewal? In the sacrament prayer. Those who partake witness unto God the Eternal Father that they “are *willing* to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them” (3 Nephi 18:10; Moroni 4:3; D&C 20:77). What does being *willing* really mean? It means we are going to do this of our own *free will* and *choice*. Choice and willingness are a vital part of covenant-making.

Mosiah 5:7 — The Nephites All Became the Children of Christ

There are two things that traditionally only happened to the king. One occurred at the coronation when traditionally the king would hear God saying, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” (Psalm 2:7). The king became a son of God representing God as his viceroy here on earth, the link between God and the people. However, in Mosiah 5:7, Benjamin declared that through the covenant, the people had all become sons and daughters of Christ. These people were in transition. They were living the Law of Moses, and they were expecting the fulfillment of the prophecies of Christ. In Benjamin’s speech we see what is missing in the Old Testament. We have the Old Testament and the New Testament, but we do not have anything showing how they went from one to the other. Benjamin’s speech is exactly halfway between the old law and the new law, and it begins with every single person being able to make the same covenant that was previously made only by the king. They are *all* sons and daughters of God. They get the name; they get the blessings and promises of the covenant.

Further Reading

Matthew L. Bowen, “Becoming Sons and Daughters at God’s Right Hand: King Benjamin’s Rhetorical Wordplay on His Own Name,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 2 (2012): 2–13.

Benjamin and the Law of the King

	Deut.	Mosiah
The Lord shall choose him	17:15	1:10; 2:30
He shall be one of thy brethren	17:15	2:11
He shall not return the people to Egypt	17:16	3:14
He shall not multiply to himself silver and gold	17:17	2:12
He shall have a copy of the Law	17:18	1:3
He shall read the Law all his days	17:19	1:7
He shall fear the Lord	17:19	2:37–40
He shall keep all the Law	17:19	1:5; 5:5
His heart shall not be lifted up above his brethren	17:20	2:26
He shall turn not aside to the right hand or left	17:20	5:8–10
His days shall be prolonged in the kingdom	17:20	2:31

Figure 4 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Benjamin and the Law of the King," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 125.

Mosiah 5:7 — They All Had the Law

In Deuteronomy 17:18–19, which lays out the requirements for a righteous king, he was required to write himself a copy, and read the law “all the days of his life” (Figure 4). Now Benjamin gave everybody a copy of the speech so that they could read in it in their families all the rest of their lives. They now could develop a sense of, “I am responsible; I am accountable.” Ultimately, his talk was designed and shared so that everyone there would take upon them the name of Christ, enter into a covenant, not just to keep the commandments that his son would be giving, as in a normal coronation ceremony, but also the commandments that Christ will give. He changed their hearts and lives forever, and this text can change ours.

Mosiah 5:8–12 — If We Do Not Serve God, Our Names Will Be Blotted Out

Benjamin then spoke about *obedience*: “There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; 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” (Mosiah 5:8). This echoed what the people themselves had said that they wanted to do: “And it shall come to pass that whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God [and not on the left 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 5:9, cf. vv. 10, 12). This is the positive, or reward, half of the covenant. Notice the perfect balance in this center piece of the final section of the speech: if ... and if not....

By the way, in the name *Benjamin*, the last part *ja (yah)-min*, means *right hand*. *Ben* is the *son of*. Thus, *Benjamin* is the *son of the right hand*. Benjamin was saying, “If you want to be with me, come on the right hand. If you want to be over there, go on the left hand.” The promise, then, is balanced with the *warning*! There will be a cutting off or a blotting out!

The word 'right' can have both a directional meaning (that is, on the right hand side), and also an empowerment sense (that is, the right hand of power, strength, and favor). See Matthew L. Bowen, *Name as Key-Word* (2018), 50. Perhaps his own name drew Benjamin to refer in his speech five times to the Lord as “omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:5, 17, 18, 21; 5:15) and five times to speak of his matchless, marvelous “power” (Mosiah 2:11; 3:5; 4:6, 9; 5:15).

Mosiah 5:10–12 is one of the most famous passages in the Book of Mormon, because of its clear and meaningful chiasmic structure. This passage, by the way, was the very first chiasms that I found in the Book of Mormon. I was awakened and led by the Spirit, early in the morning, in Regensburg, Germany, on Wednesday, August 16, 1967, to spot this structure, and a few minutes afterwards to find the same pattern in Mosiah 3:18–19.

As one can still imagine, over 50 years later, that discovery on that morning was unforgettably exciting. It changed me, my focus, my testimony, my life, and my already deep love for the scriptures and the gospel of Jesus Christ, in many creative and productive ways.

It also changed the way that people everywhere read the Book of Mormon. More than ever before, people now approach this sacred record with much greater respect for its deliberate organization, for the elegant composition of its passages, for the meaningful placement of its individual words, for the compelling logic of its coherent messages, for its convincing mode of timeless communication, for the enduring value of its spiritual and practical examples, and for the joy of its attractive manner of persuasion and invitation to come unto Christ and repeatedly find there God’s beautiful plan of eternal life and happiness.



Figure 5 Photos of Mosiah 5:10-12 in the German Book of Mormon.

Chiasmus in Mosiah 5:10–12

And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him
the *name of Christ*

must be *called* by some other name;

therefore, he findeth himself on the *left hand of God*.

And I would that ye should *remember* also, that this is the
name that I said I should give unto you

that never should be *blotted out*,

except it be through *transgression*;

therefore, take heed that ye do not *transgress*,

that the name be not *blotted out* of your hearts.

I say unto you, I would that ye should *remember* to retain the
name written always in your hearts,

that ye are not found on the *left hand of God*,

but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be *called*,
and also,

the *name* by which he shall call you.

Figure 6 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Chiasmus in Mosiah 5:10-12," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 125.

Further Reading

For a documentary on the discovery of chiasmus, see "[Greg Welch - How Chiasmus Was Discovered in the Book of Mormon \(Part 1\)](#)."

For a video interview of John W. Welch recounting his experience of discovering chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, see Book of Mormon Central, "[How Was Chiasmus Discovered in the Book of Mormon? \(Mosiah 5:11\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 353 (August 16, 2017).

For comments by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland on the 50th anniversary of the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, see Jeffrey R. Holland, "[The Greatness of the Evidence](#)," Chiasmus Jubilee, August 16, 2017, online at bookofmormoncentral.org. For a transcript of this talk, see "[Elder Holland Speaks at Book of Mormon Chiasmus Conference](#)," at newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org.

Mosiah 5:13–15 — We Must Serve God to Know Him

"For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served (Mosiah 5:13)?" Benjamin comes back to the concept of service at the end of his speech. He did not leave without explaining why we are expected to serve. If we want to know the master, we must serve the master. That is what we get out of service. When we know the master, we belong to the master because we have entered into a covenant with him, so we will not be driven out. In Mosiah 5:14, Benjamin equated the man who had not served and known the master to a familiar animal, one that they may have even seen driven from the temple on the Day of Atonement.

"Doth a man take an ass which belongs to his neighbor and keep him?" Benjamin said that the man would not allow such an ass to feed among his flocks. He would drive him away and cast him out. Here was an animal being driven out because he did not know the Lord. It was not recognized as an animal of the Lord. We will be driven out just like that animal, carrying out with us all of our own impurities, and have our names blotted out unless we take upon ourselves the name of Christ, remember it, and not transgress the covenant (5:11).

It is worth knowing that on some occasions a donkey was also used as a scape animal (like the scapegoat). Different animals were used. Benjamin here happens to speak of an ass or a donkey. We know from ancient near-eastern materials that some cultures, not the Israelites, occasionally used a dog. The Hittites sometimes used a dog and sometimes they even used a rabbit.

Mosiah 5:14–15 — Why Do We Serve?

It is by serving that we come to know the master whom we have served. That is the purpose of serving. It is not to try to repay him, for we can never get out of his debt (Mosiah 2:21). It is actually not so much about serving our fellow beings, for "when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only [merely, exclusively] in the service of your God" (2:17, see Figure 7). We serve the Master, and by so doing we get to know

Him. We hear and know His Voice. Service, first and foremost, is all about building a relationship with Him, so that we can know and do his will in serving others, and so that he can then exalt us and seal us to be bound together in righteousness.

Three Steps in Benjamin's Logic on Service

1 All service is merely service to God

Therefore, serving fellow beings produces no reason to boast, unless serving God produces some reason to boast.

"When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17)

2 But no matter how much we serve God, we remain unprofitable servants

Therefore, we have no reason to boast.

"If ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet would ye be unprofitable servants" (Mosiah 2:21)

3 We do not serve God to get ahead with God or man, but to know the voice by which we are called.

Therefore, service to God is valuable, but not in ways people always think.

"For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served" (Mosiah 5:13)

Figure 5 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Three Steps in Benjamin's Logic on Service," in Charting the Book of Mormon, chart 86.

Mosiah 5:15 — What Does "Seal You His" Mean?

In the end, the sealing power will come into play. Benjamin said, "I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all (Mosiah 5:15)." This conclusion to Benjamin's speech is a truly beautiful,

prophetic blessing upon all his people, ending with the sealing, the placing of the Lord's seal of approval that binds us to him.

What did an ancient seal look like? It was like an official stamp. It could be a cylinder seal which parties to an official document or contract would roll on clay. It was, in a way, like a credit card. It was the ancient world's way of putting a stamp of approval on a transaction. So, when the Lord seals us his, it is as if he is putting his seal, his signature on us.

When a person in the ancient Roman world was purchased as a slave, they would brand their foreheads somewhat like branding cattle. If slaves belonged to a temple and were dedicated as temple servants, they could have the seal or the brand of the temple, so the people knew to whom they belonged. While this was not done in ancient Israel, as far as we know, Benjamin had talked earlier about people "serving" God, and that could have included temple servants or people devoted to the Lord in his sacred house.

Benjamin also told his people that, by making this covenant, they had now become sons and daughters of Christ. As sons and daughters, they were free persons, and they were entitled to inherit from the Father. They now belonged to him in that sense, and they were now spiritually reborn and begotten into the family. With this formality completed for each of us, life has just begun. A new life is now lies ahead.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "How Does Christ 'Seal You His'" (Mosiah 5:15)," *KnoWhy* 558 (April 21, 2020).

Mosiah 6:1–2 — Names Were Taken of Those Who Entered the Covenant

Finally, King Benjamin had his priests record the names of all who had entered into the covenant with God. The book of Numbers, in the Old Testament and on the Brass Plates, was given its name because Moses, Aaron, and the tribe leaders numbered all the Israelites, the covenant people. They were arranged by their tribes and counted. This was partially for military and partially for taxation purposes. They counted how many there were, and then they knew who to collect taxes and to require military service from. The records also helped in administering the lands of inheritance when people intermarried between the tribes and when some might die without any living heirs.

King Benjamin, again in this final episode of his kingship, is transforming Nephite society and perception. Everyone in his kingdom was numbered among the covenant makers equally, perhaps for the first time, even though there were among them both Nephites and Mulekites. That was likely a brand new concept. They now had merged as a unified people in the city of Zarahemla under one king.

That numbering bonded everyone. It brought them together with obligations as members of this covenant house. Assuming that they all were recorded in a single tally, they also all had the same rights and privileges because they were all equal in their access to the public affairs, public benefits, protections of the law, and religious access. They all had similar duties under the Law of Moses that King Benjamin scrupulously followed. Being numbered, the king knew the names of all of his subjects and could care for them and never forget them. That numbering filled many important roles.

When we bless a baby, we give the child a name and a blessing, and put his or her name on the records of the Church. The keeping of a record was the very first commandment that was given to the church when it was organized in Fayette, New York at the Peter Whitmer farm. Doctrine and Covenants section 20, the organization of the church, was approved. Then followed Section 21, of which the first verse says, “A record shall be kept.” From the very beginning, all the names of the people who had become members of the Church were written down. We can go back to the very earliest days and know when they were baptized, even in those early months.

This record-keeping function has been very valuable to the organization of wards and stakes, and enabling good shepherds to minister to church members, even those who have become less active or are going through the process of discipline, repentance, and reinstatement. Some who have left the Church ask to have their names removed from its records. In such cases, the individual intentionally blots out his or her own name. Only at that point do Church leaders cease taking watchful care over them, although their hearts, hope, and love continue to strive with them.

We do not know how often the numbering was done in King Benjamin’s day. Probably not very often. This seems to be an unusual coronation. This was a great moment in transforming the nature of the kingdom in Zarahemla and the Church in that area. Perhaps Benjamin was looking a long way back in history and thinking, “When Moses needed to start Israel and unify his people, he numbered everybody. I am going to number my people too!” As membership record keeping is a huge effort today, it was probably a very big effort for Benjamin too, but it was and is a truly important function. The Good Shepherd knows and presumably numbers his sheep (John 10:14).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Is It Important to Keep Records?](#) (1 Nephi 9:5),” *KnoWhy* 345 (July 28, 2017).

MOSIAH 7–10

John W. Welch Notes



Main Themes of Bondage and Deliverance

In these central chapters of the book of Mosiah, readers encounter several names and events that are not very well known. The primary theme, however, should be quite familiar. These four chapters deal mainly with what it takes to be delivered from bondage of any kind in our lives. Although the types of bondage we face today may be quite different from those faced by the people in these narratives, the primary message about how we overcome such challenges is just as important now as it was then.

The following summary may be helpful as a guide to this complicated series of accounts and these amazingly interconnected records. If this history seems hard to follow as you read through these chapters, imagine how much more difficult it would have been for King Mosiah or an assistant such as Alma or Mormon as the abridger to assemble the underlying, interlocking records that stand behind the final form of the book of Mosiah. In addition, notice how precisely the details in these chapters fit together, and then appreciate Joseph Smith keeping all of this straight as he translated and dictated this record, line upon line, to Oliver Cowdery in mid-April, 1829.

- **Ammon**, a Mulekite descendant of King Zarahemla. Ammon was allowed to lead a group of 16 men to go from Zarahemla back up to the City of Nephi, to find out how the Nephites were doing who had returned there to repossess “the land of their inheritance” (Omni 1:27). Amaleki, the last writer on the Small Plates of Nephi, had a brother who had previously gone back up with that group early in the reign of King Benjamin (Omni 1:30). When King Mosiah began to rule, people in Zarahemla were curious to find out what had become of those people, and Mosiah allowed this group to go and see. Ammon’s words are quoted or summarized in 7:12–13, 8:2–3, and 8:13–17.

- **Amaleki**, one of Ammon's brethren (7:6), has the same name as the last descendant of Jacob to write on the Small Plates, so there may have been a personal family interest in wanting to reconnect with long-lost relatives. People in Zarahemla had rightly suspected that things were not going very well for their relatives, since they had not heard from them for about forty years.
- **Limhi** was the Nephite king in the land of Nephi when Ammon arrived (7:9). He was the **son of King Noah**, who was the **son of King Zeniff**. Limhi's words are quoted or summarized in 7:9–11, 14–15, 18–33. Limhi does not mention his father Noah by name. Apparently he was ashamed that Noah's people had killed a prophet of God (7:26), named Abinadi (11:20). Limhi reports the reasons why Abinadi was killed (7:27–28; see later 17:8), for which the people of Limhi had ended up in bondage under the Lamanites (7:15).
- Two generations earlier, **Zeniff**, who was Limhi's grandfather, had been made king over his small group of Nephites who had returned to the city of Nephi, but Zeniff had been tricked into entering into a treaty with King Laman, the Lamanite King (7:21). *This was bondage 1*. Zeniff's own first-hand record of the events during his lifetime is found in two full chapters (9:1–10:22). Zeniff had led his people in fighting off an attack by a host of Laman's soldiers (9:16–19). *This was Lamanite invasion 1*. After Laman had died (10:6), Zeniff in his old age (10:10) needed to rally his men once again. They contended "face to face" with the invading Lamanites, driving them back out of the land of Nephi and killing many of them (10:6–10, 19–20). *This was Lamanite invasion 2*. The Nephites won because they trusted in the strength of the Lord (10:10–11, 19).
- **Laman** was the cunning and crafty ruler who had deceived Zeniff by his enticing promises (7:21; 9:10; 10:18). He had oppressed the Nephite resettlers for twelve years (9:11). King Laman and his son, who succeeded him, believed that their ancestors had been wronged by the Nephites, who robbed them of their records and rights (10:12–18).
- **Laman's son** continued pressing his father's grievances. But during the time of the reign of King Noah (who was Zeniff's son), the Lamanites mounted no further attack. Noah had built watch towers (11:12) and presumably other fortifications. The Lamanites did not invade again until after the death of Abinadi (17:13–20) and divisions had arisen among Noah's people (18:3; 19:2, 6).
- Although **Noah's** name is skipped over in these chapters, Limhi's words tell how the Lamanites attacked again (20:9). *This was Lamanite invasion 3*. Limhi and his people had thus come to find themselves in bondage after Noah's death, paying heavy tribute yet again to the Lamanites (7:15; 21:2–21). *This was bondage 2*. It paved the way for Limhi's offer to Ammon to flee back to the Land

of Zarahemla and become, if necessary, “slaves to the Nephites” (7:15). Having heard the words of King Benjamin’s speech (8:3), Limhi’s people entered into a covenant with God and were desirous to be baptized (21:31–33). Under the leadership of Limhi, who listened to the wise counsel of Gideon, the people made their escape and eventually found their way to Zarahemla (Mosiah 22).

Many lessons can be learned from these chapters about bondage and deliverance, as the Nephites came into bondage for various reasons and were delivered by watching, preparing, and trusting in the Lord. In this compilation of texts and materials, plenty of hints can be found to help us figure out the spiritual and allegorical implications. The *captivity* experienced by these Book of Mormon peoples can meaningfully function as an allegory for our own spiritual captivity. The story is about physical bondage, but the Book of Mormon contains these stories to tell us something about our spiritual bondage, including guidance on how we can get out of spiritual captivity. Believers in Christ may not be following the path of wicked King Noah or heading for destruction. But are we modern Ammons? or Zeniffs? Or Limhis? Are we like Alma, or Gideon?

Further Reading

Monte S. Nyman, “Bondage and Deliverance: Mosiah 7–8, 19–24,” in *Book of Mormon, Part 1: 1 Nephi–Alma 29, Studies in Scripture: Volume 7*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987), 260–269.

Clyde J. Williams, “Deliverance from Bondage” in *Mosiah, Salvation Only Through Christ*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 5, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1991).

Several Significant Journeys to and from Zarahemla

These chapters are also difficult to follow geographically (Figure 1). The history covers, at minimum, seven different groups of people who made significant journeys to and from Zarahemla, the land of Lehi-Nephi, and the surrounding area. While these four chapters in the Book of Mormon may seem a bit dull to modern readers, people should remember that the earliest historical works—such as those by Herodotus or in the Old Testament books of Samuel and Kings—typically focused (as do these chapters) mainly on events involving kings, armies, contacts, conflicts, treaties, official and prophetic messages, diplomacy, and divine influences on political outcomes. Skillfully, these historical chapters describe such factors. Because they sometimes use flash-backs, these chapters require readers to keep in mind past, present, and future events simultaneously (Figure 2).

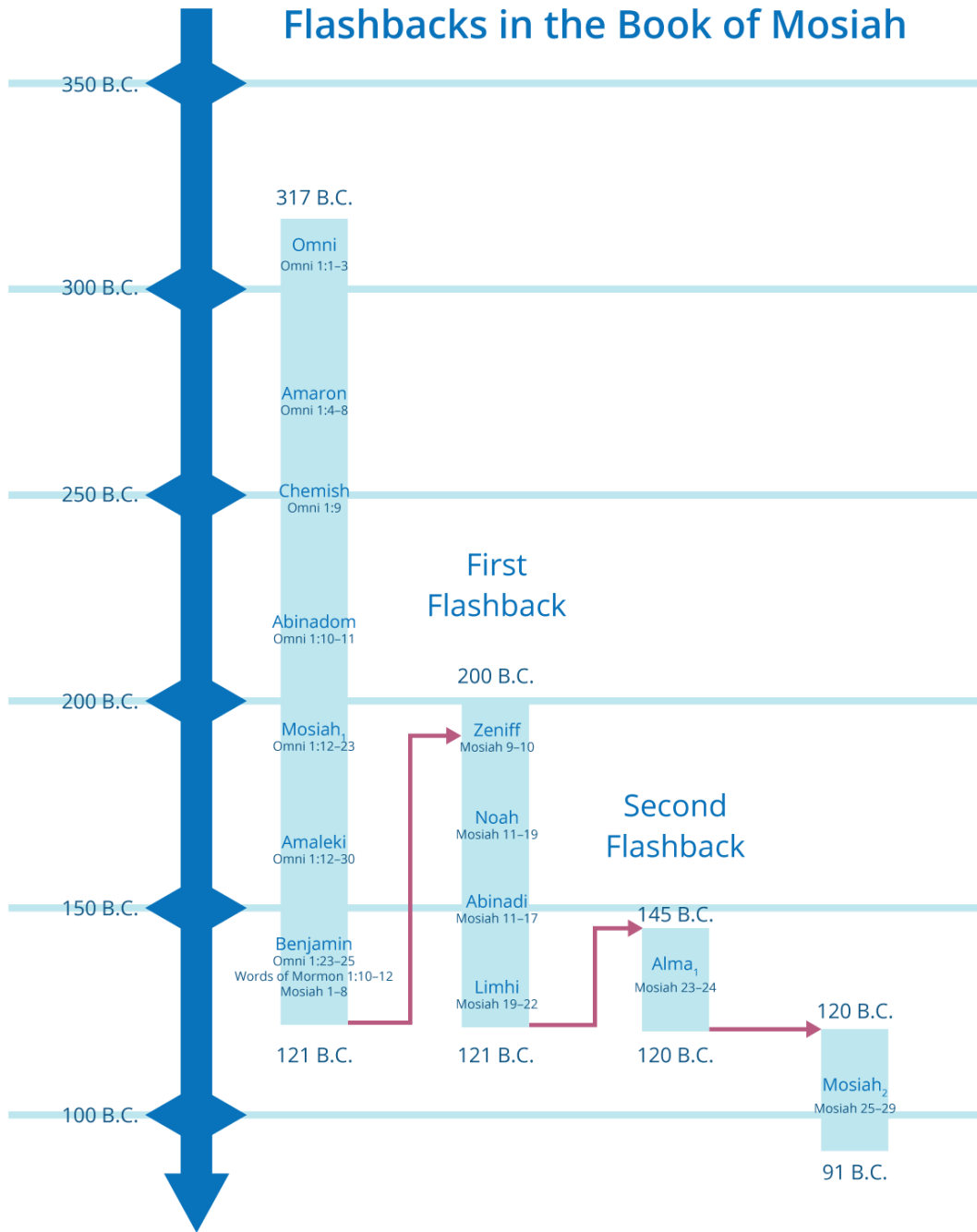


Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Flashbacks in the Book of Mosiah," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 29.

- 1 Some Nephites seek to reclaim the land of Nephi.**
 They fight amongst themselves, and the survivors return to Zarahemla. Zeniff is a part of this group. (See Omni 1:27–28; Mosiah 9:1–2.)
- 2 Nephite group led by Zeniff settles among the Lamanites in the land of Nephi** (see Omni 1:29–30; Mosiah 9:3–5).
After Zeniff died, his son Noah reigned in wickedness. Abinadi warned the people to repent. Alma obeyed Abinadi’s message and taught it to others near the Waters of Mormon. (See Mosiah 11–18.)
- 3 Alma and his people depart** from King Noah and travel to the land of Helam (see Mosiah 18:4–5, 32–35; 23:1–5, 19–20).
The Lamanites attacked Noah’s people in the land of Nephi. Noah’s son Limhi reigned while the people lived in bondage to the Lamanites. (See Mosiah 19–20.)
- 4 Attempt to find Zarahemla:** Limhi sends a group to find Zarahemla and get help. The group discovers the ruins of a destroyed nation and 24 gold plates. (See Mosiah 8:7–9; 21:25–27.)
- 5 Search party led by Ammon** journeys from Zarahemla to find the descendants of those who had gone to the land of Nephi (see Mosiah 7:1–6; 21:22–24).
- 6 Limhi’s people escape** from bondage and are led by Ammon back to Zarahemla (see Mosiah 22:10–13).
The Lamanites sent an army after Limhi and his people. After becoming lost in the wilderness, the army discovered Alma and his people in the land of Helam. The Lamanites brought them into bondage. (See Mosiah 22–24.)
- 7 Alma’s people escape** from bondage and journey to Zarahemla (see Mosiah 24:20–25).

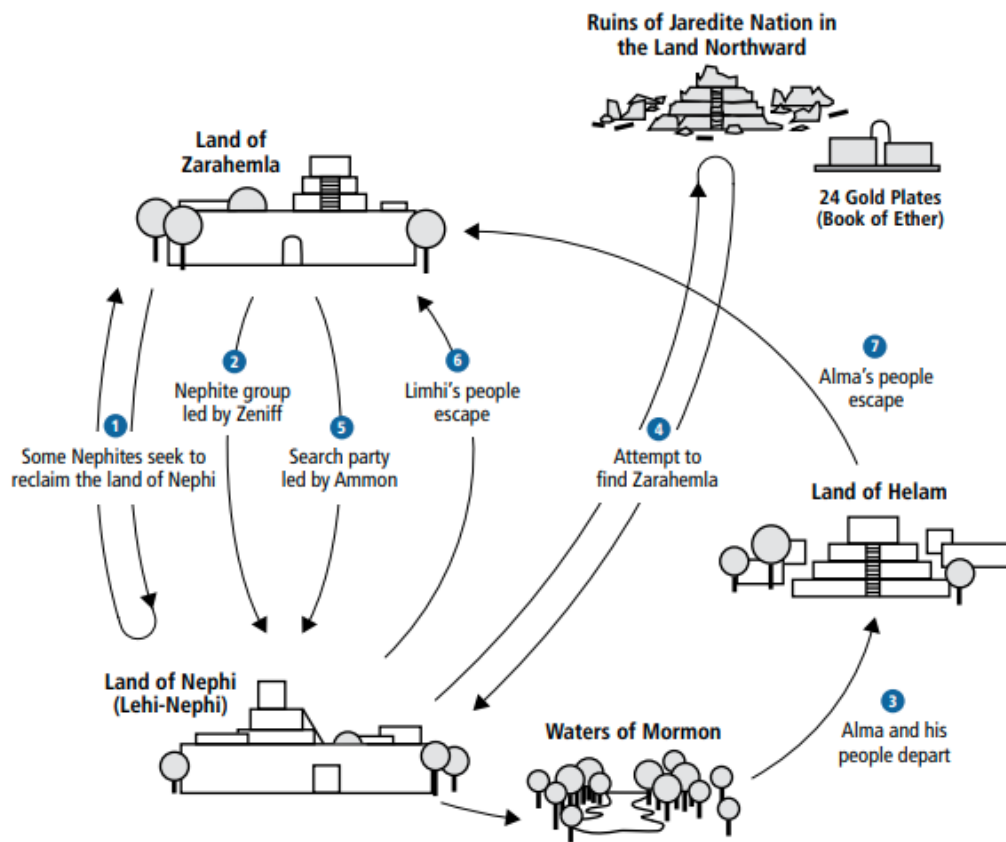


Figure 2 Image from Church of Jesus Christ Seminary Manual.

The geographical, temporal, and interpersonal dimensions of the book of Mosiah are often cited as one of the most complexly impressive sections in the entire Book of Mormon. This complexity and the satisfying resolution of each scenario into the overall story is rightly seen by many to be one of the strongest evidences of the divine authenticity and historicity of the Book of Mormon. Why would Joseph Smith choose to include a storyline where it is extremely difficult to follow the many characters, locations, twists and turns—a narrative that requires a diagram, such as the one below, for readers to follow keep track of all of the details?

Many well-educated and seasoned authors hire others to assist them when writing a novel that includes many characters and many locations to make sure that the characters' personalities remain consistent, the characters are in the right location at the right time doing the right things, and the description of the location of each city or country remains consistent and accurate. This fact-checking often takes months. Joseph Smith translated and perfectly dictated the entire Book of Mormon—a book of more than 500 pages—in 65 days with the assistance of only one scribe at a time and almost never went back to make changes to the record. The ability to write a record of this complexity, with no notes, and in such a short period of time has not been done by the best and most experienced of authors. And yet, Joseph, an uneducated, inexperienced farm boy was able to accomplish such a task because, as he said, this ancient record was translated by the gift and power of God.

Further Reading

Tad R. Callister, *A Case for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2019), 229–235.

Mosiah 7

Mosiah 7:3 — Two Ammons

There are two Ammons in the Book of Mormon. The one in this text was sent by King Mosiah three years into his reign (7:1), following three years of peace, to look for the people who had left years prior with a man named Zeniff to try to reclaim their inheritance in the land of Lehi-Nephi. Zeniff was described as “a strong and mighty man, and a descendant of Zarahemla,” and was asked to lead a search party of sixteen “strong men.” Three of them were named (or titled) Amaleki, Helem, and Hem. The name Hem might be a title. At least, as Nibley points out, *hm* means “chief servant” in Egyptian, “especially in the title *hm tp n imn*, “chief servant of Amon,” i.e., the high priest of Thebes. To have been given this assignment of leadership, this Ammon must

have been a highly trusted military officer and diplomat in King Mosiah’s court. After forty days of wandering, Ammon and his group arrived in the land of Nephi during the reign of King Limhi.

The other Ammon was the eldest (first mentioned) of the four sons of King Mosiah (Mosiah 27:34), who likewise left Zarahemla, but at the end of King Mosiah’s reign, to become missionaries to teach the Lamanites, again in the Land of Nephi. Because Mosiah was 30 years old when he was crowned and reigned for 33 years (Mosiah 29:46), Ammon could well have been born around the time the first Ammon led his group of 16 explorers to the south. If so, the second Ammon may have been named after the first highly trusted Ammon. They were at least contemporaries. There are also similarities between them: Just as the first Ammon had been sent back up to the land of Nephi because people (perhaps including that Ammon himself) had “wearied” Mosiah with their “teasings” (persistent provoking or prodding), this second Ammon and his brothers “did plead with their father,” pestering him for “many days that they might go up to the land of Nephi” (Mosiah 28:5). The second Ammon may well have hoped for similar success as his namesake, the first Ammon. Among his successes, Ammon, the son of Mosiah, is the one who cut off the arms of the Lamanites while saving the flocks of King Lamoni and converting him (see Alma 17). He also converted and led the Anti-Lehi-Nephis, who were eventually called Ammonites (Alma 56:57), north into the land of Jerushon.

Mosiah 7:9 — King Limhi Is Quoted Directly

King Limhi was “the son of Noah” and the grandson of “Zeniff, who came up out of the land of Zarahemla to inherit [the land of Lehi-Nephi].” Even though he was the son of wicked King Noah, Limhi was a just man who had faith in God and who was concerned for the welfare of his people.

John Gee has pointed out that direct quotations of Limhi occur in four places in the Book of Mormon record:

1. The trial of Ammon, Amaleki, Helem, and Hem (Mosiah 7:8–15);
2. An official address given to all his subjects at a covenant renewal ceremony (Mosiah 7:17–33);
3. The discussion with Ammon about the records (Mosiah 8:5–21); and
4. The interrogation of the king of the Lamanites (Mosiah 20:13–22).

Gee further noticed that all direct quotations of Limhi derive from situations where an official scribe would normally have been on hand to write things down. According to Gee, we can learn some very important things about Limhi’s character from these

quotations. “The major speeches of king Limhi [carefully quoted by Mormon] are dotted with quotations from previous records and prophecies, some of which are no longer available to us.” He also observed that Limhi’s speeches show a man who was very well-versed in the records. “From these [speeches] it seems that Limhi had spent a good deal of time studying and memorizing the records of his people.”

Thanks to the inspired preservation by Mormon, we can look to Limhi as a righteous example. As Gee stated, “Limhi’s passionate interest in records and scriptures might also explain why he was righteous in spite of the wickedness of his father. . . . We need look no further than Limhi for reasons to be serious about studying our scriptures.”

Further Reading

John Gee, “[Limhi in the Library](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992), 54–66.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Are Mormon’s Extensive Quotations of Limhi Significant?](#)” *KnoWhy* 85 (April 25, 2016).

Mosiah 7:20–21 — Limhi’s People Were in Bondage Because of Their Iniquities

The right words have been selected from the words of Limhi in order to clearly communicate his main message that he and his people were in bondage because they had sinned. Limhi was definitely aware of this. As king, he gathered his people at the temple and reminded them that God had saved their ancestors, reiterating the miracle of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea on dry ground. “[T]hat same God has brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem, and has kept and preserved his people even until now.” But, “[i]t is because of our iniquities and abominations that he has brought us into bondage.” In the context of the Exodus theology, returning to “bondage” could mean nothing less than returning to slavery, which the Israelites had known in Egypt before Moses delivered them. To Limhi’s people, who had returned to the Land of Nephi in order to reclaim the traditional temple in that city, nothing could have been more inspiring than Limhi’s impassioned temple speech reminding his people—and us too—to keep our covenants.

Mosiah 7:25, 32–33 — God’s Covenant Still Applies

King Limhi spoke to his people after the arrival of Ammon and pointed out that because of sin, the Lord “will not succor my people in the day of their transgression” (7:29), but “if my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the east wind, which bringeth immediate destruction,” and thus “the promise of the Lord is fulfilled, and ye are smitten and afflicted” (7:31–32). But then he added the positive side of the covenant in verse 33: “But if ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in

him,” “who was the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob,” he will “deliver you out of bondage” (7:19, 33). In saying this, I think Limhi may well have had in mind the powerful promise given by God in Leviticus 26:40–44, offering the opportunity for his people to be reconciled with God:

If they shall confess their iniquity, and ... be humbled ... [t]hen will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and ... Isaac, and ... Abraham. ... I will not cast them away ... to break my covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God (Leviticus 26:40–44).

It is clear that the Law of Moses applied to these Nephites just as it did to other descendants of the patriarchs. The Lord had told the Israelites that “all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the Lord thy God” (Deuteronomy 28:45). Limhi knew that this was true: “[I]f this people had not fallen into transgression the Lord would not have suffered that this great evil should come upon them. But behold, they would not hearken unto his words.”

Many of the problems faced by Zeniff’s community, when they sinned and broke their covenants, were the same afflictions imposed upon the Israelites if they broke their covenants. For example, in Mosiah 9:14–16, the people of Zeniff living in Shilom were attacked and “a numerous host of Lamanites came upon them and began to slay them, and to take off their flocks, and the corn of their fields.” Again, in Mosiah 11:13–17, when King Noah and the Nephites broke their covenants through oppression of the people and through immorality, “the Lamanites began to come in” upon the people of King Noah, “to slay them in their fields, and while they were tending their flocks ... and drove many of their flocks out of the land.”

Both of these events are reminiscent of what the Lord had said, in the law of Moses, would happen to those who broke their covenants: “Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and ... thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face and ... thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies” (Deuteronomy 28:31). If they refused to repent, they were warned that they would be in bondage to their enemies, which also corresponds with the warning given in Leviticus 26:25.

The Book of Mormon repeatedly demonstrates that the covenant God made with ancient Israel still applied to the Nephites. Likewise, the blessings as well as the curses of God’s covenants apply to us today as well, if we do not repent and accept his atoning mercy. In verse 33, Mormon gave the Lord’s covenant requirements a happy ending:

But if ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind, if ye do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure, deliver you out of bondage.

So, what do we need to do to get help from the Lord? According to this verse, there are three things we must do: (1) Turn to the Lord; (2) Trust Him; and (3) Serve Him.

And, when will the Lord deliver us? “According to his own will and pleasure”—that is the part that we do not like so much. We often want him to deliver us from our trials *now* and we want to prescribe the way we want it done.

Table 1 **Biblical Curses in Mosiah**

Curses or Blessings	Leviticus 26	Deuteronomy 28	Mosiah
Flocks Violently Taken Away		Deuteronomy 28:31	Mosiah 11:16–17
Delivered into Hands of Enemies	Leviticus 26:25		Mosiah 11:21
No Man Save Them		Deuteronomy 28:29	Mosiah 11:23
Blindness		Deuteronomy 28:29	Mosiah 11:29 (cf. 8:20)
Smitten Before Enemies		Deuteronomy 28:25	Mosiah 12:2
Slain	Leviticus 26:17		Mosiah 12:2
Devoured By Wild Beasts	Leviticus 26:22	Deuteronomy 28:26	Mosiah 12:2
Crops Smitten		Deuteronomy 28:22	Mosiah 12:4
Famine	Leviticus 26:26		Mosiah 12:4
Pestilence	Leviticus 26:25	Deuteronomy 28:21	Mosiah 12:7
Fear and Lamentation		Deuteronomy 28:67	Mosiah 12:4

			Mosiah 21:9–10
Insects Devour Crops	Leviticus 26:20	Deuteronomy 28:22, 38, 42	Mosiah 12:6
Destruction and Desolation	Leviticus 26:31–33	Deuteronomy 28:20	Mosiah 12:8 (8:8?)
Diseases		Deuteronomy 28:60 (cf. vv. 27, 35)	Mosiah 17:16
Scattered	Leviticus 26:33	Deuteronomy 28:64	Mosiah 17:17–18
Internal Bloodshed	Leviticus 26:37		Mosiah 7:25 Mosiah 19:2–3, 6–10
Enemies Oppress and Eat Up Fruit of Labor	Leviticus 26:16 (26:38?)	Deuteronomy 28:33	Mosiah 7:15; 21:17 Mosiah 19:15; 21:21
Few Left	Leviticus 26:39	Deuteronomy 28:62	Mosiah 21:17 (22:2; 25:9?)
Pine Away in Iniquity	Leviticus 26:39		Mosiah 21:30–35
Cursed Because did not Harken to God		Deuteronomy 28:45	Mosiah 7:25
God Will Remember If They Repent	Leviticus 26:40–46		Mosiah 7:18–33 Mosiah 21:13–16

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Do the Covenants in the Scriptures Apply to Me Today?](#)” *KnoWhy* 369 (October 3, 2017).

S. Kent Brown, “Curse, Cursing(s)” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis Largey (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003), 224–225.

Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993), 2:265.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1987–1992), 2:189.

Mosiah 8

Mosiah 8:3 — King Benjamin’s Speech Shared with the People of Limhi

Interestingly, Ammon either had with him a copy of King Benjamin’s speech or he knew it by memory, for he “rehearsed unto [the people of Limhi] the last words which king Benjamin had taught them, and explained them.” Ammon and King Limhi most likely believed that this people would benefit by knowing the revelations that Benjamin had given his people, and also by following Benjamin’s public laws, since these statutes and ordinances had already proven to be very beneficial to all the people of Zarahemla.

For example, King Benjamin, in his accounting of how he had discharged his duties, declared that he had not allowed the people to “murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery ... or any manner of wickedness” (Mosiah 2:13). These are sometimes referred to as Benjamin’s “rules of public order.” This list of five public laws is found six other times in the Book of Mormon. In three instances, the list functions as a measure of how well the kings and rulers had maintained public order (see Alma 23:3; Alma 30:10; and Mosiah 29:14–15, 36). In Helaman 6:23; Helaman 7:21; and Ether 8:16, they serve to indicate how wicked and corrupt that particular society was. Limhi would likewise have been eager to know that he had discharged his royal duties by leading his people in wisdom, truth, and righteousness. More is said about Limhi’s people entering into a covenant with God in Mosiah 21:31–35.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “Benjamin the Man: His Place in Nephite History,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS 1998), chapter 2.

Mosiah 8:7–10 — Limhi’s Search Party Discovers the Jaredite Remains

In hopes of delivering his people out of bondage, King Limhi had sent a party of forty-three people to Zarahemla to appeal for help. The group never made it to Zarahemla and, instead, got lost and found the land once occupied by the Jaredites. We do not know exactly where Limhi’s search party found the Jaredite remains, but we are getting a better idea as scholarly research continues. From the Book of Mormon record, we know the following: (1) there was a narrow neck of land in the general area; (2) the Land of First Inheritance, or the Land of Nephi, was somewhere southward and the party traveled northward, aiming to find Zarahemla; and (3) the party missed finding Zarahemla and for some reason ended up farther north, where they found the Jaredite records.

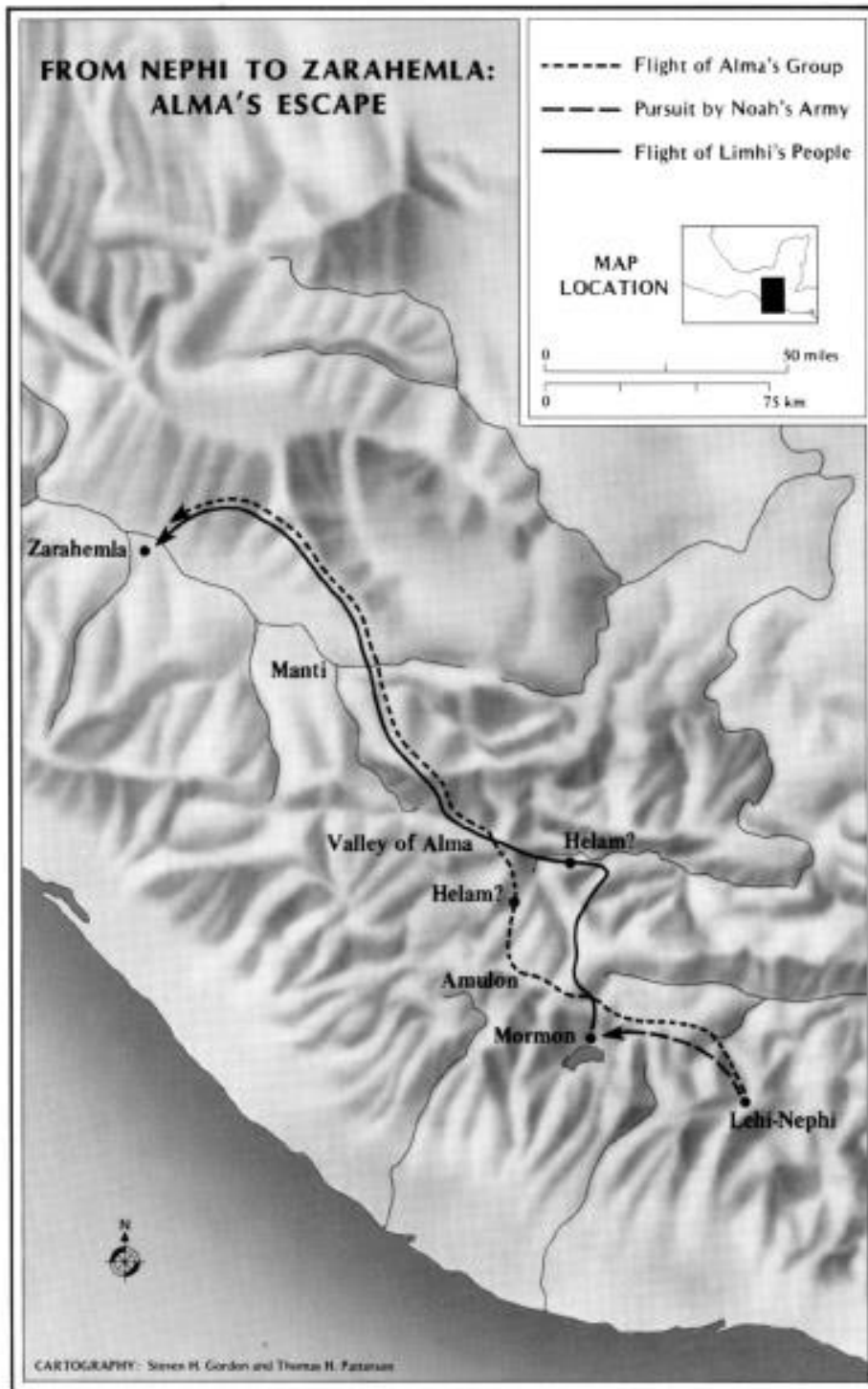


Figure 3 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "From Nephi to Zarahemla: Alma's Escape," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 155.

We also know approximately how far Zarahemla was from the Land of Nephi, where Limhi's expedition started their journey. Alma and his group traveled from the Waters of Mormon, not too far from the city of Nephi, all the way up to the land of Zarahemla in 21 days. Alma's group included men, women, children, and flocks and herds, so they couldn't have traveled quickly or gone far in that amount of time. Alma and his people did not follow trails and presumably traveled over jungle terrain, so it would have been really pushing it if they were able to cover more than ten miles a day under those conditions. Scholars estimate that the distance between the Land of Nephi and Zarahemla was no more than 200 miles (Figure 3).

As Limhi's party went north from the Land of Nephi, there must have been two ways to travel through the area, and they took the wrong one. Assuming that the lands of the Book of Mormon are located in Central America—in the area of Guatemala, Chiapas, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and Mexico—there are, in fact, two ways Limhi's party could have gone. One is to stay in the mountains—the highland route. That is the route that the Pan American Highway follows and is the traditional main trail through this area. However, if the trail was washed out or lost and the party moved off that trail and dropped down into a ravine (even slightly), they would have then been on the wrong side of a volcanic ridge, and there was no way to get back over to the river valleys to the east. Limhi's expedition did not have compasses, so it would have been rather easy for them to lose their way in the wilderness as they tried to navigate or cross this area. If they managed to get down off the ridges, they would have had to travel on the coastal route, which is the only other way to go northward.

Travelling northward on the coastal route would in fact have dropped Limhi's party into the area where the ancient Olmec population had settled. "Olmec" is the name given by modern archaeologists to describe the people living in this area anciently. It is not the name the ancient people would have used to identify themselves. The Olmec people lived in this land from about 2000 B.C. to around 500 B.C. The dates for the rise and fall of the Olmecs closely align with the dates that we have for the rise and fall of the Jaredites within the Book of Mormon. If the Olmecs were the Jaredite people who wrote their record on 24 plates found by Limhi's expedition, this area of land would be where the explorers of Limhi discovered those plates and the remains of the Jaredite population.

In any event, we must be talking here about relatively short distances. Limhi's exploring party would have had an approximate estimate of how far they needed to be traveling to get to Zarahemla, their desired destination. They would not have continued traveling for many months and going 3,000 miles thinking, "Zarahemla has to be over the next hill." And when they found the 24 plates, they were able to retrace their steps fairly easily to find their way back to the city of Nephi. So again, we're talking a fairly small

geographical region in which the land of Zarahemla and the land of Nephi were located. This event, of the return of this exploring party, is mentioned again in Mosiah 21:27, when the telling of the story of Limhi's people is resumed.

Mosiah 8:13 — A Gift from God

Surely, one must think of Joseph Smith when reading Ammon's response to King Limhi, "I can assuredly tell thee, O king, of a man that can translate the records; for he has wherewith that he can look, and translate all records that are of ancient date; and it is a gift from God." To this day, scholars argue about what kind of symbols Joseph Smith translated to produce the Book of Mormon. If such scholars as Samuel Mitchill and Charles Anthon, to whom Martin Harris took copies for their examination in the winter of 1828, were unable to define exactly what the symbols were and what they said, imagine how Joseph Smith must have felt upon first seeing them! In Mormon 9:34, Moroni prophesied:

But the Lord knoweth the things which we have written, and also that none other people knoweth our language; and because that none other people knoweth our language, therefore he hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof.

Joseph's ability to translate ancient records, like the case of Mosiah's ability mentioned in this chapter (8:13), was a gift from God and only worked when God enabled the prophet and seer to do His will. The gift of "the interpretation of languages" (Moroni 10:16), like all spiritual gifts, "come[s] by the Spirit of Christ; and they come unto every man severally, according as [Christ] will" (Moroni 10:17). Like Joseph Smith and Mosiah, we all have gifts from the Lord that can only be used properly to build up the kingdom of God. On his own, with what limited education he had, Joseph Smith would have been completely unable to translate the record without divine aid. While the Prophet may have initially sought the assistance of scholars in making sense of the characters on the plates, the result of Harris's meeting with Anthon made it clear that Joseph himself would ultimately have to be responsible for the translation. Ammon's statement that "whosoever is commanded to look in them [the interpreters], the same is called seer" (8:13) emphasizes the need for divine assistance and authority in translating such material of ancient origin. This is exactly how the Prophet Joseph Smith claimed it was done.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did the Book of Mormon Come Forth as a Miracle?](#)" *KnoWhy* 273 (February 10, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Do We Know About the "Anthon Transcript"?](#)" *KnoWhy* 515 (May 9, 2019).

Mosiah 8:15–19 — Greater Than a Prophet?

King Limhi was apparently highly impressed that King Mosiah, in Zarahemla, had such a great gift as to be able to translate the twenty-four Jaredite plates. The great joy that knowing this gave to Limhi is mentioned twice (8:19; 21:28), because he sensed that "a great mystery is contained within these plates."

Ammon repeated a statement that had been made by King Mosiah back in Zarahemla and that is often repeated: "[A] seer is greater than a prophet" (8:15). We should also note Ammon's explanation, which then delineates a distinction between prophethood and seership:

[A] seer is a revelator and a prophet also; and a gift which is greater can no man have, except he should possess the power of God, which no man can; yet a man may have great power given him from God. But a seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them, and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known. (8:16–17)

With divine authority, a prophet, who is a spokesperson for God, can foretell what would, could, or should occur if people behave in certain ways. This may include foretelling promised blessings for keeping the commandments or promised woes for falling into apostate behavior. While each dispensation has great Prophets (capital P) who stand with priesthood keys at the head of God's covenant people or God's church, individuals (both men and women) can act as prophets or prophetesses (lowercase p) in their respective lives, families, and ecclesiastical roles.

In distinguishing between a prophet and a seer, Ammon explained that a seer is one who uses "means" (divine instruments) prepared by God and "through faith, might work mighty miracles." Ammon stated that seership is greater than prophethood because a seer unlocks the meanings of what happened in the past as well as in the future (8:17)—which would include past mysteries, secrets, obscured teachings, lost scripture, and hidden knowledge. As Limhi acknowledged, the instruments of seership are "doubtless prepared for the purpose of unfolding all such mysteries to the children of men." According to Joseph Smith's 1838 history, the angel Moroni indicated to the

boy prophet that “the possession and use of [seer stones] were what constituted ‘seers’ in ancient or former times” (Joseph Smith—History 1:35).

With the restoration of God’s ancient order in our time came the restoration of the gift of seership. Members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators who direct the Church by means of divine revelation (Bible Dictionary, “Seer”).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why is a Seer Greater than a Prophet?](#)” *KnoWhy* 86 (April 26, 2016).

Ralph A. Britsch and Todd A. Britsch, “Prophet: Prophets,” in *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 3:1164–1167.

David Noel Freedman, “Prophet: Biblical Prophets,” in *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1167–1170.

Steven C. Walker, “Seer,” in *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1292–1293.

Mosiah 9–10 The Record of Zeniff

Mosiah 9:1–7 — Zeniff Tells How He Led a Group of Nephites to the Land of Lehi-Nephi

The story of Zeniff actually begins back in Omni 1:27–30, where Amaleki mentioned two expeditions to the land of Lehi-Nephi and added that he had a brother who went, presumably with the second party. Amaleki had not heard anything about the second group since then. His entire record is two short chapters long.

There actually were two trips or expeditions of Nephites to the land of Lehi-Nephi, which at the time was occupied by Lamanites. Zeniff first recorded the surprising events that transpired during the first of these expeditions. As their group got close to the land of Nephi, Zeniff was sent to scout out the situation so that their army could “destroy” the Lamanites (9:1). Zeniff was chosen for this mission because he was prepared. He had done his homework: (1) he knew the language, and (2) knew the land. When he “saw that which was good among [the Lamanites],” he recommended that they make a treaty with the Lamanites rather than try to conquer them. But the leader of this trip was “stiffnecked” and contentious, which caused a fight and bloodshed among the expeditioners. All but fifty were slain. The survivors, including Zeniff, returned home to Zarahemla.

Zeniff, “being over-zealous to inherit the land of [his] fathers,” set out on a second expedition to the land of Lehi-Nephi. This group suffered “famine” and “sore affliction,” recognizing that the problems were rooted in their behavior, “for we were slow to remember the Lord our God” (9:3). Zeniff then led a small delegation with four men from his group to meet with the king of the Lamanites to see if they could “possess the land in peace” (9:5). Preferring peace, and as he had recommended making a treaty before, Zeniff went to the king who agreed and even moved his people out of that area. Trusting the king, Zeniff and his people were given the lands of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom, and they began to repair walls, build buildings and plant crops, not realizing that the Lamanite king had designs to put them into bondage or oppressive servitude (9:10).

Mosiah 9:9 — Pre-Columbian Barley in America

As the people of Zeniff began to settle in the land, they engaged in agricultural activities, planting a list of crops that included barley and wheat. At one time, both of these crops were assumed to have been entirely absent from the pre-Columbian New World. However, that assumption regarding barley has been found to be incorrect. There are actually three types of wild barley native to the Americas—something scientists have now been aware of for a long time. Archaeologists first uncovered a domesticated form of barley native to the Americas in a pre-Columbian (ca. AD 900) context in the state of Arizona in 1983—more than 150 years since the publication of the Book of Mormon. Since then, pre-Columbian barley has been found in several other places, including in the mid-west and eastern United States.

Evidence from what is called archaeobotany (the study of plant-remains at archaeological sites) now confirms that a species of barley was highly important to some cultures in the Americas during this pre-Columbian time period. This has important implications for the Book of Mormon. In the second and first centuries BC, barley played a significant role in Nephite society, not only as food, but as a measurement of exchange (Alma 11:1–19), just as it did in ancient Near Eastern economic systems.

John L. Sorenson commented, “That such an important crop could have gone undetected for so long by archaeologists justifies the thought that wheat might also be found in ancient [American] sites.” No matter how few anachronisms are thought to exist in the Book of Mormon, patience and faith are rewarded every time another one is disposed of.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can Barley in the Book of Mormon Feed Faith?](#) (Mosiah 9:9),” *KnoWhy* 87 (April 27, 2016).

John L. Sorenson and Robert F. Smith, “*Barley in Ancient America*,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 130–132.

Mosiah 9:14–16 — The Lamanites Grew Uneasy and Greedy

Twelve years later, after settling in the land assigned to them by the Lamanites, the people of Shilom were attacked by the Lamanites, who were worried that “they could not overpower” the growing group of settlers and who wanted to take their produce. The people of Shilom fled into the city of Nephi, seeking protection from Zeniff. They made preparations to fight back against the Lamanites.

Mosiah 9:16 — How Tools of Defense Can Become Weapons of Rebellion

President Spencer W. Kimball once warned:

We are a warlike people, easily distracted from our assignment of preparing for the coming of the Lord. When enemies rise up, we commit vast resources to the fabrication of gods of stone and steel—ships, planes, missiles, fortifications—and depend on them for protection and deliverance. When threatened, we become anti-enemy instead of pro-kingdom of God (Spencer W. Kimball, “The False Gods We Worship,” *Ensign*, June 1976).

It is wise to be prepared for the future—natural disasters and potential physical dangers from those of ill will. Prophets ancient and modern have and will continue to counsel us how to more fully prepare and protect ourselves in a way that is consistent with the principles and covenants of the Gospel. But the Book of Mormon warns us how easily the tools of our defense can become the weapons of our rebellion (see also Alma 23:7).

Mosiah 9:16 — With Swords and with Cimeters

The simple weapons made by the Nephites included bows, arrows, swords, cimeters, clubs, and slings. People have wondered about the cimeters. The word “cimeter” is an old spelling of the word “scimitar,” which is a curved sword that usually has a cutting edge on the convex or outer side of the sword, but many ancient scimitars had a sharpened interior curve in addition to or in place of the exterior curve. It used to be thought that this weapon was first developed during the rise of the Muslims. However, it is now known that scimitars were used in both the Old World and the New, in both biblical and Book of Mormon times. Thanks to the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars now know that the ancient Hebrew term “kidon” refers to a scimitar. In 1 Samuel 17:45, when David faced Goliath, he declared, “You come against me with a sword [hereb] and spear [hanit] and scimitar [kidon], but I come against you with the name of Yahweh Sabaoth, god of the ranks of Israel.” Some writers have thought it strange that the Lamanite

chieftain Zerahemnah would carry both a sword and a cimeter, but as Paul Hoskisson has observed, the biblical text says the same about Goliath.



Figure 4 Egyptian Sword. Image via Wikimedia Commons

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Does the Book of Mormon Mention Cimicers?](#)” *KnoWhy* 472 (October 2, 2018).

Matthew Roper, “[Swords and ‘Cimeters’ in the Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1 (1999): 35–43.

Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Scimitars, Cimicers! We have scimitars! Do we need another cimicer?” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William B. Hamblin (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 352–359.

William J. Hamblin and A. Brent Merrill, “Notes on the Cimicer (Scimitar) in the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William B. Hamblin (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 360–364.

Mosiah 9:17–18 — In the Strength of the Lord

Zeniff recorded that as the Nephites went to tackle the Lamanite insurgency, they turned to the Lord: “[F]or I and my people did cry mightily to the Lord that he would deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, for we were awakened to *a remembrance* of the deliverance of our fathers.” They succeeded, sorrowfully counted and buried all the dead, and were freed from bondage by turning to the Lord—at least for now!

President Spencer W. Kimball was fond of teaching that one of the most important words in the dictionary is “*remember*.” Remembering the goodness of God and the deliverance of their ancestors turned the hearts of these Nephites to the Lord. Their prayers were answered and they were able to go forth “in his might.”

Further Reading

Steven L. Olsen, “Memory and Identity in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 2 (2013): 40–51.

Louis Midgley, “To Remember and Keep: On the Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book,” in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 95–137.

Mosiah 10:1–2 — Preparations of Protection

Zeniff recorded that he and his people prepared in two ways to protect themselves against attack: (1) they made weapons, and (2) they kept guards posted so that they would not be surprised and taken “unawares.” Being prepared with tools and equipment is always a first step of safety. Also, being on guard, not being taken by surprise, is something everyone should do in realizing that challenges and even attacks may come. We can’t always anticipate every future need, but we can know ourselves, know our strengths and weakness, and can take steps to protect against our points of spiritual vulnerability.

Mosiah 10:12–17 — The Causes of Lamanite Animosity

Interestingly, Zeniff recorded in his record the reasons why the Lamanites, generations later, were hostile against the Nephites. Knowing the other side’s point of view is always important in diplomacy, political arguments, or interpersonal misunderstandings. From the outset, Laman and Lemuel unfortunately had seen things differently from Nephi, and they passed on a tradition perpetuating their perspective on these events. As stated in KnoWhy 559, while “full understanding of their point of view is impossible, since no Lamanite record is directly available today,” we can at least appreciate the efforts of Nephites to understand the Lamanite position, as the Nephite record engages “in at least five places in the Book of Mormon (see 1 Nephi 16:35–38; 17:17–22; Mosiah 10:12–17; Alma 20:10, 13; 54:16–17, 20–24).” This attention to Lamanite concerns undoubtedly helped efforts by people like the sons of Mosiah (Alma 17–26) as well as Nephi and Lehi, the two sons of Helaman (see Helaman 5), as they carried the Gospel to their kindred. Being diligent record keepers can help all people understand the past, which can often be helpful in averting outright warfare and ill-will.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “What Can Readers Learn from Lamanite Traditions? (Mosiah 10:12–16),” *KnoWhy* 559 (April 28, 2020).

Mosiah 10:10, 17–18 — Success Only Comes in the Strength of the Lord

Finally, in the end, Zeniff recorded that as the Nephites went to tackle the Lamanite insurgence, they all—every able-bodied man, including the aged Zeniff—turned to the Lord. This was the key to their success: “We did go up in the strength of the Lord, . . . putting their trust in the Lord” (10:10, 19). After declaring that he “did confer the kingdom upon one of [his] sons,” even Noah, Zeniff ended his record with one last heartfelt prayer that undoubtedly had guided him throughout the challenges of his life: “May the Lord bless my people” (10:22).

MOSIAH 11–17

John W. Welch Notes



Overview

These chapters in the Book of Mormon, giving an account of the message, trial, and death of the prophet Abinadi, are quite well known. The stark contrast between the righteous dedication of Abinadi and the stubborn wickedness of King Noah and his priests is unforgettable. The sheer number of details found in this account is impressive, even if the significance of each individual point is not always appreciated. The account is long. By comparison, it is the longest trial transcript and narrative found in the Bible, if not in ancient literature anywhere. The account is specific, filled with important and interesting information about *who* was involved, *what* they said and did, *when* this transpired, *how long* this all took, *where* it occurred, and most importantly *why* things happened the way they did.

As we read and process this tragic account, many things unfold about the people involved: Abinadi, the general citizens in the city of Nephi, and King Noah and his priests. Alma, a young man, is the only one of the priests who courageously refuses to go along with the other priests, who were intent on convicting and executing Abinadi. As a result, Alma almost loses his life, but instead begins the direct line of righteous leaders, passed down from father to son, who will guide the Nephites for the next four hundred and fifty years.

Enough is said in these chapters to allow readers to clearly reconstruct what was done, who said what, what passages of scripture from Exodus and Isaiah were recited and interpreted by Abinadi, and what legal charges were raised by the priests, were rebutted

by Abinadi, retracted and revised, and which legal accusation the priests ultimately acted upon.

The season when this happened appears to have been around the time of Pentecost. Abinadi returned a second time, having been rejected on a similar occasion two years earlier. He was held in solitary confinement for three days, which may have been symbolically meaningful, recalling the three days of thick darkness that covered Egypt (Exodus 10:22), Jonah being in the grasp of the death monster for three days (Jonah 1:17; Matthew 12:40), and other times this number has customary meaning.

Readers can easily imagine where these events occurred, in the temple-city of Nephi, in the sumptuous administrative palace of Noah, and in the pure waters of Mormon, where Alma took refuge. Readers can readily grasp why Abinadi was sent, what the problems were, why Noah had been doing what he was doing, and especially what rules constrained the priests' decisions, influenced their arguments, deliberations and decision, and determined the mode of Abinadi's execution.

The account as it is found in the Book of Mormon today was probably compiled from contemporaneous notes recorded by Alma the Elder (the young priest who was expelled by Noah from Abinadi's trial) and also from records or memories provided by King Limhi (Noah's son and successor). Although it is possible to read that story of Abinadi from many perspectives, that composition almost certainly began primarily as a legal report, recounting the trial of the prophet Abinadi from a judicial point of view. Therefore, striving to understand the trial of Abinadi in light of ancient principles of jurisprudence makes good sense, and that fundamental legal perspective should undergird and inform any reading or interpretation of this classic scriptural episode.

Just as the scriptural account of Abinadi can serve as a tale of warnings for people today, it was originally a foundational story in the history of the Nephites themselves. Mormon, the main compiler of that history, lamented the wickedness of the people in his own day (about AD 325) and saw the resurgence of those disastrous conditions in his time as "the fulfilling of all the words of Abinadi" (Mormon 1:19). It is one of the most iconic tales of wo in all of human history.

Further Readings

John W. Welch, "[The Trial of Abinadi](#)," in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 139–209. On Pentecost, see pp. 188–193.

Shon D. Hopkin, ed., *Abinadi: He Came among Them in Disguise* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2018).

Mosiah 11

Mosiah 11:1 — Why Would Zeniff Have Named His Son Noah?

The name *Noah* is mentioned twice in this verse. Why would Zeniff name his son *Noah*? Let us assume that Noah was born in the City of Nephi, which makes sense chronologically.

When parents in the Nephite culture gave a royal son a name like this, they were probably hoping that he would be like Noah in a positive sense. Noah had cried repentance, and King Noah's father, Zeniff, certainly would have appreciated that. In addition, Noah in Genesis was given a promise. After the flood, the rainbow symbolized God's promise, "I will not destroy this land again" (Genesis 8:21–22, 9:14–15). God had given a new covenant; he started them over with a whole new world. Zeniff must have seen himself in this role as well: redeeming the land of Nephi and starting over. I wonder if King Noah thought of himself in that mode as starting over. And perhaps God's ancient promise may have given him great confidence, which he turned into overconfidence. Perhaps he wrongly reasoned that, because God had promised his namesake that He would never again destroy the world by flood, he and his people could be confident that they would not be destroyed. But, unfortunately, he did not walk in the ways of his father, Zeniff, and he did not correctly keep the commandments of the Lord. As a result, tragedy befell him. He should have learned from his namesake, Noah of old, to heed the warnings and follow the commandments of the Lord, in spite of any false sense of security.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Does The Book of Mormon Use a Hebrew Pun on King Noah's Name? \(Mosiah 11:6\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 406 (February 8, 2018).

Matthew L. Bowen, "'This Son Shall Comfort Us': An Onomastic Tale of Two Noahs," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 23 (2017): 263–298.

Mosiah 11:2 — Noah Had Many Wives and Concubines

In Noah's mind, the question may well have been, when Lehi commanded his sons not to have more than one wife, was that binding on all of Lehi's posterity forever, or was it only binding on his sons? In the ancient world, fathers had the right to arrange marriages and to lay down the conditions of marriage for their sons and daughters. Any righteous person following Lehi as a prophet would certainly say that Father Lehi did not think this was a good idea, unless God should command otherwise, and thus people generally should not do this either (Jacob 2:27). However, if Noah wanted to justify himself, he could certainly have argued that Lehi was only speaking as a father binding his immediate sons, not his distant posterity.

In fact, under the Law of Moses—which Noah’s priests said they were strictly obeying—the book of Deuteronomy makes it is very clear that an Israelite man could have more than one wife. If a man was married and his brother died, he could be required under the law of levirate marriage to take his deceased brother’s wife as a second wife. The law also goes on to provide that the oldest son of a first wife was to be privileged and protected in getting a double portion in the distribution of his deceased father’s inheritance among all his sons. Thus, for example, a man could not prefer the first son of his second wife in his estate planning and give that son a double portion of the standard share of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:15–17).

Noah, however, was an expert at rationalizing his behavior. I am certainly not trying to justify Noah’s inappropriate conduct, but it can be instructive to imagine what reasoning he might have used to explain away his sins. When Abinadi asked what he and his priests taught the people, they did not answer that they lived Lehi’s law; rather, they replied, “We teach the Law of Moses.” Noah apparently kept many of his large group of priests (likely 24 of them) busy finding ways to justify his behavior or to locate loopholes in selected parts of the written law.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Does the Book of Mormon Say About Polygamy? \(Jacob 2:30\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 64 (March 28, 2016).

Mosiah 11:3–4 — King Noah Imposed a Tax on His People

Deuteronomy 17:14–20 is known as the paragraph of the king. It is a provision in the Law of Moses that says what the king can and cannot do. For example, in verse 16 it says, “He shall not multiply horses to himself.” That does not mean he cannot have any horses, but rather that he cannot have an excessive amount, such as Solomon’s thousands of horses. It also says, “Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold” (Deuteronomy 17:17). How might a king like Noah have interpreted this? The law prohibits him from amassing too much gold and silver, but who decides what is too much? Noah imposed a twenty percent flat tax. While twenty percent may not seem excessive to us today, to people in the ancient world it was quite a lot. And, might the general population have considered twenty percent to be a prohibited “multiplying”? Twenty percent is, after all, twice a tithe. But, perhaps it is possible Noah saw this as providing ten percent for the Lord—for the priests to run the temple and religious practices—and then he allocated the other ten percent for himself, the king, for public needs. There is actually some precedent in ancient Israel for each—the king and the temple—to receive ten percent on some occasions. Similarly, Noah may have

rationalized that his right to collect and receive these funds was as great as the right of the priests.

As far as wives are concerned, we have clear indication in Mosiah 11:2 that Noah “had *many* wives and concubines.” Whatever additional regulations or commandments Lehi may have given concerning marriage, Noah’s problem, at least under the prohibition in Deuteronomy 17:16, was that he had *too many* wives. His excess in this regard was clearly not acceptable in the eyes of Abinadi, who was commissioned by the Lord to preach repentance to Noah and his people. It appears that Noah also rationalized his lavish building program (Mosiah 11:8, 13). We do not have the details on all the other ways he and his priests apparently had interpreted the law that had allowed or caused himself and his people to commit sins.

Mosiah 11:7 — The Nephites Became Idolatrous

Somehow the Nephites also became idolatrous in some way. Idolatry is defined in the Law of Moses at the beginning of the Ten Commandments, in Exodus 20:4, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water underneath the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them.” Abinadi quoted the Ten Commandments to the priests.

What behaviors constitute committing idolatry? This legal subject always raised debatable questions in Jewish law. Is it okay to make a statue of a fish just for decoration, to put on your mantelpiece? Is it acceptable to make a tree, to carve a nice wood tree? Is it the making of the image that is problematic, or was it the worshipping of such images, bowing down and serving them? How far can a person go before he or she has committed the offense of idolatry which was punishable by death? My guess is that Noah had commissioned the making of many statues or stelae, likely including images of himself or of other people or things, and that he quite likely worshipped those images in his heart. He was probably smart enough not to actually bow down publicly in front of them or to put sacrifices at their feet, but there are plenty of traditions within Judaism that say making a statue, in and of itself, is idolatry, and that the other elements of worshipping those images were separate additional offenses.

In ancient Israelite archaeology, one does not find many elaborate statues like the ancient Greeks and Romans made, but some early Israelites actually did make and use small statues. But statues of human images were prohibited by orthodox Jews. Clearly, whatever their conduct in this regard, Abinadi believed that Noah and his priests had gone too far. Noah may have employed so many priests because his propensity was to get as close to the line as possible, and so he needed many advisors to rationalize his behavior.

Mosiah 12

Mosiah 12:1 — Where Was Abinadi during Those Two Years?

Was Abinadi sitting out in the wilderness by himself for two years? That is a long time to spend alone out with the jaguars and the boa constrictors. The only other known Nephite settlement at this time was in Zarahemla. If Abinadi was an older prophet and had come back with the original settlers who re-inherited the land of Nephi, he would have known at least approximately where the land of Zarahemla was. I suspect that Abinadi went back to Zarahemla for spiritual and textual reinforcements. This could account for some of the similarities in language between words found in Mosiah 3 (King Benjamin) and the end of Mosiah 15 (Abinadi), although the two of them could have drawn independently on Nephite doctrines and teachings. But more than that, it seems quite possible that Abinadi went back to Zarahemla to consult the Law of Moses and the words of Isaiah recorded on the plates of brass. When he returned to the land of Nephi, he was certainly well prepared with a knowledge of the law and commandments. King Benjamin and Abinadi were both prophets of the Lord. They could well have worked and consulted together. We usually think of Abinadi as a solo operator, but he may have had connections with other prophets. He may have gone to Benjamin as an established royal priesthood leader to seek guidance from the Lord and to gather wisdom by memorizing the scriptures.

Mosiah 12:1 — Why Did Abinadi Come in Disguise?

There has been a fair amount of debate about the question of when, where, and how Abinadi returned to the City of Nephi. It appears humorous that he would come to the city in disguise, but almost immediately identify himself as Abinadi. However, I think he came in disguise for a limited purpose. Because there was an arrest warrant still outstanding against him (Mosiah 11:29), he needed a way to covertly enter the city. But once he was in the right place within the city center, he was ready to identify himself and deliver his message.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Abinadi Use a Disguise? \(Mosiah 12:1\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 310 (May 8, 2017).

Alan Goff, "[Abinadi's Disguise and the Fate of King Noah](#)," *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 20, no. 12 (2000): 2.

Mosiah 12:3 — Abinadi Prophesied against Noah

Abinadi's words, "*It shall come to pass that the life of King Noah shall be valued even as a garment in the furnace*" constitute a very interesting form of prophecy. It is a Hebrew poetic form called a *simile curse*. Such statements conveyed actual predictions and real curses. They portrayed very severe consequences to the listeners. Such curses, to ancient people, were very serious and were considered to have numinous powers to bring evil upon people. We might even say that curses such as Abinadi's words were deadly serious.

Further Reading

John A. Tvedtnes, "As a Garment in a Hot Furnace," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 127–131.

Mosiah 12:9 — Abinadi Was Brought before the King

King Noah had commanded his people "to bring Abinadi hither, that I may slay him (Mosiah 11:28)." Noah likely wanted Abinadi brought before him for a hearing, because simply ordering him to be killed would have only given Abinadi's cause legitimacy. In Mosiah 17 Noah desperately wanted Abinadi to retract his prophecies to avoid incrimination. But Abinadi said, "I will not recall my words, and they shall stand as a testimony against you. And if ye slay me ye will shed innocent blood, and this shall also stand as a testimony against you at the last day" (Mosiah 17:10). Noah wanted to engage in a little plea-bargaining at that point, but Abinadi would not go for it.

Under ancient Near Eastern law, there were several bodies of statutory material giving the king the exclusive right to put anyone to death in his kingdom. Others in authority could execute punishments, such as giving forty stripes, but they could not kill him unless ordered by the king. That tradition persists all the way through 3 Nephi 6, when the text says that the governor of the land in Zarahemla was the only one who could authorize the death penalty.

We may wonder why so many of the people in the city of Nephi went along with Noah. One reason might have been economic security. Noah's large building campaigns would have produced high rates of employment. Life was good in that sense. Presumably there was upward mobility in this relatively small society and those opportunities encouraged people to not want to rock the boat. When Abinadi came to preach repentance, the people did not agree with Abinadi's ominous condemnations. There may have been some heavy rationalizations going on in their minds, as we mentioned in Mosiah 11.

Here is a lesson for us—we must always be on our guard that we are not rationalizing away our misconduct. Instead, it helps us to have bishops, stake presidents, teachers and ministering brothers and sisters to help us see how we can do better than we have been doing.

Mosiah 12:17 — How Many Priests Did King Noah Have?

We will later learn that King Noah’s wicked priests later kidnapped the Lamanite daughters, and we can assume that they took one each. Since twenty-four of the Lamanite daughters were abducted, that becomes one evidence that King Noah had 24 priests (Mosiah 20:1–5).

Several other evidences support that conclusion, as I argue in my chapter “The Trial of Abinadi.” For example, in Israel, the seventy members of the Sanhedrin sat in three rows, and seventy divided by three is twenty-three and a third. One of the rows had twenty-four and the other two rows had twenty-three. For the big cases, you had to have the full Sanhedrin, all seventy. For a minor case, or for a case tried outside of Jerusalem, you just had to have one row: twenty-three or twenty-four. So that number seems to me to be at least plausible.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “[The Trial of Abinadi](#),” in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 170–173.

Mosiah 12:20–24 — The Priests Questioned Abinadi

The priests decided that they would try to trap Abinadi with questions. They read him a scripture and asked how he interpreted the passage. That passage is from Isaiah 52. Knowing that fact is very important because Abinadi answered by reciting the messianic Isaiah chapter 53 (see Mosiah 14). Thus, his real answer was, “If you want to understand Isaiah 52, you have to keep reading on into Isaiah 53.” I often tell my law students that the first rule of statutory construction is read on, keep reading, and so it is with the first rule of scripture interpretation: *read on*. Do not take a scripture out of context. Do not stop reading too quickly. If you don’t understand a scripture, keep reading scripture.

But one must wonder, why did the priests think they could prove Abinadi to be a false prophet by quoting this passage from Isaiah 52? It is, at first glance, the strangest kind of approach by an accusing prosecutor we can imagine. However, they must have seen something in Isaiah 52 that other readers don’t. Indeed, they may have believed that Isaiah 52 was a prophecy about the city of Nephi and their greatness.

Look at it from their point of view. The passage begins, “How beautiful upon the mountains.” Ah, *mountains*! The city of Nephi is up in the mountains. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of ... who?” The feet of a person who brings *good* tidings.

However, Abinadi had not brought good tidings, but rather condemnations and woes. “Thy *watchmen* shall lift up the voice.” One of the major projects of King Noah was the construction of a tower. He has watchmen all over. “With the voice together shall they sing ... for the Lord hath *comforted* his people, he hath *redeemed* Jerusalem.” (Mosiah 12:21–24, quoting Isaiah 52:7–10). Zeniff’s and Noah’s people believed they had gone back to the city of Nephi and redeemed the land. I will bet they used this very scripture to reinforce their city’s creation story. This is their main scripture. It justifies building watchtowers; it justifies redeeming the land; it glorifies living in comfort! It probably was one that they cited many times saying, “The Lord is with us,” for as the true prophet said, “Thy God reigneth!” (Isaiah 52:7). That is why they asked Abinadi how to explain this scripture. This, they thought, was talking about them and all was well.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Would Noah’s Priests Quiz Abinadi on Isaiah? \(Mosiah 12:20–21\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 89 (April 29, 2016).

Dana M. Pike, “[‘How Beautiful upon the Mountains’: The Imagery of Isaiah 52:7–10 and Its Occurrences in the Book of Mormon](#),” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 261–265.

Mosiah 12:29 — The Priests of Noah Claim to Keep the Law of Moses

Abinadi was a little like Paul, in that he was well trained in the scriptures and may have served in a leadership capacity. He himself may have been one of the older priests that Noah had kicked out (Mosiah 11:5), being among those who condemned the things Noah had begun doing. Yet, as we saw above in Mosiah 11:7, the law of idolatry was open to interpretation. As in our world today, there were laws and loopholes in Noah’s world. The question was, how strict were they going to be in keeping the law of Moses? The priests could well have claimed that they were keeping the law of Moses, at least their interpretation of it. There is a lesson for all of us in this kind of misreading and misconduct. It is not hard to see where it leads if you do not follow both the spirit and the letter of the scriptures with diligence.

Mosiah 12:33–36, 13:11–24 — Abinadi Taught the Basic Ten Commandments of the Law of Moses

It is interesting that the feast of Pentecost was thought of as the festival celebrating the giving of the law. When Moses went up the Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, he went alone (Exodus 19:20). He offered to take the people up into the presence of the Lord, but they were probably afraid. When they looked up at the mountain it was on fire with lightning and smoke, making it appear a very dangerous place. Boundaries were set about the mount, so that unworthy people would not gaze

upon the glory of the Lord and perish (Exodus 19:21, 23). “And the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a *furnace*” (Exodus 19:18). The Israelites did not want to become like a garment in that furnace (cf. Mosiah 12:3).

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, however, his face shone with luster (Exodus 34:29), as did the face of Abinadi (Mosiah 13:5), as he began to recite to the priests all ten of the basic commandments of the law that Moses had received on that original day of Pentecost.

Moreover, if Abinadi’s appearances in fact occurred around the time of the feast of Pentecost, the general population would not have been in the fields, but rather gathering at the temple as the Law of Moses specifically required (Exodus 23:16–17; Deuteronomy 16:16). It was an ideal situation for Abinadi to deliver his message to a maximum number of people. His message was a strong one. He declared that “You will have burdens lashed upon your backs” (Mosiah 12:5), meaning they would become slaves, and also he said that Noah’s life would be valued as a *garment in the furnace*. That would have been frightening, threatening, and terrifying.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Did Abinadi Prophecy During Pentecost? \(Mosiah 13:5\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 90 (May 2, 2016).

John W. Welch, Gordon C. Thomasson, and Robert F. Smith, “[Abinadi and Pentecost](#),” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1992), 135–138.

Mosiah 14

Mosiah 14:1 — Abinadi Went on to Quote Isaiah 53

Abinadi, of all the people we meet in the Book of Mormon, came the closest to actually experiencing what Jesus went through in terms of making a suffering sacrifice, and thus it is appropriate that he held the attention of the priests by rehearsing the chapter in Isaiah that addresses the suffering of the servant of the Lord. Abinadi most likely recited Isaiah 53 from memory. It was a classic text. Abinadi may or may not have anticipated that the priests would turn to Isaiah 52, and he may well not have known that they were going to charge him with false prophecy. He likely had no time to prepare for this trial, and no defense lawyers were used in ancient Israelite criminal cases. He most likely had not anticipated that he would need to use Isaiah 53 in his defense, but he was prepared nonetheless.

Further Reading

Monte S. Nyman, "Abinadi's Commentary on Isaiah," in *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only Through Christ*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1991), 161–186.

Ann N. Madsen, "'What Meaneth the Words that Are Written?' Abinadi Interprets Isaiah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 1 (2001): 4–15.

Mosiah 14:3–12—Abinadi Presented Isaiah's "Suffering Servant" Text Messianically

The prophets knew a lot more than most people give them credit for. How could Isaiah have known with such specificity what was going to happen to Jesus Christ? One reason may be that the original language in the ancient texts was a little clearer than it is in our modern translations. Some of the literary nuances would have been easier for them to pick up on, such as the suffering servant being wounded. It says, "He would be *marred*" (Isaiah 52:14), but in the Isaiah scroll from Qumran, the word for *marred* is not there—one letter had been added to that word and it changed the word from *marred* into *anointed*. He shall be *anointed* beyond our recognition. In other words, he will be so much greater. And the word for *anointed* in Greek is *Christos*. Abinadi must have had this version because he says, "even until the resurrection of Christ—for so shall he be called" (Mosiah 15:21).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Did Abinadi Talk About the Suffering Messiah? (Mosiah 14:4)," *KnoWhy* 91 (May 3, 2016).

John W. Welch, "Isaiah 53, Mosiah 14, and the Book of Mormon," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 293–312.

Mosiah 15

Mosiah 15:1–5 — The Ancient Perspective on Monotheism

In the Old Testament, the *Shema* was a main priestly blessing that is pronounced by Jews even today. Deuteronomy 6:4 declares, "Hear O Israel, our Lord God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart..." The word "one" can be understood in several ways. For the most part, people think of it in terms of monotheism—there is only one God numerically—but the ancient text was thinking in terms of there being only *one true and faithful God*. Almost all ancient people believed or supposed that there were many other gods, but each nation felt that their God was

preeminent. So the primacy of the one Lord may have much less to do with monotheism than the supremacy of their God, Jehovah, over all others. One was not allowed to bow down and worship other gods. Theirs was the one and only God that they loved and served with all their heart, mind, and strength.

In the Book of Mormon, the issue of monotheism comes up here in Mosiah 15, and again in Alma 11 when Zeezrom and others challenged the Nephite teaching that Jesus and God the Father are two beings, with there being just one Eternal God (Alma 11:44). While the careful wordings of these sacred statements about the awesome nature of deity are in some ways intentionally mysterious, a lot of how these statements should be understood comes back to the question of how the *Shema* in Deuteronomy should be understood. It has more to do with exclusive loyalty than numerical counting.

Mosiah 15:1–5 — Is Abinadi Teaching Jesus and God Are the Same Personage?

In Isaiah 52:7, Abinadi switched out “Thy God reigneth” with “The Son reigneth” (Mosiah 15:20), and thereby emphasized that the Son is the Messiah who will come, will redeem, will reign, and will do the things that Isaiah prophesied about in chapters 52 and 53. Having focused on *the Son*, Abinadi needed to explain in what sense Christ is *the Son* and also *the Father*. King Benjamin made a similar statement when he declared, “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” (Mosiah 3:8).

Christ will be the Son because He will come down be born to a human mother in a miraculous way. However, he will also be the Father, because he is the creator of heaven and earth (Mosiah 3:8), and because we are spiritually born again as Christ’s sons and daughters (Mosiah 5:7).

Abinadi explained this concept by highlighting aspects of the *spirit* and the *flesh* when talking in terms of the Father and the Son. If you replace the word *son* with the word *flesh* and the word *Father* with the word *spirit* in these passages, things start to become clearer in what Abinadi was saying. In Mosiah 15:1 Abinadi said, “I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men.” This refers to Mosiah 14:2 (Isaiah 53:2) passage that he recited: “He shall grow up before *him* as a tender plant.” The “he” in this passage is the Son. The “him” is God the Father. One God will come among the children of men and shall redeem his people.

Then in Mosiah 15:2 Abinadi explains, “Because he dwelleth in the flesh, he shall be called the Son of God.” Because of the flesh, he is the Son, but because he has made the flesh subject to the will of the Father, he will be the Father and the Son. “The Father because he

was conceived by the power of God” (15:3), so he is spiritual, and the Son in the sense that “he is of the flesh” (15:3), that is because he will condescend and come as a mortal.

In Mosiah 15:4, The Fatherhood refers to Christ’s immortality and his divine origin with the Father and his oneness with the Father. “They,” meaning both functions or attributes constitute one, premier God. The word “heaven” means the sky. Thus, Christ is the very Eternal Father of Heaven and Earth, but not of the whole cosmos. That is God the Father.

Mosiah 15:5 reads, “and thus the flesh becomes subject to the spirit.” In other words, the Son becomes subject to the will of the Father, being that one God who suffers temptations, suffers mockery, and is disowned by his people. And after mighty miracles, even as Isaiah says, he shall be taken “as a sheep before the shearer.” He remains dumb, and he will die for us.

Abinadi had to start here because the priests of Noah likely had a hard time understanding how God could come down and leave the heavens empty. This would be the basis for the blasphemy charge brought against Abinadi, that he had said that Christ would come down, and thus that God would somehow abandon his throne, the leadership, and rule of the world. That would certainly be considered unbecoming of God who is the King of Heaven. We can see how Abinadi was trying to lead the priests of Noah to see a little more clearly how Christ could still be God and the Father could still be in heaven.

Abinadi also had to be careful to be sure that he said that “they are one,” so that he did not contradict the first of the Ten Commandments, “Thou shalt have no other god before me.” That is usually where monotheism is thought to stem from, but in fact, there are two divine beings already mentioned in Isaiah 53:2 (“he shall grow up before him”) and 53:10 (“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him”). When you read Abinadi’s explanation of that, along with what Isaiah had said, and further with our understanding of the Godhead in mind, all of this becomes very clear.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How is Christ Both the Father and the Son? \(Mosiah 15:2\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 92 (May 4, 2016).

Paul Y. Hoskisson, “[The Fatherhood of Christ and the Atonement](#),” *Religious Educator* 1, no. 1 (2000): 71–80.

Jared T. Parker, “[Abinadi on the Father and the Son: Interpretation and Application](#),” in *Living the Book of Mormon: Abiding by Its Precepts*, ed. Gaye Strathearn and Charles Swift (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2007), 136–50.

Mosiah 15:6–8 — Christ Will Be Led as a Sheep before the Shearer

Sheep were an important image here because Christ's suffering and death was likened to the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. Isaiah had prophesied that this suffering Lord would be sacrificed, like the sheep killed in the temple. If the priests of Noah understood what that meant, Abinadi could have proven his case that this was a shadow of things to come.

It is also clear from Isaiah 53 that the Savior will have power to make intercession, and Abinadi explained the nature of that intercession by using the phrase that he will "stand betwixt them and justice" (Mosiah 15:9). The word "intercession" (v. 8) literally means "to sit between." Christ will sit between us and justice to hold off execution of our punishments while giving us time to repent. Mercy will not be inconsistent with justice, because justice will occur eventually, but not before the time of intercession. There will be an interceder who will facilitate the redemption that Isaiah referred to in Mosiah 12:23. The one who will intercede is Christ.

Mosiah 15:10–14 — Abinadi Asks, "Who Shall Declare His Generation?"

"Who shall declare his generation?" This probably means, "Who will declare his birth, and who will declare where he has come from? Who will declare his origin, his beginning in the heavens before his coming to earth, and his instatement as the eternal Son generated by the Father?" His true genesis began back in eternity. In the premortal council, the plan of salvation was laid from the foundation of the world. The Nephites knew about this council and would hear more about it in Alma 13. In speaking to Noah's priests, Abinadi said that, first, the prophets will declare his generation. The priests then asked Abinadi who the ones were who would "publish peace" (Mosiah 12:21). Abinadi's answer was, "The ones who will declare his generation." Abinadi went on to say that, second, anyone who accepts the Atonement of Christ can declare his generation. Anyone who believes in that divine plan can declare this good news. We too can declare it and declare his generation.

The priests of Noah likely thought that Isaiah's prophecy concerning those who publish peace was referring to them, or, at the very least, that it included them. After all, they were declaring the great tidings of riotous and lavish living. However, that is not what the good tidings are all about. The good tidings (the good news, the gospel) are about salvation, that the Son now reigns, and that he has redeemed his people. The word "peace" in Hebrew is *shalom*, which can also mean love and reconciliation. When the people have kept their covenants, the prophets can then declare that God and His people were now at peace one with another again, because his people have been redeemed and he has provided intercession for them.

Next, Mosiah 14:10 (Isaiah 53:10) declared, “Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him.” In a way, it pleased the Father that the Son was bruised for us, because “when *thou* shalt make his soul an offering for sin, *he* shall see his seed.” The pronoun “*thou* (you)” in this scripture refers to *us*. The prophet explained that it pleased the Lord to bruise the Messiah, so that *we* have the opportunity to make *his* soul an offering. Then there will not be a lamb offering anymore; the Son fulfilled that symbolic act. However, now we can make his soul an offering for our sins. This will reconcile us in atonement with him, and then *he* [God the Father] will see *his* [the Son’s] seed. For we are now his seed, his sons and daughters, and that makes us reconciled as family members with the Father once again.

“*He* [the Father] shall then prolong his days and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand” (Mosiah 14:10; Isaiah 53:10). Abinadi applied that couplet to the resurrection of Christ, for after Christ’s death, “the Lord will prolong his days,” and he will come back to life and “shall prosper in his hand.” That prosperity will then allow us to receive a division of the spoil, the goods captured in battle, that is talked about in in Isaiah 53:12. In this way, Abinadi said, every nation will see and know. And that, of course, goes back to and answers the question the priests had asked about the “generation” or the full becoming of this deified servant.

Mosiah 15:22–28 — The Significance of the Lord Making His Holy Arm Bare

The final verse in Abinadi’s declaration is, “The Lord had made bare his holy arm” (30). Noah and his priests might have thought of this baring or manifesting of the holy arm of the Lord as the way in which they had won all their victories. But Abinadi declared that the way in which God will make bare his holy arm is through the salvific labor of his right hand man, namely his Son, who will be seen in the eyes of all nations.

All of this explanation began, back in Mosiah 12:21–24, when the priests had asked, at the end of their quotation, what does it mean to “make bare his arm in the eyes of all nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” In Mosiah 15:22–28, Abinadi ended his extended testimony by concluding: “I say unto you that the time shall come that the salvation of the Lord shall be declared to every nation, kindred, tongue and people, and people shall see [God] eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just” (Mosiah 16:1), referring to the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ that will be delivered to all and the final judgment that will then justly confront all mankind.

With all of that, Abinadi not only successfully rebutted the accusation of the priests that he had prophesied falsely, but he implicitly counterclaimed against them of their own

wickedness, for “then shall the wicked be cast out, . . . they [who are] are carnal and devilish, . . . and persist in the ways of sin” (16:2, 3, 5).

Mosiah 16

Mosiah 16:6 — Why Did Abinadi Speak in the Past Tense?

In Mosiah 16:6, Abinadi said, “And now if Christ *had not come* into the world, speaking of things to come as though they had already come, there could have been no redemption.” This usage of the past tense is known as the *prophetic perfect* tense. In Mosiah 14 (Isaiah 53), for example, where Isaiah is speaking messianically, he uses present, future, and past tense verbs! One thing that is rather confusing about reading Isaiah is that the translations flip around from past, to present, and future. We often cannot tell whether Isaiah is giving a report of something that actually had happened to a servant who was treated badly, something that is currently happening, or something that is yet to occur.

This problem is caused by the fact that Hebrew verbs are not always crystal clear in their tense. Sometimes the verbs are not even expressed, so they and their tenses have to be implied from their contexts. But, in fact, it was common for prophets to speak about future things in the past tense. Even though this may seem odd, Hebrew grammar texts call this the *prophetic past* or *prophetic perfect*. Perhaps this is because, once the prophets had the future revealed to them, it was as though they had seen the preview of the coming attraction, and now they were talking to their audiences about what had happened in the preview. They were talking about what they had seen spiritually in the vision, but they expressed it in the past, even though it had not yet occurred physically and temporally.

There is no better description of the *prophetic past* than the one here in Mosiah 16:6, when Abinadi says that he is “speaking of things to come as though they had already happened.” We do not know who put that little aside in there. Abinadi, when he said, “And now if Christ had not come into the world,” probably did not stop and say, “Oops, let me just remind you that I am talking about things as if they have happened but they are still to happen.” Maybe he did, but it may also have been Alma the Elder, or Alma the Younger as an editor, or Mormon as an abridger, or someone else saying, “This was expressed in the past tense, but I know that the meaning is future.” In any event, that is how the *prophetic perfect* actually works.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Book of Mormon Prophets Speak of Future Events as if They Had Already Happened? \(Mosiah 16:6\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 95 (May 9, 2016).

Mosiah 16:8–12 — The Sting of Death is Swallowed Up in Christ

Mosiah 16:8 says, “But there is a resurrection, and therefore the grave hath no victory and the sting of death is swallowed up *in Christ*.” Isaiah 25:8 had said, “He will swallow up death *in victory*,” and now Abinadi glosses that by saying “swallowed up *in Christ*.” Similar language also occurs later in Alma 22:14, when Ammon is speaking to King Lamoni: “... the grave shall have no victory, and that the sting of death should be swallowed up *in the hopes of glory*” (Alma 22:14). Death, then, is being swallowed up in *victory*, in *Christ*, and in *hope*.

Interestingly, the word in Hebrew in the Isaiah passage that underlies all these passages is *netsach* (*ntsach*). The word *netsach* can indeed mean *victory*. It can also mean *the victor*, the one who is preeminent, or the leader who brings about the victory. It can also mean *the hope* for victory, not referring just to a past victory, but also to the sense of optimism that there will be a victory. So, all three of these meanings, *victory*, *Christ* (the victor), and *hope* are contained in that word. Abinadi may well have known the passage in Isaiah 25 that he was using, and understood it as a reference to being swallowed up in *Christ*, just as Abinadi had modified the line in Isaiah 52 to read, “the *Son* reigneth.” In quoting Isaiah 25:8, Abinadi may have realized that the priests would not have drawn that similar meaning out of the word *netsach* alone, and so he glossed it to render it as “*death is swallowed up in Christ*.” That would be a perfectly legitimate translation or comment on that word. The plan of the priests was obviously to try to catch Abinadi in some inconsistency with the words of Isaiah the prophet, but they could not. Abinadi knows what he is talking about. I hope this information helps you to appreciate Abinadi’s masterful rebuttal and interchange with the priests of Noah.

Further Reading

David. Larsen, “[Death Being Swallowed Up in Netzach in the Bible and the Book of Mormon](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (2016): 123–134.

Neal Rappleye, “[‘Swallowing Up’ Death in Isaiah, 1 Corinthians, and the Book of Mormon](#),” *Book of Mormon Central Blog* (September 3, 2019).

Mosiah 17

Mosiah 17:2 — Alma the Elder Was Converted: A Great Line of Descendants

The conversion of Alma the Elder was the prize jewel of the family history of his descendants for the next 450 years:

- Alma the Elder, while still a young man, was converted by the testimony and teachings of the prophet Abinadi.
- Alma the Elder's son was Alma the Younger.
- Alma the Younger's son was Helaman the First, who was the head of the stripling warriors.
- His son was Helaman the Second, the one after whom the book of Helaman was named.
- Helaman the Second's sons were Nephi the Second, and Lehi, who went to the Land of Nephi. Helaman sent them off saying, "Remember, remember my sons, the words that Benjamin spoke." They were to carry the words of Benjamin's speech with them, and they converted many Lamanites.
- Nephi's son was Nephi the Third. Which Nephi was that? He became the lead disciple of the Twelve.
- His son was another Nephi. This was the one after whom the book of 4 Nephi was named. When that Nephi died.
- His son Amos kept the record in his stead (4 Nephi 1:19). When Amos died, it was an hundred and ninety and four years from the coming of Christ.
- His son Amos the Second kept the record in his stead (4 Nephi 1:21). Then the second Amos died.
- His *brother*, Ammaron, kept the record in his stead (4 Nephi 1:47). Ammaron was the one who eventually gave the plates into the charge of Mormon.

Mormon was not a son of Ammaron, so that was the end of Alma's line, which began with Alma's conversion by Abinadi. As far as we know, Alma was Abinadi's only direct convert. He may have thought he was a failure. He had no idea how far and wide his influence would extend.

Likewise, Noah had no idea the effect Abinadi's testimony would have on the Nephite people. Abinadi's testimony was the great warning to all the rest of the Nephites and to the whole world as well. If we are not meticulous in keeping the law, if we are not faithful, looking forward to the coming of Christ, we will not have claim to blessings any more than Noah and his people.

The Book of Mormon is what Professor John Sorenson and the archaeologists have called a *lineage history*. What we are really being told from this point on is the history of the lineage of this man, Alma the Elder. The creation account of that lineage begins with Abinadi. It has a second phase, and that is with the conversion of Alma the younger, and those two stories will combine to be the main characteristics of this lineage. That is a great lesson on planting the seeds when you have no idea how the crop will eventually be harvested.

This is Alma the Elders' equivalent of Paul's road to Damascus. For the Nephite people, this beginning was what Latter-day Saints might understand as a Sacred Grove experience—a foundational spiritual event that moved forward God's purposes among the people.

Further Reading

John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Life Spans of Alma's Lineage," in *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 28.

Mosiah 17:2—Alma the Elder Was a Young Man When He Heard Abinadi

When introducing Alma the Elder, the text just says that he was "a young man" (17:2). He probably had to be at least twenty to be counted as a young man. In Hebrew, the word for *young men* is *bu-khar-im*. In order to be old enough to serve military duty, the young men had to be twenty years old, and so the soldiers are called the *bu-khar-im*, the *young men*. From the age of twenty to thirty, they would be called young men. At the age of thirty, they could hold public office. Alma, being called a young man, was probably somewhere on the lower end of that, in his early twenties. He was bright enough that he has been made a priest of Noah. Why, though, as a young man had he been put on this body of very elite aristocratic priests? All I can suggest there is that he might have been the son of a prominent priest in the city of Nephi, and therefore had been placed as a young man on the court. His father may have been one of the leaders who came from Zarahemla down to the city of Nephi.

Is his youth significant? On the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (and this is coming from a later time period in Jewish law), there were 70 people. After the members of the court had heard all the evidence and had discussed the options, they voted in order of age and seniority, starting with the youngest. The Talmud explains why, "So that the young men will not be intimidated by the opinions of the older, more powerful of the court." We do something similar today in our high councils, where the youngest high councilor will speak first followed by the rest, in order.

Alma's speaking first, then, was at least consistent with that scenario. Maybe he knew that as the youngest man he was going to have to speak and cast his vote first. That may be why he was paying close attention throughout this event, and why it affected him so much.

When Alma spoke out in Abinadi's favor, Noah told his guards to get rid of him. Alma fled. Presumably Noah then brought in an alternate priest and filled the vacancy so they could continue. It may have taken them a couple of days to do that; perhaps that took place during their three-day recess.

We can learn some lessons here for our own lives in terms of the courage of young people. For example, our own missionaries courageously put themselves in harm's way. The youth factor, I think, is always an important and interesting one.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "[The Trial of Abinadi](#)," in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 185.

Mosiah 17:2 — Alma's Name

The word *Alma* in Hebrew actually means *young man*, so, for some reason, Alma was named *young man*. You have here an interesting play on words. It says, "there was one among them whose name was Alma, he also being a descendant of Nephi. And he was a young man." (Mosiah 17:2).

A few years ago a Hebrew manuscript was discovered among the Bar Kochba scrolls down by the Dead Sea. They are not part of the Dead Sea scrolls, these were buried about 50 years after the Dead Sea Scrolls, during the Second Jewish revolt. It was a partnership sharing agreement between some owners of an orchard to divide up the harvest. One of the signators to this is a man named *Alma Ben Yahudah*, Alma, the son of Judah. This document was the first historical evidence found in which the name *Alma* was used for a man.

Further Reading

Matthew L. Bowen, "[Alma — Young Man, Hidden Prophet](#)," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 19 (2016): 343–353.

Paul Y. Hoskisson, "[What's in a Name? Alma as a Hebrew Name](#)," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 72–73.

Mosiah 17:4 — Alma Writes the Words of Abinadi

There have been many very interesting and yet tragic studies of Jewish holocaust victims, and there is a whole syndrome of psychological responses to knowledge that you are inevitably going to die. Over and over again, the holocaust victims went to

extraordinary lengths to just find some way of leaving a record—some kind of a track, even if it was just a little paper written and rolled up and stuck into a crack in a cell, or a diary. They desired to let it be known that they suffered that. It is called *the survivor witness*. Or *the will to survive* through witnessing. Abinadi was certainly going to die, and Alma may have wondered if he would be next. Alma, then, was driven by the need to leave a record. Mormon, at the very end of the Book of Mormon, when he knew that his people were done for, he said, “All I can do is stand as an idle witness, but I will leave a record.” Alma may have been driven by the same motive.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can the Book of Mormon Survivors Give Us Hope?](#) (Mormon 8:3),” *KnoWhy* 393 (December 26, 2017).

Mosiah 17:5–6 — King Noah and His Priests Discuss How to Respond Next

Abinadi was on trial for his life, and his defense had turned out to be very persuasive. His response caused the king and the priests to call a three-day recess to consider his words (17:6). Why might the priests have needed a three-day recess? One possibility is that Abinadi’s trial, as discussed above, may have occurred during the Feast of Pentecost, and traditionally the Feast of Pentecost was a three-day festival. They could not have trials on Sabbath days, and the three days of Pentecost are all considered holy days. This recess, therefore, may indicate that these priests—they claimed to live the Law of Moses—may be going through some of the motions required by the law. About a dozen Pentecost elements can be identified in the trial of Abinadi (see Table 1).

Table 1 Did Abinadi Prophecy Against King Noah on Pentecost?

Israelite Pentecost	Abinadi
Celebrating the first grain harvest	Cursed their grain (Mosiah 12:6)
Rejoicing in bounty	Sent hail, winds, insects (12:6)
Remembering deliverance from bondage in Egypt	Prophesied that the people would be brought back into bondage (11:21)
“Taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens” (Exodus 1:11)	“I will cause that they shall have burdens lashed upon their backs” (12:5)
Celebrating the giving of the Ten	Sternly recited the Ten Commandments

Commandments to Moses (Exodus 20)	given to Moses (12:34–36; 13:15–24)
Moses's face shone (Exodus 34:29)	Abinadi's face shone (13:5)
Mount Sinai became like a furnace (Exodus 19:18)	Prophesied that Noah's life would be like a garment in a furnace (12:3)
Stern condemnation of abominations	Stern condemnation of iniquity (12:2, 37)
A three-day festival (Exodus 19:11)	Cast into prison three days (17:6)
"The Lord will come down in the sight of all the people" (Exodus 19:11)	The Lord will come among the children of men (15:1)
Liturgical use of Psalms 50 and 82	Use of elements from Psalms 50 and 82
"Our God shall come" (Psalm 50:3)	"God . . . shall come down" (15:1)
"What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?" (Psalms 50:16)	"What teach ye this people?" (12:27)
"[Thou] hast been partaker with adulterers" (Psalms 50:18)	"Why do ye commit whoredoms?" (12:29)
"I will testify against thee" (Psalm 50:7)	Abinadi testified against them (17:10)
Thanksgiving and devotion are better than sacrifice (Psalm 50:8–14)	Having the commandments "written in your hearts" is better than sacrifices (13:11, 30)
Sacrifices are not for nourishment (Psalm 50:12)	Sacrifices are to signify "types of things to come" (13:31)
In day of trouble, if righteous call upon him, he will deliver them (Psalm 50:15)	God will not hear the prayers of the wicked (11:25)
Qualifications required to "declare my statutes" (Psalm 50:16)	"If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it?" (12:29)
Condemn those who wrongfully become rich	Condemn those who wrongfully become rich

and commit whoredoms (Psalm 50:18)	and commit whoredoms (12:29)
“Tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver” (Psalm 50:22)	“Shall devour their flesh” and “none shall deliver them” (Mosiah 12:2; 11:23)
“Shew the salvation of God” (Psalm 50:23)	Showing “salvation” of God (12:21, 24, 31, 32; 13:27, 8; 15:14, 18, 24–31; 16:1)
“Children of the most High” (Psalm 82:6)	“His seed” (15:10)
Death (Psalm 82:7)	Death (15:19–20)
Judged by God (Psalm 82:8)	Judgment by God (15:21–16:12)

Further Reading

John W. Welch, Gordon C. Thomasson, and Robert F. Smith, “Abinadi and Pentecost,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 135–38.

John W. Welch and Greg Welch, “Did Abinadi Prophecy against King Noah on Pentecost?,” in *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 124.

John W. Welch, “The Trial of Abinadi,” in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 188–193.

Mosiah 17:8–20 — The Conviction and Execution of Abinadi

When the final hour of his trial arrived, Abinadi was accused of yet another crime—that he had spoken blasphemously against God, for which he would be put to death, unless he retracted the curses that he had place upon the king and the people (17:8). When Abinadi refused and offered to undergo an ordeal to validate his testimony (17:10), Noah was about to withdraw all accusations against Abinadi (17:11). But then the priests advanced a fourth charge—having previously charged him with the offenses of lying, false prophecy, and blasphemy—they now accused Abinadi of having “reviled” against the king (17:12), which indeed was against the law in Exodus 22:28, which states: “Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people” (see Table 2).

Because offending the king would have been considered a “matter of the king” (2 Chron. 19:11), the law gave Noah the final say. He delivered Abinadi up to be killed (17:12).

Abinadi was put to death by fire, mirroring the fact that he had spoken insolently about the king by saying that Noah's life would be valued as a garment in a fiery furnace. But death by burning was a rare form of execution under biblical law. Thus, it was seen as particularly aberrational and contrary to normal legal rules and order.

As he died, Abinadi aimed his final prophetic judgment against the priests who had largely influenced the outcome of Abinadi's case. His predictions that the priests' "seed shall cause many to suffer even the pains of death by fire" (17:15), and that they themselves would be "taken by the hand of your enemies, and then . . . shall suffer, as I suffer, the pains of death by fire" (17:18), apparently soon came to pass. Regarding Noah's death by fire, see Mosiah 19:20. Regarding the fulfillment of the prophecy that the seed of these priests, led by Amulon, would cause other believers to be put to death by fire, see Alma 25:7, 12. Regarding the deaths of some of the priests of Noah, see Alma 25:4; and on the continued hunting of the remainder, see Alma 25:9, 12. In this violent aftermath of the death of Abinadi, many people died, and at least some of them died by fire, all of which was seen as fulfilling these final prophecies of Abinadi (see Alma 25:9, 11).

A true martyr, Abinadi was "put to death because he would not deny the commandments of God," and he "sealed the truth of his words by his death" (17:20). His horrific death casts a long shadow throughout the Book of Mormon and adds to the world's chronicles of consecrated righteousness.

Table 2 **Legal Charges Brought Against Abinadi**

Charge	Evidence	Mosaic Law in Question
Lying (Mosiah 12:14)	Abinadi had said that the people had hardened their hearts and had committed evil abominations (Mosiah 12:1)	“Thou shalt not bear false witness” (Exodus 20:16) “Thou shalt not raise a false report” (Exodus 23:1) “Ye shall not . . . lie” (Leviticus 19:11)
False prophecy (Mosiah 12:14)	“He pretendeth the Lord hath spoken it” (Mosiah 12:12)	“The prophet [who] shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, . . . shall die” (Deuteronomy 18:20)
Blasphemy (Mosiah 17:7-8)	Abinadi had said that God himself would come down (Mosiah 7:26–28; 15:1–8)	“He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death” (Leviticus 24:16)
Reviling against the king (Mosiah 17:12)	With a simile curse, Abinadi said that Noah’s life would be as a garment in a hot furnace (Mosiah 12:3, 10–12)	“Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people” (Exodus 2:28)

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “The Trial of Abinadi,” in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 201–209.

MOSIAH 18–24

John W. Welch Notes



Overview

These seven chapters trace the main events that followed in the immediate aftermath of the infamous execution of Abinadi. They involve four interwoven storylines about: (1) King Noah and his priests led by Amulon, (2) the priest Alma and his followers who fled from Noah, (3) the Lamanites who controlled the land of Nephi and sought revenge for the capture of twenty-four of their daughters, and (4) Limhi who succeeded his father Noah as king, and the courageous Gideon who was the main military officer under Limhi.

In particular, Alma and his followers formed a covenant group that suffered in servitude under Amulon, but eventually were delivered by the Lord and safely reached Zarahemla (chapters 18, 23–24). King Noah was killed by his own priests, fulfilling the prophecy of Abinadi (chapter 19). The priests, in exile, carried off twenty-four Lamanite daughters, and the Lamanites attacked and put Limhi and his people under their domination (chapters 20–21), but Limhi, Gideon, and their people were aided by the Lord and managed to escape and find their way back to Zarahemla (chapter 22).

The style of these chapters is indirect narrative, employing 57 times the rhetorical marker “and it came to pass.” But these chapters also include eight direct quotations: Alma’s words when he was performing baptisms (Mosiah 18:8–10, 12–13), official conversations between King Limhi and Gideon (20:14–22; 22:3–8), Alma’s refusal to be made king (23:7–14), and three statements of comfort and guidance given by the voice of the Lord (24:13–14, 16–17, 23).

And thus, the entire book of Mosiah can be seen as one large chiasmic structure, and one of its overall themes is how much trouble kingship can cause. In addition, in the midst of all this coming and going, many important doctrinal and personal lessons can be learned. In Mosiah 18–24, these spiritual lessons include the critical need for righteous political leadership, heeding the words of the prophets of God, making covenants, obeying the commandments, working together in unity and charity, and faithfully enduring burdens by trusting in the Lord.

Mosiah 18

Mosiah 18:6–17 — Priesthood Authority

A contrast is immediately seen at this point in the book of Mosiah between the improper uses of authority by King Noah and his priests, as opposed to the righteous use of priesthood authority by Alma.

Some have wondered exactly how Alma the Elder received his priesthood authority. We are not completely told. In one sense, he would have been ordained as a young man to be a priest of King Noah. Perhaps he was additionally given authority at some previous point by Abinadi; and, although completely speculative, that idea would explain why Alma was prepared and willing to defend Abinadi in court and to record and teach his words so precisely.

Alma plainly stated that he had “authority from the Almighty God” to baptize (Mosiah 18:13), so he may even have been ordained by an angel, as was Joseph Smith, or was visited by the angel of the Lord, as was King Benjamin. Whatever the case, Alma knew what needed to be done to organize a covenant community to help his people have “the Spirit of the Lord,” that God might grant to them “eternal life, through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world” (18:13).

Did Alma hold the Melchizedek Priesthood or the Aaronic Priesthood? Alma was clearly not from the tribe of Levi, and so he did not officiate under the Levitical line of authority. Alma the Younger was clearly aware of the importance of the great high priest Melchizedek (see Alma 13:17) and of being ordained unto the high priesthood within the holy order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father (Alma 13:6–9). So, it would certainly appear that Alma had received the Melchizedek priesthood in some form, although that holy order of priests was organized at that time differently than it would be when Christ would come and would ordain priesthood holders to distinct offices, particularly as he did with his twelve apostles in the Old World or his twelve

disciples in the New. Additionally, Alma worked closely with the king. He obtained permission from King Mosiah to “establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla,” as well as “power to ordain priests and teachers over every church” (Mosiah 25:18–19), along with jurisdiction to judge cases of covenant breaking by church members (Mosiah 26:12).

Whatever the administrative details may have been, Alma knew what needed to be done to organize the Church. Appropriate leadership, proper authority, and correctly performed ordinances produce a trust that encourages participants to honor their covenants. Alma the Elder demonstrated these characteristics.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Does the Book of Mosiah Talk So Much About Priesthood Authority?”](#) (Mosiah 23:17),” *KnoWhy* 101 (May 17, 2016).

Daniel C. Peterson, [“Priesthood in Mosiah,”](#) in *Mosiah, Salvation Only through Christ*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 5, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1991), 187–210.

Mosiah 18:13 Authority to Baptize

The Nephites recognized the importance of having the authority from God in order to baptize and to act as an agent of God in creating a binding covenant relationship (Mosiah 18:10; 21:35). Mosiah 18:13 says, “And when [Alma the Elder] had said these words, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he said: “Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God.”

Conversely, in Mosiah 21:33–34, the people of Limhi, who had been taught by Ammon, desired to be baptized, but “Ammon declined doing this thing, considering himself an unworthy servant. Therefore, they did not at that time form themselves into a church, waiting upon the Spirit of the Lord.” They were baptized later by Alma, who had received permission from King Mosiah to set up churches and ordain priests.

It was important then, as it is now, that baptism and other ordinances be performed by one having authority from God through a person holding the appropriate keys. Jesus would specifically give this power to his twelve disciples as his first organizational step in 3 Nephi 11:21–28.

In early Christianity, one finds similar expressions. Ephesians 4:5 says, “One [eternal] Lord, one [true] faith, one [authorized] baptism,” and Hebrews 5:4 says, “No man taketh this honor [of being able to administer in priesthood ordinances] on himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.” All this makes it clear that it is important to receive the

ordinance of baptism in the correct way and as administered by one holding divine authority.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Does the Book of Mormon Teach about the Priesthood?](#) (Mosiah 23:17),” *KnoWhy* 289 (March 20, 2017).

Daniel C. Peterson, “[Authority in the Book of Mosiah](#),” *The FARMS Review* 18, no. 1 (2006), 149–185.

Mosiah 18:8–13 Living the Covenant

Alma’s eight baptismal covenants were:

1. coming into the fold of God,
2. being called his people,
3. bearing one another’s burdens,
4. mourning with those who mourn,
5. comforting those who need comfort,
6. being a witness of God at all times,
7. serving God until you are dead, and
8. keeping his commandments.

When partaking of the sacrament, modern Latter-day Saints do well to reflect on this list of baptismal covenants. Keeping these covenants is not simply a matter of luck. Baptism sets a person into the fold of God. A fold is a group, a tight community that lives together in unity, enjoys being together, and sustains one another. Baptized saints, old and new, take upon themselves the name of Christ and are called “his people,” as in Mosiah 5. Once this name has been taken, it is indelibly, permanently a part of the being. The baptized are expected to bear one another’s burdens, mourn with those that mourn, and be a witness, serving God until death.

What can people do to change and to do a better job in keeping the covenant of baptism? Live as an example. Walk the walk. Keep the covenants consciously. The Lord can then offer blessings. To those who honor their baptismal commitments, the Lord promises to redeem them, number them with those of the first resurrection, give eternal life, and “pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon them” (Mosiah 18:12–13).

Mosiah 18:23 — 29 Alma’s Community, Called the Church of Christ

Alma the Elder’s people built a strong religious community that emphasized five basic practices:

1. keeping the Sabbath day holy (23:23),

2. meeting for worship and instruction as often as in their power (23:25),
3. thanking God every day (23:23),
4. freely sharing their substance according to their respective abilities and needs (23:27), and
5. having leaders who did not depend on the people for their support (23:26).

How do these five practices create and build a strong sense of community?

First, Alma commanded them to keep the Sabbath day holy. Why was this listed first? When the Lord is put first in our lives, a level of outward obedience is demonstrated, and that choice keeps the covenant in memory the rest of the week.

Second, keeping the Sabbath day holy leads to community building. Meeting for worship as often as possible and spending time ministering unto each other builds a strong sense of community. Partaking of the sacrament enables covenant renewal. Sabbath-keeping also builds family love. It excludes usual play or work. The children who are taught this path of righteousness eventually find it refreshing, and that feeling magnifies itself as they become parents.

Third, thanking God every day also adds to group cohesiveness. How does it do that? For one thing, sincere thanking is a way of praising, and praising others reinforces group values and the joy of belonging.

Fourth, every act of sacrifice or obedience also builds community. Sharing substance, as well as time and positive memorable experiences contribute to a sense of mutual belonging, as does also shared worship and sharing of testimonies of principles that are loving and fair.

As a small, cohesive covenant community, it was natural for Alma's people to embrace the principle of righteously supporting the poor. Of Limhi's administration, Mosiah 21:17 similarly says: "Now there was a great number of women, more than there was of men; therefore king Limhi commanded that every man should impart to the support of the widows and their children, that they might not perish with hunger; and this they did because of the greatness of their number that had been slain." This point may well shed light on the story of their escape of the people of Limhi (chapter 22). They were blessed because they had become charitable and cohesive as a group. There were many widows, orphans, and single mothers. They put effort into preparing the logistics and worked in unity to leave no one behind.

Finally, having learned from Noah's example of bad leadership, Alma refused to be a king (Mosiah 23:7). He admonished his people to "trust no man to be a king over you"

and to “trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments” (Mosiah 23:13-14). How does it build community trust and confidence when the leaders keep God’s commandments? How does it destroy trust when a leader does not walk in God’s ways? Why is trust so important in our relationships, especially in marriage and family? What does trust have to do with being loved? When I was a freshman at BYU, one wise professor of mine stated, “It is better to be trusted than to be loved.” That seemed odd to me at first, but isn’t it true that by being trusted one creates a relationship within which love can thrive.

And in the same way, leaders must be trustworthy. If there is no trust, there is nothing to bind us, politically speaking. Trust and love must be consciously built. One should work expressly at building trust.

Mosiah 19

Mosiah 19:20 — King Noah Suffered Death by Fire

Abinadi had prophesied that if King Noah did not repent, Noah himself would be burned by fire. So when his priests became “angry with the king, and caused that he should suffer, even unto death by fire,” that violent end was the precise and immediate fulfillment of that prophecy (17:15–18). Ironically, but truthfully, Abinadi had prophesied that the life of King Noah would be “valued even as a garment in a hot furnace; for he shall know that I am the Lord (Mosiah 12:3).” These violent events demonstrated that Abinadi was a true prophet, and Noah, having falsely accused Abinadi, suffered the punishment he had applied incorrectly to Abinadi, as Deuteronomy 19:16–19 requires:

If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him *that which is wrong*; Then both the men, between whom the controversy *is*, shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days; And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, *if* the witness *be* a false witness, *and* hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why was Abinadi Scourged with Faggots? \(Mosiah 17:13\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 96 (May 10, 2016).

Mosiah 20

Mosiah 20:1 — The Daughters of the Lamanites

Chapter 20 begins with the statement: “There was a place in Shemlon where the daughters of the Lamanites did gather themselves together to sing, and to dance.” Just as the month of February means Valentine’s Day to many Americans, the Fifteenth of Av had romantic significance to the ancient Israelites. On that day in the fifth month of the Israelite calendar (which fell originally on midsummer’s day), the maidens of Israel would gather to dance. This was, among other things, a “matrimonial holiday for youth.” This ancient holiday is described in *The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days* by Abraham P. Bloch. Bloch concludes that this unnamed holiday was of very early origin, dating back to Moses. Following the conclusion of their summer chores in the fields, youth would turn their attention to “bride-hunting,” and the dance of the maidens was “designed to meet that end.”

In particular, according to the Talmud, this day featured the dancing of the maidens of Jerusalem. As Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said: “There were no greater festivals for Israel than the Fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur. On these days the daughters of Jerusalem would go out ... and dance in the vineyards. And what would they say? ‘Young man, raise your eyes and see which you select for yourself ...’” (Talmud, *Taanit* 26b). Knowing the meanings associated with this festival provides interesting contexts for several events in Mosiah 20–24:

- ❧ When Lamanite daughters came particularly to “a place in Shemlon,” to sing, dance and “make themselves merry” (Mosiah 20:1), it may have been at a traditional place and time of celebration and matrimonial selection, as had been the vineyards around Jerusalem.
- ❧ The priests of Noah clearly saw this as a time to select wives. One wonders if the eligible Lamanite young men had planned to come there also to do likewise, only to find that 24 of the girls had already been carried off (20:5).

In Jewish life, this was a great day of joy, celebrating the day when the last of the Israelites, who had come out of Egypt, finally died. Shortly after their Exodus, spies had been sent into Canaan, but the Israelites were neither prepared nor worthy and so God decreed that a generation would need to die out before their children could enter the land of promise (Numbers 13–14). The last member of that Exodus generation was said to have died on the fifteenth day in the month of Av.

- ☞ Thus, on that particular day, these Lamanite daughters may also have thought they were celebrating the arrival of their Lamanite ancestors in their new land of promise, as the Israelites remembered the beginning of their conquest of Canaan. Marriage and raising strong children were important cultural contributions in the minds of these young women.

Moreover, according to Jewish tradition, it was on that day that members of the various tribes of Israel were first allowed to fully intermarry among each other. In an important legal case toward the end of the book of Numbers, it had been generously held that daughters could inherit the tribal land of their father, so long as the father had no sons (Numbers 27), and a second case soon restrictively clarified that those daughters were allowed to marry only within their tribe. That second ruling was to prevent the inherited land from becoming owned by members of other tribes (Numbers 36). It was on a fifteenth day of Av that the establishment of this important property right for such daughters was remembered. It was a cause for great rejoicing and celebration.

- ☞ Thus, the priests, who were Nephites, could have legitimized their action, especially since the Fifteenth of Av celebrated the right of intermarriage among the tribes of Israel. This could rationalize their marriage as Nephites with Lamanites.

In addition, in retaliation for the behavior in the incident involving the atrocious death of a concubine at Gibeah (Judges 19:20), the tribe of Benjamin ended up being attacked and their cities burned by the armies of the other tribes of Israel (Judges 20:48). In order to prevent the tribe of Benjamin from disappearing, the victorious Israelites captured 400 virgins from the city of Jabesh-gilead (Judges 21:12), and said to the remaining 600 Benjamites, “Go and lie in the vineyards; and see, and, behold if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin” (Judges 21:20–21). That event was also said to have happened on the Fifteenth of Av.

- ☞ Similarly, having atrociously killed Abinadi and Noah, the priests found themselves without wives, children, and posterity. The dancing of the Lamanite daughters at Shemlon echoes, even if only faintly, the dancing of the daughters of Israel at Shiloh, where the Benjamite survivors were allowed to catch the dancing young women from other Israelite tribes, so that they could again have wives and posterity, following their atrocious killing of the Levite’s concubine. The situation of the priests was not much different

And finally, it was on the Fifteenth of Av that Hoshea ben Elah, the last king of the northern kingdom, re-opened the roads to Jerusalem, removing roadblocks that had been set up by Jeroboam ben Nebat, to prevent people in the north from making the thrice-yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judah.

- ☞ While the priests would not have known this on the very day when they took the Lamanite daughters to wife, their language legacy would eventually become a factor in the opening of the borders between the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla (Helaman 6:6–14). This is because the Lamanite daughters are not entirely unhappy with their situation. They now have aristocratic husbands, and shortly afterwards, these women plead for the protection of their husbands, the priests, when the Lamanite men were about to kill them. The Lamanites spared them “because of their wives” (Mosiah 23:33–34).
- ☞ Eventually, the children of these women became literate, for the priests (the Amulonites) were appointed teachers (Mosiah 24:1) and became preachers (Alma 21:4) among the Lamanites, teaching them the language of the Nephites (Mosiah 24:4). These wives would have been a major factor in the successes of Amulon and his priests as they became influencers among the Lamanites, even in the very land of Shemlon (Mosiah 24:1; Alma 23:12), where the young women had gone to dance that fateful day.

Thus, although not comparable in every respect, intriguing similarities exist between the meanings of the Fifteenth of Av and the case of the twenty-four Lamanite daughters and the twenty-four priests of Noah.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, Robert F. Smith, and Gordon C. Thomasson, “Dancing Maidens and the Fifteenth of Av,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 139–141.

Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days* (New York: KTAV, 1978), 179.

Yanki Tauber, “7 Joyous Events That Happened on the 15th of Av,” online at chabad.org.

Mosiah 20:18 — Why We Should Avoid Jumping to Conclusions

As King Noah was put to death, his priests fled into the wilderness (Mosiah 19:21). They were the ones who abducted twenty-four Lamanite maidens “and carried them into the wilderness” (Mosiah 20:5). The abduction of the “daughters of the Lamanites” (20:1) caused the Lamanites such anger that their sudden disappearance “led to an immediate

rupture in the treaty” that had just been established with the recently conquered Nephites (Mosiah 19:25–29). This rupture was so severe that it “brought a military reprisal against the Nephites,” with the Lamanites launching an assault on Limhi’s people in the capital city of Nephi (Mosiah 20:6–11). The Lamanites had incorrectly assumed that the people of Limhi were connected with the taking of their daughters.

The Lamanites, in attacking the city of Nephi, had jumped to a conclusion based on an unfounded assumption that turned out to be wrong. Jumping prematurely to an erroneous conclusion is a form of selfishness. It happened to Moroni, as can be seen from his letter to Pahoran in Alma 60. People seem to naturally jump to negative conclusions. It is always better to give—without being gullible—the benefit of the doubt.

In this instance, the people of Limhi and the King of the Lamanites solved their problem by talking about it. Although the text never states that there were twenty-four priests of Noah, it makes sense that there were that many (as discussed in the previous set of notes). Either because of their location or their number, Gideon connected the priests with the twenty-four missing daughters (20:18).

The Nephites also importantly showed mercy to the seriously wounded Lamanite king, even though he had attacked them (20:13). Together they all honored their previous oath (20:22), and unarmed they returned the Lamanite king to his people (20:26). While this peace treaty gave these people a chance to reconcile, unfortunately, it only temporarily solved the problem, as the rancor remained and the Lamanites again began to rule unjustly over the people of Limhi.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why did the Lamanites Break Their Treaty with King Limhi? \(Mosiah 20:18\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 98 (May 12, 2016).

S. Kent Brown, “[Marriage and Treaty in the Book of Mormon: The Case of the Abducted Lamanite Daughters](#),” in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998), 100.

Mosiah 21–22

Mosiah 21:6–12 — Limhi’s People Fight the Lamanites Three Times and Fail

Because the Lamanites remained angry, they hit the Nephites “on the cheek” and made them carry heavy burdens like “a dumb ass” (21:3), just as Abinadi had prophesied (Mosiah 12:2, 5). The Nephites murmured, complained, and tried to get out of bondage.

They went to war three times, and kept losing. Things became worse, with more widows and orphans each time.

There may well be a lesson here. How does one get out of any burdensome situation, including spiritual bondage? What is the wrong way? When we have a sin, what is our first reaction? The Nephites were trying to fight their way out of sin on their own. When you do that, how successful are you likely to be? Not very. It simply does not work. This is one of the world's ways of trying to lead us away from the right path. The world will tell you, "You're strong; you are capable; you can do it." But don't be fooled. It didn't work for the Nephites, and it does not work for us either.

What's more, once the Nephites had fought and failed, what did they do next? They gave up. They thought that there was no way they could escape it. This is another wrong idea the world tells you, "You cannot help it; just don't worry about it." Both of these, of course, are wrong ways to get out of spiritual bondage.

Mosiah 21:13–17 — The People of Limhi Begin to Humble Themselves and to Serve Others

The people of Limhi were somewhat disgusted with themselves. They were tired. Fighting had not worked. They finally turned to the Lord: "[T]hey did cry mightily to God" (21:14). They trusted him and served him.

How did the people of Limhi serve God? They served their fellow man. They especially took care of the increased number of widows and orphans in their midst (21:17), as Exodus 22:22 required them to do. Soon they would encounter Ammon (21:23), who had with him the words of King Benjamin, which the people of Limhi embraced with enthusiasm. I imagine that when they heard Benjamin's words, "When you are in the service of your fellow beings you are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17), they were fully prepared to enter into the covenant to "serve him and to keep his commandments" (21:32), since they had already begun to live in harmony with several of Benjamin's words about serving one another and imparting their substance to those in need. Importantly, we also learn this lesson again in our own dispensation. When the Saints were expelled from Jackson County, Missouri, and wanted to know why this had happened, the Lord revealed the answer in Doctrine and Covenants 105:3, "But behold, they have not learned to be obedient to the things which I required at their hands, but are full of all manner of evil, and *do not impart of their substance, as becometh saints, to the poor and afflicted among them.*"

Mosiah 22:10 — King Limhi Plans the Escape of His People

With careful planning and by following the commander Gideon’s instinct for strategy, a point of weakness was detected in the Lamanite guards watching over the city of Nephi (22:6). Flocks and herds were driven out into the wilderness (22:6), a substantial tribute of wine was delivered to the guards (22:10), and when the guards were drunk in the deep of the night, the people left through a back pass in a back wall on the back side of the city (22:6), passing on the left of the guard’s camp (22:7). They managed to take with them their women and children, flocks and herds, their gold, silver, and precious things (22:12).

Nothing is said about this being a miraculous escape—although their escape was amazing and divine forces may have helped to keep the guards intoxicated and unaware. The plan succeeded due to careful observations and planning, proper organization, detailed timing and maneuvering, and complete cooperation from everyone involved. Although this was an unusual escape, the total population was probably not very large at that point. By comparison, the whole group of Alma’s people totaled 450 people (18:35). And the Lamanites made only a small effort to pursue them. After all the trouble caused for the local Lamanites during the time of Zeniff, Noah, and Limhi, they were probably not terribly disappointed to see the Nephites gone.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did King Limhi Think Gideon’s Escape Plan Would Work? \(Mosiah 22:6\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 100 (May 16, 2016).

Mosiah 22:14 — King Mosiah Received Limhi and His People with Joy

During this time, King Mosiah, the son of Benjamin, was the king in Zarahemla, and kings in this system saw themselves as the father of their people. Mosiah had been justifiably worried about those who had left Zarahemla and gone elsewhere, so he allowed Ammon and three other men to go to the land of Nephi, looking for his *children*. This accounts for the great joy Mosiah must have felt to learn of the success of Ammon’s mission.

This might be compared of the premortal life, in which the people have left the presence of the heavenly king and have gone somewhere else. Now, as the people return to Zarahemla, we can see this as a type of repenting and returning. There was great joy, as there will always be divinely royal joy in heaven when we finally make it back.

Mosiah 23–24

Mosiah 23:1 — A Textual Seam

It is rather amazing to realize that Mosiah 23:1 picks up exactly where Mosiah 18:34 had left off. After Alma had organized the Church at the Waters of Mormon, he and his people “were apprised of the coming of the king’s army; therefore they took their tents and their families and departed into the wilderness” (18:34). After reporting all that is said in the four chapters from Mosiah 19 to Mosiah 22, the account of Alma resumes without missing a beat: “Now Alma, having been warned of the Lord that the armies of king Noah would come upon them, . . . therefore they gathered together their flocks, and took of their grain, and departed into the wilderness” (23:1). It is as if an underlying text about Alma’s group was interrupted, sliced open, filled with other storylines, and then picked up again. This precise resumption speaks volumes of the careful masterminding of the composing of the book of Mosiah. Needless to say, one cannot imagine Joseph Smith remembering, as he dictated, where the storyline had left off at the end of Mosiah 18 (Figure 1)

Mosiah 23:6–14 — Alma Refused to Be King

Having arrived in a beautiful and pure land, Alma’s people wanted him to be their king. His polite rejection of this nomination was filled with advice about the need to esteem one another as equals, rejecting the idea of kings being above normal human beings, protecting themselves against the iniquity and oppression caused by King Noah. Alma refused to be king so that his people could “stand fast in this liberty wherewith ye have been made free, and that ye trust no man to be a king over you” (23:13), walking in the ways of God and keeping the commandments (23:14). Instead, Alma served as the High Priest.

The specific words of Alma the Elder here no doubt influenced his son, Alma the Younger, as well as King Mosiah, as the decision was made for Mosiah to abdicate the kingship, appoint Alma the Younger as the first Chief Judge and also High Priest under the new reign of judges at the end of the book of Mosiah. Especially poignant were the rationales set forth by Mosiah regarding the problems of iniquity in high places (29:17, 36) and human inequity (29:32, 38).

Mosiah 23:19–24 — Alma’s People Were Brought into Bondage

Having consecrated righteous men to be preachers and teachers, ministering to the people “with things pertaining to righteousness” (23:18), Alma’s group flourished in a land they called Helam. Helam was the name of the first person baptized at the Waters of Mormon (18:13).

Flashbacks in the Book of Mosiah

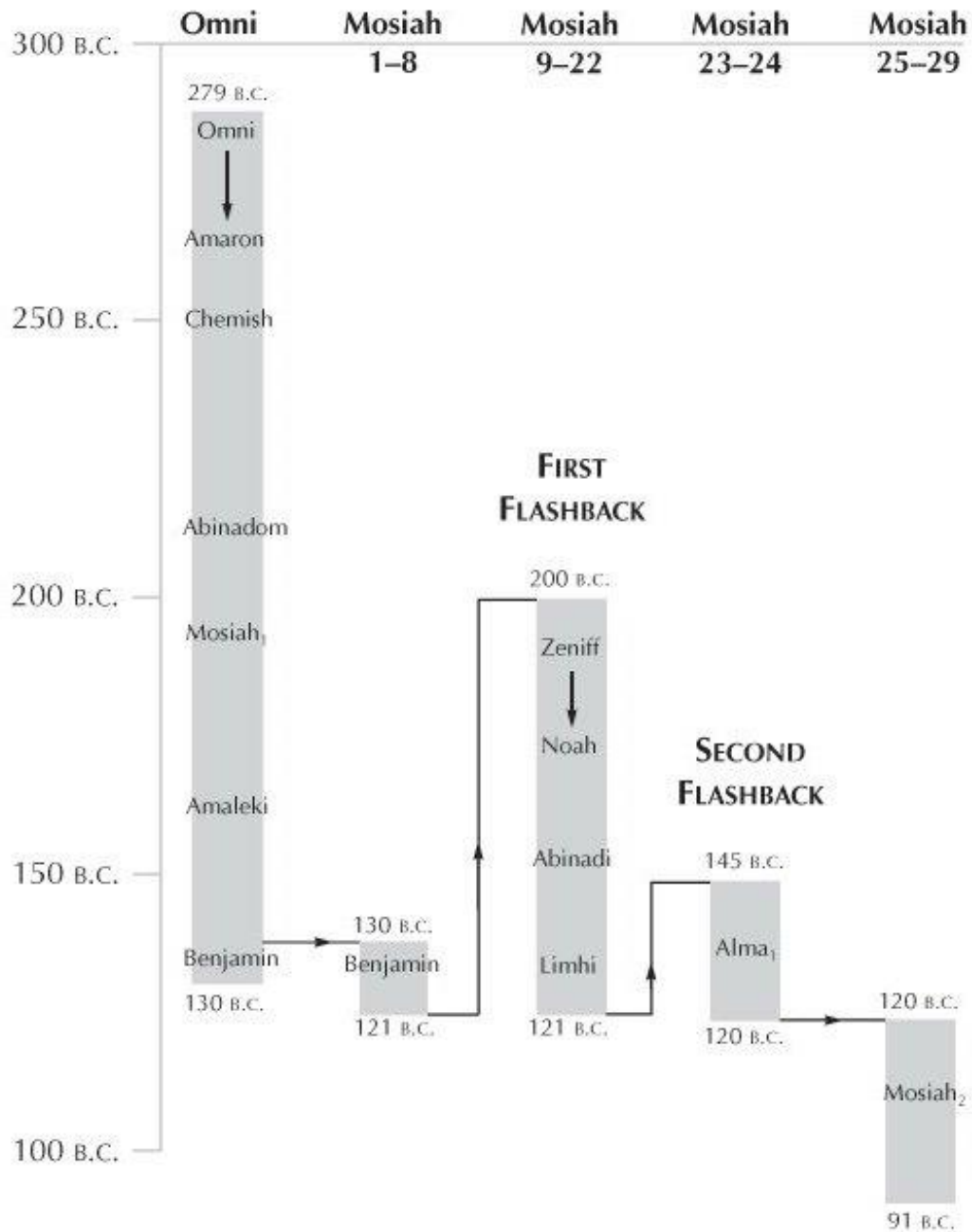


Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Flashbacks in the Book of Mosiah," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 29.

The “land of Helam” is mentioned here eight times, and the “city of Helam,” three times inside of twenty-one verses here. It must have been a place that had left a deep impression on Alma’s memory, just as the place of “Mormon” had left unforgettable memories, being mentioned six times in one verse alone (18:30).

Despite the great faith and industry of this people, Alma warns that the Lord desires to “chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith” (23:21). And then, Alma promises that “whosoever putteth his trust in him shall be lifted up at the last day” (23:22). And Alma promises to show that they were in “bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God, yea even the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob” (23:23), and indeed “he did deliver them” (23:24).

Notice that very similar wordings were used a generation later by Alma the Younger in telling his son Helaman of his conversion: “whosoever shall put their trust in God . . . shall be lifted up at the last day” (Alma 36:3), and “I do put my trust in him” and “he will raise me up at the last day” (Alma 36:27–28). “For they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and he surely did deliver them” (Alma 36:2). Indeed, Alma the Younger knew these words of his father spoken in the land of Helam just as he remembered, at the turning point of his conversion, the words of his father speaking about the Atonement of Jesus Christ (Alma 36:17). Here is yet another case of exact words being remembered and reused by exactly the one person who should have used those words, a hundred pages later in the book.

And indeed, Alma the Elder did go on to “show unto you that they were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God” (23:23). And once again it was the priests of Noah under the leadership of Amulon who inflicted the greatest suffering. Elder Maxwell has said that there are three reasons why we suffer.

1. The first one is *mortality*. We live on an earth where things happen. Where rheumatism and all kinds of things happen to us. We suffer that.
2. The second one is that *we are stupid*. Apostles do not actually use that word, but if the shoe fits, wear it. We may step out in front of a car. We make mistakes, and we end up hurting others or ourselves.
3. The third reason is that *the Lord wants to school us*, and if we are not paying attention and he needs to school us, he will give us something that will whip us into shape.

One of the problems with these three divisions of suffering is that while we are actually suffering, we do not normally know which one it is. However, whatever challenges the

Lord has provided us with, or allowed for us, we can turn to the Lord, trust him, and serve him. It will all work out the right way in his time and in his place. It is a gift. And so it was for the people of Alma.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Does God Sometimes Allow His Saints to Be Martyred?](#) (Alma 14:11),” *KnoWhy* 351 (August 11, 2017).

Mosiah 23:33 — Why Did the Lamanite Daughters Plead for Their Husbands?

The Lamanites came and took possession of the land of Helam, and Alma and his people did not resist (23:29). But then the priests of Noah, who were also in the area, feared that the Lamanites would kill them, and so they sent their Lamanite wives to plead for them, which they did.

In that day, women were less able than women today would be to object to their husbands. In fact, the word in Hebrew for *husband* is *baal*, which meant *lord*, as in “my lord,” (with a little “I”). The relationship between husband and wife was not as much of an equal partnership as it is meant to be today. Although the wives could probably make life pretty miserable for their husband, there would be a lot of risks in this society for doing that. They were probably normally very obedient. In any case, even if they had once been kidnapped, these women were now their husbands’ loyal wives. This particular story says a lot about how good those women were. They were willing to support their husbands, protect them, and do whatever they could for them.

Mosiah 24:1–5 — Amulon Taught the Lamanites His Language

When Alma and his people left the land of Helam, Amulon and his priests stayed there for an important reason which the record particularly mentions. Amulon and his priests were teaching the Lamanites the Nephite language—reading and writing. Although unintentional on the part of the priests, this service would prepare the Lamanites to receive the gospel. When the sons of Mosiah came to teach the Lamanites, they were able to teach in their own scriptures. In the Lord’s eyes, it was important that Amulon and his priests stayed rather than going back to Zarahemla. The Lord can use even wicked people to get some good things done once in a while.

Mosiah 24:8 — Amulon Persecutes the Saints

Amulon was the leader of the priests of Noah, and they had finally caught Alma and his people. Surprisingly the priests did not kill Alma. They put harsh regulations in place and in Mosiah 24:8, after exercising authority, they began to persecute Alma and his brethren. They did not want to kill Alma, but they were going to enjoy persecuting him. Amulon even caused his own children to persecute the children of the people of Alma.

Alma the Younger's age is not known at this time, but even if he was only four or five years old, he would still be old enough to feel ostracized or picked on. Those kinds of bad experiences, as a child, leave people with problems that they have to work on later.

Mosiah 24:10–23 — Alma and His People Turn to the Lord for Help

In verse 9, Amulon recognized Alma as the former fellow priest of King Noah. The afflictions suffered by the people of Alma were so great that “they began to cry mightily to God” (24:10). The Lamanites took steps to prevent their public prayers, but the people continued to pray in their hearts. We can always do that! The Nephites approached this problem by three principles: turn to him, trust him, and serve him.

Three times the voice of the Lord came to Alma and his people. The Lord told them to be of good comfort and covenanted to deliver them out of bondage and to ease their burdens (24:13–14). When the burdens were borne with cheerfulness and patience, the voice of the Lord came again, saying, “Be of good comfort, for on the morrow I will deliver you out of bondage” (24:16). And indeed, the people escaped in the night, with the help of the Lord, to a valley they called “the valley Alma,” where they gave thanks, and then a third time, the Lord warned Alma to leave quickly for Zarahemla and told him that he would “stop the Lamanites in this valley” (24:23).

Twelve days later they arrived safely in Zarahemla and were received with joy (24:25). These durations of travel give readers a fairly clear idea of how far it was from the Land of Nephi to the Land of Zarahemla—only about 200 miles.

Further Reading

On the frequent use of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt as a type or pattern of the liberations of Limhi's people from the Lamanites and of Alma's people from Amulon, see S. Kent Brown. “The Exodus Pattern of the Book of Mormon,” in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 75–98.

On distances in Book of Mormon geography, see John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1985), 8–23.

MOSIAH 25–28

John W. Welch Notes



Overview

These four chapters set the stage for three very significant political and church organizational changes in the Nephite world, namely:

1. The development of independent churches within the land of Zarahemla
2. The abandonment of the kingship by Mosiah after thirty-three years on the throne
3. The political establishment of a new reign of judges under the leadership of a Chief Judge.

Before this time, life had been fairly simple in the land of Zarahemla. There were only Mulekites and Nephites in the land, and by agreement “all of the people of Zarahemla were numbered among the Nephites,” and only a descendant of Nephi could be king (25:13). They had been unified under King Benjamin (1:10).

Then occurred the return, baptism, and assimilation of the people of Zeniff under the leadership of his grandson King Limhi (Mosiah 22:13; 25:18). That was shortly followed by the arrival and independence of the covenant people of Alma, who had been treated badly by Amulon and the priests of Noah. Alma’s followers formed seven bodies and were called the church of God, the church of Christ, or the people of God (18:17; 25:23). Also in the mix were some of the children of the priests of Amulon who opted to become Nephites (25:12).

With these developments, things had gotten complicated, and the Benjamite generation of unity began to unravel. The younger generation, in particular, did not understand or

feel bound by the words and covenant of Benjamin (26:1). Dissensions and transgressions occurred within Alma's now urbanized church (26:5). Alma tried to get King Mosiah to judge cases involving crimes committed by members of his fledgling church (26:10), but Mosiah declined to take jurisdiction over any such cases (26:12).

This put Alma in a difficult position (26:13), which he took to the Lord and received prudent counsel (26:15–32). But still he had to blot out the names of some of his covenant people (26:36). This created pockets of dissidents who created disturbances and social tensions between the various religious groups.

Soon, persecutions began to arise (26:38; 27:1), and some priests and teachers began collecting payment for their services (27:5; Alma 1:3). Nehor, in particular, must have been attracting a following of believers (Alma 1:3, 7). The problems were severe enough that King Mosiah issued a proclamation with a "strict command" prohibiting persecutions and requiring "an equality among all men" (Mosiah 27:3).

Within a decade, as the people prospered, one of Alma's own sons would come to reject his father's church, its teachings and its baptismal ordinance from the Waters of Mormon (27:8). He and the four sons of King Mosiah began secretly working to destroy the church, contrary to the commandments of God and the order of King Mosiah (27:10).

But then, the sudden and unexpected intervention of the angel of the Lord changed this precarious course of personal destruction and national disintegration. That trajectory was halted as these five repented, were converted, and began serving as ambassadors of peace "throughout all the land of Zarahemla" (27:35), seeking to repair the damages they had caused and to bring many people "to the knowledge of their Redeemer" (27:35–37).

As a result, the four sons of Mosiah volunteered, and were given permission, to go south to the land of Nephi, where Zeniff, Noah, Limhi and Alma had been (28:8). They desired to help people on all sides to be "friendly to one another, and that there should be no more contentions in all the land" (28:2).

Mosiah himself then gathered together all the records and "all the things which he had kept" (28:20). Consolidating these records symbolized a virtual reunification of these groups. Each group of people was well-served. Using two stones that Coriantumr, the last of the Jaredites, or perhaps another Jaredite like Ether himself may have given to the Mulekites (Omni 1: 20–21), Mosiah translated the plates that had been found by the people of Limhi (28:11, 17). Mosiah also gathered "the plates of brass, and also the plates of Nephi, and all the things which he had kept and preserved" (28:11). He archived "the record of Zeniff" (headnote to Mosiah chapters 9–22), and he included the "account of Alma" (headnote to Mosiah chapters 23–24).

Mosiah then entrusted all these things to Alma the Younger and “commanded him that he should keep and preserve them, and also keep a record of the people” (28:20), and Alma was consecrated by his father to be the high priest (29:42). With the background of Mosiah 25–28 in mind, one can understand why various churches will continue to exist in the land of Zarahemla, the cities of Zarahemla, Gideon, Ammonihah, Jershon, and Antionum. For reasons that will be summarized by Mosiah in his abdication speech in Mosiah 29, the Nephites will relinquish their political right to kingship, and Alma will be appointed the first chief judge, having developed strong personal connections with insiders and outsiders, newcomers and old timers.

Mosiah 25

Mosiah 25:12 — Family in the Book of Mormon: Fictive Kinship

As a part of the process that is reported in this chapter of the assembling of the Nephites and the returning groups of Zeniff and Alma, these new arrivals could choose to be numbered among the Nephites. They were baptized and organized into units within the church of God. This step of joining, assembling, renaming, numbering, and belonging created for them, as it does in the Church today, a sense of extended family, of being brothers and sisters, of working together, caring for one another, all as a result of being adopted as sons and daughters of Christ.

Notice in verse 12 that even the children of Amulon and his brethren, the priests of Noah who had captured and married the daughters of the Lamanites, were displeased at the behavior of their fathers, and did not want to be identified any longer by the name of their fathers: “Therefore they took upon themselves the name of Nephi, that they might be called the children of Nephi and be numbered among those who were called Nephites.” This social and spiritual practice, in which people who were not closely related to each other claim to have a family connection, is known by anthropologists as “fictive kinship,” and it was common in the ancient world, especially in religious contexts.

There are several examples of it in the Old Testament. When the Israelites left Egypt, they were referred to as a “mixed multitude” (Exodus 12:38), suggesting that all emigrants were not of the tribes of Israel. These newcomers were adopted into one of the twelve tribes of Israel, even though they were not technically part of these extended family groups. Each of these tribes was named after one of the sons of Jacob or Joseph, the great patriarchs of the Old Testament, although later, Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were given an inheritance with Jacob’s sons, as noted in Genesis 48:5.

This practice is evident throughout the Book of Mormon. Family was so important that those who belonged to a group that no longer had the same values, often identified themselves as Nephites. See, for example, Jacob 1:13–14, in which Jacob grouped the Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites into values-oriented tribes or fictive kinship groups: “Those who are friendly to Nephi, I shall call Nephites, or the people of Nephi.” Those who sought to destroy the people of Nephi, Jacob said, “I shall call them Lamanites.”

The importance of family relationships, whether by descendancy or adoption, is demonstrated throughout the Book of Mormon to be a primary human need fulfilled within the network of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our always-loving Heavenly Father.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “What Does the Book of Mormon Teach about Families? (Mosiah 25:12),” *KnoWhy* 382 (November 16, 2017). “For many people, family is the most important thing in life. The same can likely be said for the peoples of the Book of Mormon. Despite their sometimes-complex origins, they organized themselves into several core family relationships, just like many other societies in the ancient world.”

John L. Sorenson, “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 1–34.

Mosiah 26

Mosiah 26:12 — The Meaning of the Name *Mosiah*

Both of the kings who were named Mosiah in the Book of Mormon are depicted as exemplary leaders of extraordinary practical and spiritual ability. Both were champions of justice and mercy. Considering that these individuals were anointed as kings, it may at first glance be tempting to assume that their names derive from the Hebrew word for Messiah, meaning “anointed.” However, an even better possibility is that the name comes from the Hebrew word *môšia* ‘ (mo-SHE-ah), meaning a “deliverer” or “savior.”

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “How Was Mosiah a Type of Christ? (Mosiah 26:12),” *KnoWhy* 104 (May 20, 2016).

John W. Welch, “What Was a ‘Mosiah’?” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 105–107.

Mosiah 26:15–32 — Church Governance and Administration

As dissensions, crimes, and transgressions occurred within Alma's now expanded and urbanized church, Alma turned to King Mosiah (someone he scarcely knew) to judge cases involving crimes committed by members of his church (26:10). Perhaps wanting to not get in the middle of these problems about which he had little personal knowledge, Mosiah relinquished royal jurisdiction over any such cases, even though the results could possibly involve serious consequences for his subjects (26:12).

Given authority to determine who could remain a member of the church of God, Alma took the matter to the Lord and received instructions which amount to a handbook of membership and discipline within the church (26:15–32). The key elements are well worth noting and embracing: the Lord's repeated willingness to bless his people and their leaders (26:15–19), receiving and forgiving those who hear and know the name by which they are now and will be called at the last day (26:20–28). Alma was instructed to judge church members according to the sins they have committed, allowing them to confess, for as often as they repent the Lord will forgive their trespasses against Him (26:29). The members of the church ("ye") shall also forgive one another, but "whosoever will not repent of his sins the same shall not be numbered among my people" (26:32).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Was the Book of Mormon Used as the First Church Administrative Handbook?](#) (3 Nephi 27:21–22)," *KnowWhy* 72 (April 6, 2016).

Mosiah 27

Mosiah 27:1–3 — Unbelievers Were Making Things Difficult

The Nephite church, at this time, had a problem with the believers being persecuted by the unbelievers, to the extent that the members of the church took their concerns to Alma, who discussed the problem with the king. Mosiah consulted with his priests, and then issued a strict command throughout the churches that there should be no more persecution. That was a relief, but having the king issue a proclamation did not completely stop the problem, mainly because the persecutors went underground, operating "secretly," and thus witnesses could not be easily found to accuse and convict them (see Mosiah 27:10; compare the opposite situation in 26:9).

Mosiah 27:8 — Alma the Younger

Alma the Younger would have learned some kind of a profession or craft fairly early in his life, as well as having been trained to write and to read. He probably had the privilege of being educated, and that raises the possibility that he was a younger child. Nephi had the privilege in Lehi's family of keeping the records, but he was not the eldest son. This was likely typical of ancient families. What do they need the older two or three children to be doing? Working. Taking care of the animals, tilling the fields, doing the hard, manual work. A younger son could be taught by the father who could to turn a lot of work over to others. Laman and Lemuel apparently resented that. Alma is a privileged young man, very privileged. He ends up being best friends with sons of the king.

Further Reading

Matthew L. Bowen, "Alma — Young Man, Hidden Prophet," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 19 (2016): 343–353.

Brant A. Gardner, "Nephi as Scribe," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 23, no. 1 (2011): 45–55.

Mosiah 27:8–10 — Alma the Younger and the Sons of Mosiah Seek to Destroy the Church

We have no indication that Alma the Elder knew the extent of his son's participation in the persecution. If he knew that, it was not recorded. In fact, it says in Mosiah 27:10, "He [Alma the Younger] did go about *secretly* with the sons of Mosiah seeking to destroy the church." The main point is that the king and Alma the Elder were worried, and they were trying to do everything they possibly could to help the situation, but neither of them knew what their sons were up to. It was, therefore, up to the Lord to see that the situation was changed.

Mosiah 27:14 — The Lord Heard the Prayers of Alma the Elder and the People

I like verse 14, when the angel said, "Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people." That tells us that the believers had been praying, especially in their distress. And the angel added "and also the prayers of his servant, Alma who is thy father, for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee, that you might be brought to a knowledge of the truth." Maybe, when Alma prayed, he said, as we sometimes we say, "Such and such is the result I want." But I doubt that he said, "I would like it to happen this way." However, he probably was thrilled when he could say, "My prayer is being answered." The angel's words indicate that the prayers of Alma the Elder were crucial to the unfolding of this event, even if he had no idea how that should happen or how it might turn out. He must have been as surprised and astonished as anyone else in this powerful blessing.

Mosiah 27:16 — The Angel Told Alma to Remember the Captivity of His Father

The angel who appeared to Alma never directly told him to repent. Why is that? Well, the message about repentance is actually there in the first half of this verse; it's just not explicitly spelled out. Alma was told to "remember the captivity" that is a consequence of disobedience. That phrase will lead us to repentance, and we can even see that same language used by Alma in several of his own sermons in the book of Alma.

The angel of the Lord said, "Alma, go thy way, and seek to destroy the church no more, that their prayers may be answered, and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off." It is not immediately clear what "cast off" meant. It may have meant that Alma would have been banished, excommunicated, or disciplined under the church rules established under Mosiah 26. Later, when recounting this experience, Alma warned his sons that if they didn't "keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence" (Alma 36:30, 38:1). All of this indicates the ultimate spiritual significance of what the angel was telling Alma.

In Alma 36:9 he records the angel as having said, "If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God." This language is even more powerful. It is possible that Alma was in some sort of physical danger, much like Sherem was in the days of Jacob. He was certainly in spiritual danger. When recounting the angel's warning later in his life, Alma immediately explained that he "was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins" (Alma 36:12) and was "tormented with the pains of hell" (36:13). Alma actually would have preferred to "become extinct both soul and body" rather than "stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds" (36:15). Again, this suggests that the more weighty destruction that Alma faced and feared was spiritual in nature.

Mosiah 27:19–22 — Fasting and Praying as a Community

We often have ward fasts and prayers to help people who are sick or have some unusual health problem. How many of you have had a ward prayer for a young man who has been losing his testimony? Have you ever heard of that happening? I was really quite struck by when it says, "And Alma caused that the priests should assemble themselves"—these were priesthood holders in the church. And Alma basically said, "We are going to have a fast." I do not think he said, "We are going to fast for two days and two nights." They did fast for two days and two nights, but that was because at the end of the second day, their prayers were answered. I wonder how long they would have continued that vigil of fasting and praying.

They prayed to the Lord their God that he would "open the mouth of Alma that he might speak, and also that his limbs might receive their strength, that the eyes of the

people might be opened to see and know of the goodness and glory of God” (Mosiah 27:22). Those words are very poignant. They tell us what they were asking for in their prayers. What if the bishop were to say, “Elders, I would like you to have a special fast. I would like you to pray to help a young man in our ward who really is in need of the influence of the Spirit of God”? Maybe a bishop could say, “There is a family that is struggling.” We need to unite our priesthood power and our ward faith and pray that the Lord will bless people with these exact objectives. I would like to see that kind of thing happen. There are such needs out there.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Does the Lord Require People to Live the Laws of Tithing and Fasting?](#) (3 Nephi 24:10),” *KnoWhy* 305 (April 6, 2017).

Mosiah 27:28–31 — Alma’s Use of Language

A wonderful thing about Alma was that he had the language skills to articulate what he experienced. Many of us would not have been able to do that. In these verses, he had been out cold for three days. He woke up and was able to express these eloquent parallelisms with wonderfully accurate descriptive nouns, adjectives, and verbs. It is a masterful description of how a person feels after a profound conversion.

Mosiah 27:29 — Snatched from the Dark Abyss

Alma referred to his being snatched from the darkest abyss. His beholding the “marvelous light of God” seemed to happen rapidly and very dramatically. That happens to us some of the time, but not always. In a talk titled “[The Spirit of Revelation](#),” Elder Bednar compared the receiving of spiritual light to two physical experiences with light:

The first experience occurred as we entered a dark room and turned on a light switch. Remember how in an instant a bright flood of illumination filled the room and caused the darkness to disappear.

This was comparable to Alma’s initial experience. In contrast, Elder Bednar’s second example entails a more gradual perception of light:

The second experience took place as we watched night turn into morning. Do you recall the slow and almost imperceptible increase in light on the horizon? In contrast to turning on a light in a dark room, the light from the rising sun did not immediately burst forth. Rather, gradually and steadily the intensity of the light increased, and the darkness of night was replaced by the radiance of morning. Eventually, the sun did dawn over the skyline. But the visual evidence of the sun’s impending arrival was apparent hours before the sun actually appeared

over the horizon. This experience was characterized by subtle and gradual discernment of light (Elder Bednar “The Spirit of Revelation”).

Most of us have the “sunrise” experience of conversion, which slowly brings us into the light. Note, though, that Alma, who had the instant light did not let his conversion stop at that first bright moment. He continued to seek the light.

Further Reading

David A. Bednar, “[The Spirit of Revelation](#),” General Conference Address, April 2011, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

Mosiah 27:24–31 — Shared Words in Alma’s Three Main Conversion Accounts

Alma told or referred to his experience of being born of God on several occasions (Figures 1, 2). The three main accounts of Alma’s conversion, found in Mosiah 27, Alma 36, and Alma 38, share several words or phrases, reminding us that Alma referred to this life-changing story often and in a distinctive manner. However, the varying contexts clearly influenced the rhetorical posture of each of these accounts.

Alma’s initial account of his conversion in Mosiah 27:7–37 is youthfully spontaneous and detailed. The event had just occurred and was still very vivid in his mind. On that occasion, he used direct, antithetical parallelism to emphasize that Christ’s Atonement had miraculously changed him from his former state into a contrastingly new person.

Alma’s account to his son Helaman in Alma 36 is told about twenty-five years later. It is the longest and most elaborate. Here Alma gives this reflective account in a blessing to his first son. Alma includes historical, theological, and institutional references that would be relevant to Helaman’s upcoming service as the high priest in Zarahemla. To emphasize the pivotal moment of his calling upon of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as his Savior, Alma expresses his testimony in the form of an extended chiasm, centered on that repentant turning point in his life.

Alma’s final account in Alma 38, given to his second son, Shiblon, is a shorter text. Given at the same time as Alma 36, it tracks the first half of the chiastic structure in Alma 36. Alma’s concluding words to Shiblon then comprise a more personally applicable set of exhortations focused on the mercy and truth of Christ, counseling Shiblon to learn wisdom, to be diligent and temperate, not to boast in his wisdom or strength, and to bridle his passions so that he may be filled with love.

Three Accounts of Alma's Conversion

	Mosiah 27:7–37	Alma 36:1–30	Alma 38:4–8
When	about 100 B.C. immediately after conversion	about 73 B.C. 27 years after conversion	about 73 B.C. 27 years after conversion
Told by	Alma and Mosiah	Alma	Alma
Audience	multitude of people	Helaman	Shiblon
Tone	spontaneous	deliberate	brief
Technique	antithetical parallelism	chiasmus	narrative
Feelings	snatched, redeemed	relief, exquisite joy	peace to my soul
Sphere	public	personal, spiritual	personal, moral
Length	long	medium long	short
Angel's Words	long quote (vv. 13–16)	short quote (v. 9)	no quote
Causal Forces	prayers of God's people	Alma's cry for mercy	God's mercy
Called on	not mentioned	Jesus, thou Son of God	the Lord Jesus Christ
Unique Parts	Alma's evil deeds detailed (vv. 8–10, 30) affirmation of God's power (v. 18) angel departed (v. 17) Alma carried before a multitude (vv. 19, 21) God's declaration of judgment on all (vv. 25–27) the redeemed become God's sons and daughters (v. 25) Alma persecuted as he preaches (v. 32)	Alma heard no more (v. 11); sons of Mosiah hear more	angel face to face (v. 7) God sent angel in mercy (v. 7)

Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Three Accounts of Alma's Conversion," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 106.

Shared Words in the Three Accounts of Alma's Conversion

Mosiah 27:7–37	Alma 36:1–30	Alma 38:4–8
destroy the church	destroy the church	work of destruction
angel of the Lord	his holy angel	his angel
voice of thunder	voice of thunder	voice of thunder
fell to the earth	fell to the earth	
arise and stand	arose and stood	
remember captivity	remember captivity and bondage	thou wast in bonds
	Lord delivered them	Lord delivered thee
	trust in God	trust in God
	trials, troubles, afflictions	trials, troubles, afflictions
	lifted up at last day	lifted up at last day
	know not of myself	know not of myself
born of the Spirit, God	born of God	born of God
be cast off	be destroyed	
not open his mouth	not open my mouth	
not move hands	not move limbs	
fast two days, nights	out three days, nights	out three days, nights
the Lord in mercy	heart cried for mercy	
limbs received strength	limbs received strength	
everlasting burning	everlasting chains	
gall of bitterness	gall of bitterness	most bitter pain
marvelous light	marvelous light	
pained no more	pains no more	
many to the knowledge	many born of God	

Figure 2 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Shared Words in the Three Accounts of Alma's Conversion," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 107.

Though each of these accounts differs from the other two, all were appropriate for the contexts in which they were given. Moreover, the presence of shared words in his three main accounts is very interesting. Seven similar expressions or ideas are found in all three accounts. Eighteen are found in Mosiah 27 and Alma 36. Twelve overlap between Alma 36 and Alma 38. When compared in detail, this consistency offers circumstantial evidence of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, since, in spite of the different settings of these accounts and the textual layers of compilation, abridgment, and translation, Alma's unique, underlying personal voice can still be heard, identified, and appreciated.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Are there Multiple Accounts of Joseph Smith's and Alma's Visions? (Alma 36:6–7)," *KnoWhy* 264 (January 20, 2017).

John A. Tvedtnes, "The Voice of an Angel," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 311–321.

S. Kent Brown, "Alma's Conversion: Reminiscences in His Sermons," in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, The Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993), 141–156.

John W. Welch, "Three Accounts of Alma's Conversion," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 150–153.

Mosiah 27:32 The Aftermath of Alma's Repentance

Alma experienced a powerful conversion, and he was changed; he basically did an about-face. How did that affect him personally? Is not one of the fruits of repentance the desire to want to share with other people what you have experienced? Have you had that feeling? In the vision of the tree of life, Lehi came to the tree, partook of that fruit, and then had an overwhelming desire to share it with his family.

If we retain a bright remembrance of our conversion, or conversions—we may have many in our lifetimes—we can also retain the desire to share the truths of the gospel. In these chapters there are many lessons that will help us as we move forward. Alma's case is a wonderful example of a lifetime of growth.

It is one thing to talk about the principle of repentance and the effects of the Atonement, but Alma experienced those on a very powerful level. He became an expert in those things, and was able to teach very effectively because it was personal and real, and he

knew how to communicate that. He, like Paul, had an unusual experience. Not everyone has that kind of a wake-up call. But because of it, Alma also could act as a much stronger teacher and an example of repentance and conversion, followed by enduring faithfulness.

We love, remember, and talk about the conversion of Alma the Younger, probably because it is so much of an archetype. It is an ideal representation of the full repentance process in its most powerful form. We all have parts of that going on in our own lives and in our own ongoing conversions. When Paul was teaching, he had the same kind of fire and could speak from the same type of first-hand experience. No matter how dramatic one's initial spiritual transformation is, conversion really is a lifetime process. It was that way for both Alma and Paul, and it is that way for us. We must all endure to the end.

Mosiah 27:32 — Comparing Alma's Experience with That of Paul

Concerning the conversions of Paul and Alma, it may be instructive to compare the similarities and differences between these two magnificent missionaries. As for their backgrounds, both men were raised in a religious setting. Yet, unlike Alma, Paul wasn't opposed to his father's teachings. Paul was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and seems to have been very much in agreement with his father who apparently had enough money to send Paul to Jerusalem (a long trip) to go away from home to study. Paul must have had family support to be able to do that. So, Paul didn't have the same type of family conflict.

Both were persecuting believers. Was there a difference, though, between the kinds of things that Paul was doing and the kind of things that Alma was doing? Paul was convinced in his heart that he was doing the right thing. He was totally committed to what he was doing, whereas Alma, having been taught by his father, probably knew on some level that he was going against the truth.

Jesus said to Paul, "Why persecutest thou me?" That may have been a shock to Paul because he thought he was doing absolutely the right thing. Yet, when the angel said to Alma, "Why are you doing this? Will you of yourself be destroyed?" it was because the destruction for Alma was far more serious than for Paul. Paul had done some serious things, but he was not quite sinning against the same degree of knowledge. So Alma's situation was a little different there as well.

Paul lost his vision, whereas Alma, who was going around *saying* all the wrong things, lost his speech as well as his ability to move. That is the kind of justice that we see so often in the ancient world. It is called *talionic* justice, where the "punishment fits the crime." Paul could still walk around although he could not see. His friends helped him. He had to be led, but he was never really unconscious. In contrast, how did Alma get

from where they were when this happened? His friends, the four sons of Mosiah, had to carry Alma to his father.

Alma the Elder heard about what had happened and he liked it. He rejoiced immediately. He said, “I know the Lord’s hand is in this,” but he did not know yet how it was going to turn out. He had faith that if the Lord was in charge, at least now his son would have a chance. However, Alma the Younger *could* have turned away from this, and could have died. Looking back upon his story, we know the outcome. But Alma the Elder and those with him had to exercise a great deal of faith.

Paul, on the other hand, simply said to the Lord, “What will you have me do?” There was not the same complexity. Paul asked, “Who are you Lord?” and received the reply, “I am Jesus Christ whom thou persecutest.” He asked next, “Well, what would you have me do?” He immediately becomes a willing servant.

The columns on the far right and left sides of Figure 3 show the verses of these six accounts—three from Paul and three from Alma—in which each element either appears or is absent. Down the very middle are found elements shared by both Paul and Alma, and off center are words or experiences unique to either Paul or Alma. In sum, the personalized differences significantly offset and highlight the individual experiences in the two conversions.

Further Reading

Rex E. Lee, “Paul and Alma and Harold B. Lee: What Prophets and Common Sense Can Teach Us about Learning from Our Mistakes,” *Brigham Young University Devotional and Fireside Speeches*, (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1993/94), 13–17.

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Are there Multiple Accounts of Joseph Smith’s and Alma’s Visions? (Alma 36:6–7),” *KnoWhy* 264 (January 20, 2017).

Jasmin Gimenez, “How Paul’s conversion can strengthen your faith in Joseph Smith’s accounts of the First Vision,” Book of Mormon Central Blog, July 30, 2019, online at bookofmormoncentral.org.

Mosiah 27:32, 33, 35 — The Fruits of Repentance

What did King Benjamin say we have to do to retain a remission of our sins? We have to give to the poor (Mosiah 4:26), and Amulek taught that too. If we want an answer to our prayers, if you want God to give to us, we have to give to others. Did Alma and the sons of Mosiah do that? They did, in a remarkable fashion. They taught and they suffered persecution, no doubt in part to show the sincerity and completeness of their earlier wickedness and damage to the church.

Comparing Conversions Paul and Alma

Conversion of Paul			Conversion of Alma		
Acts	Acts	Acts	Mos	Alma	Alma
9:1	22:1	26:1	27:1	36:1	38:1
1-2			8-11	6	
			8-10	14	
1-2	5	9-12			
3-8	6-11	13-19	11-18	5-9	7
3	6	13			
			11, 18	7	7
			11-18	7	7
4	7	14	12, 18		
4	7	14	13		
5	8	15			
6	10				
				9, 11	
6	10	16	13	8	
				16	
7				11	
			12, 18		
	9	13		11	
9	11		19		
			19	10	
9	11		23	10	8
			29	12-18	8
			21-23		
10-18	12-16		21		
18	16		24-30	18-19	6, 8
			20-22		
15-16	14-15	16-19			
13-26	18-21				
20-30			30-31	22-30	4-6
			32-37	24-26	
	20				
	31		32	27	

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Chart 15-17

Figure 3 John W. Welch and John F. Hall, "Comparing Conversions—Paul and Alma," in *Charting the New Testament*, chart 15-17.

In verse 33, Alma and the sons of Mosiah “impart much consolation to the church.” What were they doing? Restitution, reconciliation, and repentance. They were trying to console and reassure the believers. They were asking for forgiveness. It was the church that they had put in an awkward position. What did they do next to confirm their faith? Not only were they saying, “We were wrong,” but they were also saying “you were right.” They were “exhorting them with long-suffering and much travail.” They had been teaching, “Do not bother keeping the commandments.” Now they wanted the people to be sure to keep the commandments.

In verse 35, we see them zealously striving to repair the spiritual damage they had caused. They were also confessing. Is confession an important part of the repentance process? Absolutely. It does not say to whom they confessed their sins, but I imagine as part of consoling the church, they were confessing to the church.

With their conduct, they may also have been implicitly confessing to Alma the Elder, the head of the church, because, after all, a lot of the things they did had been in secret (see Mosiah 27:10). That may have been helpful information for Alma. It might have been pretty shocking. He must have known that things were bad with his son, but he may not have known how bad.

In verse 37, “they did publish peace; they did publish good tidings of good; and they did declare unto the people that the Lord reigneth.” Does that remind you of one of the questions that Abinadi answered (see Mosiah 15:13–18). Alma the Younger probably had learned these words from his father, who had been converted by the testimony of Abinadi. And who will be the ones to proclaim peace? Is it just the one messenger? Is it just the Messiah? Abinadi taught that it was all the holy prophets (15:13). So Abinadi had certainly laid the groundwork for these five friends to publish good tidings of good. This is part of the repentance process, to help other people by proclaiming to them the peace of the Living God.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Would Noah’s Priests Quiz Abinadi on Isaiah?](#) (Mosiah 12:20–21),” *KnoWhy* 89 (April 29, 2016).

Mosiah 27:35 — Alma Increases His Scriptural Knowledge

Did Alma keep learning the rest of his life? We know that he started teaching right away, but did he keep learning? In verse 35, we learn that Alma and the sons of Mosiah went about “explaining the prophecies and the scriptures to all who desired to hear them.”

We have plenty of evidence that Alma knew the scriptures very well. John Hilton has done a lot of research recently on the topic of how Alma’s used Abinadi’s words. He

found that when Alma was talking to his son Corianton, he used more than 15 phrases from Abinadi’s discourse.

Later, in Alma chapter 5, we can detect a lot of King Benjamin’s words and phrases in Alma’s great discourse in Zarahemla. What this tells us is that Alma had not only studied the scriptures, but he had internalized them to the extent that he could use their words and phrases and concepts seamlessly. He became deeply knowledgeable of the scriptures.

In addition, in Alma 40, we see that Alma knew about the different situations in the spirit realm, and the times of resurrection. In order to learn that, he had “inquired diligently of God that I might know—that is concerning the resurrection” (40:3). He did not consider that his conversion taught him all he needed to know. He kept seeking for further light and knowledge.

Further Reading

John Hilton III, “Textual Similarities in the Words of Abinadi and Alma’s Counsel to Corianton,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012): 39–60.

Mosiah 28

Mosiah 28:1–4 — The Sons of Mosiah Desire to Preach to the Lamanites

As a result of conversion, the four sons of Mosiah volunteered, and were given permission, to go south to the land of Nephi, where Zeniff, Noah, Limhi and Alma had been (28:8). They desired to help people on all sides to be “friendly to one another, and that there should be no more contentions in all the land” (28:2).

Why do you think the sons of Mosiah would have taken the love they had felt and said, “God, I love you so much, I will go to the Lamanites and teach them?” How would that be an expression of that love? For one thing, these Lamanite outsiders were, after all, still relatives—distant relatives, yet still part of the family of Lehi. There was a big concern about preaching to the Lamanites. No doubt they wanted to undo some of the hostility that existed between the Nephites and the Lamanites and to solve long-standing problems.

There was a bit of a political motive behind this too. The land that the Lamanites possessed was a special land to many people in Zarahemla because it was the land of the first of inheritance, part of the land of promise. Alma’s father had grown up there, and of course that had been a very important part of what Zeniff, Noah, Limhi, and those people had thought they were doing. Alma had grown up as well with the people that had come from the land of Nephi with Limhi. He may have known them for as many as 20–25 years. There was a whole community of people who had come from there, so they

knew something of that land. That may have sparked some of their interest in wanting to go back and preach the gospel there.

One wonders why they did not come home after a few years, rather than staying there for 14 years. The religious motivations were the impetus that took them through this long, difficult mission. Apart from the success of the work, their absence from Zarahemla may have had something to do with the political environment back at home. All four of Mosiah's sons went. They didn't trade off, where some of them could have gone for a period of time while others stayed to take care of the kingdom. Instead, all four chose to go, partly because they knew that as the heirs-apparent there would be people in the city of Zarahemla that would want them to be king if they were around.

When Zeniff had gone back up to the lands of the Lamanites, he didn't go with a missionary attitude. Instead, he went with a colonization attitude, and there was hostility that only made things worse. Maybe the Nephites had learned a lesson from the experience of the people of Zeniff. The sons of Mosiah may have wanted to go back and try to do some international diplomacy the way the Lord would have liked it to be done. Of course, Ammon, the prince, the heir apparent, ended up being a slave. He was not going in order to conquer these people. The approach was completely different as a result of this conversion. This event was fundamentally paradigm-shifting for everything. They were now thinking in a completely different way.

In the fifth year of the reign of judges, in Alma chapters 2 and 3, in the new kingless system, there was a civil war in Zarahemla led by a man named Amlici. He wanted to be king. He wanted to reinstate the kings. There must have been a very substantial, political group in Zarahemla that liked the old system.

There were plenty of good, religious reasons for the sons of Mosiah to go, but there is also the issue that the Lord wisely kept them away from these difficulties. These four sons were smart enough to realize that if they stayed around, they were going to be in the crossfire. Transitions of political power were always a problem for the Nephites, as for most civilizations. On another occasion, when we get to the end of the book of Alma and the beginning of the book of Helaman, there were three brothers in Zarahemla. One was named Paanchi, another was Pahoran, and the third was Pacumeni. Within one year, all three of them were dead because there were factions with different political people supporting them. As the power shifted, they were caught in the middle of this and they did not survive. We see that these types of things really can and did happen. The situation that the sons of Mosiah were in could have gone very badly. But it worked out wonderfully in the end because they did the right things for the right reasons, and followed the inspiration of the Lord.

Mosiah 28:20 — Alma Had All the Nephite Records and the Interpreters

After King Mosiah had translated the plates of the Jaredites, and had read them to the people of Zarahemla, he “conferred them upon Alma, who was the son of Alma; yea, all the records, and also the interpreters . . . and commanded him that he should keep and preserve them, and also keep a record of the people, handing them down from one generation to another, even as they had been handed down from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem.”

We know then that Alma had the interpreters, but we do not know whether or not he used them, or for what kind of enquiry he considered them to be an appropriate tool. Whether the words “inquired of the Lord” meant that Alma used the seer stones or not is open to debate. Cornelis Van Dam indicates that the phrase “inquired of the Lord” meant *used the Urim and Thummim* in the Old Testament (Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, 3). In Alma 16:6, and 43:23–24, Alma was asked to “inquire of the Lord” for specific directions by military leaders, but how he sought the guidance and answers was not specified.

Further Reading

Jasmin Gimenez, “[4 Fascinating Insights about Seers, Seer Stones, and Interpreters](#),” Book of Mormon Central Blog, April 30, 2020, online at bookofmormoncentral.org.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Were Joseph Smith’s Translation Instruments Like the Israelite Urim and Thummim?](#)” *KnoWhy* 417 (March 20, 2018).

Matthew Roper, “[Revelation and the Urim and Thummim](#),” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorn (Provo, UT, FARMS, 1999), 280–282.

Cornelis Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN, Eisenbrauns, 1997).

Mosiah 28:11, 17, 20 — Mosiah Passes the Records to Alma the Younger

Preparing to leave the kingship in the hands of others, Mosiah himself gathered together all the records and “all the things which he had kept” (28:20). Consolidating these records prepared the way for his successor (whoever that would turn out to be) to succeed. It also symbolized a virtual reunification of these groups, which would have helped to enhance solidarity within his ongoing kingdom. Each group of people was represented. Using the two stones that the Mulekites had obtained from the Jaredites (Omni 1: 20–21), Mosiah translated the plates that had been found by the people of Limhi (28:11, 17). Involving the Nephite heritage, Mosiah also gathered “the plates of brass, and also the plates of Nephi, and all the things which he had kept and preserved”

(28:11). Not excluding Limhi's and Alma's groups, he archived "the record of Zeniff" (headnote to Mosiah chapters 9–22), and he also included in the official compilation the "account of Alma" (headnote to Mosiah chapters 23–24).

Mosiah then entrusted all these things to Alma the Younger and "commanded him that he should keep and preserve them, and also keep a record of the people" (28:20), and soon Alma was consecrated by his father to be the high priest (29:42), but Alma the Younger was not yet the Chief Judge. For reasons that will be summarized by Mosiah in his abdication speech in Mosiah 29, which echoes many of Alma the Elder's concerns in refusing to become a king over his small group of people (Mosiah 23), King Mosiah will relinquish the Nephite political right to kingship, and judges will be elected. Alma will then be appointed the first Chief Judge (29:42), having developed strong personal connections with insiders and outsiders, with the newcomers and old timers.

MOSIAH 29–ALMA 4

John W. Welch Notes



Mosiah 29

Transition from “Reign of Kings” to “Reign of Judges”

It might seem odd to combine the last chapter of the book of Mosiah with the first four chapters of the book of Alma. But, while the book of Mosiah can be seen as a unified composition covering the reign of Mosiah from his coronation (Mosiah 1:10; 2:30) until his death thirty-three years later (29:46), the final chapter in Mosiah is as much a beginning of a whole new era in Nephite history with “the reign of the judges” as it is the ending “of the reign of kings” (29:47). Without understanding what happened at the end of King Mosiah’s reign, and why that happened, the problems encountered at the beginning of the book of Alma would be unclear.

Mosiah 29:8–10 — Mosiah Desires to End the Kingship

The final chapter in Mosiah describes the governmental reforms of King Mosiah—a transition from a Nephite monarchy to a form of democracy. None of Mosiah’s sons were willing to succeed him on the throne as king. Wanting a peaceful transition of power following his reign, Mosiah thought carefully about the pros and cons of a monarchical form of government.

The Nephites had the record of the book of Ether. The twenty-four plates of the Jaredites had been translated by Mosiah, he himself being a seer. The following statement was made soon after the translation of the Jaredite record: “And this account [of the Jaredites] shall be written hereafter; for behold, it is expedient that all people should know the

things which are written in this account" (Mosiah 28:19). Moroni later delivered on that promise by abridging and inserting the book of Ether in the Book of Mormon.

However, in order to understand Mosiah's thinking, we should introduce the acute awareness of the Jaredite collapse into Nephite consciousness at this point. The account of the destruction of the Jaredite nation "did cause the people of Mosiah to mourn exceedingly" (Mosiah 28:18). How might that have changed King Mosiah's attitudes about himself, his society in general, and the kingship in particular?

Warring factions fighting over who should be king led to the utter destruction of the Jaredite civilization. Men fighting over the kingship divided the Jaredites into many bands swearing allegiance to one claimant or another. The Jaredite people contended viciously to the bitter end, and thereby destroyed their civilization. This contest of rulers battling to the death would have been shocking to King Mosiah and his factionalized people, realizing that they, too, could be swept off the land. It had happened to the Jaredites—and it could happen to them. The Nephites knew that the Jaredite plates had been translated by their king, who was one of God's seers and could know of things past and things to come. They may well have reasoned, "Has God given us these 24 gold plates as a warning that if we do not live righteously, this can happen to us too?" This would have been a very powerful message that would have come through loud and clear from the historical record and the religious example left by the Jaredites.

Mosiah very likely used the destruction of the Jaredite civilization as one of his arguments against having a kingship. He also may have taken the Jaredite account as a personal warning—not wanting his sons to get caught in the middle of a similar awful predicament. Mosiah was likely referring to the Jaredite infighting when he stated: "I fear there would rise contentions among you, . . . which would cause wars and contentions among you, which would be the cause of shedding much blood and perverting the way of the Lord, yea, and destroy the souls of many people" (29:7). Thus, Mosiah concluded, "Now I say unto you let us be wise and consider these things, for we have no right to destroy my son, neither should we have any right to destroy another if he should be appointed in his stead" (29:8). History had shown that serious contention over rights of kingship leads to years of ferocious infighting, dissension, murder, and bloodshed, just as their predecessors in the land had fought a violent civil war.

Most civilizations believe that they will last forever—that Rome will rule in perpetuity, or that Greece will live on. People of great societies never imagine their demise, thinking that they will remain a prominent civilization forever.

Hugh Nibley told me and a small group of others a story about D-Day. He was on Utah Beach on D-Day as an intelligence officer—Order of Battle. His military jacket had many

pockets and the contents in every pocket were registered and assigned by military and intelligence procedure. He had to keep things in the right pockets so that, if (or when) he got shot, other intelligence officers would know where to look to retrieve classified information he may be carrying. He was not to take anything with him except for authorized materials. As the troops crossed the English Channel in the middle of the night, Hugh Nibley had in his hand a copy of the Book of Mormon. As he read the Book of Mormon, and as he watched the horrific events unfold as the troops landed and stormed the beaches, he recalled: “Then and there, I received my testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. It dawned on me that the story of the Jaredites, which I had always thought was sheer fiction that went beyond the wildest realities that could ever happen to a civilization, was in fact true. Annihilation of great civilizations does happen.”

The same realization would have been apparent to King Mosiah. It may have affected his decision and may have been an impetus for the changes that he implemented in Nephite government. This may also be why Mosiah abandoned his dynasty and gave up kingship. There have not been many kings in the world’s history who have voluntarily stepped aside and allowed someone else take over all privileges and powers that had been available to him and his children.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Do the Jaredites Have to Do With the Reign of the Judges?](#) (Mosiah 28:17),” *KnoWhy* 106 (May 24, 2016).

John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Springville, UT: Horizon, 2003), 191–192.

John A. Tvedtnes, “[King Mosiah and the Judgeship](#),” *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 20, no. 11 (2000): 2; reprinted in *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 23, no. 1 (2003): 2.

Mosiah 29:26–27 — A Warning is Given to Nations that Do Not Desire to Follow God

Mosiah went on to state, “It is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right?” (29:26). That is how King Mosiah optimistically viewed his people, as he submitted to the people the change that he was voluntarily proposing and implementing. His plan was to use the voice of the people as a significant way of selecting judges and ruling the country. This was a huge transformation in government from the system of kings. Mosiah’s optimistic statement may or may not have been entirely true in Zarahemla. After all, within a couple years,

the situation there degenerated into a costly internal revolt led by Amlici. So, was Mosiah overconfident? Is it automatically true today in the United States, or anywhere else in the world, that “the voice of the people” will not usually desire anything that is not right? At the same time, is it not common for “the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right?” (29:26) What can we do, as citizens today, to ensure that we conduct our business by the voice of the people?

It is important to note that even though Mosiah recognized that it is not common for the greater number of people to choose wrong, he allowed for the possibility that it could happen. A majority opinion might run contrary to that which is good or right for the people. Of course, if this did occur, another step would have to be taken to ensure peace and tranquility and prevent drastic disintegration of the culture and society—the law.

For a system of popular empowerment to work, there must be commitment to the rule of law. Mosiah presumed that people would need to “observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people” (29:26). This would require attentiveness, vigilance, and concerted effort. This would also require on the part of each citizen, or at the very least on the part of the majority of citizens, a sense of civic duty to be informed and to vote wisely.

Speaking of duties, I have no doubt that as legal historians look back fifty years from now on the legal accomplishments of the United States in the twentieth century, they will remember that time as an era of increased rights—women’s suffrage and civil rights for minority groups of all kinds. The focus on rights and privileges will be viewed as the great legal emphasis of that period in history. However, if rights are not also balanced with duties and responsibilities, the nation becomes a society of entitlements rather than a society of people doing their part by carrying out their civic obligations and duties to others.

Indeed, once Alma was appointed to be the first Chief Judge under the Nephites’ new reign of the judges, he went forth among his people “that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up *in remembrance of their duty* . . . seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them” (Alma 4:19). Part of “bearing down in pure testimony” is being careful to testify only to that which one knows to be right or wrong. In some political issues, there is no right or wrong choice, and in those cases one ought not to indicate that there is. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is very careful about giving guidance on political issues. But that does not mean that individuals should not be constantly encouraged to be fully informed, to see all sides, and to listen to their conscience, or what Mosiah described as their “desire” for “that which is right” (29:26). Leaders are far more effective in instilling a sense of duty and responsibility when they themselves have integrity, model giving

preference to the public interest over their own personal benefits, and choose judiciously their agenda in selecting which political campaigns to pursue and which public battles not to fight.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What is the Purpose of Democracy in the Book of Mormon?](#) (Mosiah 29–27),” *KnoWhy* 380 (November 9, 2017).

Mosiah 29:5–36 — Mosiah’s Reliance on Earlier Records

The words which Mosiah sent out among his people were “written” (29:4, 33). As his father Benjamin had done, Mosiah may have delivered orally his directive regarding the abandonment of the institution of kingship, while at the same time being sure that everyone, in their various assemblies, could read and understand the reasons behind his decision to change their form of government. Mosiah’s document is quoted from verses 4 to 32, with a concluding summary in verses 32–36. This official document is an amazing piece of political and scribal composition, although most readers of the Book of Mormon do not notice its skillful and mature effectiveness.

Mosiah’s official proclamation appeals to each of his main constituencies. Speaking to the longtime Nephite and Mulekite populations in Zarahemla, he referred to his father, King Benjamin, by name (29:13), and alluded to Benjamin’s public law warning against “contentions” (Mosiah 2:32) and prohibiting stealing, plundering, murdering, or any manner of wickedness (Mosiah 29:14; compare Mosiah 2:13). The Nephites probably needed little persuasion to convince them to accept Mosiah’s change, since they had a weak claim to kingship to begin with: Nephi was a reluctant monarch, and the Nephites in Zarahemla were guest monarchs. Mosiah’s edict also appeals to Limhi’s group by blaming, not them, but Noah and “his people” (the priests) for the failure of the efforts of Zeniff’s colony (Mosiah 29:18).

Most strongly, Mosiah appeals to and endorses Alma’s group by clearly incorporating almost all of the key words and ideas spoken by Alma when he declined the offer to become a king over his people (Alma 23:6–15). Mosiah had been given a copy of Alma’s record, which he read to all the people of Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:6), and so the verbal interconnections between Alma’s refusal and Mosiah’s abdication are plausible, prudent, and purposeful. In fact, every line in Alma’s account is repurposed by Mosiah. Many key words have been imported, almost in exact order, from Alma’s text into Mosiah’s manifesto, including:

- “esteem” one flesh (23:7); “esteem you as such” (29:5)
- “I desire that ye should” (23:13); “I desire that ye should” (29:5)
- “desirous” (23:6); “desirous” (29:5)

- “contentions” (23:15); “contentions” (29:7; 29:36)
- “if it were possible that you could always have just men to be your kings” (23:8); “if it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings” (29:13)
- “it would be well for you to have a king” (23:8), “it would be expedient that ye should always have kings” (29:13)
- “it is not expedient that ye should have a king” (23:7; 29:16)
- “remember the iniquity of king Noah and his priests” (23:9); “remember king Noah, his wickedness and his abominations, and also the wickedness and abominations of his people (29:18)
- “sore repentance” (23:9); “sincere repentance” (29:19)
- “delivered by the power of God out of these bonds” (23:13); “deliver . . . out of bondage . . . with his power” (29:20)
- “abominable” (23:9); “abominations” (29:24)
- “trust no man to be a king over you” (23:13); “I command you . . . that ye have no king” (29:30)
- “liberty” (23:13); “liberty” (29:32)
- “he [Alma] was beloved by his people” (23:6, opening point); “strong in love towards Mosiah” (29:40, closing point)

Interestingly, Mosiah’s statement contains three blocks of material that contain no parallels in Alma’s text. These blocks deal with the need to be wise to appoint judges and thereby avoid being destroyed (29:8–12), the difficulties of removing wicked kings (29:21–24), and the operation of the voice of the people (29:29:25–29).

These evidences of intertextuality are strong enough that one may well wonder whether Alma the Elder and Alma the Younger might have assisted Mosiah in the writing of his proclamation. After all, Mosiah had already entrusted Alma the Younger with the keeping of all the sacred records of his kingdom (Mosiah 28:20).

Mosiah 29:38 — “Equality” among the Nephites

The word “equality” shows up several times in this part of the Book of Mormon. However, the meaning of the word “equality” is not easily understood or straightforward. There are several ways in which two things can be said to be “equal,” and thus there are subtle nuances and differences both in the meanings and the implementations of the idea of equality. The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution speaks about “equal protection,” and the Declaration of Independence states that all men are “created equal.” However, while this is certainly true in some crucial senses, it is not true in every possible sense. All do not have the same financial advantages when born into this world. All do not have the same health advantages or disadvantages. In what sense, then, are people created equal? Many societies and legal systems define

equality differently, and thus they provide dissimilar forms of social justice under their respective laws. For example, some systems provide justice through equal opportunity, while others provide distributive justice.

So we as readers of the Book of Mormon may well ask, What did “equality” mean to a Nephite? Under Mosiah’s reforms, all people in the land of Zarahemla were recognized as being equal in five significant areas under the law. In rapid succession, these rights of equality were delineated in the record in at least these five ways: namely,

1. eliminating the “inequality” of royal vs. ordinary status (Mosiah 29:32),
2. giving all an “equal chance” to be accountable (Mosiah 29:38),
3. having an equal “voice” (Mosiah 29:25, 39),
4. being equally protected in the freedom of “belief” (Alma 1:17), and
5. “having no respect to persons” and removing the “inequality” caused by pride, by despising others, and not sharing with all those in need (Alma 1:30, and Alma 4:12–15).

1. In most ancient societies, kings were regarded as superhuman beings. They were in no sense equal to their ordinary subjects. Pharaohs in Egypt, Kings in Babylon, Emperors in Rome—wherever one turns, to be a king meant being quasi-divine. Kings were elevated to a higher status at their coronation, and they renewed that status in year-rite festivals. They were adopted as sons of god (compare Psalms 2:7). They received instructions from heaven. Their word was law. King Benjamin had symbolically removed this awkward barrier between Nephite kings and their people, not by eliminating kingship, but by elevating all of his people to become Christ’s sons and daughters (Mosiah 5:7). Yet the appearances and temptations remained that a king would naturally abuse his powers, enacting laws “after the manner of his own wickedness,” killing at will any disobedient subjects, and using military force (Mosiah 29:23). This presumed divine essence of kings made them fundamentally unequal to the common people, and Mosiah eliminated that problem by removing the office of king altogether.

2. Next, the people were given an equal chance through “equal accountability” or “equal chance . . . to answer for [their] own sins” or crimes. As explained in Mosiah 29:38, every man expressed a willingness to answer for his own sins. By accepting personal accountability, Mosiah’s people recognized that they would be equal in that they would all stand before God to be judged.

Having a king had relieved the public from some requirements to act for themselves, because as subjects they could be compelled to believe or act under sovereign order. For these Nephites, the sins of the people would no longer be on the heads of kings, but would be upon each individual person.

This huge change in government from a monarchy to a form of democracy also relieved those who would be king from responsibility for the belief and actions of those over whom they ruled. In 2 Nephi, Jacob expressed concern that if he did not carry out his duty, the sins of his people would be upon him. King Benjamin explained that he served and taught his people “walking with a clear conscience before God . . . that I might be found blameless, and that your blood should not come upon me, when I shall stand to be judged of God of the things whereof he hath commanded me concerning you” (Mosiah 2:27). These Nephite rulers felt a keen responsibility before their people. Mosiah himself spoke of all that he had done to teach his people and “all the trials and troubles of a righteous king, yea, all the travails of soul for their people” (Mosiah 29:14, 33).

With the removal of kingship, the people of Zarahemla would no longer be compelled to believe under order of a king. That is one of the main things that “equality” meant for these people. It had little or nothing to do with personal identity. The objective was that agency would allow them to make their own choices and they would then be given equality in accountability. Ultimately, that is the underlying equality of mankind. We will all stand equally before God to be judged of our actions.

It is important to note that the removal of kingly responsibility over the people did not remove the responsibility of priesthood holders to teach and warn the people. Priesthood, however, was understood to be more egalitarian. Ordination to the Melchizedek priesthood, or the Holy Order after the Son of God, became available to greater numbers of men. Alma needed help in doing God’s work and men were called as high priests “on account of their exceeding faith and good works” to teach the commandments and to preach the coming of Christ (Alma 13:2–3). This new lack of control or collaboration between the king and his priests (as was the case in ancient Israel in general, but also with King Noah in the land of Nephi) gave rise to new, independent forms of priesthood, such as the order of Nehor, which would become a serious challenge to the new Nephite order in Zarahemla (Alma 1) as well as in Ammonihah (Alma 9–16).

Mormon also made this interesting comment about inequality in Alma 28:13: “And thus we see how great the inequality of man is because of sin and transgression.” Where there is righteousness, inequality is no longer an issue, because it is replaced by unity. Alma’s group in the wilderness emphasized their deep commitment and desire to be united, to be one. With sin, there is no equality; sinfulness undermines unity.

3. The new government reform allowed all to have a voice in government. In this way the people expressed and respected their equality in their all having “equal voice.” Mosiah instructed them to “choose you by the voice of the people, judges, that ye may

be judged according to the laws which have been given you by our fathers” (Mosiah 29:25). There is no record in the Book of Mormon that indicates that “the voice of the people” had ever been consulted prior to these reforms. However, after this precedent was set, it became an important aspect of Nephite political life throughout the reign of the judges. Immediately, the people “assembled themselves together in bodies throughout the land, to cast in their voices concerning who should be their judges” (Mosiah 29:39). Exactly how the candidates were advanced, or how those voices were expressed and counted, is never explained in the surviving Nephite records.

4. Also, the people were given complete protection of personal belief (Alma 1:17). They equally had the right to think and believe as they wanted. People were no longer compelled to belong to a particular religious cult or temple system, nor were they required to participate in religious sacrifices or celebrations. They would not be punished for what they believed. However, certain rules of social order and conduct could not be violated. They would continue to be punished for their actions in transgressing these laws, but not for what they believed.

Protection of personal belief was a huge step forward and a big change in how the whole Nephite society operated. However, it was not without its problems. One legal issue that arose was where to draw the line between “belief” and “action.” The people could be punished for what they did, but not for what they believed. There was a question as to whether preaching was a protected expression of belief or an action that was subject to public regulation. For example, the Book of Mormon dissident, Korihor, took the position that when he was speaking, he was simply expressing his belief. Therefore, Korihor thought he could say whatever he wanted about the government, about God, about priests, or about anything with impunity. He learned the hard way that not all “public speech,” especially open blasphemy, was a protected part of the sphere of “private belief” protected under the new law of Mosiah. The same problem arose with Nehor, who had his own belief system. The legal question in such cases was, how far can individuals go in publicly expressing their beliefs without having their words treated as a punishable form of “action.”

Today, Church leaders look to these Book of Mormon passages in their desire to protect personal belief. One can have private beliefs, but there is a point where beliefs are no longer private and personal—a point where personal beliefs take on a public character. When comments are submitted to the public, the public has an interest. Even “free speech” has certain limits or consequences, socially, religiously, and sometimes even legally. The concerns and lessons implicit in these Book of Mormon passages on freedom of belief can still be relevant in guiding what occurs today, particularly in the Church.

Many people minimize the importance that freedom of religious belief had in the founding of the United States. The establishment of religious freedom was not just an option or a by-product of the American Revolution. Thomas Jefferson prescribed three attributions that he wanted on his tombstone, and one of them was, “Author of the Bill of Religious Liberty for the Colony of Virginia.” Although arising out of different social and political situations, religious freedom was certainly a major part of the American Revolution and the establishment of the American Republic, as it also was in the creation of the Reign of the Judges among the Nephites.

5. A fifth way in which equality was established was to promote “equal sharing” with all those in need, as is explained in Alma 1:30: “[T]herefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons.” In other words, people were to be treated kindly and with equal respect, regardless of their age, class, gender, or religious affiliation. For the people of Zarahemla, this may especially have meant trying to overcome generational tensions between parents and children, to recognize the needs of both the elderly and the vulnerable children, to regard and cultivate human dignity regardless of indentured or subjected conditions, to look beyond physical factors, and to break down tribal barriers or social groupings.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What is the Purpose of Democracy in the Book of Mormon?](#) (Mosiah 29–27),” *KnoWhy* 380 (November 9, 2017).

Mosiah 29:41–45 — Alma Is Appointed as the First Chief Judge

At the end of the book of Mosiah and the beginning of book of Alma, we read about one of those amazing transitions in a civilization that historians like to study. In the development of culture and civilization, there are certain watershed periods in history where things change drastically. Historians want to know what led to change, how significant changes happened, and how change set the tone for things to come.

The American Revolution was one of those great watershed periods where, in a very short time, major changes occurred in the way people viewed government and human rights. This led to the birth of a new nation and a new form of government. Similarly, the French Revolution was the result of changing views on government. As you go back through history, there are great moments when things are transformed. Any Nephite, looking back at Nephite culture, would see the bloodless transformation from kingship to a reign of judges as a great turning point. It is interesting to see what lessons we might draw from this chapter in Nephite history.

To implement the Reign of the Judges, Alma the Younger was appointed Chief Judge by Mosiah and then confirmed by the voice of the people. Mosiah 29:44 simply states, “[T]hus commenced the reign of judges.” Previously, his father Alma the Elder had conferred the office of High Priest on Alma. Therefore, Alma was the Chief Judge, the official record keeper, and also the High Priest. With all of these responsibilities, his first few years in office proved to be very challenging.

First, it must have been overwhelming for Alma to be the first man in a newly-created position with the responsibility to successfully implement a new form of government largely by himself. He undoubtedly took comfort initially in knowing that he could rely on counsel and guidance from his esteemed father, the previous High Priest, and also from Mosiah, the previous king. However, what happened very soon after Alma took office? The verse immediately following the announcement of the beginning of the Reign of the Judges abruptly states that Alma’s father died, and the verse following that mentions that King Mosiah passed away. Both Alma’s father and Mosiah had long careers running the church and running the kingdom and now Alma had to assume both positions with limited experience. He had to stand alone in fulfilling his dual roles. Alma did not have counselors to assist him. Under ancient Israelite law, the Chief Priest was “chief” and did not have counselors. We do not completely know when the appointment of two counselors to a president became part of the church organization. It may have begun with Jesus taking Peter, James and John onto the Mount of Transfiguration, and three of the Nephite leaders were singled out for long service and then not tasting death (4 Nephi 1:14). Although all of these cases were somewhat different from each other, the idea of having three witnesses as leaders is something of a pattern set by Jesus in organizing his Church. And what a wise thing it is to have a leader and two counselors at the head of a Relief Society organization, head of a priesthood quorum, a ward, a stake, and the Church. The corporate and political world could perhaps benefit from this governing model. Having a presidency has a lot of value to it, especially where the counselors really do counsel. But Alma did not have that—he stood alone.

A second major challenge Alma immediately faced when assuming office as Chief Judge was deciding how to set up the new government. There was no rule book. Without a rule book, there were no guidelines, precedent, or experience to rely on. The new regime of judges was to be chosen in a different way than had been done in the past. Under Israelite law, judges were generally priests who had a hereditary right to the position. But under Mosiah’s changes, judges were to be elected by the voice of the people.

The new system of judges changed how justice would be administered, but the Reign of Judges did not change the law. The newly appointed judges were “to judge [the people]

according to the law which had been given them" (Mosiah 29:39, emphasis added). The new form of government made no provision for making new laws. There was no legislature or Congress, nor were there elected representatives to enact law. In fact, when explaining his reforms, Mosiah mentioned wicked King Noah who "enacted laws . . . after the manner of his own wickedness" (Mosiah 29:23). To the Nephites, the idea of changing the law, at least in the manner done by King Noah, was certainly viewed as detrimental to justice and good government.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "How Were Judges Elected in the Book of Mormon?" *KnoWhy* 107 (May 25, 2016).

For an excellently detailed study of kingships and democracies in the ancient world, Gregory Steven Dundas, "Kingship, Democracy, and the Message of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (2017): 7–58, showing that democracy was almost unknown in antiquity, where nearly all peoples assumed that kingship was the best form of government. King Mosiah's decision to implement a form of democracy (elected judges) among the Nephites was a bold and noble effort, but for many reasons it unfortunately did not thrive.

Alma 1–4

The first four chapters in the book of Alma cover the main events involving Alma that occurred during the first eight years of the reign of judges. The following chart (Figure 1) highlights the main events and social trajectories that Alma had to deal with as the leader of his people. Those years saw the death of Gideon and the execution of Nehor, followed by a cycle of pride, contention, prosperity, wickedness, and a civil war led by Amlici, who was slain by Alma in one-on-one, hand-to-hand combat. Alma had not started that war, and it is unlikely that he had received much in the way of military training, so his killing of Amlici must have seemed to many people as another David-slaying-Goliath miracle. For several reasons, both economic and ideological, those postwar conditions stimulated religious renewal and conversion, but those favorable conditions were short-lived. After eight years in office, Alma turned the chief judgeship over to Nephiah, which allowed Alma to focus his attention solely on his duties and ministry as the High Priest.

Alma as Chief Judge

Years 1–8 of the Reign of the Judges

References	Year	
Alma 1	1	Nehor is executed, but priestcrafts continue Church members are persecuted The church prohibits persecution
Alma 1	2	Pride and contention increase in the church Some are excommunicated or withdraw from the church
Alma 1	3	Church members regroup Preachers and workers are equal Church members prosper
Alma 1	4	Prosperity abounds Wickedness increases outside the church
Alma 2–3	5	Amlici revolts and is killed by Alma ₂ Alma ₂ is wounded in battle Lamanites invade again but are defeated
Alma 4	6	Postwar economic problems stimulate religious renewal
Alma 4	7	3,500 people are converted and baptized
Alma 4	8	Pride and contention increase in the church Alma turns the judgeship over to Nephiah

Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Alma as Chief Judge: Years 1–8 of the Reign of the Judges," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 34.

Alma 1:2–6 — Nehor Introduces Priestcraft among the Nephites

The Book of Alma rightly begins with Alma’s first major case in his role as Chief Judge over the people. Within the first year of assuming office, Alma was faced with a third crisis—what to do about Nehor. Nehor was a dissident who began teaching incorrect doctrine among the people and gathering many followers. His ideology can be summarized by his four “alls”:

1. **All** mankind will be saved, and should lift up their heads and rejoice (have fun).
2. **All** men are created by God.
3. **All** are redeemed.
4. **All** will have eternal life (Alma 1:4).

Many things make this philosophy appealing. For one thing, it eliminates the burdens of individual responsibility and accountability. It can be said that Nehor was a master of half-truths. Surely, because of God’s Plan of Happiness, all *should* rejoice. The prophet Lehi stated that “Adam fell that men might be, and men are that they *might* have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). However, one must read a little further to fully understand the nature of that joy and the conditions on which it becomes available to all. Lehi explained that we are here to make choices and that there is responsibility for the choices we make. We may choose the way of life or we may choose the way of death. All will have much reason to rejoice, provided you choose the way of life, and thus all *might* have joy and rejoice. Nehor’s philosophy swept away accountability and promised an easy path for everyone, from the pre-existent cradle to the post-existent grave. And based on this attractive platform, Nehor had formed a church, was preaching what he called “the word of God,” and had provided that his priests were to be supported financially by their church members (Alma 1:3).

Alma 1:7–10 — Nehor Contends with and Slays Gideon

As Nehor taught and gathered followers, he “began to establish a church after the manner of his preaching.” One day while on his way to preach to a gathering of his followers, Nehor encountered an elderly Limhite warrior named Gideon, who was a teacher in the church established by Alma the Elder. Gideon went out to withstand or warn Nehor, and their discussion quickly led to a contentious verbal argument. At this point, Gideon felt a need to admonish Nehor—probably giving a warning that put Nehor on notice.

Even though the government had been recently transformed to a system of judges rather than a king, the law remained the same. The people of Zarahemla were still following the Law of Moses and, under that law as delineated in Deuteronomy 13, a person

engaged in leading people into apostasy could be put to death. The law given by Nephi also prohibited priestcrafts: The Lord “commandeth that there shall be no priestcrafts” (2 Nephi 26:29). In other words, Nehor could be charged with a serious offense under the law.

Under Jewish tradition and Israelite law, there was a requirement that the offending person needed to be warned that he was committing a crime, to be sure that he knew that what he was doing was against the law (2 Chronicles 19:5, 10). This is likely what Gideon was doing—admonishing and warning Nehor that if he persisted in agitating the people toward apostasy, he could be charged with a capital offense and even, potentially, put to death.

In the ancient world and under the Law of Moses, there were no policemen, no attorney generals, and no public prosecutors. Any legal action had to be brought by an individual citizen. Someone had to step up and say, “This has gone far enough.” The old and noble man Gideon had seen this problem before in the City of Nephi. He knew where this could lead and the resultant devastation to societal norms. And thus Gideon, now a citizen of Zarahemla, stood forward and admonished Nehor with the words of God.

Gideon’s warning angered Nehor—he was “wroth with Gideon.” Under Israelite law, anger and hatred functioned as the equivalent of what we could call pre-meditation to commit the crime. As set forth in Numbers 35, there is a higher degree of intentionality and culpability when killing someone in anger and hatred than when someone is killed accidentally or when somebody gets hurt during a scuffle. The fact that Nehor had a sword and pulled out his sword in anger to slay Gideon made his guilty state of mind much easier to prove. Furthermore, there were witnesses to the slaying. The people who witnessed the crime, the audience at the scene, fulfilled their civic duty and immediately took Nehor into custody and brought him before Alma to be judged according to the crimes he had committed. Notice that verse 10 does not even mention Nehor by name. He was simply identified as “the man” who slew Gideon. The record does not dignify him by mentioning his name until the very end of this brief account.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 211–236, gives a detailed legal analysis of every step in this brief but very significant development.

Alma 1:11–15 — Nehor Is Tried and Put to Death

Alma now faced a fourth challenge during the first year of assuming office as Chief Judge. Alma stood alone as the sole judge over Nehor’s case. Nehor had taken full

advantage of the new freedom of belief provided under the law by Mosiah. Nehor must have felt confident in his legal position. It appears that he did not resist arrest, for there is no mention that he was bound. This, however, was likely a case of first impression—the legal issue being what to do about someone introducing priestcraft into the community and where to draw the line between “belief” and “action.” Under the new reforms, a person could be punished for their actions, but not for what they believed.

Nehor defended himself. We are not told what arguments he made in his defense, but there were several issues he could have raised.

This left Alma faced with making a difficult legal decision. If Nehor were not convicted of a serious crime and was released back into the community, the people of the city of Gideon would feel that justice had not been served. The blood of an innocent man would cry out from the ground. In addition, Nehor would have felt emboldened, and where would that lead?

Alma was brilliant in how he decided the case. Notice that Nehor was not convicted of homicide. He was found guilty not only of priestcraft, but for enforcing priestcraft with a sword (Alma 1:12). Until very recently, priestcraft had been viewed as destructive in Nephite culture. However, as Nehor now saw it, exercising priestcraft was no longer a crime—to him it was simply expressing his beliefs. However, when Nehor tried to enforce his views with the sword, he took action and went beyond the simple expression of belief. Alma skillfully put those two facts together and essentially created a new composite crime—enforcing priestcraft with a sword. That was the crime for which Nehor was put to death. Alma did the right thing legally, politically, and religiously in pronouncing judgment against Nehor.

Alma’s decision also set legal precedent. Notice that dissidents continue in the first half of the book of Alma to argue and fight over the ideologies introduced by Nehor. However, they did not fight with swords.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Nehor Suffer an “Ignominious” Death?”](#) *KnoWhy* 108 (May 26, 2016).

Alma 1:21–23 — A Law against Contention

The aftermath of Nehor’s trial and death proved difficult. Alma, as High Priest over the church, attempted to reduce contention and promote peace, but the contention did not subside. A strict law was put in place for members of the church: “there should not any man, belonging to the church, arise and persecute those that did not belong to the church.” Furthermore, “there should be no persecution among themselves” (v. 21). Alma

saw enough contention going on. He taught church members to respond peacefully by implying, “We’re not going to contend. We will not fight back. We will not return evil for evil.”

Alma 1:26–28 — Alma Works to Build Equality in the Church

In these verses, we find three core values that Alma wanted emphasized and implemented in the church: (1) equal status and standing; (2) no slavery; and (3) equal substance imparted according to need.

Alma desired that the people in the church were accorded equal dignity and respect for one another. He didn’t want the preacher to be any better than the hearer, and he didn’t want the teacher to be any better than the learner. We all have different roles in society and serve in different positions in the Church, but no one is better than anyone else. Alma’s goals were diametrically opposed to those of Nehor, who wanted to see divisions and class distinctions among the people. Nehor was fighting essentially to bring back kings and aristocracies—classes of people who would not work because they would be supported by the people.

Alma’s position followed a deeply-rooted principle in ancient Israelite law. The ancient world was strewn with monarchical governments of kings, cultures with aristocrats, and societies built on the backs of slaves. However, the Israelites understood that God owned everyone. Every person was equal in God’s eyes. They were all slaves of God because he had bought them, delivering them out of bondage in Egypt. In other cultures, if you poked out the eye of an aristocrat, then you would get your eye poked out. However, if you, as an aristocrat, poked out the eye of a commoner, you’d only be required to pay him 15 shekels. Thus, under the legal systems of most ancient nations, there were distinctions in how justice was served, depending on the status and class of the persons involved. This, however, was not the case under ancient Israelite law where justice was administered and punishment was meted out equally among the people.

Significant is the fact that Alma would not allow members of the church to own or make slaves of one another. This was a principle that King Benjamin had implemented (Mosiah 2:13) and it was also a principle under ancient Israelite law which allowed servitude of one Hebrew by another but only for a limited time (Exodus 21:2).

Finally, Alma asked the people of the church to live a kind of united order. Remember, this was one of the covenants that Alma the Elder’s group made at the Waters of Mormon—“to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light” (Mosiah 18:8). In other words, members of the church were to take care of one another, so that they would all be equally able to serve God and do good.

A Comparison of Nephite Law Lists

Crimes Prohibited	2 Ne. 26:32	Mosiah 2:13	Alma 1:32	Alma 16:18	Alma 23:3	Alma 30:10	Hel. 3:14	Hel. 4:12	Hel. 6:23	Hel. 7:21	Ether 8:16	Ex. 20-23
Abominations							X					X
Adultery		X		X	X	X		X				X
Babbings			X									X
Confinement in dungeons		X										
Contentions	X							X				X
Costly apparel			X									X
Deceivings				X								X
Denying prophecy								X				X
Deserting								X				X
Envy	X		X	X								X
False witness										X		X
Idleness			X									X
Idolatry			X									X
Lasciviousness				X								X
Lying	X		X	X				X			X	X
Malice	X			X								X
Mocking the sacred								X			X	
Murder	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Taking name of God in vain	X											X
Oppressing poor								X				X
Persecuting			X									X
Plunder		X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Power mongering											X	
Pride			X					X				X
Revilings				X								X
Robbing			X	X		X	X					X
Seeking riches		X						X		X		X
Slavery		X										X
Smiting weak								X				X
Sorceries			X									X
Stealing	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X
Strife			X	X								X
Whoredoms	X		X				X		X		X	X
Wickedness		X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Withholding food								X				
Withholding clothing								X				

Figure 2 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "A Comparison of Nephite Law Lists," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 127.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “*The Law of Mosiah*,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1992), 158–161.

Alma 1:24–25, 32–33 — Many Saints Leave the Church Because of Their Sins

Alma faced a fifth crisis in his early years as High Priest. Intense difficulty arose from people defecting and “many withdrew” from the church because of their iniquity. During this precarious time, Alma’s attitude reflected in this record was exemplary. Instead of focusing on the negative, Alma chose to count his blessings, noting that “those that did stand fast in the faith . . . were steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of God,” quoting Lehi’s words in 1 Nephi 2:10. He also expressed gratitude that the people who remained in the church “bore with patience the persecution which was heaped upon them” (Alma 1:25), as Alma will later commend his own son Shiblon for enduring with patience being placed in bonds and being stoned for the word’s sake (Alma 38:3–4). But the land of Zarahemla became more secular, and things began to fall apart. Prior to Mosiah’s reforms and before the people of Zarahemla were given freedom of belief and accountability for their sins, the long list of vices found in verse 32 had not been so prevalent in Alma’s world. People don’t always make appropriate choices when given freedom. Alma responded with appropriate law enforcement. If someone broke the law, then the law was enforced. Lists of laws appear on several occasions in the Book of Mormon (Figure 2). This list in Alma 1:32 and the similar list in Helaman 4:12 are the longest. Interestingly, these lists compare fairly closely with the provisions set forth in the Code of the Covenant in Exodus 21–22, showing another way in which Nephite law was consistently grounded in the basics of the Law of Moses.

Further Reading

Rex C. Reeve, Jr., “*Dealing with Opposition to the Church*,” in *Alma, The Testimony of the Word*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 6, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 15–25.

Alma 2

Alma 2:2 — Succession: A Primary Cause of Warfare in the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon records frequent warfare, and it is sometimes difficult to understand why these wars started. Comparing descriptions of events leading up to war

in the Book of Mormon with other historical war accounts suggests that one possible cause of contention involved people trying to take advantage of transitions that occurred at the death of a powerful figure. For example, continual crises and wars occurred just about every time a powerful Roman general or leader was killed throughout the decades of Roman civil wars. Naturally, wars happened at transition points like this in the Book of Mormon as well.

The first chapter of Alma explains what happened shortly after the death of the great leader and king, Mosiah, and very soon after the implementation of a radical new form of government where Nephite kingship was replaced by a form of democracy with judges chosen by the people. During Alma's first year as chief judge, a man named Nehor rose against Alma and the church. Nehor's opposition did not immediately lead to war, but by the fifth year of the reign of judges, the movement Nehor started led to a full-fledged war when the Lamanites supported Amlici in his attack against the Nephites.

Wars happened at other transition points in the Book of Mormon as seen in later war narratives. For example, many of the Lamanites converted to Christianity through the preaching of Ammon and his companions. "[T]he Amalekites and the Amulonites and the Lamanites who . . . had not been converted and had not taken upon them the name of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, were stirred up by the Amalekites and by the Amulonites to anger against their brethren" (Alma 24:1). Those joining in the rebellion did not like who was appointed king. Significantly, the timing of this war happened around a time of transition from one king to the next. Alma 24:3–4 explains, "Now the king conferred the kingdom upon his son, and he called his name Anti-Nephi-Lehi. And the king died in that selfsame year that the Lamanites began to make preparations for war against the people of God." The fact that an inexperienced king sat on the Lamanite throne may well have been a contributing factor in the commencement of this war.

Again, in Helaman 1:2, another succession crisis ensued when Pahoran died and Pahoran's sons contended for the judgeship. When Pahoran's son took office, Kishkumen assassinated the chief judge and the Lamanites took advantage of the chaos to invade Nephite territory.

One further example of war breaking out during a succession of power is described in Alma 45:19–20 and 46:1–3. This occurred when Helaman took over after the death or disappearance of his father, Alma. History was repeated when Amalickiah took advantage of the uncertainty caused by Alma's death to rise up against the less experienced Helaman.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“What Was One of the Main Causes of Warfare in the Book of Mormon?”](#) *KnoWhy* 523 (July 5, 2019).

Alma 2:1–7 — Amlici Seeks to Be King

Soon after Alma had dealt with the matter of Nehor, he faced another crisis—an even more disruptive event. A follower of Nehor, a man named Amlici, convinced a large number of rebels that democracy by the people’s choice of judges wasn’t working and that kingship should be restored. Amlici put himself forward as the choice for king. This happened during Alma’s fifth year as chief judge.

Who was Amlici and why would he be able to persuasively convince a large number of people that he should be king? In Hebrew, the written language does not have vowels. Therefore, (m-l-k), (m-li-ki) and (ma-lik) are based on the same root word in Hebrew, meaning “king.” Mu-lek may also have the same meaning of “king.” This leads to the linguistic possibility that “Mulekites” were “king-ites” and were among the “king men.”

Similarly, by removing the vowels in the word “Amlici,” we are left with (m-l-c) or “king.” Was Amlici a Mulekite? He certainly was a king-ite by ideology and his name reflects his desire and political platform. If Amlici was a Mulekite, he may well have been a descendant of King Zarahemla with a legitimate claim to be king because of his lineage. This may be why Amlici was able to convince many people that he had the right to be king and that he should be king.

The question as to whether Amlici should be king was put to a vote before the people. In effect, Amlici ran for the office of king and he lost. However, instead of the voice of the people settling the matter, Amlici gathered an army and made war against the Nephites.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Should Readers Pay Close Attention to the Mulekites? \(Omni 1:19\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 434 (May 17, 2018).

Alma 2:9–38 — The Amlicites and Lamanites War against the Nephites

Once again, Alma faced a very grave crisis. This time Alma and his people were forced into a war. Undoubtedly, the decision to go to war caused Alma deep agony of thought. Such a decision leads to the death of many people. How many died? Alma and his men killed 12,532 people who were followers of Amlici, and 6,562 of Alma’s men died in battle. Over 19,000 people died as a result of this war, and that count didn’t include any women and children. When the men came home from the battlefield, their women, children, and animals had been slaughtered (Alma 3:2). Why the animals? Soldiers need

the food. Pillaging and plundering happens during wartime because soldiers are hungry and need to be fed.

The Amlicite death toll included Lamanites who had come forward and formed an alliance with the Amlicites. The alliance was formed in the fifth year of Alma's reign as judge. Where did those Lamanites come from? They came from the Land of Nephi. The four sons of Mosiah had recently arrived in the Land of Nephi to do missionary work among the Lamanites, and they were not particularly well-received there. In fact, these missionaries were put in prison.

The Lamanites living in the Land of Nephi may have questioned why Nephites were entering their territory and trying to influence their culture—eventually taking a group of their people (Ammonites) away. The four sons of Mosiah, desiring to do good, may have created a dynamic that caused the Lamanites grave concerns that led to their decision to join forces with the Amlicites against the Nephites. This dynamic is not directly put together for us in the Book of Mormon, but something like it was probably an underlying factor in the Amlicite-Lamanite alliance.

Alma 2:11 — Are the Amlicites and Amalekites Related?

Readers are introduced to Amlici in Alma 2, where he appears among the Nephites seeking to be their king. Amlici's ideology was similar to that of Nehor. He gathered many followers, called "Amlicites," and incited them in armed conflict with the Nephites. The Amlicites then formed an allegiance with the Lamanites to continue in their war against the Nephites. During battle, Amlici was slain in one-on-one, hand-to-hand combat with Alma. At this point in the record, the Amlicites seem to completely disappear from the Book of Mormon narrative.

However, later during Aaron's missionary work among the Lamanites, he teaches a group of people called "Amalekites." There is no introduction or explanation in the record as to the origins of the Amalekite people. Like the Amlicites, the Amalekites shared ideological connections to Nehor and were later listed as Nephite dissenters.

Many scholars have concluded that these two groups—Amlicites and Amalekites—are one and the same people. This conclusion is buttressed by Royal Skousen's work with the Original and Printer's Manuscripts of the Book of Mormon. The "Amlicites" are first mentioned in the Printer's Manuscript, with the word being spelled "Amlikites," indicating that both "Amlici" and "Amlicites" may have been pronounced using a hard "c" rather than a soft "c."

In addition, the earliest surviving references to the Amalekites in the original manuscript are spelled "Amelicites." The spelling for "Amelicites" differs from the

spelling for “Amlicites” by the addition of only one “e,” with the resultant addition of another syllable in the word (making a total of four syllables)—the same number of syllables in the word “Amalekites.” Skousen felt that the similarity in spellings in the Book of Mormon manuscripts strongly supports the conclusion that the Amalekites were followers of Amlici and the same people as the Amlicites. Furthermore, both the Amlicites and Amalekites are described as having ideological connections to Nehor with similar goals. Both groups were religious dissidents who desired a return to a monarchal form of government.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“How Were the Amlicites and Amalekites Related?”](#) *KnoWhy* 109 (May 27, 2016).

Alma 3

Alma 3:4–11, 18 — Nephite-Lamanite Intermarriage Discouraged

At this point in Nephite history, strife between Nephites, Lamanites, and Amlicites became so severe that war broke out. Mormon took this occasion to explain how the warriors were able to distinguish themselves from one another in battle. Similar to the red coats worn by the British army and the blue coats worn by the French to distinguish them in battle, the Lamanites and their allies, the Amlicites, marked themselves: “[T]he Amlicites were distinguished from the Nephites, for they had marked themselves with red in their foreheads after the manner of the Lamanites.” In addition, the Lamanites shaved the hair on their heads, but the Amlicites chose not to shave their heads. Verse 5 explains that the Lamanites were naked except for a skin which girded their loins. The next verse states, “[A]nd the skins of the Lamanites were dark.”

Mormon explained that a mark was set upon the Lamanites “that their seed might be distinguished from the seed of their brethren, that thereby the Lord God might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.” The Nephites were generally discouraged from intermarriage with the Lamanites. However, as verse 11 states, “[W]hosover would not believe in the tradition of the Lamanites, but believed . . . in the commandments of God and kept them, were called the Nephites, or the people of Nephi, from that time forth.”

Alma 3 is often cited as evidence of racism in the Book of Mormon. However, when reading ancient historical texts, such as the Book of Mormon, it is absolutely essential not to impose modern ideas of race and cultural identity onto the people of the past.

There are several explanations for the mark or curse of the Lamanites—other than racism—when reading this chapter in its entirety.

Remember that the setting for these verses was at a time when the Nephites, Lamanites, and Amlicites were involved in bloody battles against one another. At time of war, it may have been unthinkable to marry someone who is or has viciously fought against you and your people. In fact, this may have been viewed as an act of treason.

Additionally, Mormon appears to couch the issue of the Lamanite curse in terms of religious and cultural identity, not merely skin pigmentation. He records that any person who was “led away by the Lamanites” had the same “mark set upon him.” On the other hand, “whosoever would not believe in the tradition of the Lamanites . . . were called the Nephites, or the people of Nephi.” Therefore, the curse of the Lamanites included the ultimate outcome that they would believe “in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.” There was concern that introducing incorrect traditions and beliefs in the Nephite community by intermarriage could result in the destruction of the Nephite nation as well. These things were done to preserve a nation of people who believed in God and his commandments and had nothing to do with what we would call racism.

When chapter 3 is read in its entirety, it becomes apparent that there may be another explanation for the dark “skins” in question. The dark “skins” were possibly animal skins worn as symbolic clothing, not their normal flesh. This is seen in Mormon’s apparent description of the “skins” being garments worn by the Lamanites. In this sense, the Lamanites and Amlicites were distinguishing themselves by the things *they* chose to wear or put upon themselves. Thinking they were marking themselves courageously, they unwittingly marked themselves in a way that signaled that they had come out in rebellion, not against their political opponents but against God. Verse 11 explains, “Now the Amlicites knew not that they were fulfilling the words of God when they began to mark themselves in their foreheads [with red markings]; nevertheless they had come out in open rebellion against God; therefore it was expedient that the curse [of separation from God] should fall upon them.”

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Book of Mormon Prophets Discourage Nephite-Lamanite Intermarriage?”](#) *KnoWhy* 110 (May 30, 2016).

Alma 4

Alma 4:20 — Examples of Righteous Missionaries

Back in Mosiah 28:1–10, the sons of Mosiah gave up power, privilege, and comfortable surroundings in order to preach the gospel. Each of them declined to become the next Nephite king and, instead, risked their lives to teach among the Lamanites. Similarly, while serving as the Chief Judge among the Nephites, Alma saw that the Church was starting to slip seriously into pride and iniquity. In response, he “delivered up the judgment-seat to Nephihah” and “confined himself wholly . . . to the testimony of the word, according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy” (Alma 4:18, 20).

The accounts of missionary service in the Book of Mormon, largely contained in the book of Alma, provide important examples of faith and righteousness. Just like the missionaries in the Book of Mormon, today’s missionaries make real and burdensome sacrifices as they respond to the prophet’s call to serve. This may mean giving up an academic or sports scholarship, postponing educational or career opportunities, or leaving behind family members in times of financial or emotional strain. Whatever the sacrifice, the Lord will always bless those who faithfully serve. The act of submitting papers to serve a mission and then accepting the call to serve in a specific area of the mission field is a great act of faith on the part of every missionary. The young proselyting missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints do not choose where they serve. They go not knowing beforehand where they may be sent and what they may be asked to do—much like Alma and the sons of Mosiah.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“How Does the Book of Mormon Prepare Missionaries to Sacrifice, Serve, and Preach?”](#) *KnoWhy* 333 (June 30, 2017).

ALMA 5–7

John W. Welch Notes



Alma 5

Alma 5:1 — The Historical Setting

If you count the years between King Benjamin’s speech in Mosiah 2–6 and Alma’s speech in Alma 5, there were 42 years, which makes the year of the speech, not so coincidentally, to be the sixth Sabbatical year after Mosiah had become king, then ruled for 33 years (Mosiah 29:46), and Alma then spoke at the beginning of the 9th year of the reign of judges (Alma 4:11, 20). The ancient Israelites had not only the seven-day week, but they had a seven-year cycle for agricultural purposes and also for covenant renewal. At the end of Deuteronomy in 31:10–11, one of the last things Moses said to the children of Israel was that once every seven years they needed to gather all the men, women, and children, in a Feast of the Tabernacles, “in which thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing.” So, the ninth year of the judges was year 42 from Benjamin’s Speech, which itself may have been given during a sabbatical or jubilee year. Thus, Alma and his people would have been observing a covenant renewal, hearing the law and reflecting again on how they could best be keeping their obligations as God’s covenant people. And so, Alma’s great speech was most likely given on a special occasion.

Appropriately, Alma gave this in Zarahemla, the same place where Benjamin had given his covenant speech as well. Many of the themes found in Benjamin’s speech are right here in Alma 5 too. The few themes that are not here have been superseded by the fact that they have a new regime of government, and Alma is speaking as the High Priest, not as the Chief Judge, let alone as a king. The setting of Alma 5 also must have included the seating of the new Chief Judge, Nephihah. We do not hear his inaugural speech. He

must have accepted the responsibility, and the voice of the people would have sustained that action, and thus some ceremonies were probably involved. But all that we hear of that occasion are the words of Alma. After all, it is Alma's book that we have, and this is Alma's record of his own words. Covenant renewal was on his mind, and there had been no more powerful, prophetic, and governmental manifesto in Nephite history than Benjamin's speech. It is alluded to here as the basis of the Nephites' understanding of their covenant obligations, their theology, and their understanding of themselves, individually and as a people.

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma's Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), 3: "Because the Book of Mormon tells us the original setting and purpose of this speech, we can confidently understand and interpret its words in context. It is not a philosophical discourse. It is not an esoteric or abstract treatise. It was delivered as ecclesiastic instruction from the highest priesthood leader of the Church. It was aimed at unifying and regulating the whole body of the Church by inspiring and enabling the righteousness and worthiness of each individual member. It is through that lens that Alma 5 can most authentically and effectively be read and applied today."

Szink, Terrence L., and John W. Welch. "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals." In *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"*, edited by John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, 147–223. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998.

Alma 5:1 — The Wisdom of Reading the Law

Reading the law is a good policy. In America and in the world generally, we send people to Congress, Parliament, and other governing institutions, and they enact many laws—so many that we have whole law libraries, and we sometimes have trouble figuring out what the laws are. One thing that would help law enforcement and civil obedience would be if there were better general understandings of the law among all people. I suppose nobody may want to listen to the Internal Revenue Code read out loud once every seven years, but there are other parts of the law that are generally applicable and universally important. At least the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and a few other things would be nice to read or hear read every seven years. It would become a kind of ritual, a renewal, a recommitment, and people would know the law. If you do not know the law, you have less chance of keeping it all the time. The Nephites were wise enough to read and renew the covenant character of their law. They tell us that they were strict in observing the Law of Moses, and doing this was part of the Law of Moses.

Alma 5:1 — Renewing Their Covenants

Once every seven years, besides reading the law, Israelites would renew their covenants. After they heard the Law of Moses, they would then “choose ye this day” as they did when Joshua had all of Israel together for their covenant renewal at the end of Joshua’s life (Joshua 24:15). Indeed, we will see those same words, “choose ye this day,” seven years later, in the eighteenth year of the reign of judges, which is the fiftieth year from Benjamin’s covenant, in Alma 30:8, where those very covenant words were quoted.

Other indications of covenant renewal are found in places where Alma drew on Benjamin’s speech in this covenant connection. As the names were recorded in the book of Numbers, Benjamin recorded the names of his covenant people in Mosiah 6:1. The names of Alma’s covenant people were likewise recorded in the official’s book of life (Alma 5:58). What did Benjamin say would happen if they were wicked? Their names would be blotted out (Mosiah 5:11). The same idea appears in Alma 5:57. Alma then assures his people that “if a ravenous wolf comes in...” the Good Shepherd will protect the flock (Alma 5:59–60). Benjamin had also talked about his people being in the flock and knowing the voice of the master to whom they belong, and if you do not enter into the covenant and keep the covenant, you will be driven out (Mosiah 5:14). This is Benjamin’s and Alma’s way of reminding people of the importance of being faithful and of remembering the name (Alma 5:38).

Alma 5:1 — Delivering the Word of God to Several Different Audiences

“Now it came to pass that Alma began to deliver the word of God unto the people first in Zarahemla and thence throughout all the land.” Alma did not give this same speech everywhere he went, but he delivered the word of God at each location. He referred to his obligation to cry repentance and preach the coming of Christ as a duty under the holy order of the Son of God—in other words, a priesthood responsibility. He went on to speak for this same purpose in Gideon (6:7), in Melek (8:3), and probably elsewhere as well.

As he spoke in Zarahemla in Alma 5, he was speaking to a somewhat ambivalent audience. There was a dilemma there, even an “awful dilemma” (Alma 7:3). There were some people who were righteous and very good, and some people who were not. In Gideon, however, he was speaking to a very righteous audience. Then the next place he went to was Ammonihah. So there was a wide range of people and audiences to whom he spoke. While the bottom-line message to each was very similar, the way he delivered it, how he talked, and what points he emphasized in each case were very different. As he delivered the word of God throughout all the land, he adapted his teachings and testimony to various needs and circumstances while he kept the core message the same.

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma's Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), 2: "For at least twenty-five years, Alma spoke to countless people, teaching the doctrines of Christ and preaching repentance. He spoke encouragingly about the Atonement of Christ to the righteous people in Gideon. He called the wicked people in Ammonihah to repentance and deliverance, and in a last-ditch effort to turn them away from their Nehorite ways, Alma spoke to them urgently about spiritual death, probation, and the plan of redemption, followed by his testimony about the high priesthood after the holy order of the Son of God."

Alma 5:2, 21–23 — The Condition of the People of Zarahemla.

By the time Alma spoke to his people in chapter 5, the people of Zarahemla had strayed quite a bit, as evidenced by Alma's later speech to the people of Gideon. In Alma 7:3–5 he compared the righteousness of the people of Gideon to "the awful dilemma that our brethren were in at Zarahemla." In Alma 4, he spoke of contentions, pride, and wickedness entering into the church, and in chapter 5, he told the people of Zarahemla to repent.

In verse 21, he said, "Ye cannot be saved, except your garments are washed white," so presumably, not all their garments were white yet. In verse 23, he called at least some of them murderers, and said they were guilty of all manner of wickedness.

It seems as though there were a lot of people sitting on the fence in Zarahemla. The population was not as cohesive as it had been 42 years earlier under Benjamin, and Alma sought to get back to that kind of unity, to find some way to get people all back together again.

Alma 5:3–59 — Alma's Greatest Public Speech

I have called Alma 5 Alma's greatest public speech. Do you think that is an apt description of this talk after reading it several times? What makes it great? What struck you about it?

He called everybody to repentance. He called them to examine their activities and how they lived, but what was great about the way he called them to do that? He makes us think about our lives. He did not just say, "Here is the list," he really brought the listeners into the process.

He asks a lot of questions, but only answers some of them. Why does he not answer all of them? Remember that they had created this new system of equality. The people were

equally accountable and responsible. Do you think Alma is making people accountable and responsible by these questions that he leaves open-ended?

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma's Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), 2: "Alma tried to do all he could to reclaim his people from straying from the covenant path. Alma 5 records what is, for many reasons, Alma's greatest public speech. That's quite a statement; this is a prophet who taught and prophesied and preached repentance for somewhere between two and three decades." (See chapter 1, "Introducing Alma's Greatest Speech.")

Book of Mormon Central "[Why Did Alma Ask Church Members Fifty Probing Questions?](#)" *KnoWhy* 112 (June 1, 2016).

Alma 5:3–59 — Was Alma's Speech Spontaneous or Prepared in Advance?

think Alma prepared his speech in advance. At the very least, if he did not, he would have caused it to be written down afterwards. It is possible he had scribes recording his words since he was the presiding high priest, just as King Benjamin had his speech recorded. Alma was also the current record keeper, so he knew the value and the importance of keeping records. There will not be in the Book of Mormon another speaker like Alma.

We have—as we encounter, Alma 5, Alma 7, Alma 9, 12, 13 to Alma 30, 32, 33—the words of Alma speaking 21 chapters of original material. This is impressive, and maybe his lawyering and recordkeeping combined to help him. He was very, very conscientious as a record keeper, and I think he wrote these speeches himself. I do not think he had a ghostwriter doing it. We do not know how much of this was said to him by the spirit. He may have had an outline. He may have had some ideas. He may have also given talks like this in smaller settings. Then he unleashed a lot of questions.

I think he sensed that the people of Zarahemla were a very tricky audience to work with. He knew that they were in a dilemma (Alma 7:3), and so he certainly came prepared. One of the things about teaching with the spirit, is that we tend to over-prepare, but we know that the Lord is not going to prompt us to use everything that we have prepared. Alma may have had a hundred questions, and then these are the fifty that he ended up using. Fifty may be just a coincidental number. He is keeping the large plates—the small plates are full—and every year he is putting some kind of a record in as to what he did. If he was writing on metal, you know he would have wanted to inscribe very carefully. By that time, he had probably polished it to have the speech the way he would have

wanted it to go down for eternity. It is interesting to think about how that all might have come about.

It is also interesting that Mormon chose to include this speech in Alma's own words. It does not appear that he abridged Alma's inaugural speech as High Priest. Like King Benjamin's speech, Alma 5 is a jewel. It stands the tests of time.

Alma 5:3–59 — Teaching with the Spirit

One of the most important things we try to do in the Church, no matter where we are called to serve, is to teach with the Spirit. Do you think that Alma spoke with the Spirit on this occasion? What was it about his sermon that conveyed that Spirit effectively? Did you learn anything about how to speak with the Spirit from the way in which Alma delivered his message? For one thing, he told his audience that he was speaking under the influence of the Spirit. In Alma 5:50–61, Alma said "the spirit sayeth unto me." That may have been something he was feeling right then, as inspiration. He was certainly open to that. Or perhaps the Spirit told him those things while he was preparing this speech. When King Benjamin reported what the angel had said to him, he stated that sometime prior to his speech an angel had awoken him from his sleep, and then he delivered that message as he had received it (Mosiah 3:2).

Alma 5:3–12 — Prologue

Alma began by reviewing past blessings. The past is a good way to teach with the spirit since it built on their common traditions and blessings from God. Using the past as his springboard, he taught simple principles and progressed to more complicated ones. He walked them through a problem and gave a solution, and showed where choices would inevitably lead one way or another. It is logically constructed, guided by and leading to the influence of the spirit.

Alma 5:5–59 — Alma's Questions

Alma asked fifty questions in this speech, split into 8 main groups of questions (see Figures 1, 2, 3, 4). To determine the number of questions in Alma's speech, you cannot simply count the question marks, because sometimes there are compound questions, and because the questions marks were inserted later by the typesetter of the Book of Mormon. When the Book of Mormon was translated, Oliver

Cowdery, and whoever happened to be the scribe on some of the later parts, wrote word for word, without punctuation. The original manuscripts of the Book of Mormon had no periods, no commas, no question marks, no dashes, and hardly any capital letters; it was just a steady stream of words. One of the young men working in Grandin's print shop

50 Questions of Alma 5

Questions 1-17

Question	Verse
Remembering God's Acts for His People	
1. Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers?	6
2. Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance God's mercy and long-suffering towards your fathers?	
3. Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell?	
4. Were your fathers destroyed?	8
5. Were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled your fathers about, were they loosed?	9
Knowing the Essential Logic of the Gospel	
6. On what conditions were your fathers saved?	10
7. On what grounds had they to hope for salvation?	
8. What is the cause of your fathers' being loosed from the bands of death, yea, and also the chains of hell?	
9. Did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi?	11
10. Was Abinadi not a holy prophet?	
11. Did Abinadi not speak the words of God?	
12. Did my father Alma believe them?	
Being Personally Converted	
13. Have you spiritually been born of God?	14
14. Have you received his image in your countenance?	
15. Have you experienced this mighty change in your heart?	
16. Do you exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you?	15
17. Do you look forward with an eye of faith?	

50 Questions of Alma 5

Questions 18–29

Question	Imagining the Judgment Day	Verse
18.	Do you view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?	15
19.	Can you imagine to yourself that you hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me you blessed, for behold your works have been works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?	16
20.	Or do you imagine to yourself that you can lie unto the Lord in that day, and say—Lord, my works have been righteous works upon the face of the earth—and that he will save you?	17
21.	Or otherwise, can you imagine yourself brought before the tribunal of God with your soul filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your guilt, yea, a perfect remembrance of all your wickedness, yea, a remembrance that you have set at defiance the commandments of God?	18
22.	Can you look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands?	19
23.	Can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenance?	
24.	Can you think of being saved when you have yielded yourself to become subject to the devil?	20
25.	How will you feel if you shall stand before the bar of God, having your garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness?	22
26.	What will these things testify against you?	
27.	Will they not testify that you are a murderer?	23
28.	Will they not also testify that you are guilty of all manner of wickedness?	
29.	Do you suppose that such an one can have a place to sit down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and also all the holy prophets, whose garments are cleansed and are spotless, pure and white?	24

50 Questions of Alma 5

Questions 30-40

Question		Verse
Assessing One's Spiritual Condition		
30. If you have experienced a change of heart, and if you have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, can you feel so now?		26
31. Have you walked, keeping yourself blameless before God?		27
32. Could you say, if you were called to die at this time, within yourself, that you have been sufficiently humble?		
33. Could you say that your garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ?		
34. Are you stripped of pride?		28
35. Is there one among you who is not stripped of envy?		29
36. Is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?		30
Identifying with a "Fold"		
37. If you are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are you?		39
38. The devil is your shepherd, and you are of his fold; and now who can deny this?		
Obtaining Spiritual Knowledge		
39. Do you not suppose that I know of these things myself?		45
40. How do you suppose that I know of their surety?		45

50 Questions of Alma 5

Questions 41–50

Questions	Refusing to Repent	Verse
41. Can you withstand these sayings?		53
42. Can you lay aside these things and trample the Holy One under your feet?		
43. Can you be puffed up in the pride of your heart?		
44. Will you still persist in the wearing of costly apparel and setting your heart upon the vain things of the world, upon your riches?		
45. Will you persist in supposing that you are better than another?		54
46. Will you persist in the persecution of your brethren, who humble themselves and do walk after the holy order of God, wherewith they have been brought into this church having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and they do bring forth works which are meet for repentance?		
47. Will you persist in turning your back upon the poor and the needy, and in withholding your substance from them?		55
48. The names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life, and unto them will I grant an inheritance at my right hand. What have you to say against this?		58
49. What shepherd is there having many sheep doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock?		59
50. If a wolf enter his flock doth the shepherd not drive him out?		

Figure 1, 2, 3, 4 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "50 Questions of Alma 5," in Charting the Book of Mormon, charts 62-65.

punctuated the Book of Mormon, so the number of question marks is not a reliable way to count the questions.

Punctuation marks are an invention of the middle ages. No ancient manuscript has any punctuation, so for example, when you look at the Dead Sea Scrolls, you would notice that they are just a steady stream of words, and the older ones do not even put spaces between the words. When we speak, we just speak in a steady line, and if you know where the words break, you can follow it. But we do not stop between each word when we speak, and so the very early writings do not even break between the words. That is enough to say that we have a little bit of flexibility in counting how many questions there are.

Why do you think he asked so many questions? How do you answer each of these questions? How can you apply his questions to your daily life?

- What questions does he ask about remembering God's acts for his people? (5:6-9)
- What questions does he ask about knowing the essentials of the Gospel? (5:10-11)
- What questions does he ask about being personally converted? (5:14-15)
- What questions does he ask about imagining the judgment day? (5:15-24)
- What questions does he ask about assessing one's spiritual condition? (5:26-30)
- What questions does he ask about identifying with one fold or another? (5:39)
- What questions does he ask about obtaining spiritual knowledge? (5:45)
- What questions does he ask about refusing to repent? (5:53-59)

Alma 5:5-59 — Alma Asks Questions to Share His Message Effectively

Remember that one of the things that everyone had to do during the Feast of Tabernacle season was to confess, so these questions that Alma was asking may have had something to do with helping people to be introspective, to repent, to recognize what they needed to do as a part of preparing themselves for the covenant to be renewed. This was so that the Day of Atonement could be celebrated properly, so that the blood of the sacrifice would purify and cleanse everyone and wash their garments clean. Are those all phrases in Alma 5? You bet. So, in Alma 5, again we are going to another level of why it is a great speech. It taps into all of the really fundamental concepts of ancient Israelite religion, the revealed law that they were living (and supposed to be) keeping. Indeed, it taps into the Law of Moses as revealed by Moses.

Moreover, Alma's questions were drawn directly from his experiences. He knew what he was talking about. Another way that we teach with the Spirit is when we talk about things that we "know whereof we speak." When he asked "have you had his image on your countenance?" or when he asked about being born of God, he had experience in

these areas. He asked about being born again, and undoubtedly as people heard him asking those questions, they knew and accepted what he was saying because they knew his story. They had probably heard it many times and they knew how sincere he was about these things.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central "[Why Did Alma Ask Church Members Fifty Probing Questions?](#)" *KnoWhy* 112 (June 1, 2016)

Alma 5:5–59 — If One Deletes All the Questions, What Remains of This Speech?

In a way this is a humorous question, but it helps readers to focus on what Alma affirmatively declared, proclaimed, or testified of in this great speech. What is left are *words of testimony*. He did not leave people wondering.

I marked in my Book of Mormon, highlighting the things that Alma testified of. You might want to do that. For example, he certainly declared, not in a questioning mode, when he said, "I, Alma, having been consecrated by my father Alma to be a high priest over the church of God, he having power and authority from God" (5:3). He declared that unequivocally. He did not say, "Who has any authority around here?" Then, in verse 4, he said, "Behold I say unto you, they were delivered out of the hands of the people of King Noah by the mercy and power of God." He testified of that.

So, it is important to imagine hearing these words aloud. They were meant to be listened to. If you don't hear them as strong assertions or as drawn out questions, it is easy to click past all these questions and declarations without really letting them sink in. But imagine the inflections, the intonations, and listen for the cadence of this great speech.

Alma 5:5–59 — Strategic Pauses

Was there a strategic pause after these questions? When he said, "Can you imagine yourselves that ye hear the voice of God saying unto you in that day, come unto me ye blessed?" (Alma 5:16), did he just let that hang for a few seconds? Or, "Do you imagine to yourself that you can lie unto God in that day? And say Lord, our works have been works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?" (17). Did he then let that sink in just a little?

There are some very poignant moments of silence in scripture. For example, when the voice of God was heard from heaven and Christ descended at the temple at Bountiful, everyone awaited profoundly silent. Just imagine how that silence would be; nobody dared to say anything. They were frozen with anticipation and wonder at what had happened. Silence can be very powerful. Sometimes, conveying the spirit requires not talking as much and letting people ponder.

There are other techniques Alma used. For example, many of Alma's testimony statements began with the word *behold*. Look at verse 13, "And *behold*, he preached the word unto your fathers and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts and therefore they were saved." That is a clear statement of testimony. This is not hypothetical. When Alma said he was bearing down in testimony, he certainly was.

Further Reading

Jon D. Green, "The Paradox of Silence in the Arts and Religion," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1995-1996): 94-131.

Alma 5:6-9 — Remembering God's Acts for His People

The first five questions asked the audience if they could remember God's great acts for his people, their heritage, and God's deliverance. I like the way Alma asked these questions in a kind of lawyerly way, with some nice qualifiers. He didn't only ask if they had remembered; he asked if they had "*sufficiently* remembered."

Have we remembered enough? Have we remembered sufficiently the captivity, or the problems that Joseph Smith faced, or that our ancestors were plagued with as they came to settle this valley?

In verse 9, he asked, "Were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled your fathers about, were they loosed?" Do you think God acted in their lives? Do we even know enough about our ancestors, about our heritage, to answer that question?

Each of the first three questions begins with the phrase, "Have you sufficiently retained *in remembrance*...." In Hebrew, the word for remember is *zchr*, and it does not just mean to remember in the sense of *recalling*. It means to remember in the sense of *obeying*. When your mother said, "Remember what I have taught you," she wasn't asking if you could pass a recall test. When she said "Remember it," she meant, "Do what I have taught you." And that is what we see in the Book of Mormon. The word *remember* does not just mean *to think about it*, but *to do it*.

In the fourth question, Alma asked, "Were your fathers destroyed?" They were not. They were delivered from captivity. Perhaps Alma's people were worried about being destroyed; Zarahemla was not impervious to attack. Just a few years before this speech there had been a bloody civil war. The Lamanites were just now beginning to put pressure on the Nephites again. Perhaps Alma sought to put his people's minds at peace so that they knew that they could rely on God.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Does Abinadi Use the Phrase 'the Bands of Death'? (Mosiah 15:8)," *KnoWhy* 93 (May 5, 2016).

Louis Midgley, "The Ways of Remembrance," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 168–176.

Louis Midgley, "'O Man, Remember, and Perish Not' (Mosiah 4:30)," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 127–129.

Alma 5:10–11 — Knowing the Essential Logic of the Gospel

In verses 10 to 11, Alma asked seven more questions. He took his audience through them—again, in kind of a lawyerly way—in an ordered step by step process of understanding some of the most basic principles of the gospel.

"What was *the cause* of your fathers being loosed?" (5:10). He was asking about the conditions, about the cause and effect of spiritual blessings. We need to think about that too. Part of the essential logic of the gospel is that there are consequences. Because of that, we can rely on certain outcomes, and we can therefore have hope. Alma did not stop and explain here, but he was not just asking his people to think on what conditions those others were saved. Of course, he wants us to be thinking and asking ourselves, on what conditions will I be saved?

Does God require us to hope for things that are without foundation? No. True faith is believing in things that are true, and we have a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). And that understanding is the next thing that we learn from thinking about these conditions. On what *grounds* did they have hope for salvation? That God will come into their lives, and will cause them to be loosed from the bands of death and of hell. That happens when Satan is driven out of our lives. That is the next step in Alma's instructions.

In question nine, Alma asked, "Did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered from the mouth of Abinadi?" (5:11). They were expected to believe the words of the prophet. Not only to believe the words—the next question was, "Was Abinadi not a *holy* prophet?" We also must not only believe that he was a prophet and believe in his words, but we also must believe in his holy calling as an authorized messenger and agent of God who would deliver those blessings.

Question number eleven, the sixth question in this set, is, “Did Abinadi not speak the words of God?” (5:11). No one in that audience was going to doubt that Abinadi spoke the words of God; they saw his prophecies fulfilled, thus defining him as a true prophet. They would have known the law about prophets in Deuteronomy 18:21 asks how one may know a true prophet from a false one, “And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken?” The key for knowing is then provided, “When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that *is* the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, *but* the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him” (Deut. 18:22).

In Alma’s audience on this solemn occasion were still some of the people who followed Alma’s father as they fled from King Noah. In this audience also were people who had come from the city of Nephi with Limhi. They and everyone there knew these stories, and all of them would have to agree that Abinadi was a true prophet.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does Prophecy Shape the Book of Mormon’s Content and Structure?](#) (Words of Mormon 1:4),” *KnoWhy* 498 (January 15, 2019).

Alma 5:14–15 — Being Personally Converted

The next five questions dealt with being personally converted. We each have to be personally converted; this is where the importance of every single person embracing the gospel comes into play. These are the questions that I am sure hit many of you as they did me. First in this set Alma asked, “Have you been spiritually born of God?” Second, “Have you received his image in your countenance?” and third, “Have you experienced this mighty change in your heart?” (5:14). Benjamin also mentioned a mighty change in the heart, in Mosiah 5:2 when the people fell down and said, “We have experienced this mighty change of heart.” All these questions were asked so that Alma can then testify of the things that he wants them to know and to believe. He wants to get us thinking, and believing, and changing!

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma’s Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), 19: “Of the life-altering questions posed by Alma, those touching on three specific topics seem particularly connected: repentance, conversion, and a mighty change of heart. As we ponder, ... we are led to ask questions of our own: Which comes first in this mighty trifecta?”

Alma 5:15–24 — Imagining the Day of Judgement

The eleven questions that start in verse 15 and go to verse 24, ask, “Can you imagine the judgment day?” Do we often imagine what it will be like when we stand before God to be accounted, to be judged according to the deeds that we have done in this mortal body? Do we think about being accountable?

Think about the 19th question, “Can you imagine yourself that you hear the voice of the Lord saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold your works have been works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?” (5:16). Can you imagine that? Can you think of that? Do you think of hearing, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant?” Does that come to your mind as you hear those questions?

Getting the people to think about judgment day and to realize “I am going to be held accountable” is a very powerful spiritual motivator. On the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites celebrated God’s kingship. The king eventually was the judge, and on the Feast of Tabernacles—supposing that is when this occurred—the people would have come expecting to give an accounting of how they had done. In effect, they would have expected to go through a fiery furnace of judgment before God, so that they could repent and renew their covenants. They would have been able to walk out of that important hearing-and-renewal of the law reconciled with God and placed where they could progress. This theme of judgment, then, is a powerful one in the context of what is happening here.

As I read these verses, I really like remembering that Alma was a judge by career. For eight years he had served as the chief judge of the Nephite court system. We do not know how many cases he tried, but probably quite a few. I am sure as he sat on the bench looking down on these people, he probably heard them making up excuses and pleading for mercy and saying, “Oh I really did not do it,” and Alma was likely thinking, “There was not a one of them that I could not see through.” We do not fool the judge, and we are not going to fool God. When Alma thought about himself as a judge, and the position of God at the judgement, he was likely thinking: “On that judgment day, do you think you are going to be able to fool him any better than any of these people have fooled me?” We are getting the voice of a person who has been there. It would have made sense to them, and it resonates with us.

Was Alma actually alluding here to his own conversion experience? I think so. He did not say explicitly, “You’d better believe, because this is what happened to me,” but he knew, and he could speak with conviction because he had been there, and he had experienced the things that he was teaching. As I read verse 21, I imagine being brought before the tribunal of God. Perhaps that was one of the things that happened to Alma

during his three days of stunned silence. He said of that experience that he feared that he was going to become banished and extinct. His soul was filled with guilt and remorse, racked with eternal torment. He had a perfect recollection of his guilt. I suppose he had told that story of his own conversion enough times that his audience would have felt and said, “Alma knows what he is talking about and I ought to really take this to heart.”

Often, when we hear Alma 5 mentioned, we just think of one verse, “Have you received his image in your countenance?” (5:19). But Alma did not let them off so easily. It’s not just a matter of receiving. There will also be things testifying against them, and against us. Did that hit you? He asked, “What will these things that you have done, what will they testify of? Will they not testify that ye are murderers, yea, and also that ye are guilty of all manner of wickedness?” (5:22–23). To whom was he talking here? There may have been people in his audience who had committed murders, but nobody had been there to witness it, and so nobody could convict them. If a judge could not prove that someone had committed murder, because it was done in secret, they sometimes thought they could get away with it.

But more than that, Alma once referred to himself as having murdered many people (Alma 36:14), meaning that he had seriously damaged them spiritually. However, whether literally or spiritually, Alma said that no one was going to get away with it. He was addressing the most crucial, the most wicked of all crimes—murder. He did not let his audience off easily.

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma’s Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), chapter 7 “Standing before God at the Judgment Day.”

Alma 5:16–20 — Teaching to Envision Personally

He asked “can you imagine yourselves . . .” in three different situations:

“can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed” (v. 16)

“Or do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord in that day, and say— Lord, our works have been righteous works upon the face of the earth” (v. 17)

“Or otherwise, can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God with your souls filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your guilt” (v. 18)

He paints a picture of the sinner at the last day, before the tribunal of God, and beholding their own countenances. What makes these words so impressive is that there is a visual dimension to them all. He is saying “Can you visualize this?” It is very concrete. We speak with the spirit when we are not so abstract but are very specific.

Alma 5:26–30 — Inviting Us to Assess Our Spiritual Condition and Repent

In these verses, Alma called his people to repentance. They needed to be stripped of pride, stripped of envy. The main physical manifestation of pride in this world was costly apparent, and so that needed to be stripped off. However, this admonition was also figurative, because if you also need to rid yourself of the emotions of pride and envy.

In verse 30, Alma asked, “Is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?” This was and is a real problem. We must be very careful never to belittle anyone. How hard that is! We live in a world where most of the elementary school students do a lot of teasing, if not bullying, and our children grow up with it. We have to strip ourselves of this, and we have to be really careful as parents and in our families to be sure that we do not ever tear anyone down.

Why is mocking or belittling so problematic? Have you ever been mocked? Been laughed at? I remember my professor Robert K. Thomas once saying, “The reason that mocking and laughter is so pernicious is because there is no answer for it.” When so attacked, you cannot rationally reply. And of course, you cannot laugh or even mock back. That just makes matters worse. Maybe we can laugh at ourselves, and deflect the mocking a little bit, but laughter is something that you cannot respond to, it stops the conversation, and people who mock know that. Once the damage is done, there is no way to recover from it, so we must be really careful. It can be so devastating. People feel belittled or mocked, even over something small or silly, and they leave the Church over that. They feel like they are not valued. There is no way they can redeem their self-esteem, let alone themselves, except, of course, with the help of the Savior.

These words and questions of Alma bring to our hearts and minds a lot of things for us to think about—things that are sad, things that show us the way things should not be, but also other things that help us to be strong and that help us to know that we are on the right path. That is the spirit of Alma here!

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma’s Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), 75: “Having received Christ’s image in our countenance, and having been delivered from captivity and bondage, we want nothing more than to be received by

Him, to go and be where He is. The Lord has made that possible through His infinite Atonement. But it is up to us to take advantage of His ultimate sacrifice by repenting.”

Alma 5:26 — Can We Sing the Song of Redeeming Love?

He asked us whether we can sing the song of redeeming love. I want to have some singing. I do not know what part Alma sang in the Zarahemla Tabernacle Choir, but I think he knew what it meant to sing as his soul sang with joy and goodness, I am sure, on many occasions.

A sister who led a Young Women’s choir for a long time said, “The way you praise God is how you live.” She would tell the girls that all the time, “If you want to be able to sing this so they know that you truly have a testimony, you sing your testimony. You sing your conversion. The way you sing is how you live.” That is a great message. Do you think Alma would have agreed with it? What makes you believe that? He lived the life. He walked the walk. He exuded this kind of enthusiasm and the dedication that shows that he lived what he testified. It is also a part of the Young Women’s theme, that we testify of him at all times and in all places. Well how do we do that? By the way we live.

When Alma described his conversion to Helaman in Alma 36:22, singing came up again. When he feared that he was going to be destroyed, he said, “I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did long to be there.” He wanted to be in the choir! I think that was part of the *song of redeeming love* that he was referring to in Alma 5.

Further Reading

LeGrand L. Baker and Stephen D. Ricks, “*Alma 5: The Song of Redeeming Love*,” in *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?: The Psalms in Israel’s Temple Worship in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2011), 520–537.

Alma 5:39 — Identifying with a “Fold”

Whereas mocking tends to drive people away, the gospel brings people together. As Alma said, “ye are of his fold.” Having a flock, a community that believes in Jesus Christ, the shepherd to be followed, matters. It strengthens us. We do not make it alone. We have to work together, and the Good Shepherd will protect his fold.

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma’s Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), 61: “since Alma taught that there are ultimately only two flocks, it stands to

reason that there are only two shepherds. The doctrine of the Two Ways, which can be found repeatedly throughout the Book of Mormon, constantly invites all people to choose to belong to the flock of the Good Shepherd.”

Alma 5:45–47 — How We Obtain Spiritual Knowledge

The next step is that you must obtain spiritual knowledge. In this passage Alma testified, “Do you not suppose that I know of these things myself? And how do you suppose that I know of their surety?” Interesting that Alma uses this word *surety* here. “To know of a *surety*.” When he first experienced his conversion, he knew! He said, “I have been born of God. I know.” And in Alma 36 later said, “For ye ought to know as I do know” (Alma 36:30), but that was not all that Alma ever learned.

The Holy Ghost reinforced and taught Alma more, as he fasted and prayed many days, kept the commandments, served, and lived righteously. There came a greater level of knowledge. He gained an assurance, a surety, and he knew at more than just the experiential level of having been called to repentance.

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma’s Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), chapter 8 “Receiving Personal Revelation.”

Alma 5:53–59 — Refusing to Repent

Alma knew what would have happened if he had not repented, but now he knew with an even greater assurance than before. He was, at this time, bearing a very powerful testimony of the truthfulness of his knowledge as a prophet of God, as one who had received a very, very powerful conviction of the truthfulness.

Alma 5:5–59 — Application of the Speech

Put yourself in the audience listening to Alma’s speech in Alma 5. How would the speech have affected you if you were

- One of the 3,500 recent converts who had just joined the church (3:4)?
- A soldier who had been seriously wounded in the battle against Amlici?
- A widow of a soldier who had fought for Amlici and against Alma?
- An old-time faithful member of the church of Alma the Elder?
- A Mulekite friendly toward Alma but who still felt politically excluded?
- A member of the church who was still leaning toward the teachings of Nehor?
- A faithful father and mother with a rebellious teenage son?
- A senior citizen who had entered the covenant following Benjamin’s speech?

Alma was addressing all of these people. So, try to put yourself in the audience here. Think, first of all, “What if I am just a recent convert? I have just joined the church; that battle with Amlici was pretty bloody and I have decided to turn over a new leaf in my life; I have been pretty bad in the past and I am now a member in this church, and I listen to Alma. How do I react?” How would you react as you hear what he is saying? Is there anything there that you would really resonate with as a recent convert?

Would someone who had just recently joined the group have been overwhelmed with the questions that he was asking? He certainly does unload a lot on people here. But does he also reassure them? Does he speak of anything that they might have recently experienced, in which they would say, “Yes, there is hope. There is goodness here.”

Throughout all these chapters there comes out loud and clear the importance of repentance and cleansing oneself, preparing oneself, and I think Alma, by all the questions and everything else, is saying that. So, he is giving great hope to the recent convert. He is speaking pretty harshly and very directly to longer time members. He is getting after them, and I think the new convert may have been saying to himself, “Hey, I have repented. I have cleansed myself. I am here,” and I think that gives a new convert great hope, especially if they have just recently been baptized.

I do not know about you, but I remember coming home right after being baptized. It was a Saturday night, and I was eight years old. I felt a wonderful feeling of being perfectly cleansed, and I remember the thought, “All I have to do is hang on for about 80 years and I am okay.” Well, that’s easier said than done, but that freshness does give us all as new converts optimism. On a couple of occasions, such as in verses 7 and 13, Alma talks exactly about that mighty change that has happened. It is an echo to Mosiah chapter 5, in which Benjamin talked about the mighty change that had happened in those people and the covenant, and being sealed unto God and unto the promise of eternal life (Mosiah 5:15).

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma’s Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), 129: “Alma asks us, as he asked his audience in Zarahemla, a sobering question: could we say, if we were called to die at this time—*right now*—that we have sufficiently prepared, that our ‘garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins?’ (Alma 5:27).”

Alma 6

Alma 6:4 — Alma Re-established the Church in Zarahemla

Alma the Elder established a covenant community around 140 BC at the Waters of Mormon in the land of Nephi (Mosiah 18:17–18). When his group rejoined the Nephites in Zarahemla after 120 BC, King Mosiah “granted unto Alma that he might establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla; and gave him power to ordain priests and teachers over every church” (Mosiah 25:19). Soon “there were seven churches in the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 25:23). By about 83 BC, however, Alma the Younger had to once again “establish the order of the church in the city of Zarahemla” (Alma 6:4). Initially, “many of the rising generation” in the land of Zarahemla had forgotten or “could not understand the words of king Benjamin” and several of them would not be baptized (Mosiah 26:1, 4). Dissensions arose “among the brethren,” and some people, eventually including Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah, “deceived many with their flattering words” (Mosiah 26:6; 27:8). Some dissenters were excommunicated (Mosiah 26:36), and the unbelievers began persecuting members of the church (Mosiah 27:1).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Alma Need to ‘Establish the Order of the Church’ in Zarahemla Again? \(Alma 6:4\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 113 (June 2, 2016).

Alma 6:7–8 — The City of Gideon

Gideon, the city that Alma visited next, was named after the great Limhite warrior that was killed by Nehor (Alma 6:7); “There having been a city built, which was called the city of Gideon, which was in the valley that was called Gideon, being called after the man who was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword.”

It was a city where the people had kept themselves clean and unspotted from the world. In Alma’s speech to the people of Gideon, he made no reference to Nehor’s preaching and death. One might think that Alma would have made something of a political speech out of this, reminding them that he had executed their hero. However, that was not Alma’s purpose or “errand from the Lord” (Jacob 1:17).

Alma 7

Alma 7:1–27 — Joy in Speaking to the People of Gideon

In verse 4, Alma used the phrase “exceedingly great joy,” and again in verse 26, “my soul doth exceedingly rejoice.” The words *joy* and *rejoicing* are modified by *exceedingly*.

What a relief! He finally had an audience of people who were righteous and good. They had waited a long time, as he explained, “having had much business that I could not come unto you.”

In Alma 5, Alma’s focus of attention was calling the people to repentance and enabling a mighty change of heart. In Alma 7, the focus was on rejoicing. Maybe he knew the people in Zarahemla all too well, but here in Gideon, in Alma 7, he was talking to some people who have never heard him speak before. He was glad to finally be able to come and speak to them in his own voice. I suppose he had sent some other people—messengers and others—but now he is finally there himself. What an experience that would have been for them finally to hear Alma speaking to them in person.

When our Church leaders speak to a smaller group, for example, at a Stake Conference, they tailor their comments to the group at hand. When Elder Oaks spoke in our Stake Conference a few years ago, he expressed great personal joy in being able to talk to us. We could tell he cared for who we are, and we could sense what he felt we needed. We get that same feeling from Alma as he begins speaking to the Gideonites. He calls them his “beloved brethren” and he says, “Seeing that I have been committed to come to you.” It is very gracious. Imagine how they might have felt. They probably did not get General Authorities visiting very often.

Alma 7:1–27 — A Different Speech for the People of Gideon

In Alma 5, there were 50 questions. How many questions can you count in Alma 7? There is not one! What a shift in terms of voice register. We have a completely different style here. If biblical scholars who specialize in hypotheses about authorship were to analyze these two texts, I wonder if they would tell us that they were written by two different people. But authorship attribution is not that easy. When people generally are talking to different audiences they communicate in different ways. In Alma 5, Alma was bearing down on the people and he did not want to answer the questions he posed because he wanted *them* to answer those questions. In Alma 7, he just laid out the doctrine. He could open up and give them the straight teachings.

Alma 7:4 — A Righteous People

In Verse 4, Alma remarked, “I trust according to the spirit that I shall have joy over you.” He is full of trust, faith, and confidence in Gideon. There were four core things in verse 6 that he firmly and positively believed about these people:

- I trust that ye are not in a state of so much unbelief as were your brethren;
- I trust that ye are not lifted up in the pride of your hearts; yea,

- I trust that ye have not set your hearts upon riches and the vain things of the world; yea,
- I trust that you do not worship idols, but that ye do worship the true and the living God.

This sincere statement of trust likely engendered a relationship of confidence between Alma and this audience, so that these people realized that he knew and cared about them. When we hear speakers address us in this generous fashion, even if we know that we are not all one hundred percent worthy of those compliments, we want to believe these good things about ourselves. As Alma expressed his confidence in them before he began his discourse, when we talk to our children or grandchildren or people we minister to, we would do well to express that same confidence. We could say such things as “I trust that you are doing these things,” or “I trust that you have read your scriptures this week and have come to this class prepared.”

Alma 7:7–13 — What Does Alma Teach about the Atonement?

The setting of this speech was clearly a sacred one. The written part of the sermon is very short and concise, but it is very unlikely that Alma would have gone there to teach for only fifteen minutes, which is about as long as it takes to read Alma 7 out loud. Mormon explains that more was involved on this occasion. The record says, “Having taught the people of Gideon many things that cannot be written, having established the order of the church according as he had done before in the Land of Zarahemla . . .” (Alma 8:1). The words “many things that cannot be written” may indicate that the Lord restrained him from writing or recording these great things that were said or done with these faithful people.

Alma’s speech or sermon on this occasion contained a classic statement of the coming of Christ and of the Atonement. He testified that Christ would come to earth, but we should notice that he did not know whether Jesus would come to these people or not (Alma 7:8). He had apparently received no revelation about whether Christ would come to this land or not. He knew that the Savior would be born in (or near) Jerusalem to a person named Mary, and that he was the Son of God. But apparently he did not know everything about how or whether Christ would get to his land, and if he did, how he would appear. Perhaps he knew more than he told the people on this occasion, but we don’t do the text any favors by reading things back into the text that haven’t yet been learned. When Jesus finally did appear in 3 Nephi 11, it was more amazing and wondrous than they had, or ever could have, expected.

After talking in verse 10 about the miraculous birth of Jesus who would come as the Son of God, Alma said, “And the Son of God shall go forth suffering pains and afflictions and

temptations of every kind” (7:11). Here, Alma appears to be drawing on Isaiah 53, which Abinadi had quoted when speaking to the priests of Noah: “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2); “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7); and “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4). Alma would have connected these words with the people of Gideon, because their parents and grandparents were among the people of Noah and his son Limhi, just as Alma was the son of Alma the Elder, who had been converted by Abinadi. So, it is fitting that Alma would have emphasized the suffering dimension of the Atonement in speaking to these people.

Alma said that the Son of God would do this so that, “*the word* might be fulfilled which saith: ‘He will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people’” (Alma 7:11). If these words are an exact quotation, as they appear to be, we do not have the prophecy from which it was quoted. Or these words about Jesus taking upon him our pains and sicknesses may be Alma’s paraphrase of either Isaiah 53 or of some parts of King Benjamin. But, in either event, here Alma intensifies this prophetic information in two very important ways. First, Alma mentions pains, afflictions, and temptations of *every kind*. That is a stronger statement of the expansive reach of the Atonement than we can find anywhere else in scripture. And second, Alma says that all that will be accomplished in order for the prophetic word of God to be fulfilled.

In this regard, our minds rightly turn to the words found in Luke 22:44, which says that Jesus was in “an agony.” The English word “an” here is a bit puzzling. What does it mean to be *in an agony*? He certainly was *in agony*, in unimaginable pain and affliction. However, in the Greek, Luke was actually saying that He was in an *agon*, which means a battle, a conflict, or a contest. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ fought and won the final battle, the ultimate conflict, between the Son of God and the Son of Darkness. And what was at stake was our eternal existence. He took up this battle; he took on death, and He won, so that He loosed the bands of death. Without having defeated the forces of death, He could not loosen us from those bands.

In addition, Alma says, “And he will take upon him their infirmities.” And indeed, Christ has already taken our infirmities upon Himself, so that all we have to do is have enough faith to come to Him and draw upon the reservoir of credit that He has already put in the bank for us. If we can do what is right and if we will ask—and Alma gives plenty of instruction here that we must and should ask and pray for these things of which we stand in need—they will be granted to us.

It is a wonderful blessing that He has done this for us. Not only has He absorbed all of those infirmities, but He learned something in that process. In Hebrews 5 it says that the

Son of God will learn *obedience* by the things that He suffers. But in Alma 7 we learn something unique to scripture, namely that He will also learn something in this extreme struggle as well: that His bowels may be filled with mercy. He had need to be filled up with mercy. Being full of mercy and empathy, there is no room for criticism or judgment on His part. You do not have to fear, that when you come to Christ, that He will be judgmental or critical. He will not turn you away or be disappointed that you have done such a thing or had such a problem, because He is *full* of mercy. There is no room there for anything else but loving kindness. He has learned mercy because He was somehow vicariously able to experience all of our infirmities, which gives Him a power, a real force, and a connectivity, that he otherwise would not have had.

And what does this word succor mean? To succor is to strengthen, but the root of the word “-cor,” also means “to run.” A courier is a runner. And the prefix “suc-” comes from the preposition “sub,” meaning from beneath or below, as in the word “support,” meaning “to carry or bear (port) from beneath (sub).” “To succor,” therefore, means *run* to a person to give strength and help from a foundation below. Having descended below all things, the Savior now is so full of mercy that He knows how to run to us when we are in our moment of need and to bear us up. He won’t hold back. He will rush to our side. What a wonderful way of seeing and expressing the openness of the Atonement. Alma is the only one in scripture who emphasizes this aspect of Christ’s sustaining power. And Alma himself, in his own conversion, has had first-hand experience with Christ’s succoring power. His words in Alma 7:11–12, therefore, should be understood as Alma’s autobiographical testimony that this is what the Savior will do and how He is able to do these things. Because of all of this, Alma can truly say, “Now the spirit knoweth all things” (7:13). Christ experienced it all and has been filled with the knowledge of all things. Thus, Alma personally testifies, “that he might take upon Him the sins of his people, that He might blot out their transgressions according to the power of His deliverance. And now, behold, this is the testimony which is in me” (7:13). This is a humble, understated testimony here, but most certainly a clear and true one.

In 2009, President Eyring said in General Conference that it is perfectly clear and assuring that our Heavenly Father and Savior live and that they love all humanity and that “the very opportunity for us to face adversity and affliction is part of the evidence of their infinite love.” It is interesting that God gave us the gift of living in mortality, so we could be prepared to receive the greatest of all the gifts of God which is eternal life in the heavenly kingdom of God, as Alma repeatedly mentions (7:14, 16, 19, 21). As President Eyring continued:

In this education we experience misery and happiness, sickness and health, the sadness from sin and the joy of forgiveness. That forgiveness can come only through the infinite Atonement of the Savior, which He worked out through pain we could not bear and which we can only faintly comprehend.

It will comfort us when we must wait in distress for the Savior’s promised relief that He knows, from experience, how to heal and help us. The Book of Mormon gives us the certain assurance of His power to comfort. And faith in that power will give us patience as we pray and work and wait for help. He could have known how to succor us simply by revelation, but He chose to learn by His own personal experience.

And then he goes on and quotes Alma 7:11–13. I think that is very powerful. It means Christ could have received this knowledge of suffering by revelation, because we know we can know things by the spirit. However, he *chose* to suffer. To me this is the Savior going the second mile. Alma emphasized that Jesus would know all this, not only by the Spirit, but also “according to the flesh” (7:12, 13). To make that choice, Jesus wanted to know exactly how it would feel, not just an impression of the spirit, what it would be like, and how we too, in a mortal state, would feel.

Further Reading

Henry B. Eyring, “Adversity,” General Conference April 2009, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

Alma 7:14–15 — Alma Invites the People to be Baptized

In these verses, Alma encourages these people to come and be baptized unto repentance, that they can be washed of their sins, that they can witness to God that they will keep his commandments and basically enter into the entire baptismal covenant that his father Alma had instituted at the Waters of Mormon.

They are probably going to be baptized in a river or natural body of water. We don’t know where this could have taken place, but anywhere in the Western Hemisphere in Alma’s day, there could have been danger in these waters. These converts could have encountered alligators, water moccasins, slippery banks, or river currents. I doubt that many of these people could swim. Lakes and springs were thought, in most ancient civilizations, to be openings into the underworld. I remember being in a small boat on the Usumacinta River in southern Mexico looking at huge alligators on the sandy beach as we went by, and I sat very still in the middle of the boat and hoped that it didn’t spring a leak! Going down into the water might well have been fearsome to these people, and so being baptized was a serious matter.

In the ancient Near Eastern world, in fact, if you were challenged as an accuser or as a witness in court, and there were conflicting testimonies or a lack of decisive evidence, so that the judges couldn't really tell who was right or wrong, the *river ordeal* was the way in which Babylonian law resolved the matter. In such a case, one of the people—the one who seemed to be the weakest as a witness—would be required to submit to the *river ordeal* which consisted of being taken out in the middle of the river and thrown in. If the person was able to get to shore, this was a sign that the gods had favored you and your testimony would then be believed. But if you were a false witness telling a lie, you would be swallowed up and swept away by the wild river.

The people in Gideon were surely still of mixed faithfulness. Undergoing baptism would show and strengthen their spiritual determination and would be a strong testimony, witnessing to God, that they were telling the truth as they said that they wanted to enter into a covenant and be true and faithful in keeping the commandments. But at the same time in that world, once you were baptized, it made sense, symbolically and legalistically, that you owed your allegiance to God, who had sustained you through this test. That allegiance would be owed to the church which Alma was establishing, regardless of the consequences. And in Alma's world, being a member of the church was not a casual matter. Besides alligators and the wildness of the river, persecutions of believers was intense in places like Ammonihah. I don't think we should downplay the word "fear," when Alma tells these people to "come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, . . . which doth bind you down to destruction" (7:15).

Alma 7:21–24 — The Spirit Cannot Dwell in Unholy Temples

This statement in Alma 7:21 reminds me of the great qualities that King Benjamin talked about in Mosiah 3:19, in saying that "the natural man is an enemy to God, has been since the Fall of Adam, and will be forever and ever until he yields to the enticing of the Holy Spirit and becometh a saint through the atonement." The natural conditions of wickedness include "filthiness" which cannot be received into the kingdom of God. Being pure and clean would not have been a common daily occurrence for most of these people, who did not have bathtubs or showers in their homes.

Some of the things that Benjamin lists in Mosiah 3:19 are repeated here by Alma in this passage: humble, submissive, gentle, patient, long-suffering and being easy to be entreated (7:23). It is interesting to me that patience is included here. Patience is included in Alma 9:26 where Alma talked about the characteristics of the Savior. We don't often think of how patient God is with us, as He puts up with us despite all that we do. What in your mind makes patience such a Godly virtue?

Alma 7:27 — Alma Pronounces a Concluding Blessing on the People

In the ancient Israelite sacrificial system, there were different kinds of sacrifices. *Atoning* sacrifices reconciled and brought man and God back together where there had been a separation between them because of sin or impurity. The words, *sin*, *guilt*, *transgression*, and *peace*, are present in Alma 7. Those words represent the full panoply of all of the types of sacrifices in the Law of Moses, under which there were sin offerings, guilt offerings, atoning sacrifices, and peace offerings. Alma, as the High Priest, who had probably just performed the special sacrifices on the Day of Atonement during the season connected with the Feast of Tabernacles, would have been especially sensitive of the great power and purposes of living the laws of sacrifice and obedience. As the High Priest, Alma had particular duties to keep the temple pure and holy, to cleanse it on the Day of Atonement, so that it could symbolize to the people the complete workings of the Law of Moses, welcoming Jesus as the one who fulfills all of these forms of sacrificial offerings and of atoning reconciliation for us.

In Verse 27, Alma concludes with a blessing efficaciously echoing the peace offering, and what a blessing it is: “May the peace of God rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flocks and herds, and all that you possess, your women and your children, according to your faith and good works, from this time forth and forever.” Perhaps you have been present in situations where you’ve had an apostolic blessing pronounced upon an audience—how encouraging and faith building that is. Here, in Alma 7:27, we have the prophet and high priest Alma pronouncing a blessing in Gideon upon these wonderful people, who are just as wonderful and blessed as you are.

ALMA 8–12

John W. Welch Notes



Alma 8

Alma 8:1–32 — Alma Taught in Melek

The nine chapters from Alma 8–15 all cover only one year, the tenth year of the reign of judges. The report of that year begins in Alma 8:3 and ends in Alma 15:19. That year began with Alma returning to his “own house” in Zarahemla (8:1), followed by a positive church experience in the land of Melek (8:3–6), and it ended with a brief but very successful and gratifying ministry in the land of Sidom (15:1–17) and with Alma taking Amulek “to his own house” in Zarahemla and ministering to him there (15:18). Whereas the cities of Gideon, Melek, and Sidom received Alma’s message very well, Ammonihah totally and violently rejected it. Just as the city of Gideon had provided a contrast with Zarahemla in Alma 5–7, the two receptive cities of Melek and Sidom in the tenth year stand as bookends demonstrating that Alma the Younger was in fact a successful missionary.

Alma 8:3–6 — The City of Melek

Was the City of Melek predisposed to accept Alma’s message? Certain words and names in the Book of Mormon are demonstrably of Hebrew origin. For example, *Melek* in Hebrew means *king*. In written Hebrew, vowels are not typically used, thus the name *Melek* may be linguistically related to *Mulek*. This could have been a Mulekite city, and because of the close similarity between their names, it could have been a royal city or one in which a king had great influence. A few chapters earlier, Alma the Younger had to fight against the king-men (Alma 2–3). While Amlici’s base of operations is unknown, it is possible that Alma went to the city of Melek specifically because they had preferred

the traditional institution of kingship and needed reinforcement in accepting the “holy order of God” (8:4) and the new system of judges in the land of Zarahemla.

When Alma went next to the city of Ammonihah, however, he was running straight into a hotbed of Nehorism. In fact, we are told that they “were of the profession of Nehor,” whom Alma had caused to be executed in Alma 1, and that as Nehorites they “did not believe in the repentance of their sins” (15:15; see also Alma 1:4). Moreover, Ammonihah was called the “Desolation of Nehors” (16:11) after it was destroyed. The mention of the city of Melek appears here as a strong literary contrast, setting the stage spiritually for readers to hope that Alma would have the same success in Ammonihah. That, however, did not happen.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Should Readers Pay Close Attention to the Mulekites?](#) (Omni 1:19),” KnoWhy 434 (May 17, 2018).

Alma 8:6 — Three Days’ Journey

When Alma the Younger left Melek, “He departed thence and travelled three-days’ journey on the north of the land of Melek,” and came to the city called Ammonihah. A three days’ journey would likely have been about thirty to forty miles. What might be symbolized by these three days? Why did the author, and record keeper, and abridger all include this detail? They could have said, “He went from there to the city of Ammonihah,” but someone thought it worth telling us that it was a journey of three days. Where else do we see three days? In 1 Nephi 2:6, Lehi traveled three days before building an altar to give thanks. In that case, being three days away from Jerusalem, Lehi was out of the temple district of the Temple in Jerusalem.

In the crucifixion and death of the Savior, very clearly, according to the Book of Mormon, there was darkness in the land of Bountiful for three days when Jesus was in the tomb (3 Nephi 8:3, 23; see also 1 Nephi 19:10; 2 Nephi 25:13; Helaman 14:20, 27).

There are other examples of three days and three nights. The sign of Jonah was mentioned by Jesus when the Pharisees demanded a sign. Jesus replied “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:39–40). There are passages in Matthew 16:4 and Luke 11:29 that refer to the sign of the prophet Jonah, but without giving its length, which was three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17). Mark 8:12 says, “There shall no sign be given unto this generation,” to which the prophet Joseph Smith added “save the sign of the prophet Jonah; for as

Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, so likewise shall the Son of Man be buried in the bowels of the earth” (Mark 8:12 JST). This seems to add significance to the Savior’s prophetic pronouncement on his interment (See Cummings, “Three Days and Three Nights,” 59).

Three days and three nights, then, from the time of Jonah in the mid-eighth century BC (2 Kings 14:25), symbolized a going down. “Three days and three nights” expressed a complete descent, down into death and hell; going to the bottom of the sea and into the death monster; going as far away into the darkness as possible. The mention of Alma’s three days of travel to Ammonihah may have carried the same symbolism for the Nephite record keepers. Perhaps the recorder noted this detail as he observed that “Alma went three days from Melek,” which was, in other words, down, down, down, into the inferno of Ammonihah.

Further Reading

Cummings, David B. Cummings, “[Three Days and Three Nights: Reassessing Jesus’s Entombment](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 17, no. 1 (2007): 56–63, 86.

Alma 8:8–9 — Remembering the Good with the Bad

The account of Alma’s initial preaching in Ammonihah is very brief. He began to preach “the word of God,” but “Satan had gotten great hold” upon their hearts and they would not listen. But that was not all. In spite of Alma’s “mighty prayer” and some success, things went from bad to worse, as we are told in considerable detail in the next seven chapters.

Why do we hear so little of the righteous cities, such as Gideon, and so much about the wicked ones, like Ammonihah and Antionum? Ministering in the city of Gideon must have been a very joyous, wonderful occasion for Alma. He was among friends and faithful people, yet we only have a single short chapter of his ministry there. However, when he goes to Ammonihah, we learn a great deal about these awful people. I would like to have been told more about the people of Gideon. Why do you think the Book of Mormon sometimes preserves for us so much more of the bad material than the good? Is it a matter of human nature to remember more easily the mistakes that we have made, the problems that we have had, the difficult times, the final exams that we failed? Or do we remember enough our successes, the triumphs, the happiness? Which is more common in real life?

There is no question that the Book of Mormon has given us a history of these people, as the historians would say, remembering the *warts and all*. Mormon wants to be sure that his record is complete enough to be a solemn warning, and it is important to be honest

with ourselves and to acknowledge our shortcomings. However, there is a difference between producing a history that simply leaves the warts as warts and writing a history that is *all* warts.

Sometimes we get caught up in self-pity or in reveling in all our past problems. Perhaps we believe that if we air all these weaknesses, that we can expunge them. Telling all of these stories can become a way of doing penance for some people, and in some cases there is a purpose for doing that, but doing penance is different than writing history. Repentance turns to Christ, may involve bishops, and requires confession of our sins and seeking solutions for our problems by placing them before God privately.

As we teach our children, we need to warn them about the problems that are out there. We need to be sure that they understand the realities of eternal judgment and the consequences of sin and transgression. However, let us be sure to also tell them the good side of things, as Alma also does in chapters 12 and 13. He let them know the great blessings and wonderful promises that could be theirs based on their righteousness. So, let us be sure to reinforce the good things along with the warnings.

Alma 8:11–13 — Alma Was Rejected in Ammonihah

As Mormon was compiling and abridging this record, he may well have identified with Alma the Younger's struggles. In Alma's initial visit to the city of Ammonihah, he went all alone. He went without a bodyguard, without a companion, without other witnesses. While that strategy must have been extremely brave and sincerely impressive, it created problems because the people exclaimed, "Who is God that he will send only one witness against us?" (Alma 9:2). The people of Nephi generally observed the Hebrew legal requirement for two or three witnesses, "Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word (2 Nephi 11:3).

At the end of his writings, Mormon may have had a similar or related thought, when he says that he stood as "an idle witness" against his people (Mormon 3:16). He too would stand alone. I believe that as Mormon went through this material, he was inclined to keep more of it when he identified personally with what was going on in the records, and he knew poignantly of the destruction that would come to his people as a result of wickedness. There are two places in the Book of Mormon where things became really, awfully wicked. One was here in Ammonihah, and the other was in Mormon's own time. So, Mormon's own personal interests and experiences may have been a factor in his motivations and inspiration for recording so many of the awful details in these chapters.

Alma 8:14–18 — Alma Was Expelled from, Then Returned to Ammonihah

After having been expelled by the inhabitants of Ammonihah, Alma was “wading through much tribulation and anguish of soul,” when an angel of the Lord appeared to him and declared that he had been sent to “command [Alma] that thou return to the city of Ammonihah, and preach again unto the people of the city” (8:16).

Before he issued the command, however, the angel cheered Alma by telling him that he was “blessed,” and by encouraging him to “lift up his head and rejoice,” in spite of his deep and painful soul-searching. He mentioned not only that Alma had been faithful since the time of his conversion, but that he, the angel, was the same angel who had appeared to deliver the Lord’s message the first time. These words and reassurances must have meant a great deal to Alma. President Henry B. Eyring has pointed out how well Alma had taught his son, Corianton, “who was mired in the misery of sin. Alma knew that wickedness could never be happiness for his son—or for any child of Heavenly Father. He taught his son that increasing in holiness was the only path to happiness.” Because Alma learned this truth the hard way, and was able to speak authoritatively about it to his children.

Further Reading

President Henry B. Eyring, “Holiness and the Plan of Happiness,” October 2019 General Conference.

Alma 8:19–22 — A Blessing Following a Meal

Upon returning to Ammonihah, Alma was met by Amulek, a citizen of the city, who had been advised by an angel to welcome “a prophet.” Amulek “received him into his house . . . and he brought forth bread and meat and set before Alma” (8:21). *After* eating the meal set before him, Alma “blessed Amulek and his house, and he gave thanks unto God” (8:22). Whereas generally, Latter-day Saints and other Christians are accustomed to offering a blessing *before* meals, “In Judaism, while a brief blessing is recited before eating, a series of longer blessings . . . follows the meal.” It is “a central feature of the liturgical service in the Jewish home” (see *KnoWhy* #115).

In 1997, Angela M. Crowell and John A. Tvedtnes explained, “Four blessings come after the consumption of bread, while separate blessings are offered for other foods, depending on their nature and origin.” Deuteronomy 8:10, provided the basis for this practice: “When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.” Amulek had apparently fed and filled Alma, and so Alma pronounced blessings as expected.

The practice is also found in the Mishnah and among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Jewish book of Jubilees (ca. 161–140 BC) depicts the patriarchs engaging in this practice (Jubilees 22:4–9). One story in Mishnah *Sukkah* 2:5 records, “When Rabbi Zadok ate only a *small* portion of food, he did not say the blessing afterward.” This was probably because Deuteronomy 8:10 calls for a blessing only if one has eaten and is *full*.

Alma’s blessing anticipated the time when the Lord would bestow a blessing after a messianic meal. The Savior followed a similar pattern during his first day among the Nephites at the temple in Bountiful. As the sacrament was administered to the people there in 3 Nephi 18, they were “filled” (v. 9), after which Jesus “blessed” them (3 Nephi 18:10, 14).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Alma Bless and Thank God After Eating?”](#) *KnoWhy* 115 (June 6, 2016).

Crowell, Angela M., and John A. Tvedtnes, [“Notes and Communications: The Nephite and Jewish Practice of Blessing God after Eating One’s Fill,”](#) *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 251–254, quote on 252.

John W. Welch, [“From Presence to Practice: Jesus, the Sacrament Prayers, the Priesthood, and Church Discipline in 3 Nephi 18 and Moroni 2–6,”](#) *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 119–139.

Alma 9–13

At this stage of this record, Mormon includes the actual, first-person words of Alma and Amulek. Alma’s opening statement is in Alma 9:1–33, and then Amulek’s supporting testimony is quoted in Alma 10:2–11, 17–23, and 25–27. Amulek’s words are then interspersed in his responses to the questioning of Zeezrom in Alma 11:22, 23–25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 36–37, 39–45; and finally, Alma’s words are quoted at length in Alma 12:3–13:30. This all constitutes a persuasive and informative record, explaining the lengths to which Alma and the Lord had gone with the people in Ammonihah, hoping to bring them to repentance and to avoid the destruction that would otherwise befall them.

Alma 9:2, 6 — The Law of Witnesses

The Nephites, even those in Ammonihah, were aware of the two-witness rule. Deuteronomy 19:15 says:

One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three

witnesses, shall the matter be established. (see also Deuteronomy 17:6; Numbers 35:30; 1 Kings 21:10)

That becomes a significant principle in what happens in Ammonihah. In *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, I explain the implications of this complaint as follows:

The people of Ammonihah rejected Alma’s testimony out of arrogance and incredulity, to be sure, but their rejection also had legal grounds. Their penchant for legal detail manifests itself when they reject Alma’s testimony on the technicality that he appeared to be a sole witness or testifier. Rather than addressing the truthfulness of Alma’s claims by accusing him of being a false witness or a false prophet (as had been the failed strategy of King Noah and his priests against Abinadi), these people argued that if God were to condemn this city as an apostate city, he would need more than one witness to stand against it in such a weighty matter: “Who art thou? Suppose ye that we shall believe the testimony of one man, although he should preach unto us that the earth should pass away? . . . Who is God, that sendeth no more authority than one man among this people?” (Alma 9:2, 6). An accusation such as this one for apostasy, they correctly and forcefully argued, needed to be supported by two witnesses.

In our legal system, we do not require two witnesses. In Biblical and Jewish law, they *had to* have two witnesses. How is the principle of two witnesses exercised among Latter-day Saints today? Missionaries and ministering sisters and brothers travel two-by-two. At baptism, there must be two witnesses. Similarly, in bestowing the gift of the Holy Ghost, and in the marriage sealing ordinance, and so on. Even the notion of the presidency of the bishop and two counselors is based on the principle that in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall all things be established. You cannot, or at least should not, operate as a presidency if you do not have the concurrence of your counselors.

We use this principle more often than we appreciate, and it is an important one. When you are involved as a married couple, within a missionary companionship, or as a presidency, learn to use the power of the two-or-three-witnesses principle. There is real wisdom and strength here.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “*The Trial of Alma and Amulek*,” in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 237–271, quote on 242.

Robert L. Marrot, “*Witnesses, Law of*,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992), 4:1569–1570.

Alma 9:11–13 — The Lord Commanded the People to Repent or Be Destroyed

In Deuteronomy 13:12–18, the Law of Moses specified what Alma needed to do if there were an apostate city in the land:

If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the Lord thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying, Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known;

Then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask *diligently*; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you; Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, *destroying it utterly*, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword.

And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, for the Lord thy God: and it shall be an heap forever; it shall not be built again.

Alma was the Nephite high priest, and had the personal responsibility for seeing that no iniquity defiled the land. Under this law of the apostate city, if there was wickedness in a city, he was required to warn the inhabitants. If they did not repent, he would consign it to being killed by the sword and having it burned and completely destroyed. The legal requirement said that he must inquire *diligently*. It could not be a superficial observation. He could not destroy a whole apostate city without a very thorough investigation, but “if in truth abomination is wrought among you” then it says you shall “smite the city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly.”

The words *utter destruction*—in Hebrew—form a phrase that is quite distinctive, and it means being wiped off the face of the land. How many times does Alma use this phrase *utter destruction* in chapter 9? Three times, in verses 12, 18, and 24. We do not know if the people in Ammonihah knew the scriptures well enough to understand what Alma was saying and what was happening here, but apparently they did, because their reaction was so extreme. Alma gave them not only practical and religious encouragement, but also legal notice and fair warning that if they did not change and repent, their destruction would be made sure and complete. Amulek would next go on, as the second witness, to tell them that they would “be smitten by famine, and by pestilence, and by the sword” (10:23).

It must be said that Alma, of course, no longer commanded the army, and would not have been inclined in any event to call in the soldiers to obliterate the city. This

destruction mandate in Deuteronomy 13 was a part of the Israelites' conquest of Canaan, and there are many Jewish law scholars who maintain that it was a unique command, applying only at that time when the Israelites took over Canaan and had to establish themselves, and even then, only after they had offered a peaceful settlement and arrangement with cities that were problematic. So, Alma may not have thought that destroying the city would happen in this case literally and under Nephite command. In what seems to be an act of providential justice, a Lamanite attack happened to come and all this destruction happened in one single day—a “coincidence” that Alma and all Nephite record keepers would have found quite remarkable and compelling as a sign of divine intervention and prophetic fulfillment.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “*The Destruction of Ammonihah and the Law of Apostate Cities*,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1992), 176–179.

Alma 9:15–18 — The Lamanites Will Receive Mercy in Their Ignorance

In Chapter 9, Alma also emphasized that people who have a greater knowledge will be held to a higher standard (9:15–18, 24), and thus the strict warning against the people of Ammonihah was justified. On the other hand, of the Lamanites he says, in effect, “It will go better for the Lamanites than for you people, because you know better and you will be held accountable.” This is the clearest lesson that the Book of Mormon ever gives on this particular subject. In the New Testament, 2 Peter 2:21 likewise teaches, speaking of false prophets and false teachers among the early Christians, “For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.” We see this as a reality in the lives of people who have apostatized, especially those who had been overzealous. When they turn away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they often turn away with a vengeance, as Peter points out had happened to the “angels that sinned,” to Sodom and Gomorrah, and those “following the way of Balaam” (2 Peter 2:4, 6, 15).

Alma 10

Alma 10:1 — Amulek Speaks up in Support of Alma

Alma 10 begins with Amulek recounting to his fellow townsmen his own conversion account. He spoke bravely to a hostile audience. These are people he knows. He was a wealthy man, and he had been doing business and living with them for a good while. However, this may be the first time that Amulek told his neighbors much about his

personal religious convictions. Here Amulek makes a public and very daring statement, especially in light of the things he had recently experienced.

Alma 10:2–11 — Amulek Establishes Credibility

Amulek began by saying, “I am a man of no small reputation” In today’s terms, he may have been saying, “I am credible. This is a hard story to believe, but here’s what happened.” It is important to establish credibility when bearing testimony.

He stated that he was descended from Aminadi, who saw the finger of the Lord writing on the temple wall. He seems to be saying, “I come from a heritage of people among whom these kinds of manifestations are taken seriously.” In addition, the knowledge of this detail in his ancestor’s experience may well have predisposed Amulek toward recognizing Alma as one bringing the word of God. Potentially, this story may also have been part of Amulek’s reputation among his peers. In a culture like his, the fact that Amulek’s ancestors had received these kinds of manifestations would have been very prestigious. Amulek may also have been saying to his audience, “You accepted that incident which happened long ago. Well, let me tell you what happened to me just the other day.”

And notice that Amulek gives a great deal of detail about his own conversion. As people write about their conversions, it is important to have detail there to help others share in the experience. Amulek spoke as someone who knew the truth but who had rebelled against God. As someone who had formerly hardened his heart, he still responded to Alma. This is how he hoped things would also happen for to the people of Ammonihah. When trying to talk to and teach someone, relating to them is crucial. Real communication requires bridges to be built.

And, by the way, Amulek also traces his lineage back to Nephi, Lehi, Manesseh, and Joseph, who was sold into Egypt (10:3). This is the only place in the Book of Mormon where we learn that Lehi belonged to the tribe of Manesseh. The mention of “Joseph who was sold into Egypt” also provides a potential connection with the annual season of Passover.

Alma 10:6 — A Passover Setting?

Amulek gave the exact day, month and year for the arrival of the angel: “The fourth day of this seventh month, which is in the tenth year of the reign of the judges” (10:6). Why is such detail given? He even stated that he was going to visit a “very near kindred” (Alma 10:7).

In the Law of Moses, doing things precisely on certain days and months was crucial. When the law said that you shall do something—such as the observance of Passover, the

Feast of Tabernacles, or the Day of Atonement—it declared specifically on which day it should be. Thus, the day, month, and year were extremely important to the children of Israel, and we can assume that the Nephite calendar followed the Law of Moses.

The first month of the year for the pre-exilic Israelite calendar was in September. In the “commencement” of the new year, Rosh Hashanah occurred on the first day of the month. The Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles followed, all within the first month of the year. The other large festival, Passover, was seven months later. As Amulek relates it, on the fourth day of the seventh month, he is traveling to be with his family, or “very near kindred.”

What kind of a festival was Passover? It was when the family gathered, sacrificed the lamb, and had the Passover meal. They set a plate for the coming of the Prophet Elijah, expecting that one day he would return. One wonders, in that connection, what Amulek thought when the angel said, in effect, Go home, have Passover there, “for thou shalt feed a prophet of the Lord” (10:7).

Passover also commemorates the time when the destroying angel passed over the homes of the Israelites in Egypt and spared those who had the blood over their door. The coming of an angel was a large part of what would have been remembered and included in the Passover celebration.

After Alma had finished giving his first judgment speech against the people in Ammonihah, the people tried to arrest him and put him in jail (9:33), but with the Lord’s help he evaded their attempt. As he was on his way to the city of Aaron, the same angel who had converted Alma (8:15) told him to “return to the city of Ammonihah” and preach there again (8:16). As Alma reentered the city, he met Amulek as he was returning back to his home (8:20; 10:8). Amulek took him to his home, even though he likely knew what Alma had said to the city and had been rejected and was considered a criminal. So Amulek put his own social status on the line by talking to Alma and receiving him, who was hungry from fasting for many days and was “a holy man, who is a chosen man of God” (10:7), and of this Amulek could truly testify.

When Alma spoke those fateful words, “Will ye give to an humble servant of God something to eat?” (8:19), what a manifestation that must have been for Amulek! And with that, Amulek, together with his women (likely his wife, mother, and maybe sisters), his children, his father, and his whole household, were blessed and were tutored by Alma and became converted (10:11). They were blessed by having received a prophet, for “he that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward” (Matthew 10:41).

Further Reading

Welch, John W. Welch, "*The Trial of Alma and Amulek*," in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 237–271. "Although the visitor turned out not to be Elijah coming before 'the great and dreadful day of the Lord' (Malachi 4:5), Alma did come to announce the day of destruction in the city of Ammonihah, with the destroying angel passing over only [a] few [of those] in that land who were willing to receive Alma's message" (p. 240).

Book of Mormon Central, "Were Nephite Prophets Familiar with the Passover Tradition? (Mosiah 13:30)," *KnoWhy* 420 (March 29, 2018).

Alma 10:7–10 — Amulek Encountered an Angel

How important were angels in the history of the Nephite world?

The same angel that had converted Alma and the four sons of Mosiah directed Alma to return to Ammonihah to deal with the Nehorites (8:15). Whether the same angel came to guide Amulek to aid Alma and to provide a second witness for him, we do not know, but it seems that it might have been. In any event, where would the Nephite world be without those messengers? If the Nehorite movement had been able to gather momentum, what would have happened in Zarahemla? And where would the Restoration of the Gospel by Joseph Smith have stood if it had not been for numerous angelic visitations?

Many of us may not have had angels visible in our lives, but angels are present more often than we realize. Elder Bednar called these types of events "tender mercies." President Eyring has asked members of the Church to write down these mercies as they occur in their lives. Watch for such events; they do happen.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why is Amulek's Household Significant?" *KnoWhy* 117 (June 8, 2016).

For a compilation of the visitations received by Joseph Smith, see Alexander L. Baugh, "Parting the Veil: Joseph Smith's Seventy-six Documented Visionary Experiences," in *Opening the Heavens*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and BYU Studies, 2005), 268–273, 280–289.

Alma 10:7 — These Events Happened Rapidly

The events Ammonihah all happened within the tenth year of the reign of the judges. Alma and Amulek were in jail for "many days," and Alma had stayed with Amulek's family for "many days." He cannot have been with Amulek for more than three or four

months, and they cannot have been in jail for more than two or three months, because there were only about six months for those events to occur, since this episode began at the beginning of the seventh month (10:6) and finished before the end of that year (15:19). So, all this happened fairly quickly, even though it takes several chapters to cover this agonizing scene.

Alma 10:12 — The People of Ammonihah Were Astonished

The people had complained because there was only one person, Alma, condemning them, which was a legitimate legal issue. How surprised and crestfallen they must have been when Amulek similarly testified. “When Amulek had spoken these words the people began to be astonished, seeing there was more than one witness who testified of the things whereof they were accused.” The Lord again provided a tender mercy to aid in his purposes. He does not leave us alone. Yet, they hardened their hearts and “were more angry with Amulek” (Alma 10:24).

Alma 10:14–16 — Definition of “Lawyer” in Nephite Culture

What did the word *lawyer* mean to the Nephites? They did not have lawyers as we do: they did not have bar exams, they did not have law schools, and they did not have reported cases. These people were simply officials who helped with the administration of the law. They were called *lawyers* because they were involved with the law. The same was true when Jesus condemned the lawyers; they did not have lawyers in Jerusalem. The word used is *nomikos*, which means a law person, and Luke uses that word where Mark uses the word *Pharisee*. It is a way of classifying people who are deeply involved in the study and interpretation of the law, official culture, required customs, and so on. In the Jewish system, we find no evidence that these knowledgeable functionaries represented clients in court or in negotiating and transacting business deals as our lawyers do today.

Alma 10:31–32 — Zeezrom

Zeezrom, who contended with Alma and Amulek and was subsequently converted, is described as a lawyer, one that was expert in his area, “having much business to do among the people.” Alma 10:32 adds, “Now the object of these lawyers was to get gain; and they got gain according to their employ.” In fact, those assigned as judges and legal administrators were paid under the new law of Mosiah by their time. Alma 11:1 says, “Now it was in the law of Mosiah that every man who was a judge of the law, or those who were appointed to be judges, should receive wages according to the time which they labored to judge those who were brought before them to be judged.” Apparently, Zeezrom was one who earned his living according to the time he spent in such legal matters, which gave them incentive to aggressively encourage litigation.

Alma 11

Alma 11:1–4 — King Mosiah Standardized Their Monetary System

The system of weights and measures described in Alma 11:5–19 was instituted by King Mosiah (11:4) as part of the legal reforms he instituted (11:1) to serve the needs of the justice system that began with the new reign of the judges. Why was this economic reform necessary?

Previously, the king administered the justice system and appointed judges. To be a judge was a position of honor, and the elders would take their turns serving. It was the responsibility of all adult men to participate in the legal process. The virtue of judging righteously was expected to be a universal virtue in the Old Testament. The men were supposed to know the law and judge according to the proper values and conventions of the Law of Moses. But the names of their “different pieces” of gold or silver varied from town to town, and “in every generation” (11:4). They did not “reckon” (count) according to the old Jewish manner of accounting used in Jerusalem, and they did not use the old Jewish measurements, or names for their weights and measures (11:4).

For the Nephites, all this changed with the reign of the judges. They had a professional, nationwide judiciary now. The judges would have to award damages and their judgments would need to be clear. In addition, they would have to be paid themselves. The governors needed to know how much to pay them. This is likely why the creation of this new legal system and the standardized Nephite monetary system came into being, hand-in-hand. Previously the Nephites “altered their reckoning and their measure, according to the minds and the circumstances of the people, in every generation, until the reign of the judges, they having been established by king Mosiah” (11:4).

This monetary system had no coins as such. They only had weights of standard sizes that could be then equated with certain measures of grain or other commodities (Figure 1). Mosiah’s basic silver system had six binary weights: a leah, shiblum, shiblon, senum, amnor, and ezrom, with the onti being the sum of them all (Figure 2). They would have known how to use these in the marketplace, allowing them to convert from silver, or gold, into “barley, and also for a measure of every kind of grain” (11:7), and from there into the various other commodities. Nephites would have had weights for each of these sizes that they could use in weighing produce on balance scales to determine whether they had the right amount of barley, oil, or any other commodity. For efficiency, an antion (equal to 1½ measure) was added, which actually maximizes the number of amounts that could be weighed with the fewest number of weights.



Figure 1 Stone weights from the Etruscan area of Gubbio, Italy. Photo by John W. Welch.

King Mosiah's Monetary System

Alma 11:1–19

Silver Measure	Gold Equivalent	Grain Equivalent	Math Ratio
leah		$\frac{1}{8}$ measure	1, or 2^0
shiblum		$\frac{1}{4}$ measure	2, or 2^1
shiblon		$\frac{1}{2}$ measure	4, or 2^2
senum	senine	1 measure	8, or 2^3
	antion	$1\frac{1}{2}$ measures	12
amnor	seon	2 measures	16, or 2^4
ezrom	shum	4 measures	32, or 2^5
onti	limnah	7 measures	

Figure 2 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "King Mosiah's Monetary System," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 110

Further Reading

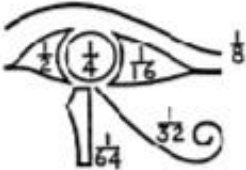






John W. Welch, "Weighing and Measuring in the Worlds of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 2 (1999): 36–45, 86: "This sidelight in the book of Alma contains enough facts to support meaningful parallels between King Mosiah's weights and measures and those used in other ancient cultures. For many reasons, these monetary details found in the large plates are weighty matters indeed. The attempted bribery, the overreaching of the lawyers, the royal standardization and official codification of these measures, their mathematical relationships, and the unusual names involved in Alma 11 have long intrigued readers."

Alma 11:4–19 — Mosiah's System Compared with Those of Egypt and Mesopotamia

Where did Mosiah's system of weights and measures come from? We aren't told, but we do know from Mosiah 1:2–5 that King Benjamin taught his sons "in all the language of his fathers," including "the language of the Egyptians," so that they could read the engravings on the plates of brass. No doubt, one of the first things Mosiah and his brothers would have learned was how to count in Egyptian, a basic part of any language. In the early twentieth century, a mathematical papyrus was found that shows us how precise and elegant the ancient Egyptian system of weights and measures actually was. Interestingly, the mathematical symbols for counting in the marketplace were all related to the "wedjat eye," or the right eye of Horus. Altogether, it was a symbol of protection, royal power, and complete good health, as well as a full measure of grain. When broken into its parts, moving around the eye, each part became the glyph that represented that fraction of the full measure. So, the pupil was $\frac{1}{4}$, the eyebrow was $\frac{1}{8}$, the eyelash was $\frac{1}{32}$, and the tear duct was (sadly) only $\frac{1}{64}$. This system was binary (each measure was half the size of the previous measure), and there were six of these weights or measures with the seventh being the sum of them all, just like the system inaugurated by King Mosiah (Figure 3).

Moreover, in the beginning of legal history in Mesopotamia, a king named Eshnunna (1770 B.C., just before Hammurabi) set forth a body of laws. His law code began, as its first matter of business, by establishing how much silver was worth how much barley, and then how much silver it took to purchase how much sesame, and so forth. This was an immense step forward in establishing a kingdom-wide economy with regulated ratios and established proportions. These laws in the kingdom of Eshnunna allowed people to deal confidently in the marketplace with barley, silver, oil, lard, wool, salt, bitumen, and refined and unrefined copper. And this was one more thing that King Mosiah's system also did, allowing people to convert between precious metals and "every kind of grain" (11:7).

Egyptian Hieroglyphs for Grain Measurement

Full Measure		$\frac{63^*}{64}$
Half Measure		$\frac{32}{64}$
Quarter Measure		$\frac{16}{64}$
Eighth Measure		$\frac{8}{64}$
Sixteenth Measure		$\frac{4}{64}$
Thirty-Second Measure		$\frac{2}{64}$
Sixty-Fourth Measure		$\frac{1}{64}$

*Compare Alma 11:10: “the value of them all”

Figure 3 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, “Egyptian Hieroglyphs for Grain Measurement,” in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 113.

This was an early form of price regulation, so that people could not overcharge. They also could not create artificial scarcity on a commodity like corn in order to price gouge. It was a big step forward in creating a viable market economy, but at the same time it could also be subject to abuse, as is seen with the lawyers and judges of Ammonihah.

By combining the binary aspect of the Egyptian grain measure with the commodities conversion feature found in the earliest Mesopotamian laws, Mosiah (perhaps unwittingly, but maybe intentionally) brought together cultural contributions from both the Nephite (Egyptian) and the Mulekite (Near Eastern, Jaredite, and Mesopotamian) worlds. And recent interest in the complex and long-term use of standardized accounting practices and currencies in the ancient Maya world offers students of the Book of Mormon yet another glimpse into why the details about Mosiah system of weights and measures were reported as they were in the book of Alma.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why You Should Care About the Nephite Weights and Measures System](#) (Alma 11:7)," *KnoWhy* 322 (June 5, 2017).

John W. Welch, "[The Laws of Eshnunna and Nephite Economics](#)," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 147–149.

Kirk Magleby, "[Money in Ancient America](#)," online at bookofmormonresources.com. This blog post draws extensively from David A. Freidel, Marilyn A. Masson, and Michelle Rich, "[Imagining a Complex Maya Political Economy: Counting Tokens and Currencies in Image, Text and the Archaeological Record](#)," *Cambridge Archeological Journal* (2016), 29–54.

Alma 11:21–22 — Zeezrom Attempts to Bribe Amulek

Zeezrom offered a bribe to Amulek, "Behold, here are six onties of silver, and all these will I give thee if thou wilt deny the existence of a Supreme Being." That was the equivalent of forty-two days' work; it was a substantial bribe. In Exodus 23:1–8, there exists what I refer to as Jehovah's Code of Judicial Justice. This comes at the end of the Covenant Code, which begins in Exodus 20. The prologue to the Covenant Code is the Ten Commandments, as is fairly obvious. But very few notice that Exodus 23 also has ten commandments at the end of the Covenant Code. They all deal with the justice system, and the last one is, "thou shalt not take a bribe."

Exodus 23 describes the judicial values that all men under the Law of Moses were obligated to enforce, and if you go down the checklist, every one of those judicial values

was violated here in Ammonihah, showing the complete wickedness, unrighteousness, and injustice of the residents, justifying the fate that eventually falls upon them.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Would Zeezrom Attempt to Bribe Amulek?” *KnoWhy* 118, (June 9, 2016).

John W. Welch, “Weighing and Measuring in the Worlds of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 2 (1999): 36–45, 86: “Mormon’s break to introduce the Nephite monetary system makes sense in light of Zeezrom’s attempted bribe. To give readers a solid understanding of the gravity of the situation, and to help them better appreciate both the level of corruption in Ammonihah as well as the nature of Amulek’s temptation, Mormon provided his description of the monetary system at this place in the narrative. In short, by knowing the Nephite monetary system, readers would know how much Zeezrom’s bribe was worth—about 42 days of labor.”

Alma 11:26–35 — Zeezrom Questions Amulek

Zeezrom’s arguments are closely related to the Nehorite doctrines. When compared to the things which Nehor taught, especially in Alma 1, you see the consistency with these arguments now raised against Alma and Amulek. They are the political platform of the Nehorite people. It is not a casual “what can we ask him?” line of inquiry. These questions are crucial for establishing the difference between the Nephite and Nehorite points-of-view. Alma and Amulek answered those questions with a long discourse in Alma chapters 12 and 13.

Alma 12

Alma 12:1–2 — Alma Confounds the Nehorite Doctrine

Alma’s discourse in chapters 12 and 13 is one of the most profound theological, religious, priesthood, and temple-oriented speeches found anywhere in the scriptures.

A great irony of this episode is that Alma chose to teach some of the most exalted and holy things in the Book of Mormon to some of the most wicked and depraved people found in that text. Why did Alma do that? It may have been a final effort. He may have set the glories of the Gospel and all potential blessings in front of them, in the hope of the people changing, but he knew that it was not likely to happen.

Understanding what the Nehorites believed is an aid to observing how Alma opposed that set of doctrines. While there is no text containing Nehor’s preaching, much is known of his doctrine through Alma’s report and from what Mormon retained in his

abridgement. When combined, these sources allow a list of the main Nehorite doctrines to be made:

Nehorite Priests: From Alma 1:3, we learn that Nehorite priests were to be supported by the people and were not allowed to labor with their own hands. There is no indication as to why, but perhaps getting their hands dirty would have made them impure and would disqualify them from performing some kinds of sacred rituals. To correct this whole doctrine and system of priestcraft, Alma speaks at length in Alma 13 about the holy priesthood order after the Son of God.

Nehorite Redemption and Restoration: The Nehorites taught that all mankind would be saved and redeemed (Alma 1:4). It is not clear where they got that idea, but from Alma's instruction to Corianton in Alma 41, it appears that they had conflated redemption with restoration. They believed that God had created all people, and they also agreed that mankind was originally in a newly created state in the Garden of Eden. They acknowledged that there had been some kind of a fall. However, they believed that God would redeem his people by buying them all back. The word redemption means to buy back. For example, as in redeeming land. If a person were poor under ancient law, and had to sell their land to pay their debts, one of their near kinsmen could buy the land from the buyer, in order to keep it in the family. That was known as the right of redemption. The words redemption and redeem are still used even in our own property and mortgage law.

However, when ancient Israelites redeemed something, they typically returned it to the person who had originally lost it. Thus, the Nehorites presumably got their idea of full and automatic restoration from the concept that there would be a redemption. They had overlooked the teaching that in order to qualify to receive a full redemption, they had to do something. Specifically, they had to repent and obey the commandments. They could have argued that under their redemption model, the poor person whose land was redeemed did not have to do anything. His land was freely redeemed. But the poor person then owed his near-kinsman a great deal. If the poor person was rude to their near-kinsman, did not show him respect, and did nothing for him, their near kinsman would not be pleased. To give a full and correct understanding of the fall and the redemption, Alma speaks in detail about those topics in the second half of Alma 12.

Nehorite Rejoicing: The followers of Nehor taught that people should not "fear and tremble" (Alma 1:4). It is interesting that when Zeezrom began arguing with Amulek, and Amulek silenced him, it says, "He [Zeezrom] began to tremble" (Alma 12:1, 7, see also Alma 11:46). These very people claimed that there was no need to tremble, and in the record, Alma points out gladly, that Zeezrom was trembling. It pierced him to his

heart; he knew better. Even though the Nehorites taught that they need not tremble, their own consciences belied their teaching. While they taught that all people should lift up their heads and rejoice, in Alma 13:22 Alma indicated the real nature of joy and rejoicing. He taught how and why to rejoice. They would truly rejoice when they entered into the rest of the Lord. Their idea of rejoicing—eating, drinking and being merry—was not real joy. Alma preferred the more eternal approach.

Nehorite Rejection of the Final Judgment: Some of the Nehorites appeared to believe in an afterlife, but they denied the idea of resurrection and repudiated the doctrine of a final judgment, because they believed that there was no sin. They argued that God had created all people equal and therefore would equally restore everyone through his redemption. Alma will address this topic in Alma 12–13 and also in his teaching to Corianton in Alma 41. The Nehorite view was that we are all equal, and thus they could not see how God could make any distinctions among them. But by arguing that because there was no sin there would be no punishment, they actually rejected the entire principle of prophecy.

Alma 12:9–11 — How Can We Know the Mysteries of God?

In Alma 12:9 it says, “It is given unto many to know the mysteries.” How can they be mysteries if they are known to many? They are things which are kept sacred, and there is a limit to who learns of them, namely the covenant people. The people who are obedient, who with their faith and diligence according to their heed, allow it to be revealed to them, and they are shown more incrementally.

In addition, people may be given many opportunities, but not all absorb them to the same degree. Alma was teaching people who did not accept those mysteries. He was essentially saying to them, “We as Nephites do not have anything that is exclusively private. I am willing to give the mysteries of God to all of you. It is given to many, and you can absorb this at whatever speed or depth you are able.” It was a very kind position for him to take under the circumstances.

But, as he explained, God will “impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him” (12:9), and that statement is, in all of scripture, the best formula for how to understand and appreciate what are called here “the mysteries.”

Heed and diligence. What do those words mean? *To heed* means hearing and paying close attention. The words are “according to the *heed*.” In other words, one can heed a little bit or a lot. One can heed certain things, while wrongly overlooking to heed other things.

The people of Ammonihah were not heedful at all. They were very dismissive, very proud, not teachable, and not willing to listen.

In 1 Nephi 16:28, Nephi said that the Liahona “worked according to the *faith* and *diligence* and *heed* which thou didst give unto them.” In that scripture, faith, diligence, and heed applied only to the use of the Liahona, whereas Alma now took that sacred operation which the prophets used to make that instrument work and applied it to people’s spiritual lives.

Our leaders continually tell us to heed the scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon. One should not just read it through, but also really read it and understand. Sometimes that takes somebody to teach us and others to discuss it with. It is assumed that obedience will be part of that learning process. The words *heed*, *hearken*, and *obey* are linguistically very closely related. We should evaluate how well we are heeding today in comparison with how well we heeded in previous years.

We also need to be diligent to obtain the mysteries of God, and in order to be diligent we must work. Alma addressed the *mysteries of God* being unfolded. King Benjamin unfolded mysteries. By that, he meant “sacred revelations.” Often these mysteries, or sacred revelations, have a great deal to do with the temple; they are not mysterious in the modern sense of the word. If the word *sacred revelation* is used whenever the word *mystery* appears—and that is what King Benjamin revealed, namely “the words that the angel spoke to me”—the text becomes much clearer. There is nothing really “mysterious” about it. It is sacred revelation. The temple is a place where many of the sacred revelations, especially the foreordained plan of God, how we will progress, and why we are here, are all made manifest.

In Amos 3, it is written, “God will do nothing save he reveal his mysteries unto his servants the prophets.” The word *mystery* in that context refers to the prophetic experience of being brought up into the Council, amidst the hosts of Heaven, where the will of God and the judgments of God are manifest. The word *plan* appears seven times in chapter 12. This chapter has the highest density of references to the plan of salvation in any chapter in the Book of Mormon. It is the plan that is revealed to the prophet, so people know what the program is. The *plan* is really the greatest *mystery*, because it is the decree of the Council of Heaven, which is what the word *mystery* means in this context.

It is interesting that the word *mystery* is used in the very first verse of the Book of Mormon. Nephi mentions that he had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God (1 Nephi 1:1), and he gives that as the reason for making his sacred record. Some people believe that they will never find out what the *mysteries* are until they arrive in Heaven, but the prophets reveal mysteries frequently.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Does Alma Mention ‘the Plan’ Ten Times in His Words to Corianton?](#) (Alma 42:13),” *KnoWhy* 150 (July 25, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Alma Teach His Opponents about the Temple?](#)” *KnoWhy* 119 (June 10, 2016).

Alma 12:12–15 — How Will We Be Judged?

In Alma 12:14, Alma presented one of the most important mysteries, realing how we will be judged:

For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence. (12:14)

Just as students wonder what their final exam is going to be like, people are concerned about what the final judgement will be based on. As part of their basic doctrine, the Nephites believed that all men would be resurrected and would have to stand before God to be judged according to how they had lived. Alma went into more detail on the elements of that final judgment in this text than is available elsewhere. He taught that people would be judged on three elements, *deeds*, *words*, and *thoughts*.

The idea of being judged based on our deeds, or individual actions, is comfortable enough for most people, but how about our words? Are people prepared to be judged on their words? Jesus spoke of that same principle, “By whatsoever measure you mete.” In other words, the judgments that people have themselves spoken will set the rules or the orders of judgment upon which they will be judged. This judgment of words is scary, for measuring one’s words is rather harder than controlling one’s deeds.

However, what about “our thoughts will also condemn us”? How many people are ready to be judged according to their *thoughts*? In this, there is nowhere to hide! That is the same principle that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, a teaching also found in biblical and ancient Jewish thought. Judgment is not only based on what one does, but what one thinketh “in the heart” (see Genesis 27:41; Psalms 14:1; Luke 2:25).

How can one repent of bad thoughts? How can one get those out of the mind? We must feel godly sorrow for our mental sins. Like Zeezrom, we must, to some extent, suffer spiritual migraines over our intellectual mistakes (see Alma 15:3, 5). In many ways, their effects on ourselves and on others are the hardest to undo, but through Jesus Christ’s

Atonement, the human intellect can be transformed into an instrument for loving God. The Atonement, through repentance, is the only way that these things can be cleansed and changed. A change of heart can also lead to a change of mind. Alma 12:14 is a beautiful text. What Alma taught is priceless. These are the words by which we will be judged. These words will guide us unto eternal life.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "And with All Thy Mind," *BYU Speeches*, September 30, 2003.

Alma 12:22–32 — Alma Taught the Creation Story Using Temple Themes

In chapter 12 and on into chapter 13, Alma taught the people of Ammonihah about the Creation story and the Fall of Adam and Eve, and how they and all mankind can avert a second death by obeying God's commandments (12:22). Since all people must die and come to judgment (12:24), messengers and angels were sent and God revealed the plan of mercy through the Son (12:29–30). Mankind was then given a second set of commandments (12:32), accompanied by an oath that whoever broke those commandments would die an ultimate spiritual death (12:35–36). After stating these fundamentals, Alma continues his teaching on into chapter 13. Actually, the break between chapters 12 and 13 is one of the least felicitous chapter breaks in the Book of Mormon. The text at the end of chapter 12 flows right into what follows in chapter 13, as Alma continued speaking about several very sacred and important doctrines. Alma was the High Priest, and accordingly addressed several temple themes in these two chapters. But in chapter 12, he sets the stage for the need for holy order of the priesthood, which he discusses in chapter 13.

Why did he relate the Creation story? One reason may be that when people are disobedient and have lived a long time without the influence of the Gospel, as had the people in Ammonihah, the most basic and compelling teachings are found in the the story of the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. For example, later, Ammon asked King Lamoni if he would believe everything he said. Lamoni replied that he would believe, and so Ammon also began with Adam and Eve. The Creation account was foundational in most ancient religions.

The doctrine of Christ's Atonement makes little sense without the doctrine of the Fall. People need to know why the world is in its present condition for them to appreciate what the Atonement of Christ offers. Alma told this story of Adam and Eve hoping that the people in Ammonihah would recognize their predicament without his having to accuse them more. He was not dwelling on *their* transgressions. He was saying that there is a problem for everyone. Of course, Nehorite doctrine did not accept that principle;

they thought that everyone would be saved and there was no such thing as sin. Thus, Alma set this doctrine out in detail and clarified it.

It is well to remember that Alma was the High Priest with responsibility for temple matters. In current times, the temple endowment begins in the Creation room. It goes through the Creation account, then through the garden room, through the world room, and then to the terrestrial room. After the Creation, the Orders of the Priesthood are given. This is common knowledge described openly. These parts of the mysteries are told to all. In Alma chapters 12–13, he spoke of the creation, the fall, then the orders of the Priesthood, including the Priesthood after the Order of the Son of God. It is possible that Alma, as the high priest, was speaking in veiled terms to these people about what the Nephite temple ordinances were all about, and saying, “I am giving you as much as I can about all of the truth that we have.”

In Alma 12:20, Antionah, a chief ruler, asked:

What is this that thou hast said, that men should rise from the dead and be changed from this mortal to an immortal state that the soul can never die. What does the scripture mean which saith that God placed cherubim and a flaming sword on the east of the garden of Eden, lest our first parents should enter and partake of the fruit of the tree of life and live forever? And thus we see that there was no possible chance that they should live forever.

This was a great question, and it is interesting that this chief ruler among them had that much knowledge. Those people, of course, had not yet experienced the fulfillment of the promise of the coming of Christ. Those who did not believe that it was going to happen, nor understood how it was going to happen, were left hanging. All they knew was that they had been kicked out of the Garden and banned from partaking of the tree of eternal life, a sad situation.

The use of covenants pervades scriptural texts. In Alma 12:35, we read, “And whosoever will harden his heart and will do iniquity, behold, I swear in my wrath that he shall not enter into my rest.” With these words, God Himself was making an oath. A covenant is a two-way oath, in which God swears certain things, and we reciprocate. Generally, there is a positive and a negative consequence for our diligence in keeping the oath.

Entering into my rest was their way of saying *entering into the presence of God*. At the end of a long journey, we can be in God’s presence and rest with him. The word *rest* occurs several times here (four in Alma 12:34–37, and five times throughout Alma 13).

This text tells us more than any other text in the Book of Mormon about how their understanding of the Plan of Salvation was taught by the Nephites, often in the form of

ordinance and rituals, which helped the covenant people retain and expand that knowledge. Alma taught the people of Ammonihah what has been taught through the ages and is still taught today, the Plan of Salvation, the purpose for earth-life, and the means to progress beyond it.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1994), 297–387, esp. 363–367.

LeGrand L. Baker and Stephen D. Ricks, "Alma 12, The Universal Pattern of Apostasy," in *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?: The Psalms in Israel's Temple Worship in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2011), 538–540.

ALMA 13–16

John W. Welch Notes



Alma 13

Alma chapter 13 is among my favorite chapters in all the Book of Mormon, if not all of scripture. Chapter 13 is the concluding second half of Alma's patient words to the hostile Nehorites in the city of Ammonihah. Together, these profound chapters stand at the center of Alma's horrific half-year experience there.

To see this discourse in its original historical context, here is a basic outline of "the words of Alma and also the words of Amulek" (Alma 9–14) and their subsequent outcomes (Alma 15–16):

- A Alma arrived in Ammonihah, warned them of their **utter destruction**, and **was rejected** (Alma 9).
- B Amulek received Alma into his **house**. Amulek converted and testified openly in Alma's behalf (Alma 10).
- C Zeezrom tried to **bribe** Amulek, who **withstood** and silenced Zeezrom (Alma 11).
- D Alma answered Zeezrom's questions by explaining the creation, fall, God's commandments, redemption, the resurrection, judgment, and the holy order of priests who help people repent and enter into God's rest (Alma 12–13).

- C The people **burned** the women and children and imprisoned Alma and Amulek who **escaped** (Alma 14).
- B Zeezrom was healed by Alma and Amulek in Sidom. They went to Alma's **house** in Zarahemla (Alma 15).
- A Ammonihah was **utterly destroyed**. Alma and Amulek were **received** throughout the land (Alma 16).

At that point, the book of Alma reverts (in Alma 17) back to the account of the four sons of Mosiah beginning in the first year of the reign of the judges.

Alma 13:1–12 — The Correct Understanding of Priesthood Callings and Ordinances

One of the main teachings of Nehor was that his priests should “become popular” and “ought not to labor with their hands” but “be supported by the people” (Alma 1:3). Alma the Elder and other Nephite leaders saw it otherwise: “the priests were not to depend upon the people for their support; but for their labor they were to receive the grace of God, that they might wax strong in the Spirit, having the knowledge of God, that they might teach with power and authority from God” (Mosiah 18:26). Alma’s understanding of the holy order of priesthood stood in sharp contrast to the Nehorite program.

Alma began his exposition on the priesthood where he had left off at the end of chapter 12. He said: “I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave *these commandments* unto his children” (13:1, emphasis added). What does Alma mean by “these commandments”? This continues the discussion at the end of chapter 12, starting in verse 33: “But God did call on men, in the name of his Son ... saying: If ye will repent, and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son.” So, the commandments to which Alma refers here include to the need for these people in Ammonihah to “repent” and to “harden not [their] hearts.” Since followers of Nehor believed that God “had redeemed all men,” they stood resolutely against the idea of needing to obey God’s commandments, let alone to repent for breaking them, in order to “have eternal life” (Alma 1:4).

Interestingly, here Alma added another point. We often think of man calling upon God in the name of God’s Son; but in this verse, God calls upon man “in the name of his Son” — emphasizing the role of the Savior as a mediator and intercessor going between God and mankind. The use and power of the Savior as mediator works both ways.

In addition, in Alma 13:2 Alma taught that God not only calls upon man in the name of his Son, but he ordains priests after the “order of his Son,” to function similarly, marking

the way between God and man. The very nature of priesthood ordinations somehow symbolically demonstrated “in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption” (Alma 13:2). Both Jesus and the priests use and model the way of conciliation and atonement. Of course, the Nehorites also denied that redemption required any particular action on the part of mankind (Alma 1:4). So, Alma provided a more detailed explanation, as follows.

First, men were called, and then some kind of initiatory preparation was given. This happened “from the foundation of the world, according to the foreknowledge of God” (13:3). After establishing the nature of these priesthood *callings*, Alma mentions that men were also “*ordained* unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest” through their repentance (13:6, emphasis added).

In verse 11, we learn that this Nephite ordinance included some manner of sanctification. Men were made holy and were “sanctified,” and “their garments were washed white.” So, we know that this ordination made some use of important garments, and that they were cleansed through the blood of the Lamb. On the Day of Atonement every year, the ancient Israelites sacrificed lambs and other animals, and Nephites used that blood as a symbol of the blood of the Savior that would eventually be shed. That blood would then be used ritually and symbolically to sanctify the people and purify their garments.

Ritual sanctification is also closely tied to temple worship. We know that the Nephites built a temple after the manner of the Temple of Solomon, only not so grand (2 Nephi 5:16). We also know that the Temple of Solomon had three chambers: (1) the court of the priests, where the altar of sacrifice stood, then (2) the main inner room of the temple, and then, separated by the veil from that room, was (3) the Holy of Holies. From the outer court, the priests would go up a step into the second room, and then only the High Priest could step up again, this time through that final veil, into the third room. They were symbolically ascending, in a ritual model of the cosmos, as they progressed through the three levels within the Temple. Entering into the Holy of Holies represented entering into God’s rest, or entering into his presence.

The inner hall, the *hekal* in Solomon’s Temple, represented the days of creation as God worked through the veil, which represented the divider between heaven and earth. In the hall they had the menorah, which was the light—“let there be light”—on that day. There was, on the table, vegetables which represented the creation of organic elements. Animals were also represented. The different parts of the creation were all there.

This is typical of temples in the ancient world, which often tend to portray the Creation with symbols. In Egypt, all the temples had to do with the emergence of the first lotus, and the first bit of ground out of the primordial waters. All the Creation-related rituals that brought people like Horus back from the dead are answering the question, “How can we be raised again to life and never die again?” That is why the Egyptians mummified people. It was all connected with their understanding of the holy order of the priesthood, and eternal blessings and promises. In the Book of the Dead, people were being given certain things that they needed to say in order to pass by the angels and the sentinels that guard the way to eternal life. People who were not supposed to enter into the afterlife did not know how to do that if they had not had that blessing.

If you did not see hints of all of this in Alma chapters 12 and 13 the first time through, you now have a little orientation. Go back and read Alma’s words with some temple lenses on, and see what you make of it. Of course, reading these two chapters with priesthood and temple lenses on are not the only ways to read this richly rewarding text. I encourage you to read the two chapters several times in the next few days. Each time you read these chapters and verses, approach them from a different vantage point and look for something different:

1. Read these two chapters from **Alma’s personal perspective**. Why was he personally motivated to mention these particular things? How do these words relate to Alma’s conversion, previous speeches, needs, or experiences? What emotions and feelings does he communicate to you in these words? What does he hope will happen to all listeners as a result of this speech?
2. Then read these two chapters again and outline **Alma’s main subjects and most emphatic words**. How was this speech organized? Do all of its pieces work together logically, structurally, developmentally, and persuasively? Which words and phrases stand out most prominently to you?
3. What would it mean to hear these words through the ears of the **people in Ammonihah**? Which words might have stood out most prominently to that audience, especially if they were hearing some of this for the first time?
4. Then read these two chapters **from Zeezrom’s perspective**. Did Alma answer all the questions that Zeezrom had raised in Alma 12:7–8? How did these words contribute to Zeezrom’s further conversion and permanent change of heart?

5. And next, read these two chapters from **Amulek’s perspective**. Being a recent convert with a wicked background, Amulek might have taken special note of certain words and explanations that he would have heard with new and important meanings to him.

6. Then read this speech **for yourself**. Can you imagine yourself hearing Alma deliver this speech? What lessons might you learn personally from this text? What does it tell you about how you may know the mysteries of God, or about the purposes of this life, or about the Savior, or on what basis will we all be judged?

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How a Tangent About Foreordination Helps Explain Repentance \(Alma 13:3\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 398 (January 11, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Did the Book of Mormon Teach Early Church Leaders about the Order and Offices of the Priesthood? \(Alma 13:8\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 330 (June 23, 2017).

Alma 12–13 — Hebrew Numerology in Alma’s Speech

While I realize that sometimes words can appear in a text a random or insignificant number of times, I believe that more is going on here in Alma 12–13 than just something inadvertent or unintended. It would appear that Alma had probably given something like this speech more than once. After all, he had been dealing with the repercussions of the execution of Nehor for ten years. All this in Ammonihah occurred during the tenth year of the reign of judges (Alma 8:3; 15:19). The appearance of key words either seven, ten, or twelve times may well reflect, to some degree, careful composing of this text.

Hebrew numerology assigns symbolic meanings to certain numbers. The number twelve is believed to represent official judgment. For example, there were twelve apostles, twelve tribes, and twelve months of the year. It is an *ordering* number. Perhaps not coincidentally, there are five words that appear twelve times in this text. This feature would have been designed to enhance the *holiness* of the holy order of God, one of Alma’s main topics. Alma was only a man, but he was indicating, in a solemn, esoteric way, that his words were authorized by a governing force. The words he chose to repeat *twelve* times are noteworthy in this regard:

- **Prepare:** Alma applied this word to the plan of redemption that was prepared from the foundation of the world. Everything was prepared and done in order. His point was that God’s plan is an orderly plan for the world; it is not just a random set of things that happen. (See the appearances of *prepare* / *prepared* / *preparatory* / *preparing*.)

- **Priesthood** (or related words such as *priests* or *high priest*): The subtext here is that true priesthood is the proper way in which the world should be governed.
- **Word**: *Word* is likely there twelve times because the *word* of God orders and shapes our lives. Nehor had used the term “word of God” to describe his doctrine (Alma 1:3), and he had been required to confess that what he had taught was “contrary to the word of God” (Alma 1:15). Alma does not miss this opportunity to stress the true meaning and content of the divine “word.”
- **Hard**: The root word *hard* (as in *harden*, *hardened*, *hardeneth*, or *hardness*) appears twelve times in reference especially to the hard hearts of the people. Alma was not coming right out and saying “*you are hard-hearted*,” but he was saying that if the people were hard-hearted, God’s resolute judgment would befall them. When he condemned the people the first time back in Alma 9, they threw him out of town. In this attempt, he was being a bit more politically correct or cautious. He never comes right out here and says, “this is what will happen.” But instead he gave the ordered conditions that inevitably point to the problems of *hard-heartedness*.
- **You**: The other word that is used twelve times is *you/thou*. *You, you, you* are individually called upon, you are accountable, you are being judged.

In addition, four words appear here ten times: *men*, *high*, *Son*, and *hearts*. Thus, *men* can be called to the *high* priesthood through the redemption of the *Son* if their *hearts* are pure. Alma points here to the underlying mystery, namely, that humans, as the children of God, can become perfect like their Father. And on the receiving end, Alma equally uses the injunction to “harden not” ten times. Ten is typically the number of perfection, and the high priesthood after the order of the Son of God is the medium of perfection.

Thirteen words make an appearance *seven* times each. They are: *also*, *brethren*, *called*, *calling*, *faith*, *many*, *ordained*, *plan*, *prepared*, *priesthood*, *repent*, *repentance*, and *spoken*. Seven was perhaps the most significant number in the Bible, representing spiritual perfection, completion, the seven days of creation, the seven-fold ceremonies throughout the book of Leviticus, the requirement to forgive seventy times seven (or forty-nine times ten), the seventh heaven mentioned by Paul, or the seven churches, candlesticks, lamps, seals, horns, eyes, trumpets, thunders, crowns, plagues, vials, and angels in the final completion of the history of the world in John’s Apocalypse. Accordingly, the fulfillment of the principles that Alma mentions seven times leads all people to spiritual completion.

Further Reading

Corbin Volluz, “[A Study in Seven: Hebrew Numerology in the Book of Mormon](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2014): 57–83.

Diane E. Wirth, “Revisiting the Seven Lineages of the Book of Mormon and the Seven Tribes of Mesoamerica,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2013): 77–88.

John W. Welch, “The Number 24,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1992), 272–274.

John W. Welch, “Counting to Ten,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 42–57, 113–114.

Alma 13:13–19 — Melchizedek Held the Priesthood of God

To drive home the power of the true order of the priesthood of God in implementing the plan of salvation, Alma turned his attention next to Melchizedek and the Melchizedek Priesthood. Alma’s comprehension and articulation of the preeminence of Melchizedek is amazing in many ways, only a little of which we have time to highlight here.

When I was studying in a seminar conducted by James H. Charlesworth at Duke University in the early 1970s, I was very excited to learn about a recently published text from the Dead Sea Scrolls, named 11Q Melchizedek. As a Latter-day Saint, to whom the name Melchizedek is a more meaningful household word than among any other people in the world, it was impressive to me to find that certain Jews at Qumran, before the time of Christ, revered Melchizedek and expected him to lead his holy men to return to sweep the earth in God’s great cleansing and sanctifying of the world. This especially rang a bell for me because of Alma 13. There Alma also turns to Melchizedek as the greatest known holder of the high and holy priesthood after the order of the Son of God. I spent much of the next summer researching the history of Melchizedek among ancient Jews and Christians, and then presented a paper on that topic at the public celebration at BYU of Hugh Nibley’s 65th birthday on March 27, 1975. Finding even more to say on this subject, I continued to update and expanded this groundbreaking study in an article, “The Melchizedek Material in Alma 13:13–19,” which was included in the Hugh Nibley Festschrift, published in 1990. That study provided greater context and meaning about Melchizedek’s role in Alma 13 by analyzing various treatments of Melchizedek throughout history, not only in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon, but also in the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 14, in the Book of Jubilees, 2 Enoch, Qumran texts, Philo, and other ancient texts.

A great deal has been written about Melchizedek having been a type of Christ. There are even people who believe that Melchizedek, who appeared to Abraham and to whom Abraham paid tithing, was the angel of the Lord himself. We are in good company when

we talk about the order of Melchizedek, which Alma equates with the Holy Order after the order of the Son of God. There is very important symbolism and material involved here.

For example, the name Melchizedek—*Melchi-zedek*—meant *my king is righteous*, or *righteousness to the Lord*. This name could easily be applied to Christ himself. Nevertheless, when Alma refers to Melchizedek, he is not referring to an angel. He is speaking of an actual king, the king of Salem, and a righteous king and a priest, of whom “none was greater” (Alma 13:19).

In verse 18, we read something very striking. Melchizedek was a king who exercised mighty faith. He received the office of the High Priesthood, but also, Melchizedek was working with wicked people. He had very wicked people to deal with just like Alma, and he converted them! Through teaching according to the Order of the High Priesthood with which he had been charged, he was able to preach repentance to these people, and as Alma said, “behold, they did repent.” That was the greatest miracle of them all!

Is there anything done by the power of the Priesthood that does not try, ultimately, to bring people to repentance? For example, baptism is for the remission of sins after repentance. The priesthood ordinance of blessing the Sacrament is for the renewal of baptism, that we might be forgiven of sins. The main, but not exclusive, use of Priesthood power is to bring about repentance in the lives of people, and that is how Alma would have hoped to be able to use his priesthood in Ammonihah.

At the end of his speech, Alma gently echoed the words of King Benjamin, gave comfort, and offered persuasion without condemnation and with love unfeigned (see 13:28). It is amazing that he could love such people that were truly his deepest and most entrenched enemies, knowing sadly that what he was doing would ultimately work to the condemnation of most of them. Nevertheless, as did that angel who stood before Alma and brought about his repentance and conversion, the greatest wish of his heart was that he could be an angel and do the same.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Are Ordinances So Important?](#) (Alma 13:16),” *KnoWhy* 296 (April 5, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Alma Talk about Melchizedek?](#) (Alma 13:14),” *KnoWhy* 120 (June 13, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[The Melchizedek Material in Alma 13:13–19](#),” in *By Study and Also by Faith*, 2 vols., edited by John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:238–272.

Alma 13:17–18 — The Significance of Alma’s Use of Melchizedek

Jews, early Christians, Gnostics, and all kinds of people have been fascinated with Melchizedek. It is clear that he was an important person, but there is so little about him in Genesis 14 that it is very hard to know exactly what we are supposed to make of him. However, Alma seems to know more about Melchizedek than any of these other people. The Joseph Smith Translation builds on this subject even further, and now we have texts coming along like 2 Enoch and texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which may shed further light on Melchizedek’s legacy. And you can imagine my excitement in learning that people at Qumran believed that Melchizedek would come back, that he was a King and a High Priest, and he would stand as God’s right-hand-man carrying out the judgments of God.

Alma, however, did not see Melchizedek as a great warrior standing at the head of all his men. Alma did not have any soldiers to call on. What Alma really admired in Melchizedek was that Melchizedek had exercised mighty faith, and the people repented. Alma raised Melchizedek as an example to the people of Ammonihah, who also had “waxed strong in iniquity and abomination.” Alma was trying to help them recognize that repentance was still possible.

Melchizedek was also a solo operator, at least as far as the scriptures reveal. We know nothing about his father or about his lineage. He comes out into the battlefield and Abraham gives him tithes of all that he had. Here, Alma was doing some of the same things. He was operating alone, he had gone into Ammonihah armed with nothing but the Melchizedek Priesthood and the office of the High Priest after the Holy Order of God, which had been handed down from Enoch according to the Joseph Smith Translation and perhaps the version of Genesis on the plates of brass.

Melchizedek preached repentance, and the people repented. He used the power of the priesthood in such an effective way. Can you imagine Alma’s longing to do the same? A little later, Alma will exclaim, “O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!” (Alma 29:1). In Alma 13, he is sort of saying, “O that I were Melchizedek! I know I have the same power as he held.” What a miracle it was to bring about repentance and establish peace in the land. That was why he was called the King of Peace, and why the scriptures make particular mention of him.

There is nothing greater that we can do with the priesthood than to bring people to repentance. That is what the power of the priesthood and every ordinance of the priesthood is for, whether it is baptism, the sacrament, or even marriage. Priesthood ordinance workers are working to help people to repent and turn their lives over to God.

That was why Alma said, “And now is the time to repent. Now is your chance, people. If you will do this, you will have joy, not the Nehorite kind of rejoicing, but real joy.”

Alma 13:27–30 — Alma Prayed that the People Would Repent

Verse 27 shows us the heart of Alma. Even under enormous pressure, even at the risk of his life, he spoke “from the inmost part of my heart, yea, with great anxiety, even unto pain.” Alma’s desire was traumatic enough that it appears he somehow already felt the coming pain—surely emotional and spiritual pain, but perhaps also some degree of physical pain. He declared, I wish that you “would hearken to my words, and cast off your sins, and not procrastinate the day of your repentance; But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord and, call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually” (v. 27). And remember that the Nehorites refused to pray. Why should they pray if they did not believe in sin? If God was going to redeem them all anyway, as they thought, what was there to be asked for?

“Watch and pray,” Alma said, “that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering” (v. 28). At this point, Alma quotes King Benjamin. Why does he quote Benjamin at the very end of his last chance to speak to the people in Ammonihah? The ancestors of these Nehorites, their grandfathers, had been part of King Benjamin’s community, and Alma probably referred to Benjamin, hoping it would touch their hearts. It might have even occurred to them that they too could have “that mighty change” that King Benjamin had spoken of.

Then Alma offered the following: “Having faith on the Lord, having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life, having the love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up [resurrected] at the last day and enter into his rest” (v. 29). Alma followed that with an interesting thought, “And may the Lord *grant unto you* repentance” (v. 30, emphasis added). Have you ever thought of being granted repentance? Usually we think of repentance as something that we do, but here, Alma realized that the only way these people, and the only way any of us really repent, is when God grants us repentance, to soften our hearts and help us to be able to repent fully. This is the only place I know of where that concept appears in scripture—a wish that God will grant repentance. And there Alma ends.

These are wonderful chapters, as deep and profound as possible. We may wonder why he would throw such pearls before swine! As he addressed the most wicked people in his area of responsibility, he gave them the holiest and most sublime teachings that the High Priest possibly could give. He was giving them every opportunity, and he was being very

directly responsive to their concerns and giving them every reason to turn around and repent and live their lives properly. It is a beautiful example of a faithful high priest.

Alma 14

Alma 14:1 — Many People Begin to Repent

Alma was successful with many of the ordinary men in Ammonihah, but apparently not with the priests. We do not know the composition of the group that he addressed, nor do we know where their chief judge fits here. Alma may have been doomed because so many people began to believe in him. The Nehorite leaders may have been alarmed as the people began to realize that for ten years, they had been told how bad Alma was. He had their hero, Nehor, executed. But after hearing Alma preach in person, some of them began to soften their hearts and repent.

Alma 14:1–2 — Amulek and Zeezrom as People

Amulek and Zeezrom are both portrayed as real-life human beings. It is interesting how much can be pulled out of the record about these people to reconstruct their concerns, their backgrounds, and how they used language.

Zeezrom's arguments were closely related to the Nehorite doctrines. What Nehor taught, especially according to Alma chapter 1, consistently fueled the arguments raised against Alma and Amulek and provided the political platform of the Nehorite people. It was not just a casual, "What-can-we-ask-him?" kind of thing. The questions posed to Alma were crucial for establishing the difference between the Nephite point of view and the Nehorite view. Alma and Amulek answered those questions in detail and with conviction. Zeezrom went along to Antionum after his conversion and healing, and that is an interesting part of his story. Zeezrom is initially thought of as one of the villains of the Book of Mormon, one of the bad people. But after his encounter with Alma and Amulek, he was totally converted. He reconsidered when he heard what they taught, and he became a powerful convert. What a hero he was. He became sick, he was healed, and then he went on to be a missionary companion to Alma.

We can also consider how Amulek must have felt after being told, "The blessing of the Lord shall rest upon thee and thy house" (Alma 10:7), yet he had to watch many righteous women and children in his community being burned to death. It does not say whether or not Amulek's family were among the sufferers, but I think it was very likely that they were. For, after this incident and the healing of Zeezrom, Alma took Amulek home with him to the land of Zarahemla "and did administer unto him in his tribulations, and

strengthened him in the Lord” (Alma 15:18), which certainly suggests that he had no family to go home to after he and Alma had been delivered from prison by an earthquake.

Amulek had said that Alma had blessed “my women and my children,” so one wonders who else was in Amulek’s family. He may have been taking care of his mother or aunts. Perhaps Amulek had responsibility for the widow of a deceased brother under the Levirate marriage system. Whatever the situation, he was responsible for a large household. Rising above his unimaginable losses and personal trials, he became Alma’s second witness in Ammonihah, and then became Alma’s main companion as he traveled for the rest of his missionary work.

In Alma 34, the Book of Mormon preserves another chapter of Amulek’s powerful testimony. Amulek’s experiences in Ammonihah help explain what he says to the Zoramite poor. There we have the strongest teaching in the Book of Mormon about the infinite power of Christ’s Atonement, the infinite ability of God to make things right. Amulek was the only person in the Book of Mormon who spoke of being embraced in the arms of God’s safety. He used the word *safety* and no one else does. That word must have meant a lot to him after the risks he had experienced.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Kind of Earthquake Caused the Prison Walls to Fall?](#) (Alma 14:29),” *KnoWhy* 121 (June 14, 2016).

Alma 14:8–13 — Believers Are Killed by Fire

Who were the women and children that were burned? Do you think they were Amulek’s children? We know that Amulek’s women and children accepted Alma, and were among the believers. The text makes a point of that in Alma 10.

Why did Amulek not rush in to rescue his family from the fire? Well, both he and Alma were bound. They had been stripped, tied up, and starved for many days. He was in a very weakened and impossible condition. His heart must have ached as he watched. He asked Alma if they could do something miraculous to save them. He was hoping that Alma would call on the powers of Heaven to stop the suffering. Elijah was able to make a fire burn to destroy the priests of Baal. Why could not Alma make a fire stop burning? The Spirit constrained Alma, however, unlike when he was able to request the powers of Heaven to get them out of the prison. He recognized that “the Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand” (Alma 14:11). Even a prophet cannot do something if the Spirit does not tell him it is right.

Alma explained that it was necessary for the event to reach its conclusion so a just judgment could come upon the people according to the hardness of their hearts. It is one

of those awful events, but Amulek believed that in the end the women and children would be rewarded for their faithfulness.

God will typically not intervene to undo people’s choices. One wonders how our Heavenly Father, who loves and feels deeply, can bear to watch people using their agency. This event is strong testimony of the importance of the principle of agency and choice. As Captain Moroni wrote, “For the Lord suffereth the righteous to be slain that his justice and judgment may come upon the wicked; therefore ye need not suppose that the righteous are lost because they are slain; but behold, they do enter into the rest of the Lord their God” (Alma 60:13).

Consider that while Joseph Smith was healing people, his own children died, and Emma asked, “Why do you not raise our children? Why can you not heal our children?” He replied that it was the Lord’s will, not his. Think of Joseph and Hyrum in Carthage too. Even there, the jail walls did not come down with an earthquake as it did for Alma and Amulek, but Joseph knew, “I go as a lamb to the slaughter.” He did not expect those walls to come crashing down on the murderers who were invading that jail to kill him.

Often, such miracles happen to help those around, but the people in Ammonihah were beyond that kind of help. It may have strengthened Amulek when he and Alma were delivered by the power of God as the jail was opened.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Does God Sometimes Allow His Saints to Be Martyred?](#) (Alma 14:11),” *KnoWhy* 351 (August 11, 2017).

Alma 15

Alma 15:5–12 — Zeezrom’s Conversion

Alma and Amulek had been cast out of Ammonihah, and had fled to Sidom, where they encountered Zeezrom, who was sick. He, the former Nehorite accuser of Alma, was healed, converted, and baptized. He “began from that time forth to preach unto the people” (Alma 15:12). Eventually, Zeezrom served with Alma, two of his sons, and Amulek, in teaching the Zoramites in Antionum (Alma 31:6, 32).

Alma 15:19 — The Tenth Year of the Reign of Judges

This verse is one of many time markers in the Book of Mormon. It records the end of the tenth year of the reign of the judges. The text provides good information about some of the years in which Alma was the high priest during this time (Figure 1). We recall that he

Alma as High Priest Years 9–19 of the Reign of the Judges

Year	References	Events
9	Alma 4 Alma 5; 7	Nephihah becomes chief judge Alma ₂ preaches in Zarahemla and Gideon
10	Alma 8; 9; 15 Alma 10; 15 Alma 14	Alma ₂ preaches in Melek, Ammonihah, and Sidom Amulek and Zeezrom are converted Women and children suffer death by fire in Ammonihah
11	Alma 16:1–11	Ammonihah is destroyed
12	Alma 16:16	Peace; no inequality exists among Nephites
13	Alma 16:21	Peace; the church is established
14	Alma 27 Alma 16:12	Ammonites possess the land of Jershon Lamanites invade
15	Alma 28:3	Lamanite attack ends
16	Alma 30	Peace
17	Alma 30 Alma 31–35	Korihor contends with Alma ₂ ; dies in Antionum Some Zoramites are converted and granted refuge in Jershon, leaving apostate Zoramites angry
18	Alma 36–43 Alma 43 Alma 43–44	Alma ₂ blesses his sons; they preach in every city Zoramites and Lamanites invade Jershon and Manti Zerahemnah is defeated
19	Alma 45:1–17 Alma 45:18–19 Alma 45:20–24	Alma ₂ passes the mantle to his son Helaman ₂ Alma ₂ goes as if to Melek and is not seen again Helaman ₂ and his brethren preach in every city

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Figure 1 John W. Welch, Greg Welch, "Alma as High Priest: Years 0–19 of the Reign of the Judges," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 25.

was the Chief Judge as well as the high priest for the first eight years of the Reign of Judges. He then gave up the judgment seat to focus on being the High Priest, and that happened in the ninth year. Alma immediately went to set the Church to rights, first in Zarahemla, then in Gideon. In Alma 8:2, we read, “And thus ended the ninth year of the Reign of the Judges over the people of Nephi,” and in 8:3, it is recorded that “... it came to pass in the commencement of the tenth year of the Reign of the Judges over the people of Nephi, that Alma departed from thence and took his journey over into the land of Melek.”

The tenth year began, then, as he is going to Melek to teach, but when did the tenth year end? It is recorded in this verse, Alma 15:19. “And thus ended the tenth year of the Reign of the Judges over the people of Nephi.” That is the end of chapter 15. They got out of prison in Ammonihah, and fled from there to the neighboring city of Sidom, where some of the persecuted male converts had fled.

Everything that was covered from the time Alma went to Melek, all the time in Ammonihah, all the horrifying events, and until Alma and Amulek returned to Alma’s home in Zarahemla, happened within one year. In fact, most of it happened within the second half of that year. A great deal of information is compressed here into a rather short time.

Chapter 16

Alma 16:1 — A Little Peace in the Aftermath of the Destruction of Ammonihah

Apart from Ammonihah’s being destroyed, all in a single day, after the fifth day of the second month in the eleventh year (16:1, 10), the Nephites enjoyed a few years of peace until the Lamanites attacked again while chasing the converts of Ammon, whom Ammon had brought to the Land of Zarahemla. The Lamanites did not like that at all; they did not like losing all those people from their population. Thus, there was a bitter war in the fourteenth year of the reign of the judges. But then again, in the fifteenth and sixteenth years, peace returned. Notice also that the Zoramites in Antionum would also react bitterly when Alma and Amulek and other missionaries converted back and away many of the Zoramite working class.

Ammonihah, on the other hand, was destroyed as prophesied and in accordance with the Law of Moses, which sets forth the procedures to be followed against an apostate city. Many details in the account of the trial of Alma and Amulek in Ammonihah are based solidly on legal provisions in the Law of Moses (Figure 2). In particular, it appears highly likely that Alma had Deuteronomy 13:12–17 specifically in mind in his accusation against

the wicked people in the city of Ammonihah. That biblical text provided that an apostate city should be destroyed and anathematized in a particular way, involving a thorough investigation that produced clear evidence that the inhabitants of the city had withdrawn to serve other gods and had become “children of Belial” (or of Satan; for that detail, see Alma 8:9), followed by execution by the sword, leaving the city as “an heap for ever” (Deuteronomy 13:16). Of course, Alma no longer commanded the armies of the Nephites, and thus he did not have the military power at his disposal to carry out the destruction of an apostate city by his own physical means, but in due time, God brought the scourge of war upon the city of Ammonihah at the hands of an invading Lamanite army that would “slay the people and destroy the city” utterly, killing “every living soul” (Alma 16:2, 9). And indeed, it remained a “heap” for at least seven years (perhaps a ritual fallow sabbatical period), from the beginning of the eleventh year to the end of the nineteenth year (see Alma 16:1; 49:1).

The Law of Apostate Cities

Deuteronomy 13:12–18	Ammonihah (Alma 9–16)
certain men gone out from among you	Nehorites
withdrawn the inhabitants of their city	withdrew from Nephites
serve other gods	turned from God
children of Belial	Satan had great hold
inquire and search diligently	Alma visits personally
smite all inhabitants with the sword	everyone killed
destroy utterly	everything destroyed
a heap forever	bodies heaped up
abomination	desolation of Nehors

Figure 2 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, “The Law of Apostate Cities,” in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 126.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008), 238–271 discusses, among other things, the legal reasons why the women, children, and sacred books were burned, but not the men, who were banished (260–262); the legal significance of smiting on the cheek (263–266); the abusive imprisonment of Alma and Amulek (266–267); and the total infraction of all ten provisions of the code of judicial ethics in Exodus 23 (269–270), and thus articulating the justifications for the disastrous outcome in this case.

John W. Welch, “The Destruction of Ammonihah and the Law of Apostate Cities,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 176–179.

John W. Welch, “Law and War in the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen Ricks and William Hamblin (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS., 1990), 91–95.

Alma 16:5 — Zoram Went to the Prophet for Military Advice

Here we have an interesting event, in which Zoram, the chief captain over the armies and his two assistant sons came to consult the prophet to find out where to go to reclaim captives. There is a famous precedent in which King Hezekiah consulted Isaiah to seek counsel to save Jerusalem. Isaiah prophesied that the Assyrians would be defeated and Sennacherib would die. Interestingly, King Hezekiah prayed for deliverance (2 Kings 19:1–7). It would be a wonderful way to run a country. Recall also that Nephi went to Lehi to ask where he could find food (1 Nephi 16:23).

Alma 16:13–21 — Preach Nothing Save It Were Repentance

Alma returned to preaching repentance, the whole point of learning the Gospel. Earlier, at the Waters of Mormon, Alma the Elder had taught specifically that they should “preach nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord, who had redeemed his people” (Mosiah 18:20). Here, Alma the Younger is still following his father’s guidance.

Alma 16:19–20 — Sometimes “I Do Not Know” Is a Good Answer

Shortly after the destruction of Ammonihah, Alma and Amulek went around preaching, “Holding forth things which must shortly come; yea, holding forth the coming of the Son of God, his sufferings and death, and also the resurrection of the dead.” They were preaching exactly the things that the people in Ammonihah rejected.

Then, in verse 20, the people began to ask questions, “And many of the people inquired concerning the place where the Son of God should come. And they were taught.” Alma must have received specific information by revelation that the Savior “would appear unto

them after his resurrection.” This seems to be the first time that this important detail was spoken quite so clearly and publicly in the Book of Mormon. Earlier prophecies about the resurrection spoke about “all the earth [seeing] the salvation of the Lord” (1 Nephi 19:17), and about Christ appearing “to his people” in an old-world context in connection with the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem (2 Nephi 25:14). Learning this new expectation that the Lord would come to them in the new world, no doubt, filled the people of Alma “with great joy and gladness” (16:20).

Wherever Alma was preaching, among hostile opponents or with faithful followers, he was asked tough questions. No doubt he sometimes had to say things like, “I don’t know the answer to all these things.” Here he was asked about “*the place* where the Son of God should come.” But what were they asking? Did they want to know “Which holy place?” “Which temple?” “Which city or land?” “Which isle of the sea?” How specific was their question? Certainly, Alma knew that the Son of God would come. That much he knew. And he answered cautiously, “He will appear to them, but not until after his resurrection.” And that much was enough to satisfy them deeply.

Does this say something to us? We do not always know the answers to all the questions that are thrown at us. In that case, it is better to say we don’t know something than to speculate beyond the limits of our understanding, especially without first clarifying that what we are teaching is speculation rather than revealed knowledge. At the same time, it is also essential to say what we do know. Typically, we know more than we might think we know, and usually we know all that we need to know.

ALMA 17–22

John W. Welch Notes



In reading the “account of the sons of Mosiah” in Alma 17–26, it helps to be mindful about time, place, and purpose. While keeping track of the times and places may be difficult, the purpose driving these four missionaries is always clear.

Alma 17 begins back at the time of the first year of the reign of judges. Everything that happens with the four sons of Mosiah in the ten chapters from Alma 17–26 took place during the same fourteen years with Alma the Younger in Alma 1–16. When King Mosiah relinquished the kingship in the land of Zarahemla and then died, his four sons left for fourteen amazing years—two whole seven-year sabbatical cycles. Their return and joyous reunion with Alma is exuberantly reported in Alma 26.

The events in this block of chapters took place in several lands. It helps to keep track of the separate places where the key events occur. Watch especially for lands or cities called the lands of Ishmael, Jerusalem, Middoni, and Nephi. In all, the brothers converted people unto the Lord in seven lands or cities (Alma 23:8–12). An important overview of the geography of these lands is given at the end of Alma 22, verses 27–34.

These four brothers—Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni—left their previous life of privilege and aristocracy and went anonymously into different cultural settings with no purpose or motive other than to cultivate faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and faithful lives of righteousness based on his plan of salvation for all of mankind. Their hope was to break down barriers of tribal misunderstanding, doctrinal

forgetfulness, and the use of violence. Through patience and suffering, they facilitated spiritual conversions that led to peace among families and peoples.

Many personal and religious lessons can be learned by attentively reading the accounts of these courageous and inspired brothers. Only a few of those lessons will be pointed out here. These four sons of Mosiah had been present with Alma when they all saw and heard the angel of the Lord. That conversion taught them many things and changed their lives forever (Mosiah 27:32). The effects of their missions were strongly felt in their day and continue to be inspiring even today.

Alma 17

Alma 17:1–4 — Alma Rejoices in Seeing the Sons of Mosiah after Fourteen Years

Rather than becoming political leaders at home, the four sons of Mosiah decided to leave the Land of Zarahemla to serve a mission among the Lamanites. This was done for spiritual reasons, but their devotion also had political consequences. Their absence may have prevented them from becoming a political liability to Alma, the new chief judge, and Nephiah, who replaced Alma in that position after eight years, with people perhaps wanting to pressure them to insert themselves into positions of power (consider Mosiah 29:2). Their mission was a long one and lasted fourteen years. We do not have much of a record about the last twelve years of their mission. However, the record gives us considerable information about the first few years—how they were successful in establishing the conversion of King Lamoni and also his father. From then on, we only get a general accounting that a lot of impressive things were generally accomplished through their missionary efforts.

To see the sons of Mosiah again after so many years brought great rejoicing to Alma, but what added more to his joy was that “they were still his brethren in the Lord; yea, and they had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth” (17:2). That’s what matters most.

Alma 17:2–3, 9–12 — We Can Search the Scriptures to Gain the Spirit of Prophecy and Revelation

What lessons can we learn from how the sons of Mosiah approached their missions? What did they do to prepare? Obviously, there was no MTC available to help them prepare for their missionary call. Indeed, Alma 17 is used today as a primary scriptural source of study and training for newly-called missionaries in the MTC. These scriptures discuss principles that can also apply to any calling. How do you approach a difficult calling in the Church?

First and foremost, the sons of Mosiah spent a lot of time reading the scriptures. “[T]hey had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God.” This helped them become “men of a sound understanding” as they “waxed strong in the knowledge of truth.” Apparently, these missionaries had some sort of scriptural record with them. We are not told the material on which those writings were written—perhaps it was something written on fig bark, a commonly used material. Metal was probably not used because such records would be very heavy to carry from place to place, and metal would also have been a liability if somebody wanted to rob them of something valuable.

When Ammon taught King Lamoni, he “rehearsed and laid before [the king] the records and the holy scriptures of the people, which had been spoken by the prophets, even down to the time that their father, Lehi, left Jerusalem” (Alma 18:36). Ammon understood and used the scriptures to good effect as he taught. When it mentions that Ammon “rehearsed” the records, it could have meant either he was reciting from memory or reading from a scriptural text. To better understand how teaching was done by Ammon, it is important to note that reading in the ancient world was rarely done silently. Today when we read a book, we are quiet. However, even in the Middle Ages, monks would read out loud, even when reading by themselves, so that the words could be not just seen but heard. So, in a typical ancient setting, to “rehearse” a text meant to read it out loud.

We can follow the example of the sons of Mosiah when we get a new calling. We can ask ourselves, “What will the scriptures tell me about this new calling? What do the scriptures tell me about how to approach and work with people over which I have stewardship and accountability?” When we reread scriptural passages that we have read on other occasions, we often find that with a new set of problems the scriptures open themselves in ways that they had not before.

Next, after “much prayer and fasting,” the four missionary brothers and Alma received the “spirit of prophecy” and the “spirit of revelation.” One might wonder, is there a difference between the “spirit of prophecy” and the “spirit of revelation”? Why, when there was so little space on the plates, would both of these phrases be used?

The “spirit of prophecy” is a gift of the spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians. For the ancients, it meant prophesying beforehand about the future. During this time period of the Book of Mormon, the most important future thing that the righteous people were looking forward to was the coming of Christ. Perhaps, as these four missionaries read the scriptures, they were filled with the spirit of the prophets who had spoken about the coming of Christ. They certainly made the coming of Christ a major part of their missionary message—both Ammon and Aaron focused much of their preaching on this topic. We too can seek the

spirit to make the future second coming of Christ and events leading up to that inevitable arrival more vividly present in our hearts and minds.

The “spirit of revelation” then refers to moments when the veil is taken from our minds and we understand things a little better. When something is revealed, answers to a difficult problem are uncovered or some new insight or understanding is discovered and becomes clear. By reading the scriptures and by asking for the “spirit of revelation” in addition to the “spirit of prophecy,” we desire to think like a prophet—we want to have the mysteries of God open to our understanding by His influence, and not by our own rationalizations or limited perspectives.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Book of Mormon Prophets Quote Long Passages of Scripture? \(1 Nephi 19:22\),” *KnoWhy* 473 \(October 4, 2018\).](#)

Alma 17:3–4 — The Sons of Mosiah Serve with the Power and Authority of God

The sons of Mosiah had the ability to speak with power and authority of God (17:3). Why is special attention drawn to this point? Evidently, these missionaries had been called, they had been set apart, and received power not only by fasting and prayer, but they also had been given the appropriate authority.

How does this apply to us when we receive a church calling? We too need to have the authority to act. How do we get that authority? We receive the authority of God by the laying on of hands. We should not serve in a calling without being set apart for that particular calling. Undoubtedly, every bishop would be happy if members who were recently sustained to new callings in sacrament meeting would come and ask for that setting apart and blessing. It is hard for bishops to keep track of this sort of thing. There is no tracking system on your membership record to indicate that you have or have not been set apart for each calling you receive. The bishop may assume that one of his counselors has set you apart for your calling, and the counselors may assume that the bishop has done it. We should be sure that we are set apart for any calling, and thereby receive the appropriate authority and blessing. We should also listen carefully to the contents of the blessing, and remember and strive to live worthy of its promises.

These four missionaries had the right to serve as God’s missionaries. It is not something that a person simply takes upon himself or herself. We may assume this happened by some laying on of hands (as was typically done anciently in consecrating a priest or making a sacrifice; see particularly, Moroni 2:2). Then, by their righteous living they were able to speak with authority. An important principle about the Melchizedek priesthood is that it has the power to cause people to repent (see Alma 13:18). Righteous use of authority

is the key for opening up the hearts of people so that they will repent. There are other dimensions to the priesthood, of course; but every purpose—everything we do in the priesthood, when you think about it—is to bring people to repent. We have no need to wonder why the Book of Mormon instructs readers so thoroughly about the preparations of the sons of Mosiah as they undertook their calling as missionaries. Through the power and the authority that these missionaries had, they were, most notably, able to bring about repentance in the lives of many people—Lamoni, Lamoni’s father, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, and many individuals within these lands and kingdoms.

Alma 17:6 — Mormon Abridges and Inserts Flashback Narratives

As you may remember, there were several flashbacks in the Book of Mosiah after King Benjamin’s speech (see [chart 29](#) in *Charting the Book of Mormon*). Once again, here in Alma 17–26, Mormon abridges and compiles various underlying records with the result that more flashbacks are found here as well. Not only do these flashbacks remind us of the complex challenge anyone would face in trying to compose such a record, keeping track of these concurrent lines of narrative also helps us follow what happened to Alma the younger and the sons of Mosiah as these remarkable men were simultaneously involved in important works taking place in various far-off locations.

- Starting on the left-hand column of this chart (Alma 1–16), at the first year of the reign of judges, or 91 BC, that column tracks what happened in Zarahemla through the eleventh year of the reign of the judges and what Alma the younger was doing. It covers the execution of Nehor, the Amlicite civil war, the conversion of Amulek, the conversion of Zeezrom, and, in the eleventh year of the reign of judges, the attack on Ammonihah.
- In the next column (covering Alma 17–20), the narrative backtracks to 91 BC and picks up what happened to the four sons of Mosiah during those same years—specifically, events about Ammon, Lamoni, and the land of Ishmael.
- Then we have yet another flashback in chapters 21–27 of Alma (the third column), in which the reader learns what happened to Aaron. After Ammon converted Lamoni, he went to the land of Ishmael to teach the people there. Meanwhile, Aaron went on to the main city of the Lamanites where the father of Lamoni was king. Lamoni’s father lived in the old city of Nephi that was evacuated a few years earlier when Limhi left. We never learn the name of Lamoni’s father, but we know that he took over and ruled in the old city where King Noah used to rule. After all, it was probably a nice place—King Noah and others before him had done a lot of building there. We follow on through with subsequent events in the third column, and eventually we again run across Ammonihah being attacked. This is when the Anti-

Nephi-Lehies moved with Ammon north to Zarahemla and were given a land called Jershon for their inheritance. These people are often referred to as the Ammonites.

Flashbacks in the Book of Alma

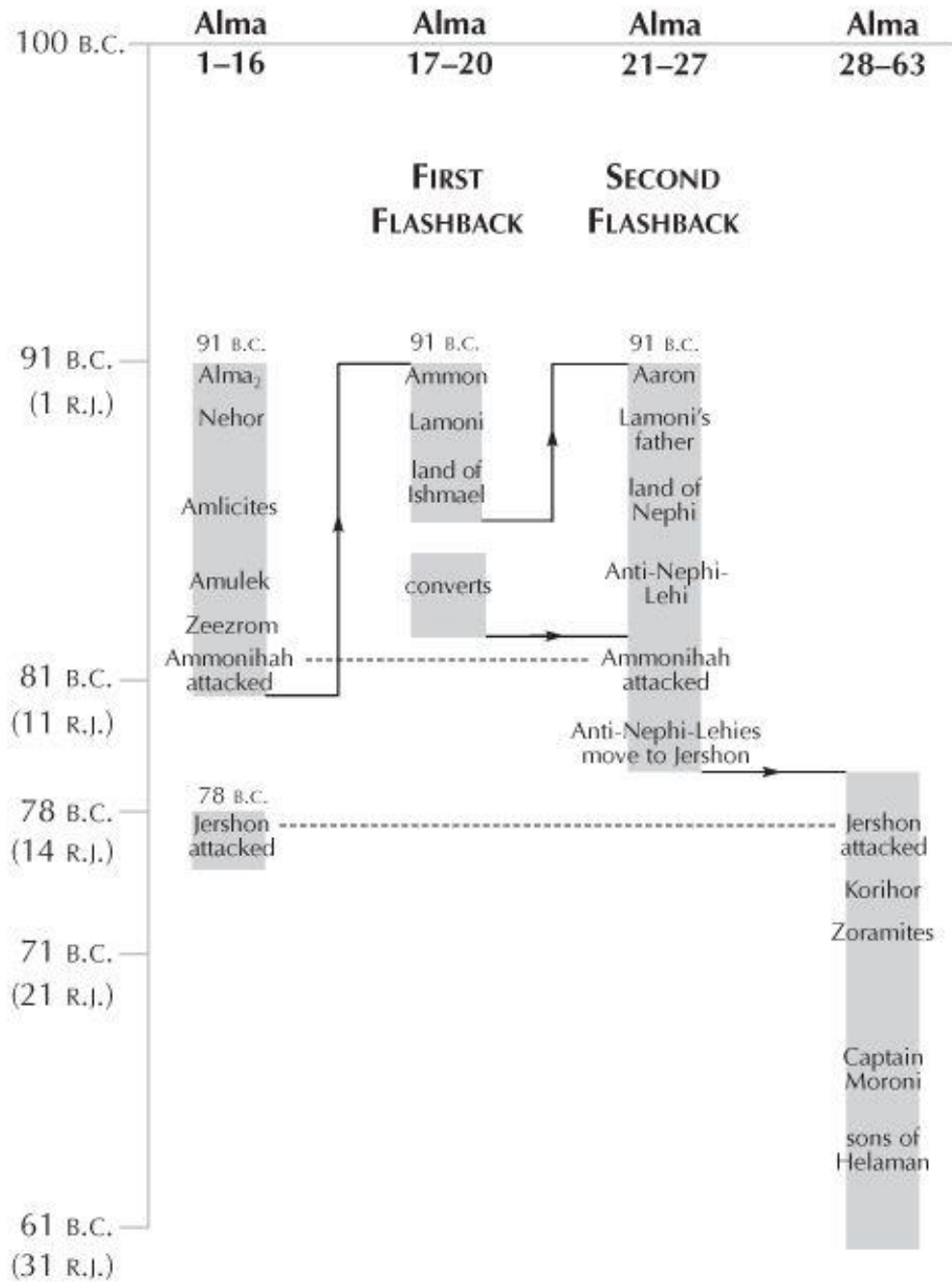


Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Flashbacks in the Book of Alma," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 30.

- The final or fourth column (Alma 27–63) begins with the fourteenth year of the reign of judges and corresponds with the Ammonites being attacked as the Lamanites tried to get the converted people back. It then covers the rest of Nephite history through Alma 63, including Alma’s confrontation with Korihor, his mission to the Zoramites, his instruction to his sons, and the war chapters.

Keeping all these comings and goings straight is hard enough for readers. Imagine what it was like for Joseph Smith. It is strong evidence that Joseph Smith was translating an actual record. If he were just making it up off the top of his head, it would likely have been impossible for him to keep track of each of these people, their names, styles, concerns, and characters, as well as the smooth interconnections between these interlocking narratives, both in time and place. For, in addition to the dovetailing chronological details, the corresponding geography is also consistent throughout the Book of Mormon record. The complexity of these combined chapters, as well as the coherent accuracy of each individual account, are wonderful testimonies of Joseph Smith’s role as prophet in translating this ancient record.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Mormon Include Flashbacks in His Narrative? \(Alma 21:13\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 129 (June 24, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Mormon Give so Many Details About Geography? \(Alma 22:32\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 130 (June 27, 2016).

Alma 17:10–12 — The Lord’s Blessing on the Sons of Mosiah

The sons of Mosiah recorded the blessing that the Lord gave them at the beginning of their fourteen-year mission. It is found in Alma 17:10–12. They received a very special blessing. “It came to pass that the Lord did visit them with his Spirit, and said unto them: ‘Be comforted.’” It was a very short blessing, but there are many times when that is just what people needed, and what we also need to hear when we are given a calling or a difficult assignment. A message of comfort from the Lord lets you know that he is mindful of you.

The very next sentence states that the sons of Mosiah indeed “were comforted.” If we do not accept messages of comfort with faith, and instead continue with fretting and worrying, the blessing may not take root, and it won’t have its full effect in your life. These four missionaries were comforted through all their difficulties. Their experience may remind us all of the second Beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed will be those who mourn (*hoi penthountes*): for they shall be comforted (*paraklethesontai*).” The concept of “mourning” here certainly includes a penitent sorrow for sin and a mourning for sinners, hoping for their repentance and returning unto God. The concept of “being

comforted” in the biblical vocabulary includes meanings such as being encouraged, assured, accepted, as well as consoled. The biblical word for the Comforter is *parakletos*, the companion that helps, mediates, advocates, and advises. In Psalms 94:19, a traditional Israelite psalm, the faithful thank the Lord, for “thy consolations cheer [love or comfort] my soul.” All of these divine blessings were received and enjoyed by the sons of Mosiah as they went forth with a fullness of heart and devotion.

The missionaries were then instructed, “Go forth among the Lamanites, thy brethren, and establish my word.” Note that they were to “establish” the word. Missionary work among the Lamanites was going to be started for the first time by their efforts. They were opening up new territory for missionary work—opening a field of work where the gospel had not been taught for about 450 years. They were told to “be patient in long-suffering and afflictions.” Their blessing did not promise a mission of ease, they were promised patience and long-suffering in their afflictions. In the midst of their trials during the mission, they had the assurance from the Lord that things were unfolding according to God’s plan.

As faithful missionaries, their true desire—as ours should be as well—was to be “instruments in the hands of the Lord” (17:9), by which or through which the Lord’s will could be done. Often the objective in our callings is primarily to be transparent so that the light of Christ—the glory of God—will shine *through* us and not just *on* us. We receive this instruction in the Sermon on the Mount where Christ told his disciples to “let your light so shine before men” (Matt. 5:16). The word “so” is instructive and is key here. The directive is not simply to “let your light shine.” In the Greek, the meaning is very clear in this phrase— “Let your light shine *in such a way* that, when people see your good works, their reaction will be to glorify your Father which is in Heaven.” That is an interesting and significant way of telling us how one should be “an instrument in the hands of the Lord.”

Alma 17:20–21 — Ammon Is Captured and Brought before the King

The lengthy account of the labors of these four missionaries begins by following Ammon. Perhaps this was because he was the oldest of the brothers, but also because the compiler of these accounts knew ahead of time that Ammon’s phenomenal successes with King Lamoni and his wife would set the stage for the liberation of Aaron, Muloki, and Ammah from prison in Middoni, so the storyline had to first follow Ammon, who went alone, into the land of Ishmael.

Soon after arriving in Lamanite territory, Ammon was captured. At this time in Book of Mormon history, the Ishmaelites had merged with the Lamanites. There were no passports nor identification cards in this ancient world. It could be tense when an unknown person arrived in any area—especially someone from enemy territory. They did not know if the person came with dangerous designs, intents or purposes. The people of

the community likely hoped Ammon traveled alone—that he had just wandered into their territory. They had no idea what to expect from him. If Ammon had arrived with a group of people, that would have signaled more of a threat. For example, in Mosiah chapter 7, when a different man named Ammon and his explorers bumped into the watchmen of King Limhi, they were almost executed on the spot as trespassers or intruders. In this case, since Ammon had wisely traveled alone, he was simply taken to the king, and it was up to the king to determine Ammon’s fate.

Alma 17:22–23 — Ammon Offers to Be a Servant

Ammon made a long-term commitment to stay in the land with the Ishmaelites and to serve their king. Overall, he would not return home for fourteen years. Today, when missionaries go into a city, they know that they are not going to be there for very long. However, it is important that they connect with the people in their mission area and serve them in love, as if they would be there forever. It is also good for missionaries later to remember the people among whom they served and to continue to have contact with them and with their missionary companions, even after their mission. In modern times, we do not have the same kind of stability in our lives that people did in the ancient world. We move around a lot for school and career. But, building and maintaining long-term commitments to other people as friends is always beneficial—even if the only time you stay in touch is when you write your annual Christmas cards.

Ammon had a sincere interest in those he met on his mission and that built a strong relationship with the Lamanite people—evidenced by the fact that later, in order to save the lives of many of his converts, they followed him to the land of Jershon and became a new people with a new identity as the people of Ammon or Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

Alma 17:24–26 Ammon Makes a Positive First Impression on the King

Ammon was certainly effective during his initial face-to-face with king Lamoni. Having grown up in the home of King Mosiah, Ammon knew his way around amidst the political protocols of his world. The record states that “king Lamoni was much pleased with Ammon, and caused that his bands should be loosed.” Not only that, Lamoni “would that Ammon should take one of his daughters to wife.” Ammon clearly made a positive first impression on the king.

I had the occasion to listen to Elder Kim Clark not long ago at one of my own mission reunions. Elder Clark was Dean of the Harvard Business School, and later, President of BYU Idaho. He often taught students about first impressions. His theory was that when you first meet a person, you have about ten seconds to show interest in them. When you sit down on a bus next to someone, or in a class next to someone, or in a job interview, you should immediately connect—introduce yourself or ask their name. If you do not

show some interest in the first ten seconds, you may never be able to be effective in introducing yourself to that person. Even if you pick up the conversation a little later, they may not trust that you really care about them if you did not immediately reach out and try to show an interest in them in the first place. First impressions are important, but you have to follow through with the relationship afterwards. Following up is the second step in the process of building trust in a relationship.

Ammon followed up in building trust with the king and the Ishmaelites in many ways. He was only in the service of the king for three days when Ammon's loyalty to the king was demonstrated by his courageous act of protecting the king's flocks.

Ammon's father, king Mosiah, was promised that his sons would be kept safe. I am sure that gave him some confidence, but young men often push the envelope when it comes to safety. I have taken enough boy scouts out into the wilderness and have promised them that *if* they are smart, they will come back safely. Was Ammon pushing the envelope a little bit here? Regardless, many of Ammon's wonderful virtues came out in this episode.

Alma 17:36–38 — Alma Returns with the Severed Arms of the Marauders

King Lamoni had a problem. A particular watering place was used by him and others in tending their flocks. The king used servants to protect his animals, but they failed to carry out that duty. Biblical law protected such servants or hirelings if the animals are driven away "no man seeing it," or if it is "torn in pieces" by wild animals (Exodus 22:10, 13), in which cases they had no liability; but "if it be stolen from him [in his presence], he shall make restitution" (Exodus 22:12), which was the case in King Lamoni's case. His servants had not protected the flock from those who came to scatter them. Indeed, the problem was serious enough that Lamoni had killed some of his servants, whose flock had been scattered (Alma 19:20).

But Ammon rose to the challenge. When the marauders attacked again, Ammon killed six of them with his sling, and a seventh, their leader, he killed with his sword (perhaps a wooden blade studded with extremely sharp obsidian chip blades, called a "macuahuitl" in the Nahuatl language; Alma 17:38). The severed arms of all seven (Alma 19:16) were then presented to King Lamoni, who immediately wanted to reward him, by offering him one of his daughters in marriage (17:24).

All of this makes one wonder, Was it customary among Ishmaelites to return to their commander with the bloody body parts of defeated enemies? It is interesting to note that in the ancient world, especially in the ancient Near East, soldiers would often return from the battlefield with a designated body part of those they had killed. Such soldiers were not necessarily mercenaries, but they all expected to be properly rewarded for their skill

and valor in battle. The soldier would often receive piece-meal compensation for each enemy he killed. The designated body part brought from battle was often the right hand. This is because every person has only one right hand. Soldiers were not compensated for left hands because that could result double payment. This gruesome wartime practice is depicted in several Assyrian archeological murals showing soldiers bringing the arms or the legs (or whatever agreed-upon body part) in order to be paid for their service. The practice is also documented in Egyptian archaeology, as in the forecourt of a Hyksos palace where two deposits of seven right hands were found. Because the practice shows up in Mesoamerica as well, it is clearly possible that this same practice was traditional among the Ishmaelites and Lamanites.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why did the Servant Present Lamoni with the Arms of His Enemies?](#) (Alma 17:39),” *KnoWhy* 125 (June 20, 2016).

Bruce H. Yerman, “[Ammon and the Mesoamerican Custom of Smiting Off Arms](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1 (1999): 44–47, 78–79.

John M. Lundquist and John W. Welch, “[Ammon and Cutting Off the Arms of Enemies](#),” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 180–181.

Manfred Bietak, Nicola Math, Vera Müller, and Claus Jurman, “Report on the Excavations of a Hyksos Palace at Tell El-Dabca/Avaris,” *Ägypten und Levante / Egypt and the Levant* 22, no. 23 (2012): 17–53.

Alma 18

Alma 18:1–3 — The Servants of Lamoni Testify before Him

Ammon’s loyalty to the king became evident when the other servants reported that they did not know whether Ammon was the Great Spirit or simply a man, but they did know that when they were all scared to death, Ammon put his own life on the line. By his actions, the servants could testify that Ammon was a friend to the king. Ammon had proved his loyalty.

Alma 18:8–10 — Ammon Serves Lamoni Faithfully

After his heroics, Ammon did not sing his own praises before the king, but instead chose to return to the stables with the other servants. He was willing to do the dirty work, even anonymously. Likely, the other servants had no idea who Ammon was. It is probable that

Ammon had not disclosed to the servants that he was the son of a king. They probably did not even know much about his Nephite background.

Alma 18:14–16, 21–23 — Ammon Desires Lamoni to Listen to His Words

We have detected many virtues in Ammon, including unselfishness. He thought of these people as his brothers and wanted to serve behind the scene without praise or accolades. Ammon's courage, his physical strength, and faithful humility left the king speechless. Also, the Holy Ghost touches hearts and accompanies missionary work. Ammon was filled with the Spirit of God as he stood before Lamoni, and the king sensed this. Lamoni then made the following offer: "Whatsoever thou desirest of me I will grant it unto thee." What did Ammon ask for—riches, power, status? No. Ammon simply requested that the king listen to what he had to say. Ammon wanted to teach Lamoni about Christ and God's plan of redemption and mercy. Ammon was selfless; he was not in this for self-aggrandizement.

Alma 18:24–39 — Ammon Teaches Lamoni and His Servants

The first question Ammon asked king Lamoni was the same question that Aaron later asked Lamoni's father (Alma 22:7): "Do you believe there is a God?" That is the first Article of Faith— "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost." If an investigator does not believe in God—if you are dealing with an atheist, secularist, or whatever—it is very difficult to construct any kind of ethical theory or accountability for what we do. So, both Ammon and Aaron began their missionary discussion with that crucial question. They must have understood, or even agreed, that this was a good way to begin teaching the gospel: "Do you believe in God?"

I wonder if somebody read the missionary accounts of Ammon and Aaron when writing the Church missionary manual, *Preach My Gospel*. I imagine they did.

Teaching the gospel follows a logical flow of divine principles. First, "Is there a God?" "Yes." Next, "Do you believe that he created all things?" "Yes." Then, by having created all things, he understands all things. That is an important principle of faith. If you look at the world and suppose that all things are random, it is difficult to believe in God and accountability to him. But if God is the designer—the creator—he knows the world that he has created. That is the next step in having faith in God. God, the creator, knows what he is doing and has a plan. All these principles of faith followed logically as Ammon and Aaron presented their missionary discussion to two different kings. Ammon and Aaron then talked of the creation of the world and the creation of Adam. They both talked about man being created in the image of God. They both talked about the fall of Adam and Eve, the plan of redemption which was laid from the foundation of the world, the coming of Christ, believing in his name, and so on.

Further Reading

For a parallelistic schematic of Ammon’s words to Lamoni, see “[Ammon’s Rehearsal](#),” *BYU Studies* 37, no. 1 (1997–1998): 205:

Alma 19

Alma 19:6 — Lamoni Falls as If He Were Dead

Throughout scripture, there are occasions where a person has a spiritual experience which drains his strength, causing him to fall to the ground from exhaustion. The Book of Mormon has several of these accounts, and the case of Lamoni and his wife is one of them. After Lamoni laid still on his bed for two days and two nights, the queen asked to speak with Ammon, whom she believed might be “a prophet of a holy God,” as reported to her by her servants. Ammon explained to the queen that “the light of everlasting life was lit up in [the king’s] soul” and that this experience “had overcome his natural frame, and he was carried away in God,” but that he would rise on the next day (the third day). She believed and Ammon blessed her for her exceeding faith and faithfulness. Not only Lamoni, but also his queen and his household would be similarly affected.

The Book of Mormon records that after Lehi had a profound vision, he was “overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen” (Nephi 1:6–7). Nephi and Alma the younger also had similar experiences (1 Nephi 19:20; Mosiah 27:19). Old and New Testament prophets like Moses, Daniel, and Paul the Apostle did so as well (Moses 1:9–10; Daniel 8:27; Acts 9:4–19). Several modern-day accounts of extreme fatigue following spiritual manifestations are also recorded—especially those involving Joseph Smith. He describes what happened immediately after the First Vision: “When I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven. When the light had departed, I had no strength; but soon recovering in some degree, I went home.” The vision had sapped Joseph’s strength so much that he actually needed to recover before he could make the short walk home.

Therefore, we see that Lamoni’s spiritual experience was not unique. The similarities between the accounts of those in ancient times and this dispensation suggest that depletion of physical strength related to spiritual experiences is a common element of such events. We should not be surprised to find that significant spiritual experiences may require the same of us.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Are People Exhausted After Powerful Spiritual Experiences?](#) (Alma 19:6),” *KnoWhy* 460 (August 21, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Does the Lord Speak to Men According to Their Language? (2 Nephi 31:3)," *KnoWhy* 258 (January 6, 2017).

Mark Wright, "Nephite Daykeepers: Ritual Specialists in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon," in *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of the Expound Symposium* (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2011), 243–257.

Alma 19:11–13 — Lamoni Sees His Redeemer

Why do you think King Lamoni was blessed with a vision of the premortal Christ? Partly because of his faith and because of the righteous and devoted relationship between this king and his wife. The first thing Lamoni does after he arises was to reach out to his wife and say, "Blessed be the name of God, and blessed art thou" (19:12).

In addition, this is an extraordinary event. How many missionary converts have an experience like this after the first discussion? Not very many. Visions like this come at certain times in history at important moments. For the same reason, why did Lehi see what he saw? The Lord needed to call Lehi to do something very unusual and to start a whole migration—so that a whole nation could be faithful. Likewise here, the Lord was trying to raise up a righteous people. Don't you think that the Lord must have known that there was a great opportunity here with king Lamoni? From Lamoni's conversion came the people of Ammon along with other converts in the lands of Ishmael and Nephi. The results of the work done by the four sons of Mosiah for fourteen years also prepared the way to a host of converts, including Samuel the Lamanite, who were brought to a testimony of the truth of the Gospel by the missionary work of Nephi and Lehi, the sons of Helaman (in Helaman 5) about 55 years later.

Alma 19:16–17 — Abish Brings Others to Witness God's Power

Abish is one of only six women mentioned by name in the Book of Mormon. Abish played a pivotal role in the account of King Lamoni's conversion. Having been previously but privately converted, it was Abish who "ran forth from house to house, making it known unto the people" of Lamoni's miraculous experience (19:17).

Often, when we think of missionary work in the Book of Mormon, we think of full-time missionaries like Alma, Ammon, or Aaron. However, one of the most important missionaries in the Book of Mormon was a "member missionary" who took advantage of a prime opportunity to share the gospel with her neighbors—Abish. She was a servant in the king's household who had been previously "converted to the Lord." Therefore, "when she saw that all the servants of Lamoni had fallen to the earth, and also her mistress, the queen, and the king, and Ammon lay prostrate upon the earth, she knew that it was the power of God; and supposing that this opportunity, by making known unto the people

what had happened among them, that by beholding this scene it would cause them to believe in the power of God, therefore she ran forth from house to house, making it known unto the people.”

We are familiar with the principle, “Every member a missionary.” Abish provides an excellent example of how we can all be member missionaries today. She had kept her testimony alive and therefore readily recognized that it was the power of God that accounted for what was happening to Lamoni and the rest of the royal court. She quickly became anxiously engaged in inviting others to see and share in the experience. When others misunderstood what was happening in the royal household, she facilitated bringing them to the truth. She was in the right place at the right time, and took advantage of an opportunity to bring others to God.

Further Reading

Michael J. Call, “[Reading Competency in the Book of Mormon: Abish and Other Model Readers](#),” *BYU Studies*, 56, no. 2 (2017): 59–70.

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Can We Learn from Abish’s Member-missionary Work?](#) (Alma 19:17),” *KnoWhy* 374 (October 19, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Was Abish Mentioned by Name?](#) (Alma 19:16),” *KnoWhy* 127 (June 22, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Does the Abish Story Signal About the Resurrection?](#) (Alma 19:29),” *KnoWhy* 449 (July 12, 2018).

Alma 19:18–36 — Lamoni and the Queen Arise and Some Are Converted

As a result, all kinds of people began assembling at the palace, including the family members of the seven men whom Ammon had killed at the Waters of Sebus. They were there, no doubt, seeing this as a time for revenge against Ammon. The brother of the leader (whom Ammon had killed with the sword) was about to extract vengeance by killing Ammon (19:22). This would have been the normal instinct, if not the duty, of a near kinsman as a “redeemer of blood.” Moreover, because Ammon was a Nephite, public biases would have naturally run against Ammon. While people began arguing over what kind of dreadful “monster” Ammon was (19:26), Ammon was protected and his assailant fell dead. The debate about Ammon was settled with the queen’s magnificent: “O blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell! O blessed God, have mercy on this people!” (19:29). The queen then said many other things, and she took the unconscious king by the hand, and “behold he arose and stood upon his feet” (19:30).

Some people there were converted, but many were not, as the crowd continued to be divided. Converts, however, saw angels, and were baptized, marking the establishment of the church and the commencement of the work of the Lord among the Lamanites. This memorable event vividly set the all-important Book of Mormon precedent that the arm of the Lord “is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name” (19:36).

Alma 20

Alma 20:1–8 — Ammon Receives Revelation to Free Aaron

Fairly soon afterwards, King Lamoni wanted to take Ammon to meet Lamoni’s father, the king of all the land of Nephi. But Ammon received a revelation telling him that his brother Aaron and two other missionaries were imprisoned and that he needed to go and free them. Ammon told king Lamoni about the situation, who responded with faith, “I know, in the strength of the Lord thou canst do all things” (20:4). Lamoni was curious as to how Ammon knew about the perilous situation of his brother, so Ammon told him, “No one hath told me, save it be God; and he said unto me—Go and deliver thy brethren, for they are in prison in the land of Middoni” (20:5). Lamoni decided to join Ammon on his journey to Middoni, promising to use his influence as king to persuade the king of Middoni, who was a friend of his, to release the missionaries from prison. On the way to Middoni, Ammon and Lamoni met up with Lamoni’s Father who was “king over all the land” (20:8).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Did it Mean to be ‘King Over All the Land?’ \(Alma 20:8\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 128 (June 23, 2016).

Alma 20:15–16 — Lamoni’s Father Draws His Sword to Smite His Son

Both kings, Lamoni and his unnamed father, had a lot of power, and they were used to wielding that power. Generally, they seemed to be quite deferential toward one other. However, Lamoni’s father was suspicious of Ammon as a Nephite (20:13) and was angry at his son for refusing his orders. He drew his sword and was about to kill his own son. In the ancient world, an ordinary father could kill his son with impunity. This right is known as *patria potestas* (the power of a father), which in most ancient civilizations gave the father the right to kill his offspring for any reason. Under such circumstances, the father could not be accused of homicide or punished by the society. After all, a father was the king in his own family. If the father also happened to be king of the land who controlled the life of all his subjects, he was twice over the king in this situation.

In our day, this event might strike us as odd. Why would king Lamoni's father threaten to kill his own son simply because he had been offended that the son had not attended a great feast thrown by the father. Because Lamoni's father was "king over all the land," the feast may have been an extremely important celebration for political and religious purposes. Lamoni's absence from an important kingly feast may have been regarded as dishonor and high disrespect, if not an act of high treason.

Alma 20:17–26 — Ammon's Selfless Requests

Once again, Ammon showed his skill with his very sharp sword as he defended Lamoni from the sword of his father. Of greater significance, Ammon's generous and subservient character was revealed to Lamoni's father. To save his own life, Lamoni's father offered Ammon anything he desired—even half of his kingdom. Ammon wasn't interested in riches. The father was astonished when all that Ammon requested was the release of his brethren from the prison in Middoni and assurance that Lamoni would retain his kingdom with free reign over his kingdom. Neither of Ammon's terms benefited himself personally. Ammon acted out of love and concern for his new convert, Lamoni. He acted unselfishly, once again. His great desire was to bring others to God through missionary work.

Alma 20:27 — Missionary Work among the Lamanites Continues

Ammon and Lamoni returned to the Land of Ishmael, while Aaron went to the city of Nephi to work with the father of King Lamoni, who now had a taste of the greatness and the generosity of Aaron's brother, Ammon. Ammon's love for Lamoni opened the door for Aaron to follow up on the "referral" to teach the father of Lamoni. The missionaries were invited to come to the city of Nephi to personally preach to Lamoni's father, the king over all the land. The king wanted to learn more because of his encounter with Ammon.

It is interesting that successful missionary work continues with this same pattern today. One missionary companionship may work with an investigator and plant a seed of interest or testimony in the gospel. Another missionary companionship may continue teaching the investigator until she or he is ready for baptism. They share and help each other. Throughout the process, members are essential in making referrals to missionaries of people they know who may be interested in hearing the gospel. There is a higher likelihood of success if an investigator is introduced to the missionaries by someone they already know. The work was divided up by the sons of Mosiah, and they traveled to different locations to preach. They may not have gone two-by-two as we usually do today.

Alma 21

The voice print for this section is quite different from the previous three chapters. The text now switches into third-party narrative accounts. It is difficult to determine whether the person writing the text is the same author in the previous chapters who is now simply using a different literary style, or whether a different author, or authors, are now writing the text.

We do not know who originally wrote these missionary stories. It could have been Ammon or maybe Aaron. Perhaps they combined and gave their homecoming report together when they returned home to Zarahemla and then filed their record. This text, however, is probably something that was written sometime later. It does not appear to be a contemporaneous record. It is retrospective, and the writer knew well how this was all going to turn out in the end as he began writing these narratives. He knew what was important to preserve in the record. There were undoubtedly many other things that happened to Ammon, Aaron, and the other missionaries that were not recorded.

In places where Ammon and Aaron were not the authors, possibly Alma the Younger fashioned the narratives in these reports. In Alma 17:2, it is recorded that Alma was thrilled to run into his four friends. He had not seen them for a very long time, and they rejoiced together. The record states that they swapped stories on what had happened since they were last together. After their reunion, Alma may have decided that their missionary experiences should be preserved. Under that scenario, Alma may have been the author of this section. Since Alma was chief judge for a period of time, it may even have been a court reporter continuing to work for Alma who recorded these missionary narratives. Because of his conflicts with Nehor and the Ammonihahites, Alma would have been particularly interested in tying in with the encounters of the sons of Mosiah with Amulon and the followers of Nehor in the land of Jerusalem. It also may be that Mormon wrote or reworked these accounts based on the records that were in his possession. Mormon would have been especially interested in the successes of these Nephites in converting Lamanite kings, which was something he himself would have yearned to do but never could accomplish.

Alma 21:1–11 — An Account of Aaron and His Brethren in Jerusalem

The next few chapters flash back to give an account of the work of Aaron and his brethren among the Lamanites at the same time Ammon was working with Lamoni. They traveled from city to city, while Ammon stayed put. Unlike Ammon, who was taken directly to teach Lamoni, Aaron and his companions fell among less noble individuals.

Around the first year of the reign of the judges in Zarahemla, they first went to a great city called Jerusalem that had been built by a coalition of the Lamanites, the Amalekites,

and also the Amulonites! The Amulonites were descendants of Noah's priests who defected to the Lamanites about forty years previously. The record points out, "Now the Lamanites of themselves were sufficiently hardened, but the Amalekites and the Amulonites were still harder" (21:3). These people had built "synagogues after the order of the Nehors" (21:4), and Aaron dared to preach there. He was taunted there by people who knew already that Aaron "had seen an angel" (21:5), when he and his brothers had been with Alma when they were stopped by the angel of the Lord. To have learned reports of this angelic appearance, these people in the city of Jerusalem must have had contacts among the followers of Nehor in Zarahemla.

The city of Jerusalem was "joining the borders of Mormon" (21:1), which geographically links this account back to the record of Alma the Elder, who had taken refuge with his people in the land of Helam, not far from this place, about halfway between the Waters of Mormon and the city of Zarahemla. It was near this place, in Helam, where Alma's people had been oppressed by Amulon himself (Mosiah 24:8), before they could finally escape. In Mosiah 24:1, we learn that Amulon had gained "favor in the eyes of the king of the Lamanites" and had managed to get his men appointed to teach the Nephite language throughout that king's land (Mosiah 24:4). It is no wonder that the Amulonites were thus strong in that area, and that Aaron and his brethren suffered greatly there. They were cast out from place to place until they arrived in Middoni (Alma 21:12), where they were thrown in prison and treated very badly (Alma 21:12), which is when and where Lamoni and Ammon had come and had gotten them released from prison (Alma 20:28).

One wonders, did Aaron and these missionaries walk into the city of Jerusalem and the nearby land of Middoni unwittingly? Did they know the recent history of Alma the Elder in that area? Did they know that the descendants of Amulon were there? And if so, how did they think they were going to make headway in that area? Maybe they knew that the Lamanites there had at least been taught the Nephite language. The record does not state how or why Aaron and his brethren chose the cities where they proselyted.

Aaron and his companions went into the synagogues, which were full of unfriendly people who were "after the order of the Nehor" (21:4), and they preached to them out of the scriptures. This was a different kind of experience from Ammon's. He had his own hardships, but at least Ammon was dealing with a very noble person. King Lamoni was a believing person. He believed in the Great Spirit. He believed the words of Ammon.

Alma 21:18–23 — Ammon Returns with King Lamoni to the Land of Ishmael

After getting Aaron and the others released from prison in Middoni, Alma returned with King Lamoni to the land of Ishmael. There they built synagogues, taught many things, and enjoyed freedom of belief, because Lamoni's father had granted Lamoni

independence (Alma 20:26). Lamoni used that freedom to give his people the liberty of worshipping “in whatsoever place they were in” (21:22).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Does the Book of Mormon Use an Ancient Storytelling Technique?”](#) *KnoWhy* 414 (March 8, 2018).

Alma 22

Alma 22:1–14 — Aaron Teaches and Converts Lamoni’s Father

Meanwhile, Aaron was led by the spirit to go to the palace of Lamoni’s father (22:1), not only to thank him for helping them to get out of prison in Middoni (22:2), but also to offer to be his servants. But he refused their offer and asked them to “administer unto [him]” (22:3). He had some questions about Ammon’s behavior and about the Spirit of the Lord.

In response, Aaron explains things to him “from the creation of Adam,” to the “fall of man,” and also “the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ . . . to be swallowed up in the hopes of glory” (22:13–14). As mentioned above, when comparing Ammon’s words to Lamoni in Alma 18:24–39 with the words of Aaron to Lamoni’s father in chapter 22:6–14, many similarities are readily apparent. Ammon’s rehearsal of the basic first principles of the Gospel also spoke of these same doctrines. And also closely aligned is the explanation given by Alma to the people in Ammonihah in Alma 12–13. We may conclude from these similarities that Alma and the four sons of Mosiah had come together in their hearts and minds, including the same basic missionary outline as they taught together “throughout all the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 27:35). Alma would have been readily inclined to see these parts of the reports of Ammon and Aaron included in the final record.

In speaking to the father of King Lamoni, Aaron began by emphasizing the primary importance of repentance (22:16). He knew that this was what Lamoni’s father needed most. We saw earlier that Lamoni’s father was a bit of a hothead. We also see, in several ways, that Lamoni’s father was not quite as spiritually inclined as Lamoni himself. The relationship between Lamoni and his wife, and the relationship between Lamoni’s father and his wife, were very different. How did king Lamoni feel about his wife? Their relationship was wonderful and very tender. We note the blessings that Lamoni gave to his wife, how much they understood each other, and how well they worked together. When we compare that with Lamoni’s mother and father, we see that they did not get along so well. She did not understand the effect of the Spirit on her husband, and thus this queen-mother was ready to kill the missionaries—she too easily flew off the handle and

did not get what was going on at all (22:19). Thus, repentance received the greater emphasis in Aaron's message, where previously Ammon had emphasized belief in his teaching to Lamoni.

Other differences are also worth noting. When Ammon spoke to Lamoni, he explained the history of the Old Testament prophets, how Lehi came across the sea, the rebellions of Laman, Lemuel, and Ishmael, and what eventually happened with the Nephites and the Lamanites. Aaron, however, apparently did not talk about these things. We might wonder why. He jumped over those points, and instead talked about God's commandments that were given to man. Maybe Aaron had less of a personal relationship with Lamoni's father. Ammon had won enough confidence of Lamoni that he could explain to Lamoni how the Nephites and Lamanites had become separated through what happened among Laman and Lemuel with Nephi. King Lamoni's father still believed that the Nephites robbed and stole their rights (20:10–13). Lamoni, on the other hand, was more open to accepting Ammon's explanation of the Nephite point of view.

Alma 22:15–18 — Lamoni's Father Desires to Repent

Aaron, talking to Lamoni's father, emphasized that because of the fall of man, man could not merit anything of himself. As you think about this, how would a king of that stature likely receive that teaching? King Benjamin was willing to admit that he was only "dust," but that was rare. King Benjamin's sentiments were not Lamoni's father's usual way of thinking about himself.

He was, however, impressed enough by Aaron's teaching that he asked, "What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken?" (22:15). That was the crucial question that was asked by the Pharisee who came alone to speak with Jesus and asked, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life" (Luke 18:18). Lamoni's father also asked, "What shall I do to be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast?" (22:15). People in the ancient world were very concerned about having wicked spirits in them and wanted to expurgate them. Lamoni's father wanted to see that wicked spirits were removed from having any influence over him. He also recognized his failings, and he wanted to get rid of those shortcomings. Aaron took the opportunity to tell Lamoni's father that he must repent, bow down before God, and call upon His name. And in response, this was the wonderful prayer that the king offered: "O God; if there is a God, . . . I will give away all my sins to know thee" (22:18)

When we urgently need an answer to a prayer, should we not be thinking of this same thing? We no longer make sacrifices of blood and sacrificial animals or grain offerings, but there are things we can sacrifice—things such as sins that we are willing to give up to know the Lord and his will. It is pleasing to the Lord when we say, "I would like to know,

O Lord, what the answer to this problem is, and this is what I will give up that I might know." Have you ever asked in that way, and how has it worked?

Remember in Alma 20:23, when Ammon was in a position to kill Lamoni's father, what did that king say? He pled, "If thou wilt spare me, I will grant unto thee . . . even to *half* of [my] kingdom." That was quite an offer, wasn't it? But now, after hearing Aaron's words, the king has made even greater progress. At first, he was only willing to give up half his kingdom. Now he is willing to "give up *all* that [he] possess[ed]" (22:15). He was even willing to "forsake [his] kingdom]" (22:5) and, more important, he was willing to give up "*all* [his] sins" (22:18).

With that, he was "struck as if he were dead" (22:18), and the queen orders the people to kill Aaron (22:21). But Aaron extended his hand and "raised the king from the earth" (22:22), and everyone in his whole household was converted unto the Lord (22:23). The king pacified his people "towards Aaron" (22:25), and then he sent a proclamation granting protection and freedom of religious expression to the four sons of Mosiah "throughout all the land" (22:27). Words from that proclamation are found in Alma 23:1–3. They will be discussed in the next installment of these Notes, together with the geopolitical description of the lands that were affected by that proclamation, as was inserted by Mormon in Alma 22:27–34.

ALMA 23–29

John W. Welch Notes



Alma 23

23:1–3 — Royal Protection Is Given to Mosiah’s Sons

The text in Alma 23:1 picks up where Alma 22:27 had left off, with the remarkable extension of royal privileges to the sons of Mosiah granted by King Lamoni’s father. It is not surprising that he would extend this political, diplomatic privilege. Ambassadors and envoys were typically granted regal immunities and protections in the ancient world, since otherwise international communication and diplomacy would have been impossible. But more than that, Lamoni’s father had a special interest in protecting his missionary, Aaron, and also the other three sons, since he had made a special personal appearance in Middoni to free the four brothers from prison.

When Ammon and Lamoni returned to his land of Ishmael, Lamoni declared that his people “were free” and independent from his father’s rule (21:21), and Lamoni granted them “the liberty of worshiping the Lord their God according to their desires” (21:22).

Meanwhile, Lamoni’s father was converted by Aaron, with Omner and Himni and their companions, who accompanied him back to the land of Nephi (22:1). But recognizing “the hardness of the hearts of the people” and even the queen, who were ready to kill Aaron (22:21–22), Lamoni’s father “sent a proclamation “throughout *all* the land, amongst *all* his people who were in *all* his land, who were in *all* the regions round about” (22:27), which was a grant of absolute safe conduct for these four sons of Mosiah and their brethren. Freedom of religion was not granted by this decree, as it had been by King Lamoni in the land of Ishmael, but at least the missionaries were absolutely protected and granted free access into homes, temples, and holy spaces (23:2–3).

Apparently, the lands of Amulon, Helam, and Jerusalem, were outside the jurisdiction of King Lamoni, and so, even though the converts of Ammon (the Anti-Nephi-Lehis) will be butchered in those lands, Ammon himself and his brothers were protected there by this proclamation of Lamoni's father. The four sons were never threatened or harmed. Indeed, when they finally meet up again with Alma, Ammon rejoices that they had been able to travel from "house to house" and also to teach in "their temples and their synagogues" (26:28–29). Although they had been spit upon, smitten on the cheeks, had stones thrown at them, and were cast into prison (26:29), they were apparently protected to a certain degree by this king's royal proclamation.

All of this explains why the geographical explanation in Alma 22:27–34 was included in this text. While people studying the geography of the lands of the Book of Mormon rightly see this geographical aside as the best roadmap we have been given for the lands around Zarahemla, it is clear that its purpose here is to explain just one thing, namely the extent of the territory covered by the royal edict of Lamoni's father, who controlled only "the land of Nephi and the wilderness round about" (22:34). But beyond that, except to some extent in the east (22:29), the Lamanites were "hemmed in" and had "no more possession on the north" (22:33), neither "on the west" (22:28), nor in "all the northern parts" (22:29–32).

The purpose of this geographical information was not to connect Alma with the Sons of Mosiah. None of Alma's Nephite lands, such as Gideon, Melek, Sidom, Ammonihah, Jershon, or Antionum are mentioned here. Nor are the interior regions of the land of Nephi mentioned that were controlled by the king of the Lamanites. If this geographical statement had been made by Ammon or Aaron, one would have expected places such as the lands of Ishmael, Jerusalem, Ani-Anti, Middoni, Midian, Amulon, and Helam to have been mentioned. Mormon's interests, however, were much more focused on the separation between the greater land northward and the political configuration of the land southward (22:30–32), and thus it makes sense that he would have included only this information, exclusively from his perspective, for the general benefit of his ultimate readers many years to come.

Further Reading

John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book*, Revised Edition (Provo: FARMS, 1992), 242–248.

Joseph L. Allen & Blake J. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, Revised Edition (American Fork: Covenant, 2011), 402–416; new edition, with Sheryl Lee Wilson, *Promised Place—Precious People* (2020), 79.

Joe V. Andersen, F. Richard Hauck, Stanford Stoddard Smith, Ted Dee Stoddard, Lenard C. Brunsdale, *A Compelling Geographic Model of the Book of Mormon* (Mesa, AZ: JVA Publishing, 2018), Appendix 7, 231–242.

Alma 23:3 — True Grandsons of King Benjamin

It is also well to pause and think about the fact that these four missionaries were not only the sons of Mosiah, but also were the grandsons of King Benjamin. Ammon dutifully gives his father Mosiah credit for putting into practice in Zarahemla the law that there should not be “any slaves among them” (Alma 27:9), but it was his grandfather, Benjamin, who had announced that new law among all the people in the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 2:13). Thus, it is noteworthy that the last words in the proclamation that the Lamanite king sent out in Alma 23:3 repeated almost exactly the very same five public law prohibitions found in King Benjamin’s speech in Mosiah 2:13, namely that people should not (1) murder, (2) plunder, (3) steal, (4) commit adultery, or (5) any manner of wickedness. These laws (1) protect life, (2) prohibit violence and lawlessness, (3) secure property against secret taking, (4) respect marriage and family, and (5) honor religion and righteousness.

The Lamanite king likely gleaned this material from Benjamin’s four missionary grandsons. When they preached the gospel, they opened the records and shared them with the people. Similarly, when the first Ammon and his brethren had compared their records with Zeniff and Noah down to the time of Limhi in the city of Nephi, they also opened up and shared the speech of Benjamin (see Mosiah 8:3). It is clear they all carried King Benjamin’s speech with them as one of their main scriptures. Upon his conversion, Lamoni’s father no doubt was taught and readily agreed that these five basic rules of public order had been wisely revealed by King Benjamin, that they had worked well for Nephite society, and so they should work well for people in the land of Nephi as well.

One of the implications here is that these Lamanite converts learned the Nephite heritage well. They took the new knowledge they had embraced very seriously. This can be seen when Ammon and Aaron converted these royal households and then entire lands. When the people of Ammon finally moved to Zarahemla, they integrated quickly and readily into the Nephite world. Regardless of one’s background, all are welcome into the fold of God, as Ammon rejoiced (26:4). People can change. No doubt many of us have witnessed how converts to the gospel of Jesus Christ can end up showing greater faith and devotion than those who have grown up in the Church.

In addition to the use of Benjamin’s words, there is another interesting feature of this decree. The king said that it should go:

Throughout the land unto his people, that the word of God might have no obstruction, but that it might go forth throughout all the land, that his people might be convinced concerning the wicked traditions of their fathers, and *that they might be convinced that they were all brethren* (Alma 23:3).

In that last part of his decree, he emphasized that everyone within his land were all brothers. While there were many different types of people living there—Lamanites, Lemuelites, Ishmaelites, Amulonites, etc.—he wanted to overcome tribal tension, clannish exclusivity, and social segregation by instilling a sense of brotherhood. The Gospel can do that.

Does the restored gospel hold the potential for convincing everybody in the world today, men everywhere, that they are all brothers? It most certainly does. Joseph Smith once said that “Fri[en]dship...is the gr[a]nd fundamental prniple [principle] of Mormonism, to revolution[ize] [and] civilize the world. — pour forth love” (Joseph Smith, [Journal, 23 July 1843](#), Book 3, 15 July 1843–29 February 1844, *Journals* 3:59–185, available online at [Josephsmithpapers.org](#)). The restored gospel is the greatest revolutionary power the world has even known, because it can cause all men to become friends with each other. It is remarkable that he made that revolutionary statement only 50 years after the American Revolution and 35 years after the French Revolution. World peace and harmony certainly would qualify as the greatest change upon the face of the earth and in every land in the world today. Joseph had a lot to say about friendship, and how he hoped to transform hearts to create friendship among all people; and King Lamoni and his father, in being converted through the wonderful doctrines of King Benjamin’s speech and the testimonies of the sons of Mosiah, wanted to make that happen. However, one royal decree did not turn everyone into good friends.

The Restored Gospel does an amazing job of successfully integrating people and peoples. Our wards and units are defined by geographic boundaries and not by social or economic choice. Members of many other churches may choose which church, priest, or pastor they want to follow, and as a result, people select the ones that they are most comfortable with. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is rare, if not totally unique in the world, in that it requires church members to belong to a ward and stake based on where they live and to regard everyone there as brothers and sisters. Imagine if this principle, of all being family, were implemented on a massive political and social scale. That would indeed be nothing short of a daring revolution that would civilize the entire world.

Alma 23:8–12 — The Sons of Mosiah’s Seven-fold Success

Seven seems to be an important number in the report of Ammon and the rejoicing of Alma, as we will see below. Here it is recorded that the sons of Mosiah converted

Lamanites in seven lands or city-states: the lands of Ishmael, Middoni, Nephi, Shilom (meaning “peace”), Shemlon, Lemuel, and Shimnilom. The text doesn’t say there were seven, but they count up to that, “and these are they that laid down the weapons of their rebellion, yea, all their weapons of war, and they were all Lamanites (23:13).

Of course, there are seven churches found in the Book of Revelation, along with seven angels, seven trumpets, and seven seals; and the number seven is all over the place in the priestly book of Leviticus. When Alma the Elder came to the Land of Zarahemla, he received permission from King Mosiah and opened seven churches in Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:23). I wonder if the four sons of Mosiah ever pondered about having converted people in seven cities. Perhaps they saw these as doing seven-fold penance for the damage they had done to the church in the land of Zarahemla. In the process they also learned that God cared just as much about the Lamanites as he did about the people in Zarahemla. This equal, ecclesiastical setting offer yet again a good message for us today throughout the world.

Alma 23:14 — Who Were the Amalekites?

The one main barrier that the sons of Mosiah ran into was the Amalekites: “And the Amalekites were not converted, save only one” and “neither were any of the Amulonites” (23:14). They become problems for the Nephite world. The Amulonites were the successors of the priests of Noah. The Amalekites are unidentified. They were not descendants of Laman or Lemuel. They may have been Ishmaelites. They may have been Zoramites, or perhaps Mulekites. Or they could have been complete outsiders.

One possibility is that they are related to the Amlicites. Because in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, the words *Amalekite* and *Amlicite* were spelled four or five different ways, we do not know whether they represented different groups. It is possible that Oliver Cowdery did not know how to spell this term every time the word came up. It is also possible that the words were pronounced differently depending on the ancient dialect. The history indicates that sometimes when Joseph Smith came across a new name in the Book of Mormon translation, he would spell it out. There is also manuscript evidence of in-process corrections of the spelling of some words. This means a word would be written, but then it would be crossed out and spelled again in line—not above the line, but right after it. However, that would only happen the first time it was spelled. And then Joseph expected Oliver to remember how it was spelled, which apparently did not always happen.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Were the Amlicites and Amalekites Related? \(Alma 2:11\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 109 (March 27, 2016).

Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part Three, Mosiah 17–Alma 20* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2006), 1605–1609.

J. Christopher Conkling, "Alma's Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 108–117, 130–132.

Alma 23:14 — Only One Amalekite Is Converted

We are told in Mosiah 23:14 that one Amalekite was converted. Why might this have been mentioned? They worked so hard to convert these people by preaching in the synagogues of the Amalekites, and yet they came away empty except for this one.

Missionaries, take hope wherever you are, the worth of souls is great, even if it be only one soul! (D&C 18:15). It would have been easy for the account of the four sons to have said that they worked real hard but did not have much success among the Amalekites. But even one soul was worth mentioning in the record. Think of other stories in the Book of Mormon where just one was converted. Alma the Elder was the only convert of Abinadi in the courts of Noah. Was he worth something? In the city of Ammonihah, Amulek was initially the only one who listened to Alma, and what a convert and ally he became! Together, Amulek and Alma converted only Zeezrom. As far as we know, the others were driven out or killed. At times, missionaries in the Book of Mormon converted thousands, but that is not always the case. It begins so often with just one, and that one is important.

President Bateman gave a talk in which he reminded us that the Savior invited the people at the temple in Bountiful to "Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and . . . feel the prints of the nails in my hands and . . . feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world" (3 Nephi 11:14). President Bateman went on to say:

The record indicates that the multitude went forth "*one by one* until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety" (3 Nephi 11:15; emphasis added). Although the multitude totaled 2,500 souls, the record states that "all of them did see and hear, every man for himself" (3 Nephi 17:25). If each person were given 15 seconds to approach the resurrected Lord, thrust their hand into his side, and feel the prints of the nails, more than 10 hours would be required to complete the process.

That is the way the gospel works—one at a time. We all go through the same process. There are no missed steps for anyone.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Jesus Minister to the People One by One?](#) (3 Nephi 17:21),” *KnoWhy* 209 (October 14, 2016).

Merrill J. Bateman, “[One by One](#),” *BYU Speeches* (September 9, 1997).

Alma 23:17–18 — Believers Take the Name “Anti-Nephi-Lehies”

In this setting, the king over the greater land of Nephi wanted to have a name by which all of the converts could be called. He and Aaron settled on the name “Anti-Nephi-Lehies” (23:16). This name embraces the land of Nephi, the common ancestry back to Lehi, and the idea that these converts are now a part of the Nephites.

There are a good number of names that begin with the prefix *anti*. Antionum, Antipas, Antipus, antion, and then of course there is the Anti-Christ. The *anti* in *anti*-Christ means something completely different from the usage here. *Anti*-Christ, it means *against* Christ. Transliterated words such as *Antionum*, are Nephite words with Nephite syllables.

We do not really know what *anti* means. That is one of the things I want to look up in the Nephite dictionary when we finally get it. This name may simply have designated “descendants of Lehi who are not descendants of Nephi,” or as we might say “non-Nephite Lehites.” But a better possibility is that it comes from the Egyptian *nty*, which means “the one who,” or “of,” or “part of.” In other words, these people wanted to be known as descendants of Lehi who were part of the Nephite religious order.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Converted Lamanites Call Themselves Anti-Nephi-Lehies?](#) (Alma 23:17),” *KnoWhy* 131 (June 28, 2016).

“[Anti-Nephi-Lehi](#),” Book of Mormon Onomasticon.

Alma 24

Alma 24:1–6 — The Lamanites Prepare to go to War against the People of Ammon

The king’s proclamation did not succeed in all ways, at least it did not please the Amulonites and the Amalekites, who opposed the king entirely and openly. In addition, the king’s proclamation was quickly ignored, because he passed the kingship to his son before he died (24:3). Whenever there was a new king, there was instant instability. Immediately there were people who wanted to attack those who had converted. Sadly, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies had taken an oath that they would not take up arms ever again; they would rather die than use their weapons. Since, as the text says, they had buried the

weapons “deep in the earth” (24:17), they would have had to dig them out of the ground. Their king commanded them not to make any preparations for war (24:6), and more than a thousand of them died rather than violate their oath.

Alma 24:7–16 — The King of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies Makes a Declaration on Repentance

The essence of the words of the king of these converts is found in Alma 24:7–16. His words of assurance and reinforcement are a model of solidifying the repentance process. The story of the Ammonites offers great instructions on how we too can best go about the repentance process.

They began by being thankful for God’s goodness, for his messengers, for softening their hearts, and for taking away their guilt, no matter how great (24:7, 8, 9, 10). They then sought to distance themselves from everything they might use, such as their swords, to commit sin again. If God will take away our stains, we must not repeat the sin (24:12–15). Only Christ’s blood can overpower the bloodstains of our sins (24:13). This gives vibrant meaning to the idea of “blood for blood,” which will remain bright “unto future generations” (24:14).

Alma 24:17–26 — The People Keep Their Covenant Together

These converts knew the importance of standing together in unity. The people all agreed with their leader. Together they came forth “vouching and covenanting with God” that their repentance was indelible. They then began to work hard together with their hands. They changed from being idolatrous (24:18). They firmly accepted the truth both verbally and practically—they really applied the gospel to themselves. That is an important example for us when we repent and want to change. Change is usually not easy. We cannot expect to repent and not have to expend effort. Doing it together is best.

They associated with good people. They became friendly with the Nephites, and that would really have helped their repentance. If we continue running with the wrong crowd, that does not facilitate our progress either.

Stunningly, they all remained committed as a group. This appears to be an ordinance that was not conducted one by one; they were all willing as a group to pledge to honor this commitment together. There was strength in numbers here. Perhaps, in the repentance process, we can become stronger in overcoming problems as communities if we are all committed to the change.

They all buried their weapons. They found whatever the implement of the sin was, and buried it deep within the ground. Maybe we could look for a symbol of our repentance too. I do not know what your implements might be, but, if you struggle with the Word of

Wisdom, you may consider confiscating whatever food or drug tempts you. Whatever it might be, bury it deep and get it out of your way.

They faced the challenges and oppositions together, whatever the costs. Many were killed rather than take up arms again. The result was horrific, but the effect was more powerful than anything else they could have done, and many of their attackers came over to their side.

Alma 25

Alma 24:28–25:12 — The Wicked Fight among Their Own

This brief section appears to have been inserted by Mormon to show how the wicked will not support each other, will turn against each other to everyone's harm, and how the Lord's prophecies will be fulfilled.

Some of those who had been violently opposed to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were pure literal Lamanites, "actual descendants of Laman and Lemuel" (24:29), and they became very upset that their supposed allies had used them to kill so many of their own Lamanite brethren (24:28). Most of the leaders who had led the attacks on the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were, in fact, "after the order of Nehors" (24:28), who were Nephites, or were "the seed of Amulon," who were priests of Noah, also a Nephite (25:4). The Lamanites, now becoming angry because those people had "slain their [Lamanite] brethren" (25:1), turned their vengeance "upon the Nephites" (25:1). In particular, they chose as their target "the land of Ammonihah," not only because it was close (being near the head of the River Sidon, including the cities of Melek, Sidom and Ammonihah), but also because Ammonihah was the headquarters of the Order of Nehors. These Lamanites "fell upon the people in the land of Ammonihah and destroyed them" (25:1), leaving it as the "Desolation of Nehors" reported back in Alma 16:9–11. This explains the not so obvious reasons why the Lamanites attacked the borders of the land of Zarahemla and destroyed the city of Ammonihah (25:1–2).

While few details are given, among those who attacked this Nephite territory were both Lamanites, many of whom were driven and slain (25:3), and also "almost all the seed of Amulon," and they were slain by the Nephites (25:4). The remainder of this Lamanite force, including "the remnant of the children of Amulon," then fled into the east wilderness (not wanting to return to the land of Nephi). Those Amulonites then usurped "power and authority over the Lamanites" (25:5) and put to death any Lamanites who began to disbelieve the traditions of the Lamanites and wanted defect over to the side of the Nephites. But those additional martyrdoms caused "contention in the wilderness"

(25:8), and those last remaining Amulonites were then hunted and killed, thus fulfilling the prophecies of Abinadi (25:7–12).

Alma 25:13–17 — More Lamanites Repent

Many of these Lamanites return home and come over into the land of Ishmael, where they also bury their weapons of war, join the people of Lamoni, Ammon, and the sons of Mosiah. They keep the law, statutes, and ordinances according to the law of Moses, knowing that it was a type of Christ's coming. "They did retain a hope through faith, unto eternal salvation."

Alma 26

Alma 26:1–9, 11–37 — Ammon Expresses Great Joy at the Success of Their Mission

With one brief interruption from Aaron who thinks that Ammon's joy carries him "away unto boasting" (26:10), this entire chapter gives us "the words of Ammon to his brethren." He expresses amazement at the great blessings the Lord had granted them during their fourteen year mission, things they could not have imagined when they left their home and royal stations in Zarahemla. His reminiscence is very detailed:

- How they had been persecuted and had been laughed to scorn as they left (26:23; see Mosiah 27:32).
- How the Lord had comforted them and promised them success (26:27; see Alma 17:10–11).
- Recalling the houses they entered, expressly protected under the proclamation of the king of the Lamanites (26:28; see Alma 23:2).
- Becoming "instruments" in the hands of the Lord (26:3, 15; see Alma 17:9)
- The thousands who now rejoice in the fold of God (26:4).
- In spite of all their great sufferings (26:28, 34; see Alma 21:14).
- Being "patient in afflictions" (26:27, 28; see Alma 17:11).

In every respect, the rejoicing of Ammon in Alma 26 acknowledges the fulfillment of the blessings given to the sons of Mosiah at the outset of their mission. Thus, Aaron may have been a little too quick to quick in objecting to Ammon's exuberance. He rejoiced as he glorified God, not himself (26:11–12, 35–36). We might well wonder if we rejoice in Ammon's way often enough today.

In reading Ammon's words, an interesting personal thread also runs through his exuberant reverie, namely the number of times his words echo the words of Alma, as he described the appearance of the angel to him and the four sons of Mosiah reported in

Mosiah 27 or other words of Alma about their conversion. Take note of the following distinct verbal allusions:

- Darkest abyss (Alma 26:3; back to Mosiah 27:29).
- Marvelous light (26:3; back to Mosiah 27:29).
- Pains of hell (26:13; see Alma 36:13).
- Sing the song of redeeming love (26:13; see Alma 5:9).
- Snatched (26:17; back to Mosiah 27:28).

Remember also that these sons of Mosiah were grandsons of Benjamin. Thus, be on the lookout for places in Ammon’s rejoicing that are drawn from King Benjamin’s foundational speech. For example:

- Natural man (Alma 26:21; Mosiah 3:19).
- Know the mysteries of God (Alma 26:22; Mosiah 2:9).
- God has *all power, all wisdom, all understanding, and comprehendeth all things* (Alma 26:35; see Mosiah 4:9).

Finally, notice that the word “joy” appears in Ammon’s ecstatic reflection seven times (“my joy,” 26:11; “with joy,” 11; “our joy,” 16; “our joy,” 30; “my joy,” 35; “my joy,” 36; “my joy,” 37).

Another seven-fold expression of complete joy will show up again in Alma 27:17–19, and yet a third time in Alma 29:5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 14, 16.

These triple expressions of joy to the seventh power, along with the many precise word choices in these deeply personal chapters seem far too literarily purposeful and symbolically meaningful to be accidental or unintentional.

Further Reading

Corbin Volluz, “A Study in Seven: Hebrew Numerology in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2014): 57–83.

Alma 27

Alma 27:1–14 — Ammon and His Converts Decide to Move North

When the Lamanites returned, having gone on a campaign against the Nephites in the land of Ammonihah (see 25:13; 27:1), they found that the Amalekites were very angry and they begin to destroy the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. Ammon and his people decide to ask the Lord what to do. Ammon was told, “Get this people out of this land” (27:12). He gets permission from the king of the Lamanites to do this, and he takes his converts to the

wilderness between the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla (27:14). There he leaves the people, while he and his brothers return to Zarahemla to see if they can negotiate terms on which these refugees can be given a place.

One can easily imagine why these righteous Ammonites, however, would have rightly been concerned about relocating to the land of Zarahemla. They would be leaving their homeland, their culture, their language, their climate, their normal occupations, going into the land of their traditional enemies, into a new religious and cultural mix, and facing many other challenges. Immigrants and refugees today can certainly relate well to the challenges that these recent converts must have faced. But they went, seeking safety, protection, the free exercise of religion, and to follow the instruction of the Lord to emigrate to a new land of promise.

Alma 27:15–20 — Ammon and His Brothers Meet Alma

On their way to the city of Zarahemla to consult with people in Zarahemla, the sons of Mosiah meet Alma, who was on his way from Gideon to Manti (Alma 17:1; see also Alma 16:15). This chance encounter produced this second seven-fold expression of joy (27:17–19):

- The joy of Ammon was full
- He was swallowed up in the joy of his God
- This was exceeding joy
- This is the joy of the truly penitent and humble seeker of happiness
- The joy of Alma was truly great
- The joy of Aaron, Omner and Himni also
- And their joy did not exceed their strength

Alma 27:21–24 — The Ammonites Are Granted Land and a Limited Military Exemption

Apparently without much difficulty, these five returned to Alma's house and obtained permission of the Chief Judge, who without further consultation, issued a proclamation admitting the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi into the Nephite nation. The voice of the people then approved the transfer of the land of Jershon to these people as a land of inheritance (27:22). They agreed to protect these people because of their oath not to take up arms, provided they would agree to give "a portion of their substance to assist" in maintaining the Nephite armies (27:24), a kind of a tax.

The immigrants happily agreed, were numbered equally among the people, were zealous toward God, honest in all things, and firm in the faith of Christ (27:27). About fifteen years later, these men and women will become the fathers and mothers of the boys who will become the stripling warriors of Helaman (in Alma 55–57).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why were the People of Ammon Exempted from Military Duty? \(Alma 27:24\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 274 (February 13, 2017).

Alma 27:22 — The Meaning of Jershon

The Hebrew root word, *Jerash* (יָרַשׁ) meant *to inherit*. When they put a *nun* (ן) at the end of a word, as in *Jerash-on*, it meant *a place of*—it is a toponymical suffix—and so the name *Jershon* literally means *a place of inheritance*, and it was given to them “for an inheritance” (27:22).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Was Jershon Called a Land of Inheritance? \(Alma 27:22\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 134 (July 1, 2016).

“[Jershon](#),” Book of Mormon Onomasticon.

Alma 28

In this short chapter, a great battle—as had been threatened by the Amalekites, “because of their loss” of these people (27:2)—was fought. This battle was greater than any previous conflict in the land of Zarahemla (28:2). Evidently the Nephites were resolute in keeping their commitment to protect the Ammonites, who themselves were exempt from frontline duty. What made this war uniquely terrible? Several factors must have contributed. For one thing, the Zoramites had already defected from the central powers in Zarahemla and were building the city of Antionum in that area. They probably did not respond with their normal enthusiasm for the honors of battle. From a geo-political perspective, the lands of Jershon and Antionum must have been important to both the Nephites and the Lamanites. They were certainly willing to lose many lives in defending these neighboring lands, as “the bodies of many thousands” were given a proper burial and were “laid low in the earth,” while the bodies of many thousands were “mouldering in heaps upon the face of the earth,” presumably the bodies of the invaders that would not have been given anything but a token burial (28:11).

Alma 28:7 — The Dating of Alma’s Pious Soliloquy in Alma 29

The war in this chapter occurred in the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi (28:7). Thus, Alma’s famous text in Alma 29 was written after an intense year of joy (with the return of the sons of Mosiah) and a devastating year (with the successful but very costly defense of Jershon). Thus, the beginning of the sixteen year of the reign of judges would have been the beginning of the forty-ninth year, the completing

of the seventh sabbatical, since the time of King Benjamin's speech. Such a sabbatical would have been a traditional time of great rest, of peace, of freeing the slaves, freeing of the debts, of rejoicing in the rest of the Lord. There had been thirty-three years from King Benjamin's speech to the death of King Mosiah, and then these sixteen years more would equal forty-nine. King Benjamin's speech itself may have occurred on some kind of sabbatical or jubilee occasion.

Alma 29

Alma 29 — What Prompted Alma to Write the Words in This Chapter?

While a complete religious and literary analysis of Alma's great introspective ode remains to be written, any careful reader comes away from this text inspired, sobered, instructed, happy, reminded, and fulfilled. In a manner that many readers can relate with, Alma expresses a devout wish, recognizes his limitations and God's realities, poses introspective questions to himself, and most of all finds glorious joy in doing what God has commanded, remembering what God has done, sharing joy with others, and praying for their ultimate blessing.

But there is more going on here than that. Like a Bach fugue where every note has its place, every word in Alma's composition is measured and counted. And like the text of a psalm that lends itself easily to singing, the opening lines of Alma 29 have been set unforgettably to music in one of the most successful musical settings ever given to any passage in the Book of Mormon.

While Alma 29 was certainly written as a part of the mourning and burials of the fallen soldiers who bravely defended the land of Jershon (see Alma 30:2), Alma's words also made an exquisite sabbatical text. These words set the tone for the forty-ninth year, and also for the following fiftieth year, a jubilee year.

Whatever one calls Alma's wonderful composition—a hymn, a psalm, a soliloquy, a high priestly benediction—it was the result of Alma's fourteen years of service and struggle, his great joy at his reunion with the sons of Mosiah, but also his lamentation at the devastation of the war that has just ended.

It begins on a very high plane of confidence, recalling the voice of the Angel that had converted Alma and his four best friends. Alma must have still been pinching himself, realizing that his friends were still alive. For fourteen years, they had had no communication. They all could have been dead. They were thrown in jail. They were

almost killed on several occasions. I suppose he had almost given up on ever seeing his friends again. What joy he would have had at their return!

And, notice again, that the word *joy* occurs in this chapter seven times (29:5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 14, 16). This is the third set in which the word joy is mentioned seven times. The number seven also has special significance in celebrating their 14 years apart. Ammon's 7 mentions of the word joy plus Alma's 7 equals 14.

The 49th year is also a sabbatical year, 7 x 7. So, the High Priest Alma is writing this at the beginning of the 49th year. This leads us to wonder if that year wasn't recognized as the final sabbatical year before the Jubilee, which would be the 50th year from the time of King Benjamin's speech, there having been 33 years from Benjamin's Speech to the death of Mosiah and then these 16 years more. And notice that Alma 30:5 says that the 16th year of the Reign of Judges there was a year of peace, with no disturbances, and then that the 17th year was a year of "continual peace" (30:5). This is what the Sabbath and Sabbatical years were all about. Rest. Everything is peaceful. Even the land you let lie fallow. And what do you do the whole time? You celebrate, you rejoice. You remember the past. You praise God. You thank him for all the things that he has done. Just as Alma does in Alma 29.

Moreover, the Hebrew word *jubel* (יִבֵּל) means *a trumpet*. Alma 29:1 begins, "O that I were an angel and could speak with the voice of a *jubel*." This is the word that the word Jubilee comes from. And at the beginning of each ritual year, there would also be a celebration of the Day of Atonement, a time for repentance as well as forgiveness leading to joy. And that theme follows next in Alma 29:2, as Alma wished that he could declare with a voice of thunder the need for repentance, the plan of redemption, that all would repent and come unto God, that there would be no more sorrow, and only happiness, on the face of all the earth. There could not be a better beginning for a Jubilee text than Alma 29:1–2, especially in the mind and heart of the High Priest over all the land.

When Alma, as the High Priest, begins this text with his wish to be able to "speak with the trump of God" (29:1), he invokes many high and holy contexts, for the blowing of the trumpets in ancient Israel was connected with many religious and political occasions. The "day of Yahweh" was a day for the sounding horns in joy over His victories. Horns would announce the commencement of an important feast-day, as required on the beginning of the New Year (Leviticus 23:24; Numbers 29:1), or the commencement of the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 25:9). Accompanying shouts for joy could occur in association with a royal jubilation, or when an individual experienced personal salvation, or to celebrate the making of a covenant by taking an oath, or in everyday life.

Alma 29 also ends with a high tone of personal reassurance, remembrance, praise and blessing, especially for those four brothers. I wonder if maybe this text might not be best understood as a high priestly prayer, a prayer of benediction in their behalf. All of this would fit perfectly, if this text was prepared in connection with a great sabbatical and jubilee moment.

In any event, it is hard to imagine any other person better suited to have composed this wonderful scripture, which also has some psalmodic qualities. For instance, Nephi's psalm in 2 Nephi 4 was provoked, inspired, or brought about by the death of Lehi. Many psalms are expressions of lament. Likewise, it may have been the cumulation of Nephite and Lamanite deaths that made Alma so reflective and sober. Nephi, when he wrote his psalm was very vulnerable and going out into uncharted territory. I think Alma is also open here in recognizing his own vulnerability. With this writing, Alma began to reveal more about his worries, the fears that people had, the concerns about all the deaths. He could easily have kept this writing to himself, but we can be very grateful that he chose to keep it among his records and to share it with future generations, to let them know the deepest desires of his heart.

Alma 29:1–17 — Alma's Character and Personality Revealed Here

We can certainly learn many things about Alma's character and personality from this beautiful spiritual expression.

For example, as always, Alma was not timid. He was a man of conviction. He wanted the people to repent and to come unto "our God." He was not apologetic about his deepest wish. He knew what he knew, and he wanted people to come to his side.

Alma was not doubtful. He testified using the words "I know ..." frequently. He knew whereof he spoke. He was a man of testimony.

He went on to say things like, "I know that God has granted man their agency, I know that there is a plan, that they should be able to choose." His deepest motivation was "that there might not be more sorrow upon the face of the earth" (29:2). He was a compassionate man; he did not want these things for himself. The one wish of his heart was righteousness and benefits for all people.

He accepted God's decrees. He was content with his assignment in life. He not only accepted but gloried in what he had been commanded to do.

He knows how to have joy: to be grateful for God's mercies, to remember the deliverances (not the deaths), and to be happiest for the success of others.

Finally, Alma was a generous soul. The way he spoke of his joy is inspiring. His joy for other people took him even beyond his body to being overwhelmed (29:16). He was happy with his own success, but often when people have success in this competitive world, they hope that the competition does not succeed too much. That was not the way with Alma.

One can imagine that Alma realized the difficult choices made by the converts that Ammon brought back with him. Consider also the sacrifices of the four sons of Mosiah, who were gone for fourteen years as missionaries. There is never any mention anywhere in the Book of Mormon of any sons of Ammon, or of Aaron, Omner, or Himni, and there is not even an indication that they were ever married. How long they lived after their return is not recorded. Life expectancy was not very long in those days. They must have made some serious sacrifices in that matter, but Alma rejoiced for them even more than for himself. Such selflessness is characteristic of Alma. His soliloquy here is a genuine expression of his desire to bless others.

Alma 29:1 — What Was Wrong with Alma’s Desire to Be an Angel?

When Alma declared that he wanted to be an angel, he probably was not thinking about a random angel in the abstract. If you remember, Alma had first-hand experience with an angel. This angel cried repentance and spoke with the voice of thunder. The angel’s power knocked everybody down, and caused Alma to be physically afflicted for days. Alma was likely thinking that *this* was the kind of angel he wanted to be. An angel that had the power to bring about mighty repentance.

On an interesting note, Alma had been serving for the last eight years as the high priest of the temple. In the Israelite temple, angels appeared to God’s servants, such as Isaiah and Zacharias. Sometimes the angel was none other than the Lord himself. The *angel of the Lord* was often a name or euphemism for God himself appearing at the temple in the Holy of Holies. We do not know if Alma ever had angelic experiences in his service in the temple. Interestingly, Alma was not in the temple either time that the angel appeared to him. Alma knew that it was possible for an angel to appear outside of sacred precincts. His angelic experiences likely helped Alma recognize what it may have meant if he could have taught with angelic power: “And that I could have the wish of mine heart” (29:1).

What would you wish for if you could have the wish of your heart? We know what Alma’s heart was set on: wishing that he could bring repentance to every people. He was not some kind of an aristocratic, exclusivist leader, but rather wanted to embrace all people inclusively. That was unusual in the Israelite tradition because the high priest typically felt so strongly the need to protect his own purity. Jesus’ eating with the ordinary people, the sinners, the publicans, and the tax collectors, was concerning to people because that would have defiled him, in their minds. Even more so, the high priest needed to keep

himself pure, but Alma did not approach his priesthood responsibility that way at all. He went out, even to do battle with Amlici and to call the unholy people in Ammonihah to repentance.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Was Alma's Wish Sinful? \(Alma 29:3\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 137 (July 6, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Alma Wish to Speak "with the Trump of God"?](#)" (Alma 29:1)," *KnoWhy* 136 (July 5, 2016).

Alma 29:1 — Is There a Grammatical Mistake in Alma 29:1, 7?

Dr. Glade Hunsaker, a former professor of English at BYU, commented on the beauty and appropriateness of the language as follows:

This beautiful soliloquy, as we sometimes call, it begins with, "*O That I were an angel.*" We take it so for granted. You notice that the "*I*", the subject, does not seem to agree with *were*. *Were* seems to be plural, and there are very few folks today who realize that it is a singular subjunctive. We have PhDs in English that, unless they have studied German, French, or another language, have no clue what the subjunctive mood is. If this were really a product that had been put together in upstate New York by some flimsy folks, that piece would be lost to "*O That I was an angel?*" I would pick up my bag and leave. All the pieces are there. It is just exquisite.

While using the subjunctive "were" in this case may not have been the prevailing English grammatical usage in Joseph Smith's day, it was not unknown then. Although Alma's usage is unique in the Book of Mormon, it appears several times in the King James Bible. See 2 Samuel 15:4 ("Oh that I were made a judge"); Job 9:15, 21; Job 29:2 ("Oh that I were as in months past"); Psalms 50:12; 1 Corinthians 5:3; 2 Corinthians 13:2). Its linguistic touch in Alma 29 is compositionally elegant. Alma 29 is without a doubt a beautiful, powerful piece of writing. People can try to paraphrase the Book of Mormon, but to do so often diminishes its sophisticated beauty. In reading the writings of Alma, Mormon and Joseph Smith, the best presumption is that every phrase and every word is there for some very meaningful reason, and that reading technique certainly serves flawlessly well throughout Alma 29 in particular.

Alma 29:1–17 — The Qualities of Language in This Gorgeous Expression

Having talked much about the wording of Alma 29, we are now prepared to read the words themselves. Hopefully these two final charts will help readers to see Alma's masterpiece once again for the first time. However one reads this chapter, it always yields new insights. Here is a new arrangement of this text, with thematic subdivisions, with

color coding to highlight the repetitions of individual words and phrases, with the text separated into poetic and parallelistic lines, and with chiasmic inversions made apparent. This chart is followed by information that draws attention to word frequencies in Alma 29. Awareness of these textual characteristics and interactivities adds appreciation to the sophistication of this text at many levels.

Word Counts in Alma 29

Looking at words and phrases, the number of times each appears certainly does not appear to be random.

91 words appear in Alma 29 once and only once. This is a relatively high density in a text only 708 words long. Alma's skill here gives solo emphasis to these singular terms, which in turn makes it more likely that the words used more than once were also intentionally chosen and counted.

Showing their diversity, the 91 words, in alphabetical order, are: Abraham, alone, always, am, amen, among, arm, away, because, before, blameless, body, calling, carried, coming, conscience, content, counsel, cry, declare, destruction, down, Egyptians, ends, exceedingly, extended, face, filled, firm, fit, forever, granteth, harrow, heard, heart, holy, how, instrument, Isaac, Jacob, kingdom, land, man, many, merciful, mine, myself, Nephi, no, O, our, penitent, perform, perhaps, plan, praise, prayer, preach, redemption, remorse, reward, salvation, separation, shake, shall, sin, sit, so, some, sorrow, surely, teach, than, there, therefore, think, those, thunder, tongue, towards, true, truly, trump, unalterable, upon, we, what, wills, words, work, would.

Reading these 91 words in the order of their appearance highlights the special power that each of these singular words has in the flow of this text: O, mine, heart, trump, shake, cry, would, declare, thunder, plan, redemption, our, there, sorrow, upon, face, am, man, sin, content, harrow, firm, granteth, unalterable, wills, salvation, destruction, before, blameless, remorse, conscience, than, perform, work, ends, tongue, teach, fit, therefore, we, counsel, true, myself, perhaps, instrument, some, many, truly, penitent, coming, filled, what, heard, prayer, merciful, arm, extended, towards, surely, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, always, Egyptians, among, holy, calling, preach, alone, because, land, Nephi, exceedingly, how, shall, reward, think, carried, away, separation, body, so, sit, down, kingdom, those, no, praise, forever, words, amen.

At least 27 words that appear twice, as doublets, in this text are color-coded as pairs in the chart of repeated expressions. These most often appear in synonymous or antithetical parallelisms, adding contrasts and drawing attention to nuances.

- 2x **wish/mine** X (inverted to) my/**wish** (29:1, 3)
- 2x **that I were an angel** / **that I were an angel** (1, 7)
- 2x **with a voice** / **with the voice** (1, 2)
- 2x **every** people/ **every** soul (1, 2)
- 2x **I ought to** / **I ought not to** (3, 4)
- 2x **allotted** unto me/ **allotteth** unto men (3, 4)
- 2x **my desires** / **their desire** (4, 4)
- 2x **granteth** unto men/ **allotteth** unto men (4, 4)
- 2x firm **decree** X (inverted to) **decrees** unalterable (4, 4)
- 2x **death** / **life** X (inverted to) **salvation** / **destruction** (4, 4)
- 2x **his desires** / **he desireth** (5, 5)
- 2x **why should I desire** / **why should I desire** (6, 7)
- 2x **in wisdom** / **in wisdom** (8, 8)
- 2x all **nations** /own **nation** (8, 8)
- 2x **his word** / **the word** (8, 13)
- 2x **the Lord hath commanded me** / **the Lord hath commanded me** (9, 9)
- 2x joy is **full** /my joy is more **full** (13, 14)
- 2x every **soul** /some **soul** (1, 9)
- 2x **my soul** filled / **my soul** is carried away (10, 16)
- 2x **captivity of my fathers**; / **captivity of my fathers** (11, 12)
- 2x **did establish his church** / **did establish his church** (11, 13)
- 2x **great** shall be their reward/ so **great** is my joy (15, 16)
- 2x they have **labored** / their **labors** (15, 17)
- 2x **labored** / **fruit** X (inverted to) **fruit** / **labors** (15, 17)
- 2x **carried away** / even to the **separation** (16, 16)
- 2x may **God grant** / may **God grant** (17, 17)
- 2x **my words** / **I have spoken** (17, 17)

Only four words appear three times in this text, giving triadic solidarity to the central rejoicing of Alma, not only over the deliverance from bondage but also from sin:

- 3x **repentance** (29:1, 2, 9)
- 3x **earth** (1, 2, 7)
- 3x out of **bondage** (11, 11, 12)
- 3x **same God** (12, 12, 13)

Other triads, such as the **God** of Abraham / **God** of Isaac / **God** of Jacob, also appear (11).

Seven terms appear four times or in quatrains. Alma may have cast these fours in honor of his four friends, the four sons of Mosiah, his brethren, remembering the glory of their deliverance in the combat between good and evil:

- 4x *good and evil / good from evil / good and evil / good or evil* (5, 5, 5, 5)
- 4x **do I remember** / **do I remember** / **I also remember** the captivity
/ **I have always remembered** the captivity (10, 10, 11, 12)
- 4x *did deliver / did deliver / did deliver / delivered* (11, 11, 11, 12)
- 4x **glory** (9, 9, 9, 9)
- 4x **brethren** (10, 14, 16, 17)
- 4x *success* (2x the success of my brethren + 2x my success)
- 4x *grant* (4, 8, 17, 17)

The word “according to” appears five times:

- 5x *according to* their desire / *according to* their wills/ *according to* his desires/
according to that which is just and true/ *according to* my words
(4, 4, 5, 8, 17)

Two words appear six times. They have to do with our desires, which make all the difference for all men, all nations, all that God wills, and all who bring forth good fruit, one of Alma’s main points:

- 6x my *desires* /their *desire* /his *desires* /he *desireth* /I *desire* /I *desire*
(4, 4, 5, 5, 6, 7)
- 6x **ALL** (2, 5, 7, 8, 8, 17)

Interestingly, four key words are given the special status of appearing seven times, emphasizing the completeness of revealed knowledge and of righteous joy, as well as the seven-fold holiness of the name of Jehovah (Lord):

- 7x **know** (5x in “I know” and 2x in he that “knoweth”)
- 7x **JOY** (5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 14, 16)
- 7x *may* (9, 17, 17, 17, 17, 17, 17)
- 7x **the Lord** (by itself) (3, 8, 8, 9, 9, 10, 11)

Repeated Expressions in Alma 29

My Wish

- ¹ O **that I were an angel**, and could have *the wish* of *mine* heart,
that I might go forth and **speak with** the trump of *God*, **with a voice** to shake the *earth*,
and cry **repentance** unto *every* people!
- ² Yea, I would **declare** unto *every* soul, as **with the voice** of thunder,
repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should **repent** and come unto our *God*,
that there might not be more **sorrow** upon *ALL* the face of the *earth*.

My Reality

- ³ But behold, **I am a man**, and do sin in *my wish*;
for *I ought to* be content with the things which the *Lord* hath **allotted** unto me.
- ⁴ *I ought not to* harrow up in *my desires* the *firm decree* of a just *God*,
For I know that he **granteth** unto men *according to their desire*,
whether it be *unto death or unto life*;
yea, I know that he **allotteth** unto men,
yea, **decreeth** unto them **decrees** which are *unalterable, according to their wills*,
whether they be *unto salvation or unto destruction*.

Universal Reality

- ⁵ **Yea, and I know** that *good and evil* have come before *ALL* men;
he that knoweth not *good from evil* is blameless;
but he that knoweth *good and evil*, to him it is given *according to his desires*,
whether he *he desireth good or evil, life or death, JOY or remorse of conscience*.

My Question

- ⁶ Now, seeing **that I know** these things,
why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called?
- ⁷ *why should I desire* **that I were an angel**, that I could **speak** unto *ALL* the ends of the *earth*?

Divine Reality

- ⁸ For behold, the *Lord* doth **grant** unto *ALL* nations, of their own *nation and tongue*,
to teach *his word*, yea, *in wisdom*, *ALL* that he seeth fit that they should have;
therefore we see that the *Lord* doth counsel *in wisdom*, according to that which is *just and true*.

My Glorious Joyous Answer

- ⁹ **I know** that *the Lord hath commanded me*, and I **glory** in it.
I do not **glory** in *myself*,
but I **glory** in that which *the Lord hath commanded me*;
yea, and this is *my glory*,
that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of *God* to bring some *soul* to **repentance**;
and this is *my JOY*,.
- ¹⁰ And behold, when I see many of *my brethren* truly penitent,
and coming to the *Lord* their *God*,
then is *my soul filled* with *JOY*;

Deep Remembering

Then **do I remember** what the *Lord* has done for me,
 Yea, even that he hath heard my prayer;
 Yea, then **do I remember** his merciful arm
 Which he extended towards me.

¹¹ Yea, and **I also remember** the *captivity of my fathers*;
 for I surely do know that the *Lord did deliver them out of bondage*,
 and by this *did establish his church*;
 Yea, the *Lord God*, the *God* of Abraham, and the *God* of Isaac, and the *God* of Jacob,
did deliver them out of bondage.

¹² Yea, **I have always remembered** the *captivity of my fathers*;
 and that *same God* who *delivered them out of* the hands of the Egyptians
did deliver them out of bondage.

¹³ Yea, and that *same God* *did establish his church* among them;

The Fullness of Joy

Yea, and that *same God* hath called me by a holy calling,
 to preach *the word* unto this people,
 and hath given me much *success*,
 in the which my **JOY**, is **full**.

¹⁴ But I do not **JOY** in my own *success* alone,
 but my **JOY** is more **full** because of the *success* of **my brethren**,
 Who have been up to the land of Nephi.

¹⁵ Behold, they have *labored* exceedingly;
 And have brought forth much *fruit*;
 And how **great** shall be their reward!

¹⁶ Now, when I think of the *success* of these **my brethren**
my soul is *carried away*,
 even to the *separation* of it from the body, as it were,
 so **great** is my **JOY**.

My Request

¹⁷ And now may *God grant* unto these, **my brethren**,
 That **THEY** may sit down in the kingdom of *God*;
 Yea, and also **ALL** those who are the *fruit* of **THEIR labors**
 That **THEY** may go no **more out**,
 But that **THEY** may praise him **forever**.
 And may *God grant* that it may be done
 according to **my words**,
 even as **I have spoken**. Amen.

You can view these charts as separate study handouts [here](#).

ALMA 30–31

John W. Welch Notes



Alma 30

Alma 30:5 — Was This a Year of Jubilee?

As mentioned in our discussion of Alma 29, there appears to have been a special recognition of a great season of peace at this time among the Nephites. Before King Mosiah died, he had reigned for thirty-three years after the time of King Benjamin's speech. Now in Alma 30, it was the sixteenth and then seventeenth years of the reign of the judges, totaling forty-nine and fifty years since King Benjamin's speech. Dates are often given to us in the Book of Mormon for some kind of meaning, and thus it is possible that this moment may have been recognized as a type of jubilee season, although we cannot be sure what that observance or celebration in Zarahemla might have looked like.

It is even unclear how the Jubilee might have been observed in ancient Israel under the law found in Leviticus 25. Jonathan Burnside, a professor of law at the University of Bristol, discusses this question in his superb book, *Law, God, and Society* (Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 6. On page 205, he surmises that in the Jubilee, there might have been one full year sabbatical rest in the forty-ninth year (the completion of the seventh sabbatical), and then in the fiftieth year, as it would have been too difficult to keep the crops going and provide enough food to live on, the Jubilee event could have occurred in the opening months of the fiftieth year. According to Burnside's analysis, it was only in the *commencement* of the fiftieth year that the Jubilee events took place to take care of reconfiguring the economy, such as liberating the slaves, forgiving debts, allowing original owners to redeem their lands, and moving people around as needed to have their

blessings and rights protected under the jubilee laws. Several factors make this festival season a plausible context in these chapters.

First, in Alma 29:1, Alma declared, “O that I were an angel, that I could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the *trump* of God.” The word *trump* (Exodus 19:13) or *ram’s horn* (Joshua 6:5) in Hebrew is *yôbhēl*. It is also the word for the Jubilee (in Leviticus 25:10–15, the chapter in which the Jubilee laws are given). It was the time of the trumpets. If we read Alma 29, particularly thinking of the emotions of people who may have been celebrating the Jubilee, there are some very interesting ways to appreciate what Alma was saying.

Second, Alma ended the forty-ninth year with great success and joy. A difficult war had been won. New converts had been protected. His four friends (the Sons of Mosiah) had returned from their missions and were working closely with him. He even said that his soul was filled with joy: “Yea, my joy is full,” not only about what he had done, but also the success of his brethren, who had brought the Ammonites up to the Land of Jershon. He was optimistic. The word joy appears seven times at the end of Alma 29. And indeed, Professor Burnside suggests that “the specific purpose of the jubilee law [was] to rejoice in the difference between being a slave of Pharaoh and a slave of Israel’s God (p. 211).

Third, regarding any concrete evidence of the actual observance of the Jubilee, Professor Burnside regrets that there is very little historical evidence that it was actually honored among the ancients, although its laws certainly set forth social and spiritual ideals that the people did strive to achieve. And while there is no archaeological evidence for the celebration of the Jubilee in ancient Israel, this occasion in the Book of Mormon may provide one such piece of circumstantial evidence. Particularly, the Nephites under Alma had a season of peace in “all the sixteenth year” and on into “*the commencement of the seventeenth year*” (30:4–5), as Burnside has surmised was the way the Jubilee was observed.

Alma 30:6 — Korihor, an Anti-Christ

Korihor was an important character with an interesting, although tragic, story. Everything we hear about him is found throughout all of chapter 30, which stands at the very center of the book of Alma. His case set important precedents legally, doctrinally, ecclesiastically, and politically. Alma, having been not only the Chief Judge but also the High Priest, likely took a special interest in this important case for many reasons.

But first, what were Korihor’s origins? Korihor “came into the Land of Zarahemla” (30:6), so he was apparently not a local. But he was extremely well aware of what was going on in Nephite culture and politics, so he was not very far removed the issues of the day there. For instance, the city of Ammonihah had been destroyed in the fourteenth year of the

reign of judges, only three years earlier. When Korihor accused the Nephites of teaching that people are “guilty and fallen, because of the transgression of *a parent* [namely Adam]” (30:25), he was possibly aware of what Alma, Amulek, and Zeezrom had debated in this regard in Ammonihah. A similar issue had also been raised by Nehor and also by Zeezrom in Alma 1:4; 11:35–37 (that people need not fear, for they had been redeemed and will all receive eternal life). Korihor’s argument here would have appealed to any remaining pockets of followers of Nehor in the land of Zarahemla. And he apparently knew the law in Deuteronomy 24:16, which he seems to paraphrase here (that children are not to “be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin”). So, Korihor was not a clueless newcomer to populations in the cities Zarahemla, Jershon, and Gideon.

Those in Ammonihah had been studying and working to undo the Nephite government in the city of Zarahemla (Alma 8:17), and Korihor appears to continue that campaign, accusing the Nephite leaders of taking advantage of their position to exploit the people. While they took no pay (not even one senine, Alma 30:33), they were likely entitled to eat some of the sacrifices made at the temple. Interestingly, Korihor accuses them of “glutting on the labors of the people” (30:31). The word *glut* means to over-eat, and if the priests encouraged the people to bring more sacrifices, it meant that they ate better. So, it is easy to see how Korihor might have wanted to twist this idea in order to capitalize on that situation. Korihor may even have known enough to have quoted from the record of Zeniff here, which states that the Lamanites wanted to bring the Nephites “into bondage that they might glut themselves with the labors of our hands” (Mosiah 9:12; I thank Elliott Jolley for drawing this textual connection to my attention). And since the record of Zeniff was brought by Limhi and Gideon when they came to the land of Zarahemla, the people in Gideon might very well have recognized Korihor’s subtle implication that Alma and the Nephite priests were no better than the Lamanite oppressors of their grandparents in the land of Nephi.

Most of all, Korihor was identified as being “anti-Christ” (30:6). He denied that people could “know that there shall be a Christ . . . also that he shall be slain for the sins of the world” (30:26). Challenging the roles of Christ as the Son of God, redeemer, and judge of individuals were among the main issues that had been raised in Ammonihah, especially by Zeezrom (Alma 9:28; 11:42–44; 14:26; 15:6–10). So, on this key issue of debate, Korihor was also very well informed and shrewd.

Alma 30:7–11 — Basic Public Nephite Law Described

Interestingly, the episode of Korihor is set entirely in a legal context, and from a legal perspective the case of Korihor is marvelously complicated, specific, and detailed. Crucial for understanding the underlying legal issue in the case of Korihor is the opening

affirmation in this chapter that “there was no law against a man’s *belief*” (30:7). But if a person did some culpable *action*—specifically “[1] if he murdered he was punished unto death; and [2] if he robbed he was also punished; and [3] if he stole he was also punished; and [4] if he committed adultery he was also punished; yea, [5] for all this wickedness they were punished” (30:10). This statement actually derives precisely from King Benjamin’s public law expressed in Mosiah 2:13, which lists exactly the same crimes—[1] murder, [2] plunder [robbery], [3] stealing, [4] adultery, and [5] committing any manner of wickedness—and in the same order. This cannot be accidental, especially if the Nephites were at that very time celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Benjamin’s covenantal giving of that law.

But now, since the decree of Mosiah had provided that a person would be “punished according to the crime which he has committed, according to the law which has been given” (Mosiah 29:15), and since there had been no law given allowing people to be punished for their beliefs but only for “for the crimes which he had done” (30:11), the legal gap that remained open under the law of Mosiah was about speech. Could a person be punished for speech alone? Was speaking an action, which under some circumstances could still be punished—as in the case of blasphemy, or inciting rebellion, or leading people into apostasy—or was all such speaking protected as a mere expression of one’s belief? This was an open legal issue when Korihor came into Zarahemla. But his complicated case, involving speech-acts in Zarahemla, Jershon, Gideon, and heard before judges in Gideon and then in Zarahemla, would make it clear, by divine judgment, that some expressions of belief and accusations went beyond the new protective rubric that a person could not be punished for their beliefs. Keeping one’s beliefs private was always a safe choice, and discussing one’s questions was always an option, and even being critical of how things were being handled could have been acceptable. But when Korihor “went on to blaspheme” (30:30), to “revile against the priests and teachers” (30:31), and to make false accusations (30:32–35), he was effectively found, in this case of first impression, to have gone beyond the protected purview of mere speech, even under the stated law (see Exodus 22:28; Leviticus 24:11; Deuteronomy 5:11). It makes sense that not all speech is protectable in all circumstances. Even today, while we believe in free speech and the First Amendment says you are free to speak, a person cannot falsely yell “fire” in a crowded theater. There are certain speech acts that even our modern law will hold as *action*.

Although the full legal analysis of this fascinating case goes far beyond the purposes of this installment of notes and comments, it can be said without further elaboration that legal technicalities abound throughout the account found in Alma 30. For many who dig deeply into this material, the amazing fact that all of this is legally consistent with ancient Israelite jurisprudence and judicial process is a great testimony that whoever wrote this

account was a sophisticated expert in ancient laws generally and was also personally familiar with the fine points of Nephite legal practice. Alma himself would seem to be the only one who would qualify as the author of this marvelously detailed account. My chapter analyzing this case, in my book cited below and used throughout these notes, discusses technical legal matters such as: expulsion (280), criminal arrest (281), courts, multiple jurisdictions, and venue (282–84), reviling and blasphemy (284), giving notice and warning (285), the problems of a single accuser (286), the requirement of diligent investigation, evidences, and witnesses (286), submission to an ordeal (288), collective responsibility and the “better one than many” rule (288), cursing of an opponent with speechlessness, talionic justice, imposing the inability to speak as matching the crime of speaking unlawfully (289–293), granting an opportunity to confess, taking that confession in writing, and the inadequacy of an incomplete confession (293–295), banishment as an alternative to execution, proclaiming and heralding the result of a court proceeding, giving public warning, and punishment by an act of God (295–298). All of these legal topics are woven smoothly into the narrative fabric that stands behind this legal proceeding and the precedent that was established by this seminal case.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “[The Trial of Korihor](#),” in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo: BYU Press, 2008), 273–300. The [full book](#) is freely available in the Book of Mormon Central Archive.

Alma 30:12–17, 23–28 — What Doctrine Did Korihor Teach?

Of great intellectual interest are the teachings, doctrines, rhetoric, and logic that stand behind the words and argument of Korihor. Rarely has such a case presented such a thorough précis or summary of the full sweep of secular philosophies, past and present. Many of Korihor’s points were not original to him. They can be found in biblical examples, in ancient Greek philosophy, and the history of academic inquiry dating back into Lehi’s and Alma’s day. Some of Korihor’s arguments resonate with other arguments in the history of philosophy, including Enlightenment rationalism, Hegelian and Marxist class conflicts and dialectical materialism, Existential nihilism, and relativistic and deterministic philosophical strands that would not emerge or flourish until later in the nineteenth century or on into the twentieth century. As the accompanying chart shows (Figure 1), Korihor’s brief one-liners project the headlines of numerous ideologies. No doubt, Korihor had developed his bullet points much further and had much more to say on each of his assertions. Each “Korihorism” is aligned in this chart with a possible modern or standard philosophical counterpart. Indeed, a strong syllabus for any modern course in the history of philosophy could take Korihor as its guide. He misses very few of the standard sophistic, skeptical, or cynical beats.

The Teachings of Korihor in Alma 30

Modern Counterpart	Korihorism	Verse
Anti-Christian	"there should be no Christ"	12
Negativism	"bound down under a foolish and vain hope"	13
Agnosticism	"no man can know of anything which is to come"	13
Empiricism	"ye cannot know of things which ye do not see"	15
Psychological explanation	"it is the effect of a frenzied mind"	16
Positivism	"a belief of things which are not so"	16
Sophism	"every man fares in this life according to the management of the creature"	17
Naturalism	"every man prospers according to his genius"	17
Egoism	"every man conquers according to his strength"	17
Relativism	"whatsoever a man does is no crime"	17
Hedonism	"lift up their heads in wickedness"	18
Nihilism	"when a man dies, that is the end thereof"	18
Anti-Religion	"priests usurp power and authority over people"	23
Skepticism	"ye do not know that they are true"	24
Atheism	"a being who never has been seen or known, who never was nor ever will be"	28

Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "The Teachings of Korihor in Alma 30," in Charting the Book of Mormon, chart 78.

This chart summarizes the teachings of Korihor mainly in Zarahemla (30:12–18). His teachings there were mainly practical, political, social or secular in nature. His litany is essentially a standard road map to modern secularism.

For example, various schools of thought have followed the axioms of Agnosticism or Empiricism (30:15), "You just cannot know anything you cannot see," which of course is simply not true. Knowing and seeing are not the same thing. Korihor tosses in psychological arguments to denigrate or dismiss anything that is spiritual. Such

arguments jump to the simplistic conclusion that all spirituality “is some kind of mental derangement, the result of a frenzied mind” (30:16).

Logical Positivism, the main philosophy of the mid-twentieth century, accuses people of believing things which are not so (30:16), and you have to have things positively logical in order for them to be believable. However, even the proponents of this view abandoned that school of thought as it was circular or incomplete.

Sophism, or the view that “every man fares in this life according to the management of the creature” can be found right in the Greek Sophists, who were challenged in several of Plato’s dialogues. Sophism insists that God does not influence or have any control over this world, but that we somehow do. “Man is the measure of all things,” as Protagoras famously put it, and Korihor does too (30:17).

Naturalism, Egoism, Humanism, Relativism (whatever you do is no crime, 30:17), and so on, all the way down to Nihilism and Atheism which is Korihor’s final card (30:18). He boldly asserts that “You talk about a being who never has been seen or known, who never was nor ever will be” (30:28), but how can he be so absolutely sure of any of that, either past or present, let alone future? Highly recommended are the wise and sobering articles published in the 1970s and written by two BYU philosophy professors, Chauncey C. Riddle and C. Terry Warner, listed and linked below. Gratefully these are now readily available and only a click away.

As you read Korihor’s ranting, do not overlook the fact that his philosophical and political arguments shift dramatically in nature and tone when he speaks to the righteous people in the city of Gideon (30:22–28). Another chart could and should be produced to list Korihor’s many further arguments in that location, which become much more theological or ecclesiastical in nature. There he deployed his mental gymnastics to “pervert” or twist “the ways of the Lord,” to deny any promised messiah, to “interrupt” the rejoicings of faithful people, and to speak against “all the prophecies” (30:22). He baldly labeled all traditions, ordinances, and practices as “foolish,” ignorant and oppressive (30:23). He ridiculed the idea of Christ being “slain for the sins of the world” (30:26). He accused the priests of being self-serving, following their dreams, whims, visions, and “pretended mysteries” (30:27–28). As is often the case in critical thought, Korihor’s arguments are mainly negative. He offers little in the way of helpful solutions to existing problems or human needs.

And if that were not already enough, Korihor’s allegations and propositions get even more strident and less coherent when he is transferred from Gideon to the authorities back in Zarahemla (see 30:30–31). In his behalf, we can be sure that Korihor was very bright

and that we only get a very brief thumbnail of his multiple lines of debate. He must have been able to discourse on these various arguments at great length. He was very persuasive in the minds of several followers, and he must have been very shrewd. But so were many in the audiences he addressed. The people in Jershon, having just been defended by the generosity of the Nephites, understandably gave him no quarter. And the officials in Gideon wisely realized that this case was above their experience or paygrade.

Further Reading

Riddle, Chauncey C., "Korihor: The Arguments of Apostasy," *Ensign*, September 1977, 18–21.

C. Terry Warner, "An Open Letter to Students: On Having Faith and Thinking for Yourself," *New Era*, November 1971, 14–19.

Alma 30:19–20 — Korihor Had No Success in Jershon and Was Cast Out

The Nephites in Zarahemla apparently felt that they could not kick Korihor out of Zarahemla, since the law (after all) said that a person could only be punished for committing an actual crime in violation of some written statute or law. But the people in Jershon had no trouble throwing him out of their new city and land. Why was that the case? The answer may tell us something about the law in the Land of Jershon.

The people of Jershon, the recently converted Lamanites, were certainly more righteous than some of those in the land of Zarahemla, and perhaps they may have had different laws there. Were they bound by the law of Mosiah? Perhaps not. They had their own city, given to them for their inheritance, so they may have been somewhat autonomous, operating under their own local rule. Having come from the land of Nephi where religious speech was only allowed by a royal proclamation (see Alma 23), these Ammonites may well have felt no need to give Korihor an open microphone. At least we know that Korihor had no recourse against them when they kicked him out.

Alma 30:21–29 — Korihor Was Tried in Gideon

This elaborate judicial report teaches us some interesting things about the justice system in the land of Zarahemla. We learn here about different jurisdictions and the removal or transfer an accused from one venue to another. By its action, the court in Gideon was not trying to delay the trial. Delay was not a feature in most ancient legal systems. There was not a trial and then an appeal. If an appeal was to be made, it was based immediately on some failure of the party to accept the jurisdiction of the court, or for the court to refuse to accept the case, and the latter was what happened here.

The judges in Gideon said, "Let us send him to Zarahemla," and they were legally able to do that. We see that happening elsewhere. Before the time of the reign of judges, the king

and his priests worked closely together on legal problems like the ones created by Korihor. This is evidenced by the collaboration of Benjamin and the holy prophets who were among his people (Words of Mormon 1:16–18), and also in the case of Noah and his priests working with each other (Mosiah 12–17). With the establishment of a covenant church and at the same time a separate civil administration in Zarahemla, priests were no longer involved in civil and criminal matters, which were instead heard by the judges. This, of course, raised the question of whether Korihor’s case should be considered a church matter or a public matter.

Alma 30:37–38 — Was Korihor Really an Atheist?

Korihor is well-known as the infamous “Anti-Christ” who preached “against the prophecies ... concerning the coming of Christ” (Alma 30:6). Among other things, Korihor taught that “there should be no Christ” (30:12), and when asked by Alma if he believed in God, he flatly answered in the negative (30:37–38). Because of this, modern readers of the Book of Mormon are accustomed to describing Korihor as an atheist, or someone who denied the existence of God. Others have even argued that Korihor is an anachronistic figure in the Book of Mormon since he espoused teachings that are congruent with Enlightenment philosophies such as Deism and other secular ideologies.

Ancient atheism, however, could and did sometimes take the form of denying that God(s) existed at all, but it might also involve efforts to redefine the nature of God(s) into something radically different from typical beliefs. For example, some atheists might simply deny the operative power of God(s) in the cosmos, or they might consciously rebel against the God(s), or undermine accepted ideas of piety by refusing to worship a given deity in the state religion. In so doing, a philosopher did not necessarily need to deny the existence of God(s) in order to be considered an atheist in the ancient world. Any of these variations may have been the case with Korihor.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Was Korihor Really an Atheist?”](#) (Alma 30:37–38), *KnoWhy* 532, (September 19, 2019).

Joseph Spencer, [“Is Not This Real?”](#) *BYU Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2019): 1–18.

Gerald N. Lund, [“An Anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon—The Face May Be Strange, but the Voice Is Familiar,”](#) in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 107–128.

Alma 30:43 — Korihor Demanded a Sign

Korihor decided that he was going to take his challenge against Alma, the High Priest, all the way to the end—he was going to play this out. If he knew of the case of Sherem, he did not believe that the Sherem phenomenon would repeat itself, that somehow a divine manifestation would intervene to show that he was wrong. On the contrary, he believed that no sign would be given to undermine his right to speak. Indeed, he was even willing to blaspheme and revile, adopting an “I can say anything I want to” type of attitude. To a modern person we say, “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” But for ancient people, words and names could be injurious. For example, they could commit a tort by placing a curse on someone, or on their land, or by desecrating a name. Such words or incantations were feared as much as actions, and were thought to be able to carry the powers that manifest themselves here in Korihor’s important test case. It got to the point of testing the limits of this new Law of Mosiah about freedom of belief. How far did that law go?

Alma 30:46–50 — Korihor Was Struck Dumb

Alma essentially said, “It is better that your one soul should perish, than that you should lead many people astray.” This is the same legal principle was invoked in the slaying of Laban. Alma was not saying, “We are going to kill you so that you will not mislead other people.” God was the one who had been offended by the blasphemy, so leaving the judgment to God and allowing him to curse Korihor with speechlessness made good sense and was perfectly fitting and appropriate.

The cursing of Korihor with speechlessness is interesting. His tongue had been the instrument of offense. There was nothing more fundamental to biblical jurisprudence than the idea that the punishment should suit the crime, that it should be tailored to match the wrong. So, Korihor’s tongue being cursed was a clear sign that what he had been doing with his tongue was inappropriate.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Was Korihor Cursed with Speechlessness? \(Alma 30:50\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 138 (July 7, 2016).

Alma 30:51–53 — Korihor Confessed His Sins

The Nephite court then handed Korihor a written question asking if he had received the divine message. It appears that he had been stunned so that he could not speak. But he wrote, “I know that I am dumb, for I cannot speak.” Could he also not hear? Perhaps, but perhaps he was not deaf, or perhaps his hearing recovered more quickly than his speech. We do not know. Whatever the case, the Nephite judges wanted Korihor’s confession in writing, and they wrote four questions for him. This all may involve less the matter of his

ability to speak than the need for the court to have a legal record, so that anyone who wished to examine Korihor's confession could do so. When Nehor was put to death, he would not voluntarily confess; it is unclear how much, if anything Nehor "was caused" to confess. So, the Nephites on this occasion were not going to let Korihor go in any way without getting his confession in writing.

Alma 30:51–53 — The Judge Asked Four Questions, Korihor Answered One

There were four questions asked of Korihor, and those four questions are in verse 51. They were:

- Art thou convinced of the power of God?
- In whom did ye desire that Alma should show forth his sign?
- Would ye that he should afflict others, to show unto thee a sign?
- Behold, he has showed unto you a sign; and now will ye dispute more?

Korihor's confession (in 30:52–53) addressed the first question, but the remainder were left largely unanswered. While he admitted that he "always knew that there was a God," he never took any personal responsibility for the damage he had done or hoped to do. Perhaps he was not even at this point telling the truth when he vaguely said that he always knew there was "a god." One wishes to give him the benefit of the doubt, but it seems likely that he was simply saying what he thought the Chief Priest wanted to hear from him. While he admitted, that he taught the words of the devil "because they were pleasing unto the carnal mind, . . . insomuch that I verily believed that they were true," he never agreed that he would "dispute no more," as Nephiah, the Chief Judge, had ultimately required and, most of all, needed Korihor to honestly say. From the point-of-view of the law and of the Chief Judge, Korihor's confession was flawed and inadequate. Alma and the Chief Judge would have been well within their legal rights and official duties to say, "This is not an acceptable confession," and thus when Korihor asked to have the curse removed, his request was denied, for he had not conformed with their request.

This was not a wholehearted, sincere confession. It was quite half-hearted, and thus it was unacceptable for many reasons. Korihor attempted to rationalize his behavior. He was a great rationalizer. He would not accept responsibility for what he had done even at the very end. Alma essentially responded to Korihor's request to be freed from the curse by saying something to the effect that, "You know, we do not trust you. If we let you go, there will be more of this, so we will let God deal with you."

So, what could the judge, in the end, do with him? They likely gave him the option of going into voluntary exile, and leaving Nephite lands. He could not go to any of the other Nephite cities and be a citizen in good standing. However, Antionum was no longer a Nephite land, and that is probably why Korihor went there.

Alma 30:54–57 — The Nephites Learn What Happened to Korihor

Korihor must have left Zarahemla as a marked pariah. His speech was probably still noticeably changed for the worse. The Nephite official took two additional legal steps to complete the case.

The first was to send out heralds. In ancient biblical law, in an important case where many people might be affected by the outcome, it was incumbent upon the priests, the elders, and the officials of the land to proclaim the outcome. When officials put the *titulus* on the top of the cross, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” that was one of these public notices, saying who was being executed and what his offense had been. Giving public notice was an essential part of their legal system. This decision has now established the law of our land.

The second thing that this notice did was to warn people: If anyone in Zarahemla were now to continue to believe and to promulgate the things that Korihor has taught, he could expect to be subjected to the same punishment of banishment as Korihor had received. Such perfidious action was not protected under the Law of Mosiah.

The public warning heralded in Zarahemla is just as pertinent today in our world as it was in Alma’s day in Zarahemla. As Chauncy Riddle in the September 1977 *Ensign* has admonished, Korihor’s experience teaches us that having great access to many gospel truths and even having a testimony and being a covenant servant of Christ for a time do not absolutely guarantee salvation; “we are also reminded that the most powerful opposition to the work of the Savior on this earth comes from those who know the truth and then deliberately turn from it and seek to destroy others.” Hence our need—as the Lord himself has pleaded with us—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).

Further Reading

Riddle, Chauncey C., “Korihor: The Arguments of Apostasy,” *Ensign*, September 1977, 18–21.

Alma 30:58–60 — Korihor Is Killed by the Zoramites

Korihor left Zarahemla in disgrace, and went to the Zoramites in the city of Antionum. He knew that he was not welcome in Jershon, and that the people in Gideon were too righteous. He was now a cursed man, and who would want to have someone accursed by God in their city? Perhaps the Zoramites. Korihor may have thought, “They did not believe in this God, maybe they would be more receptive.” Unfortunately for him, the Zoramites did not even have the compassion of wicked Nephites anymore.

Interestingly, Alma and his eight companions went to the City of Antionum shortly after Korihor had been trampled. We do not know whether his death was inadvertent, whether

he could not hear them coming, whether he could not yell out for help, whether he was trodden down, or whether the citizens deliberately eliminated him. In ancient societies, the trampling of people who were pariahs was not uncommon. But it does not say. There is no accusation; we are only told that it happened. From Alma's point-of-view, it was the justice of God finally being carried out.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "The Trial of Korihor," in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2008), 273–300, see specifically, the section "Korihor's Rejection among the Zoramites," on page 298. While much has been written on Korihor, many more things remain to be explored and research avenues pursued in order to understand fully everything that is going on in Alma 30. It is just one of the many impressive and memorable chapters in the Book of Mormon.

Comparing Sherem, Nehor, and Korihor

Because we have mentioned Sherem and Nehor in connection with the foregoing notes on the trial of Korihor, this is a good point at which to offer a chart (Figure 2) comparing these three cases which involve the most famous Nephite dissenters.

Concerning the similarities, these cases obviously share certain features with each other, as Elder B. H. Roberts drafted in 1922, when he set out to identify the main problems that he thought critics of the Book of Mormon might raise some day. He postulated that the similarities are so strong that one might doubt their historicity.

These three legal cases, however, have much less in common with each other than people might assume based merely on casual familiarity or superficial comparison. The differences are numerous, and they differ from each other widely. Indeed, the facts and legal factors in each of them are case-specific and relevantly distinctive, as one actually finds in real-life legal experience, in which no two court cases are factually or procedurally identical. The salient, distinguishing facts of these cases make the holding and legal importance of each one of them truly unique.

While there are certain obvious similarities, they can be accounted for and can be put into perspective in several ways, but seldom have commentators focused on the numerous differences found in the scriptural reports of these three cases. The similarities are what one would expect to find in any series of such cases coming out of a single culture. Legal cases are, by their very nature, somewhat repetitive and formulaic, yet each case involves particular distinguishing facts. When one reads these cases with sensitivity toward their legal technicalities and jurisprudential principles, these cases are clearly seen to be subtly

nuanced, historically plausible, and legally credible, as the accompanying expanded chart illustrates.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “Comparing Sherem, Nehor, and Korihor,” in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2007), 301–309.

Three Diverse Nephite Opponents

	SHEREM (Jacob 7:1-25)	NEHOR (Alma 1:2-15)	KORIHOR (Alma 30:6-60)
Process and Procedure			
Date	c. 500 B.C.	91 B.C., 1 RJ	c. 74 B.C., 18 RJ
Locations involved	Land/City of Nephi	Land/City of Zarahemla, Gideon/Ammonihah?	Zarahemla/Jershon/Gideon, Antionum (land of the Zoramites, where he dies)
Age of judge or official	Jacob was very old	Alma was about 40?	Alma was about 58?
Judge’s experience	Mainly as the High Priest	First year on the bench (also relatively new High Priest)	Nephihah as Chief Judge for nine years and Alma High Priest for 18 years
Nature of the court	Sherem’s action turned out to be only juridical, not judicial, for his case never went to court and only God was the judge	Nehor was taken immediately to the highest judge, Alma, the Chief Judge, who heard the case alone	Korihor appeared before judges or officials in 3 lands, Jershon, Gideon, and Zarahemla
Court jurisdiction	General justice and temple divination	Under new law of Mosiah for a capital crime	Chief Judge and High Priest both involved
Was arrested?	No	Yes, taken, bound	Yes, bound, sent
Status in legal proceedings	Plaintiff	Defendant, defends himself boldly	Defendant, with counterclaims (accused priests of leading people astray)
Nature of legal action or offense	Falsely accused Jacob of 1) leading into apostasy 2) blasphemy 3) false prophecy	Killed Gideon, was convicted of enforcing priestcraft with the sword	Reviled against God, accused priests of leading people astray, committed blasphemy

Attributes of the Opponent			
Origin of the accuser (“satan”)	From among the people	Unstated	From outside Zarahemla
“a man”	Yes, Jacob 7:1	Yes, Alma 1:2	Yes, Alma 30:6
Name stated?	7:1, up front	1:15, at very end	30:12, after intro
Called anti-Christ?	No	No	Yes
Sources of power	Speech, flattering with words	Alma 1:3-5, Physical strength, popular support	Logic, practical, politics and theology, the Devil
Number and organization of his followers	Had just begun to declare among the people leading away many hearts	Had a following who believed on his word as the word of God	Was a lone, itinerant sophist, finding success in Zarahemla, but not in Jershon or Gideon
Impact of preaching	Lead away hearts, no actions mentioned	Many believed, gave money	Lead away hearts, many committed sin and whoredoms
Declared that he opposed the ruling establishment?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Arguments and Beliefs of the Opponent			
Basic theology	Theist, traditionalist	Theist, universalist	Atheist
Religious tenets	Pro law of Moses	All law was irrelevant	Opposed law of Moses
Political stance	Reactionary, royalist	Populist	Radical
View on priests	They should keep law	They should be paid	They oppress the poor
Complexity and amount of argument	Only three closely related points aimed at Jacob	Developed one alternative doctrine of redemption and universal salvation	Extensive practical, political, theological, and religious arguments
Decried foolishness of leaders and among the people	No	No	Yes
Can anyone know the future?	No	Probably	No
Proceedings			
Interrogated?	Asked about his belief in Christ	No (he pleads for himself)	About God’s existence
Accepted scriptures?	Yes, says he does, 7:10, bases his three accusations on provisions in Deut.	Unclear, selectively at best, “redeemed” “end,” redefined word of God	Rejected as foolish, used Deut 24:16 against Alma
Denial of Christ	Evasive	No	Clear
Counterclaims?	No, accepted the outcome	No, but argued in his own defense	Yes, accused leaders and advanced claims

Requested a sign?	Yes	No	Yes
Was warned?	Indirectly	No	Yes
Was the sign-giver hesitant?	Yes, for fear of tempting God	Not applicable	No, better one soul be lost
Reason for sign	To confirm revelation by the Holy Ghost	Not applicable	To confirm the existence of God
What Divine sign was given?	Smitten to the earth, but could still speak	None	Struck dumb, but could still write and walk
Role of devil	Impersonal, deceived by his power	Not mentioned	Personal, visited and taught by devil
Verdict and Aftermath			
Was there a judicial verdict?	No	Yes	No
Confession	Sincere, complete	Involuntary, caused	Incomplete
Penalty	Divine justice	Creative definition, capital punishment	Judicial decision, ostracism
Died?	Yes, but naturally despite being nourished for many days	Yes, taken immediately and publicly executed	Yes, but in another city, trampled in an unstated way
Cause of death	Non-human causes, from effects of the sign	Human, legal causes, probably stoning, hanging	Accidental, not related to the sign given
Announcement of Confession	Public confession by Sherem, near death	Ignominious death, was caused to confess, hill top	Result heralded by officials
Reaction of people	Fell to earth, love restored	Priestcrafts continue	End of this problem, many converted, go to Antionum underground
Precedential value of the holding	Legitimized Nephite Christianization of the law of Moses	Gave original jurisdiction to Chief Judge under the new reign of judges	Held that speech acts were still punishable under the law of Mosiah
Historical consequences	Law of Moses was strictly observed in next generations	Nehor's followers probably join with King-men and go to war	Public criticism curtailed. Dissidents go underground, secret combinations
Place in the record	At the end of Jacob's book, validating his life work and teaching	At beginning of Alma's record, setting stage for upcoming problems	Middle of book about Alma and Helaman, a crucial turning point

Alma 31

Alma 31:1–3 — The Zoramite Defection Is Dangerous Militarily

From a geo-political perspective, why were the lands of Jershon and Antionum so important to the Nephites and the Lamanites? Why were they willing to do so much and to lose so many lives in settling and defending these neighboring lands? Why did they care so much about them? This problem weighed heavily on Alma; he was very concerned about the people in particular, and so many lives were lost in the cause.

There is a great deal of concern in the Book of Mormon about populations leaving, as had occurred earlier in the Book of Mosiah when the people of Limhi left the land of Nephi, or in the Book of Alma when the Ammonites had likewise left. With relatively small labor forces, any ancient civilization could be seriously affected. The wealthy class in Antionum took advantage of the poor and forced them to work hard constructing elaborate buildings, as King Noah had also done, yet they would not permit the poor to access those places. If that poor portion of the population departed, there would be a deep threat to the Zoramites' economy and society.

When the Ammonites were brought into Zarahemla, the Nephites made a wise decision. They knew there were going to be difficulties; there had already been threats towards the Ammonites. The Lamanites wanted to kill them, so the Nephites settled the Ammonites as far to the north as possible, in the Land of Jershon. This put them on the north side of the Land of Zarahemla, with the city of Zarahemla between the Lamanites to the south and the Land of Jershon to the north.

This was a generous thing for the Nephites to do, but this placed Zarahemla in the crosshairs of any Lamanite effort to try to break through and get these people back. In the disastrous war related in Alma 28, not only were thousands of people killed, but this was the first time that the city of Zarahemla had been invaded. It was not a heavily fortified city; it had never been threatened before. The Nephites were not militaristic. They equipped themselves quickly, but there is no indication that Zarahemla was prepared for an attack.

In Alma 31:1–3, we thus learn why Alma was so concerned about bringing the Zoramite people of Antionum back into the Nephite fold. The people of Antionum were beginning to interact with the Lamanites. They were on their side, and this would make it easy for the Lamanites to take over.

How would that have worked militarily? Why would the Lamanites have been especially interested in having such an ally? It would place them within closer striking distance to

the rest of the Land of Zarahemla, and they would gain manpower for their army. Without the Land of Antionum on their side, any Lamanites coming from the Land of Nephi that fought their way through Zarahemla would have been cut off from their homeland. The Land of Antionum provided them with a base and a source of supply. In addition, the defection of the Land of Antionum would have forced Alma's people to fight on two fronts, and that was the last thing that he wanted. Eventually, the Nephites will end up fighting a two-front war with Captain Moroni on one front and Helaman and his stripling warriors on the other. That war lasted for seven years, and it was virtually the undoing of the Nephite nation.

In our lives, the physical, spiritual, and emotional fringes must always be protected, because that is where erosion enters. Alma and his people had outlying areas where the borders were very hard to control and defend. The people in the city of Antionum were Zoramites, they had become dissenters, and they had moved out of Zarahemla. They took strategic knowledge with them: they knew the land, the roads, and the cities. A Lamanite army coming in would not have known where the weaknesses were, but the Zoramites would know. Alma would surely have been disturbed by the fact that many of his strongest warriors—the Zoramites were known for their military prowess—would aid the Lamanites. Indeed, the Zoramites would later become the leaders of the Lamanite armies.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Was the Zoramite Defection So Disastrous? \(Alma 35:11\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 143 (July 14, 2016).

Alma 31:8–13 — The Zoramites Perverted the Ways of the Lord

In Alma 31:10–11, when the Zoramites left Zarahemla, their objections were that they no longer wanted to observe the performances of the Church. Basically, they went inactive in the Church, and viewed the performances as just routines. They withdrew from the society, the historical bonds, and the social and ritual fellowship of the Church. They refused to pray and supplicate to God daily. They would pray only on one day of the week. They thought that offering daily prayers or sacrifices was too much. In addition to this, they also refused to pray that they might not enter into temptation.

That particular refusal tells us that this was a standard part of Nephite prayer. It would do us well today if it were to become an explicit standard part of all of our prayers as well. The Lord's Prayer says, "Lead us not into temptation," and I believe that we all too rarely ask that we be protected against the temptations of the devil, as the Lord instructed the Nephites to do in 3 Nephi 18:18.

Next, the Zoramites perverted the ways of the Lord. The text does not clearly set out what that means, but the ways of the Lord, the way or the walk of the Lord in Hebrew, is the word *halakhah*. So, they may have perverted the life, that *halakhic* way, of living. This could have meant that they started mixing meat and milk, or that they stopped observing the Sabbath day. There were likely many important religious rules under the Law of Moses that they simply stopped observing.

Speaking of the Sabbath, one of the things that the Zoramites did is mentioned in Alma 31:12. They built a synagogue where they gathered themselves together. The word *synagogue* comes from two Greek words that mean *to gather together*. We do not know what the Nephite word for synagogue would have been. However, the gloss on that, that they “did gather themselves together” (31:12) in the synagogue, indicates that the name itself may have been related to that gathering function accurately enough. They gathered themselves one day a week, “which day they did call, the day of the Lord” (31:12). Notice that the Zoramites did not specify that it was the Sabbath Day, which would have brought with it all of the Sabbath rules and regulations. The text does not even say which day of the week “the day of the Lord” was for the Zoramites. They picked a day, and called it the day of the Lord. Perhaps Sabbath observance was another big problem for them and they wanted to deflect attention away from the Sabbath by calling the day simply “the day of the Lord.”

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Alma and Amulek Preach in Synagogues?](#) (Alma 16:13),” *KnoWhy* 124 (June 17, 2016).

Alma 31:14–19 — Alma Was Shocked at the Zoramites’ Manner of Prayer

The great errors of the Zoramites were shocking to Alma, and his reaction is understandable when you read the Zoramite prayer: the repetition, the requirement of people to get up and say the same prayer, the social pressure, the clothing, and only being able to pray at this one place. In Alma 32, the poor are concerned because they were not allowed to go into this place, and were taught they could only pray there.

These were gross errors of social pressure, of dominance by an aristocratic class over the working-class people. The wealthy had their own theology. They brought into their synagogue words like “holy, holy, holy.” There was a sacrilege that would have been a gross offense to Alma the high priest. “Holy, holy, holy” were words that were spoken in the Holy of Holies, in the temple, not in a make-shift synagogue atop some bizarre Rameumptom. Then the content of the prayer would have been a shock to Alma, “We know, O God that thou art a spirit.”

Most offensive of all may have been the statement in Alma 31:16, “Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren; and we do not believe in the tradition of our brethren, which was handed down to them by the childishness of their fathers; but we believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children; and also thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ.” Imagine Alma’s response to the claim that they knew by revelation that there was no Christ!

Alma 31:24–35 — Alma Prayed for Help in Reverting the Zoramites

Alma, whose “heart was grieved,” “lifted up his heart to Heaven” and in his heartfelt prayer we learn how appalled he was by their apostate condition. The concern he expressed and the blessing he requested from the Lord is reminiscent of Enos’s intercessory prayer on behalf of his Nephites and Lamanite brothers and sisters (Enos 1:9–12). Alma’s prayer of desperation teaches readers much about Alma’s resolutely generous character.

As he and his eight companions stood outside the central Zoramite places of worship in the city of Antionum, they beheld their arrogant prayers up on the top of their main high place (the Rameumptom, the Hebrew word *ram* meaning “high”). In response, Alma prayed intently, hoping to somehow bring at least some of them back to a wholesome view of prayer and righteousness (31:26–35).

It is especially interesting to notice that, in this urgent prayer for strength, patience, comfort and success, Alma invoked God with the appellation “O Lord” precisely ten times (31:26, 30, 30, 31, 31, 32, 32, 34, 35, 35). Remembering that Alma at this time was still the High Priest among the Nephites, it becomes even more remarkable that the Jewish oral traditions in the Mishnah describe the ritual on the Day of Atonement in detail and count ten times when the High Priest pronounced out loud the otherwise unspeakable name of the Lord. Indeed, as the High Priest prayed for forgiveness and atonement on behalf of his people, the holy name was vocalized ten times in the formula “O [name of God].” Likewise, Alma’s formulaic expression repeated the words “O Lord” ten times, followed by declarations of the people’s sins and wickedness and petitions for strength in Christ, through whom reconciliation and atonement with God comes. For instance, Alma prayed, “O Lord God, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and infidelity shall be among this people? O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ” (31:30, 34).

Indeed, so as to emphasize the difference between his holy prayer and the Zoramite prayers to some unnamed God (30:15, 15, 16, 17, 17 18), Alma shifted his terminology from his initial “O Lord” (31:26) to “O God” (31:27, 27, 28, 28), as he described the Zoramite worship practices. He then continued on with his nine other uses of “O Lord.” All this attests to the intentionality of Alma’s tenfold repetition of “O Lord” in this high-priestly

prayer. It makes sense that Alma consciously shifted his terminology from O Lord to O God, in order to avoid profaning the sacred name while describing the Zoramites' apostate practices. Moreover, when he reverts to using "O Lord," Alma's second occurrence of "O Lord" is the only instance where the expanded expression "O Lord God" appears in this text, indicating that Christ, Jehovah the Lord, is indeed the true Lord and God.

Ultimately, Alma turned to the Lord concerning the "gross wickedness" of the Zoramites. He prayed: "O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ. Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren; therefore, give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee" (31:34–35). He and his companions then separated and went out among the Zoramites. Some of them received these missionaries and fed them, in answer to the prayer Alma had offered (30:33, 38), and several of them, especially among the Zoramite poor, came out to a hillside on the hill Onidah (32:4), where they were able to hear Alma and Amulek speak (Alma 32–34), as will be covered in the next chapter.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How is the Name Zoram Connected with Pride? \(Alma 31:25\)](#)", *KnoWhy* 458, (August 14, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Alma Repeat the Lord's Name Ten Times While in Prayer? \(Alma 31:26\)](#)", *KnoWhy* 139, (July 8, 2016).

John W. Welch, "[Counting to Ten](#)," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 42–57, 113–114.

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why did Mormon Emphasize the Zoramites' Costly Apparel? \(Alma 31:28\)](#)", *KnoWhy* 283, (March 6, 2017).

28

ALMA 32–35

John W. Welch Notes

**Alma 32–33 Alma’s Words to the Zoramite Poor**

Alma 32 is often read and thought of as a unit, in and of itself a single composition. In fact, the report of Alma’s words on that occasion embrace both chapters 32 and 33. No break was intended between these two chapters. And then Amulek continues speaking to the poor Zoramites, standing as a second witness to what Alma has said. So, clearly, these chapters should be read together. And, in fact, in the first edition of the Book of Mormon, all of six chapters, Alma 30–35, were treated together as one long chapter, Chapter XVI (pp. 304–323).

Obviously, it is helpful for readers today to have all of this material broken into smaller chapters, but one should not forget that all of these six chapters together embrace what happened in the seventeenth year of the reign of the judges (about 74 BC). That year was marked by the splitting off of the Zoramites, by the problems created by Korihor that were narrowly averted, followed by Korihor’s demise among the Zoramites, and then confronted by the great doctrinal teachings of Alma and his strong contingent of companions trying to reconvert the Zoramites and to prevent them from entering into a dreaded alliance with the Lamanites. In spite of the brilliant words of both Alma and Amulek, that effort failed, and the Zoramite leaders went on to become the commanders of the armies that will be at war against the Nephites for the remaining years of the book of Alma.

Alma’s words in Alma 32–33 teach the following five main points:

1. The importance and blessings of being humble, even if it is a result of afflictions, mistreatment, and being cast out by others (32:6–16),
2. How true faith is obtained and its eternal fruit enjoyed (32:17–43),

3. The proper modes of prayer and worship, crying unto God in the wilderness and closet (33:2–11),
4. Believing on the Son of God (as taught by Zenos, Zenoch, and Moses) brings healing, not perishing, through the redemption of the Son of God that atones for their sins (33:12–21), and
5. The content of “the word” that should be planted in the heart (33:21–23).

Amulek’s second witness recapitulates and enhances these same points in the opposite order:

5. Admonishing them to “plant the word in your hearts” (34:4),
4. Believing in Christ, the Son of God, as testified by Zenos, Zenoch, and Moses (34:5–7), and how faith in Christ’s infinite atonement affords repentance and salvation (34:8–16),
3. The proper content of prayer, crying unto God in the wilderness and closet (34:17–26), as well as not turning away the needy (34:2–29),
2. Bringing forth fruit unto repentance and righteousness (34:30–36), and
1. Humbling yourself, worshipping God patiently in whatever place you may be (34:38), even if you are afflicted and cast out (34:39–41).

The intertextual dynamic of these two mutually reinforcing texts is marvelously and deeply impressive. Vast treatises could be written on the content and messages of these three chapters alone. Their axioms deal with the conditions of spirituality, the problems of evil and suffering, and responses to social injustice and poverty. Their instructions chart out the steps of nurturing faith, obtaining knowledge, worshipping, praying, and bringing forth the fruits of repentance. By planting their “word,” one understands the Atonement of the Son of God and the essence of the plan of salvation and redemption. Of all that could be said, only a relative few thoughts will be included in these notes, which I hope will be found helpful as sidebars to the words of Alma and Amulek themselves. Nothing replaces those words, just as the words of Alma and Amulek do not replace “the Word” which must ultimately be planted in our hearts as readers of these three chapters.

Alma 32:4 — Testimony Is a Process

Alma taught the poor Zoramites who “were poor in heart, because of their poverty as to the things of the world.” (Alma 32:4). The people had been kicked out of the synagogues with their Rameumptoms, and even had to leave the City of Antionum. They flocked to the hill Onidah, where Alma could talk to them safely and openly.

The teaching of Alma and Amulek was quite different from what normal Protestant and Catholic teachings and prevailing views were like in the world at the time of the Restoration. They did not offer a revival-type event characterized by instant salvation. Instead, they taught these poor Zoramites that gaining a testimony is a developmental process. Faith will grow in stages if the seed is planted, nourished, protected, and attended to. He assured them that even once a person has gained a sure knowledge of a principle, that is not the end of the process. They have to go on by helping others. Thus, here, and in many other ways, the Book of Mormon stood out as something rather different from what contemporary Christians were used to.

Alma 32:7–8 — Lowly in Heart

What might it mean to be “lowly in heart” (32:8)? These poor Zoramite people were certainly economically disadvantaged, and were already in a humble condition as measured by worldly wealth. However, Alma seems to make a distinction between being humble and being “lowly in heart.” These people had been forced to be humble, and yet Alma assured them, “I behold that ye are lowly in heart; and if so, blessed are ye” (32:8). The poor Zoramites were bereft spiritually at first, but they were not hard-hearted; and hard-heartedness may be the opposite of being *lowly in heart*. Alma encouraged them by saying, “Blessed are the lowly in heart,” that is, “You will be blessed if you are humble enough to go through this process of spiritual refinement and growth.”

Alma 32:12–16 — Compelled to Be Humble, Compelled to Know

Being compelled to humility is one of Alma’s opening themes. Can anyone be humble without having been compelled to be humble? Are we not all compelled in one way or another? Alma commented, “Do ye not suppose that they are more blessed who truly humble themselves because of the word?” (Alma 32:14). He may have been referring to when we humble ourselves from an internal, self-motivated reason rather than because of some external matter. True humility comes through a personal choice, a willingness to respond to lacks and afflictions in a spiritually positive way.

The next phrase, being “compelled to know” (Alma 32:16), is closely related. Can we be *compelled* to know something? Again, the idea is, we are blessed if we are willing to accept the truth without having it absolutely proved or socially imposed upon us by prevailing ideologies. Alma may have been telling these people that they would be better off if they could have faith in the first place, because Alma himself knew that it was not a good thing to be compelled to know by an angel and trials, troubles, and afflictions.

Alma 32:12 — Learning Wisdom

Alma wanted the humble Zoramites to “learn wisdom.” But how does one obtain this wisdom? It is one thing to gain “knowledge”; it is another to gain “wisdom.”

While a common definition says that wisdom is about what you do with what you know, Alma says that this is not just a matter of practical efficiencies. He said that it was necessary for these people to *learn* wisdom, and that doing so was necessary for their salvation. What might this mean? Well, if we are going to be judged according to what we have learned by how we act, think, talk, and what we do, we must strive to learn *wisdom* and to be counted wise in the eyes of our eternal judge, and not in the eyes of the world. That kind of wisdom may be gained only by *the blessings of the Holy Ghost*. Alma's words to the receptive Zoramites told them that it was necessary to have the Spirit of the Holy Ghost and to learn to obtain wisdom through that means.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Did Nephi Work So Hard to Preserve the Wisdom He Had Received? (1 Nephi 6:5–6)," *KnoWhy* 262 (January 16, 2017).

Alma 32:13 — Finding Mercy

"He that findeth mercy shall be saved" (Alma 32:13). How is one supposed to *find* mercy? We may feel lost. We may feel that God has abandoned us or has left us bereft in some way. Certainly, the poor Zoramites felt that way. Alma promised them and us that we can find mercy through faith and repentance. Repentance is a process, and through that process we will figure out what it would take to find mercy.

Are we surprised when we find mercy? C. S. Lewis' book *Surprised by Joy* is a classic example of being surprised by an overwhelming feeling, in his case, of the joy that accompanies mercy. When we are feeling down, feeling low, suddenly joy may wash over us. It comes unexpectedly from somewhere, and when we stop and notice it, we actually *find* mercy. Mercy was there. It is not just that we receive mercy, or that God gives it to us, but we have to find it. It is there to be discovered and found. But it can also be overlooked. God will force no person to heaven. He also will not compel anyone to find and to enjoy joy.

Further Reading

C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955).

Alma 32:19–20 — Forgiving Transgressors

Alma did not directly tell the poor Zoramites that they had to forgive the rich Zoramites who had expelled them, but in reality, they were going to have to have a spirit of forgiveness in their hearts if they wanted to be forgiven of their own failings. Alma alluded to this when he preached, "How much more cursed is he that knoweth the will of God and doeth it not?" (32:19). The hitch is that we are going to be punished or cursed if we *know* the will of God and do not do it.

Alma next said, “Now of this thing ye must judge.” The word *must* is interesting. Judging between the two choices is not optional. We cannot avoid this either/or judgment. “Behold,” he says, “I say unto you that it is on the one hand even as it is on the other,” meaning that we will unavoidably reap the attendant consequences of our actions (or inactions), whether we opt for the one hand or the other hand. Choosing not to act is itself a choice.

The balanced sense of reciprocity of justice was a common biblical idea, and examples of this include the rule that if we want mercy, we have to give mercy; if we want forgiveness, we have to be forgiving; if we want to be given blessings, we have to bless and give to the poor; and if we are the poor, we must give to each other.

Alma 32:21 — Alma’s Discourse on Faith

In this verse, Alma declares his famous statement, “If ye have faith ye *hope* for things which are not seen, *which are true*” (Alma 32:21). This is a classic consequentialist definition of faith. Alma’s view of faith is active (not substantive). If you have faith, you actively hope. Faith propels us to do the things that move us in the direction of that hoped-for and true, but yet unseen, goal. This is not a definition of what faith *is*, but what faith *does*. If you have faith, you necessarily hope.

Alma goes on to say: “[God] desires that, *in the first place*, ye should believe even on his *word*” (32:22). In a few verses we will learn what “*the word*” is (33:22). Of course, it has to do with believing in Christ and the plan of salvation. Thus, the *first* step or principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ and in His Church is faith, specifically in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Acquiring Spiritual Knowledge: Act in Faith](#) (1 Nephi 2:16),” *KnoWhy* 260 (January 11, 2017).

Alma 32:23 — God Imparts His Word to All Who Come to Him

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has used this particular verse several times to speak of the equal access that all people have—men, women, and children, of all statures, of all status in society or cultures, the rich and the poor, of every nation, tongue and people—to the truth. Alma happened to be talking to the poor people when he said this. They felt like disenfranchised citizens in their own city. After having built the place, they had been kicked out of the synagogue, and it was here that Alma’s comment emphasized that God speaks to all people, and not just those who happen to be standing on the Rameumptom. God universally reveals His Spirit to all people who seek Him.

Alma 32:27–43 — Faith Grows Like a Seed

Alma produced an unforgettable and very inspiring analogy. “Now, we will compare *the word* unto a seed” (Alma 32:4), in which the term, *the word* refers to the word of the Lord, the Gospel, or as people call it today, the *Good Word*. Ultimately, the elements in this “word” will be defined more specifically in Alma 33:22.

But verse 27 is a very important part of the beginning of this process. Alma explained that “even if ye can no more than *desire* to believe” the seed would begin to swell and then sprout, and as it grows, you will know that it was a good seed. Metaphorically, securely planting the message of the Gospel in our hearts, giving it room, not crowding it out, is the first step to growing our testimony.

What is “the seed”? In the musical, *The Fantastics*, there is a song called *Plant a Radish*. The lyrics say, “Plant a radish, Get a radish” and “Plant a carrot, Get a carrot.” If we do not plant the right seed, we are not going to get the results that Alma is talking about. *The word* is the truth of the Gospel and is represented by this seed. This is a big seed with many smaller parts. If you want to know the truth of the principle of tithing, you plant the tithing seed and it will grow. But if you want eternal life, you have to plant the seed of eternal life and then gain a testimony of that.

Alma teaches that obtaining a testimony is an experiential matter. To some philosophers, empirical knowledge is the only knowledge, the kind that you can measure or you can scientifically replicate. As has often been said, experiencing the word of God is something like tasting a strawberry. We can taste a strawberry, and distinguish it from other edibles, but it is impossible to describe the taste to someone who has never tasted one. Alma probably knew that these people had not yet tasted *the word*. They had come from a society that was anti-Christ, which had impeded their ability to gain spiritual experiences. So, Alma invited them to partake, and he was trying to communicate all the wonderful benefits of feasting on the word. However, since explaining a testimony is inadequate to one who has never experienced it, this metaphor helped to at least explain the steps one must go through to gain the effect for themselves. Follow the steps: Planting, nourishing, giving it care, giving it room, and giving it light. Do those and the spirit will grow and this seed will thrive.

Alma 32:28–35 — The Effects of the Word on Our Hearts

We sometimes glide over these words, but they are beautiful. These phrases may puzzle and inspire us. Alma said that as this seed begins to “swell ... it beginneth to enlarge my soul” (32:28). Have you felt the gospel enlarging your soul? And how is that manifested? And is your soul still being enlarged from day to day?

When we accept the gospel and understand it, how does it taste? Alma tried to describe it in verse 28: “it is delicious to me.” He even described this fruit in terms of light, “After ye have tasted this light” (Alma 32:35). Alma is weaving together many different images—delicious taste, clear light. In a way, his use of this analogy is reminiscent of the Savior’s use of details in His parables.

Alma said, “Now, if ye give *place*, that a seed may be planted in your heart” (Alma 32:28). Things tend to crowd out the gospel, and we need to give it an unmistakable position. It will shrivel if we discard it off in some nethermost part of our lives; we need to give it a well-defined and ample place.

Giving the word a place in our hearts, also implies that we must give it prominence. In a similar way, Deuteronomy 12 speaks repeatedly of given the holy name of God “a place” where it could dwell, namely the temple in Jerusalem, and required that His people love him with all their hearts, mights, and strength. All that speaks volumes about prominence. If we love other things too much, or if we are getting too involved in things that take us away from the gospel, it will lose prominence. We cannot forget to nourish it properly, or else the seed will begin to wither. This is a dynamic process, as we help the tree to continue to grow and continue to bear fruit. Compare Alma’s words here with Zenos’s parable of the olive tree in Jacob 5, which speaks often of giving “place” (Jacob 5:13), and of nourishing “the root” (e.g. Jacob 5:18), preserving the tree and yielding fruit (Alma is well aware of Zenos’s biologically authentic allegory! And indeed, he will quote another text from Zenos farther down this speech, in 33:3–14.). We cannot just plant the seed once and then hope it will grow: “But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out.” (Alma 32:38).

As the seed begins to swell, Alma told them, it will “enlarge your soul” (32:28). This is the litmus test for how we can tell whether something is really good or not. We have to give it some space. Give it a try, and if it *enlarges your soul*, we know it to be a good seed.

We often bear our testimony that we know the Church is *true*. I had a mission president who bore his testimony regularly that he knew the Church was *good*. He wanted people in Germany to know that this was a good way to live, and if they believed that it was good, and if they could taste that goodness, the knowledge of its truthfulness would be added so that they would know what they needed to know. I would like to hear more testimonies in our own midst of the goodness of the Church.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Alma Use Creation Imagery in His Sermon on Faith? \(Alma 32:40\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 140 (July 11, 2016).

Alma 32:40–43 — The Word Will Grow to Become a Tree of Life

In the garden of Eden there were two trees: the tree of knowledge, and the tree of life. If we have the experience Alma is talking about, we will become fruit-bearing trees in God's garden. That is a great promise and a way of relating us to having permanence and fruit-bearing capabilities. Fruit-bearing may also be, in a human case, posterity. And thus, we are blessed and promised that we can have eternal posterity.

This tree that Alma is alluding to is also the tree that Lehi saw, that had the fruit that was white above all that is white, the sweet fruit, "Whose fruit was desirable to make one happy" (1 Nephi 8:10). So Alma precisely describes the tree that will grow from the planting of the seed of the word as bearing "fruit" which is "most precious," "sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure" (32:42). It is interesting that Alma is using the tree of life as a similar metaphor, like the one found in Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision. However, in Lehi's vision, when people came to the tree of life, the tree was external to them. Lehi brought the people to the tree, and the ones who made it all the way there rejoiced, fell down, and were grateful that they had gotten there.

Moreover, there is another step beyond that first partaking of the fruit and knowing how delicious it is. It is through diligence and cultivation of this word that we may have the tree of life growing inside us. Alma went beyond where Lehi left off. Alma taught that we need to take the vision that Lehi saw and internalize it so much that the tree of life grows up inside each of us to give us eternal life.

We thus encounter three different perspectives on the tree of life in the Book of Mormon (Figure 1). In Jacob 5, Zenos' tree represents the House of Israel. Who are you in that allegory of the olive tree? Where are you on that tree? You may be a leaf or an olive, but you are just a very small part of that very big tree.

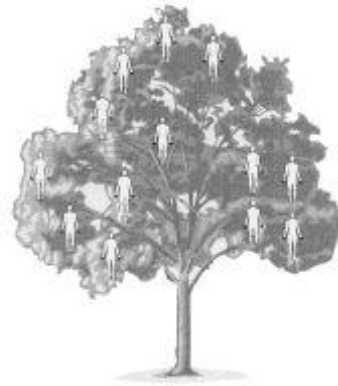
In 1 Nephi 8, Lehi's tree represents the goal of eternal life. We come to that tree, partake of the fruit, and stand under the tree. Although the tree is still external to us, we are now a much bigger part of that picture than individual people were in Zenos's allegory.

Finally, Alma wanted that tree of life to be in each one of us, where we will each become a tree of life planted in God's eternal paradise, and we will become a fruit-bearing tree that will produce eternal fruit for us and for others around us.

Three Trees in the Book of Mormon

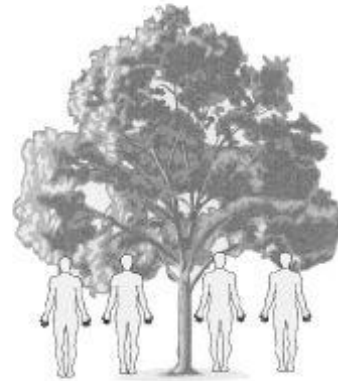
Zenos's Olive Tree

The House of Israel
Collective Salvation



Lehi's Tree of Life

The Love of God
Blessedness



Alma's Tree of Righteousness

Personal Righteousness
and Testimony

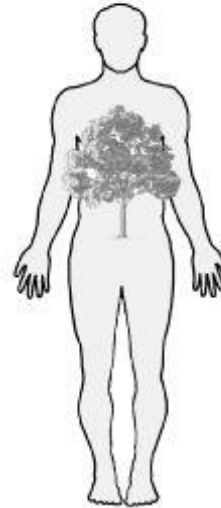


Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch. "Three Trees in the Book of Mormon," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 95.

Alma 33

Alma 33:1–2 — We Can Pray or Worship Anywhere

It is interesting that Alma, in the middle of giving one of the most profound doctrinal discussions of faith and testimony that can be found anywhere, is also able to relate to these people and solve their practical problems. They had been expelled from the places of worship they had built with their own hands; they felt that this excluded them from praying or worshipping with equal dignity.

Once we are aware of what the issues were for the Zoramite poor, we can see how effectively Alma addressed each one of their concerns, replacing what they had been taught, or maybe what they had never been taught, with the truths of the gospel. He did not ignore the realities of what they had been going through. Although Alma 32–33 is a very tightly argued and beautifully sophisticated message to the people, part of Alma’s skill lies in relating closely to them, addressing their immediate needs, and recognizing their difficulties.

Alma 33:3 — Pray for Wisdom and Knowledge

The most important thing we can do to strengthen our faith is to pray. That is why Alma quoted the words that Zenos, the prophet of old, had spoken concerning prayer and worship. What Zenos had to say about prayer and worship was different from a Rameumptom prayer.

And just as Joseph Smith read in James 1:5, “If any of you *lack wisdom*, let him ask of God,” if we want to gain spiritual knowledge, we must, as Alma said, *learn wisdom*. If we lack wisdom, there is ultimately only one thing to do, and that is to pray—to ask God, and he will bless our hearts in many different ways so that our wisdom will grow. Too many discount prayer as the source of wisdom, and as a result, they are learned but not wise.

I suspect that Alma had not planned to recite this wonderful text from the ancient prophet Zenos when he prepared to go to Antionum. It was not until he and his companions got to Antionum and saw how the people were praying that they were astonished. Before that, they did not realize how far the apostasy had gone and how perfectly the ancient words of Zenos were what he needed to rehearse to them. Nevertheless, when the people asked him what they should do next, Alma asked them if they remembered the words of Zenos on this topic. He then quoted Zenos’s beautiful poetic text. In Alma 29 (“O that I were an angel”), Alma was able to give poetic expressions that really poured out his soul. I wonder if he learned how to do some of that by previously studying and memorizing the writings of Zenos.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Nephi Work So Hard to Preserve the Wisdom He Had Received?](#) (1 Nephi 6:5–6),” *KnoWhy* 262 (January 16, 2017).

Alma 33:3–11 — Zenos’ Poetic Expression of Gratitude on Prayer

Thirty years ago, I laid out Zenos’s words in a possible poetic form. I called this his poem *Hearing Mercy*. Alma wanted his audience to *find* mercy, and Zenos tells us how he found the mercy of God by crying unto the Lord for many things and then being heard. A number of words come up over and over again in this very tightly woven refrain. Zenos uses 43 words once and only once in this poem, but when he wants to emphasize a few words, he uses them repeatedly.

The words “afflictions” and “Son” appear 2x, the latter curing the former.

The words “because,” “enemies,” “prayer,” and “turned” are each used 3x, achieving antithetical balance.

“O God,” “cry” (past, present, and future), “hear” and “heard” each appear 4x, and “merciful” predominates 6x, all affirming that God will always be there with mercy whenever we cry in prayer unto Him wherever we may be.

“I,” “my,” “me” and “mine” appear a total of 33x, while “thou,” “thee,” “thy” and “thine” appear 30x, conveying the need for an even match. Worship is not all about me, and it is not all about the Lord. It is a bringing together of us individually with the one true Lord (O Lord is used only once in Zenos’s expression of gratitude for havng heard mercy). This was one of the most important messages that Alma would have wanted these Zoramites to hear and understand.

Written probably long before 600 BC, and preserved on the Plates of Brass, Zenos’s plaintive but jubilant cry features several archaic qualities. Zenos’s poem is a classic. It is very beautiful poetry judged by ancient standards.

The overall thought flows progressively from the most remote wilderness, through Zenos’s field and into his house, and then into his most intimate closet. It then moves, in reverse, from the personal domestic setting of children, to the public assembly, and back out to the condition of being cast out into the wilderness where the poem began. Everything here affirms that a person can pray in the wilderness or wherever need be, and all because of God’s Son, no circumstance is beyond the joy of hearing mercy.

Hearing Mercy

Thou art merciful, O God,
for thou hast heard my prayer,

even when I was in the wilderness;
Yea, thou wast merciful,
when I prayed concerning those who were mine enemies,
and thou didst turn them to me.

Yea, O God, thou wast merciful unto me
when I did cry unto thee in my field;
When I did cry unto thee in my prayer,
and thou didst hear me.

And again, O God, when I did turn to my house,
thou didst hear me in my prayer.
And when I did turn unto my closet, O Lord,
and prayed unto thee, thou didst hear me.

Yea, thou art merciful unto thy children
when they cry unto thee
to be heard of thee and not of men,
and thou wilt hear them.

Yea, O God, thou hast been merciful unto me,
and heard my cries in the midst of thy congregations.
Yea, thou hast also heard me when I have been cast out
and have been despised by mine enemies;

Yea, thou didst hear my cries,
and wast angry with mine enemies,
and thou didst visit them in thine anger
with speedy destruction.

And thou didst hear me
because of mine afflictions and mine 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.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, ed., "Hearing Mercy," *BYU Studies*, 33 no. 1 (Winter 1991).

Alma 33:3–11 — When Did Zenos Live?

There is little evidence for when Zenos lived, but it appears to me that he is writing at a time when the temple in Jerusalem had become corrupted. The time of Solomon may be a bit early for dating Zenos, because the Book of Mormon tells us that all prophets knew of the prophecies that Zenos taught, and Isaiah made similar prophecies in the eighth century BC, so it's possible that Zenos and Zenock lived during that century too.

According to this prayer, Zenos had a difficult time prophesying, speaking, or preaching. He was apparently expelled. He had enemies, and he was evicted from assemblies, probably the many bodies in Jerusalem as well as local councils—rather like the poor in Antionum had been. Zenos's contemporaries were treating him as an "enemy." Moreover, it's likely that some of the people who were his enemies would not have wanted his words to survive. Fortunately, a copy survived on the brass plates.

One gets the impression that one of the reasons that Zenos was cast out of the midst of the congregations was because he understood and spoke of the concept of the Son of God who was to come. He also expressed that it was because of his belief in Christ—in other words, his faith in what Alma would call *the word*—that Zenos's prayers were answered.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "What are the Roots of Zenos's Allegory in the Ancient World? (Jacob 5:3)," *KnoWhy* 70 (April 4, 2016).

David Rolph Seely and John W. Welch, "Zenos and the Texts of the Old Testament," in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 322–346.

Alma 33:12–14 — The Reading of the Scriptures

Some people in ancient Israel had access to some books of scripture. In Mesoamerica, they typically could have written on fig bark. They would not have been able to get all the scriptures on one of those fig-bark books, so they probably had selections or portions copied onto different books. The official, complete record, from which copies were made, would have been kept in the Temple. Literacy in the ancient world was generally low. Being able to read and write was a professional skill in most ancient societies.

Under the Law of Moses, at the Feast of Tabernacles each year, and with the special emphasis on the seventh year, the leaders would read the law aloud to everyone. While

the average person may not have been able to read, they would have at least heard the law repeated periodically. They may also have had a reading cycle. In Jewish worship, they go through the entire Old Testament week by week throughout the year, and then the next year they would go through it again. There may have been a liturgical cycle of that nature.

Because literacy in the ancient world was low, there was a very strong oral tradition. People learned how to memorize and quote texts precisely, as we see Alma doing in this chapter. A young boy preparing to become a man—to go through his *bar mitzvah* or whatever their equivalent would have been—would likely have had to memorize and know scriptures by heart. They may not have had much access to written copies, but they certainly had access verbally, and were able to repeat these things, as we see Alma doing here.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Book of Mormon Prophets Quote Long Passages of Scripture? \(1 Nephi 19:22\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 473 (October 4, 2018).

Brant A. Gardner, “[Literacy and Orality in the Book of Mormon](#),” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 9 (2014): 29–85.

Alma 33:22–23 — The Nephite Articles of Faith

In these verses, Alma told the poor Zoramites exactly seven things they needed to believe:

1. Believe in the Son of God,
2. That he will come to redeem his people.
3. That he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins.
4. That he shall rise again from the dead.
5. That he will bring about the general resurrection.
6. So that all men can stand before him.
7. That they will be judged at the last judgment day according to their works.

Precisely we are told that the Zoramites did not believe in a Messiah: “there shall be no Christ” (31:16). This is one of the main things that they had rejected. Nor did they believe that they needed atonement for their sins. Again, that was something that their doctrine rejected. Their belief was, “We are a chosen and a holy people” (31:18). In contrast, Alma gives the Zoramite poor the most complete and concise statement of the traditional expression of belief that began with Nephi and was variously stated by Jacob, Benjamin, and Abinadi. Alma had apparently taught this list to Amulek who used it in Ammonihah (see Alma 11:39–41).

Consistent Elements in Nephite Declarations of Faith

		Believe in the Son of God	He will come to redeem his people	He shall suffer and die	He will atone for their sins	He shall rise again from the dead	He will bring to pass the resurrection	He shall judge all men
Nephi ₁	1 Nephi 11:31–33							
Nephi ₁	1 Nephi 19:9–10							
Jacob	2 Nephi 9:4–15							
Nephi ₁	2 Nephi 25:12–13							
Benjamin	Mosiah 3:5–10							
Abinadi	Mosiah 15:5–9, 20 Mosiah 16:10							
Amulek	Alma 11:39–41							
Alma ₂	Alma 33:22							
Moroni	Mormon 9:1–14							

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Figure 2 Adapted from John W. Welch and Greg Welch, “Consistent Elements in Nephite Declarations of Faith,” in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 43.

Apparently, this had become something of what we might call the Nephite “articles of faith.” We actually see variations of this very list nine times in the Book of Mormon (Figure

2). Awareness and use of “this word” continued down to the time of Moroni after the final destruction of the Nephites (see Mormon 9:1–14).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Are the Nephite Articles of Faith? \(Alma 33:22\),](#)” *KnoWhy* 141 (July 12, 2016).

Alma 33:22–23 — Plant the Whole Seed

The whole text of verse 22 is referred to as the seed, *the word* that we must plant. We do not just plant belief in the Son of God. One must also believe that he will come to redeem his people. The people in Antionum had rejected that doctrine. Another part of the seed is also that he will “rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection, that all men shall stand before him, to be judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works.” The whole expression is the seed.

If we plant that whole seed and believe all of those elements—how the atonement will work, why it will work, what we need to do, and what will happen, and how we will be held accountable—all of those principles together will grow up in you to produce the tree of eternal life. All of that is necessary. The gospel is not a cafeteria plan where we can pick and choose the parts that appeal to us.

As Alma and Amulek discovered, most of the things that the people in the City of Antionum had come to believe were contrary to those elements of basic Nephite beliefs. They had turned away from those observances, practices, and beliefs. Thus, Alma’s final plea was for them to plant this seed so that they could have eternal life as well as the earthly reward that follows, “Then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son” (33:23).

Alma 33:23 — Their Burdens Will be Made Light

The class system was foundational to the Zoramites because their economy needed to exploit the labor of the poor. Again, we see that part of Alma’s skill lies in relating closely to his audience and recognizing their difficulties. We know that they had been required to labor with little pay, as they complain in 32:5, at the beginning of Alma’s word: “They have cast us out of our synagogues which we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands; and they have cast us out because of our exceeding poverty.” Not unintentionally, at the very end of his words, Alma thus promised these poor people that those very burdens would be lightened.

Perhaps Alma was also echoing back to the time when his own father had been under captivity by the Lamanites, and they were laden with heavy burdens. They prayed and were faithful, and the burdens were made light (Mosiah 24:15). It is very interesting that

Alma promised these people the same blessing that his father had experienced. Alma may have been a young boy when that happened, but it was certainly part of his family memory, and he would have personally understood the burdens that these poor people were being placed under by their own Zoramite people.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does the Lord Make our Burdens Light? \(Mosiah 24:15\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 102 (March 18, 2016).

Alma 34

Alma 34:4–8 — Amulek’s Testimony of *the Word*

Amulek then arose to add his testimony to that of Alma’s. He picked up where Alma had ended, by talking about *the word*. He wanted the people to have so much faith that they could plant the word in their hearts. Here, Amulek was standing as a second witness, but as Amulek usually did, he developed the idea a little further. In the following verses, he also called upon the words of Zenos who preached of the redemption that would come through the Son of God.

Amulek’s validating and further expounding of Alma’s testimony is a good example for missionaries. Even today, when one missionary teaches and testifies, the other missionary testifies to the truth of what was just taught. In this case, it was almost as though Alma gave the first missionary discussion, and Amulek gave the second, taking the principles ever further. Take the topic of faith for example. Alma taught the people to plant the seed, nourish it, let it grow, and it will bear fruit. Amulek took it even further and emphasized faith unto repentance. He also taught them to not procrastinate their repentance, so that they would have faith in the day of judgment, when they would stand before God to be judged.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Role Does the Book of Mormon Play in Missionary Work? \(2 Nephi 30:3\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 288 (March 17, 2017).

Alma 34:9–16 — The Atonement Explained

Amulek added much more detail to the news about Christ’s Atonement than Alma had covered. Alma had condensed what they needed to have faith in. Now Amulek expanded it. He clarified why there must be an atonement made, tying it clearly to the Fall, and highlighting its purpose to save man from perishing in their fallen state. He referred twice (v. 10 and 13) to the fact that it must be a great and last sacrifice, greater than any man

could perform, greater than the sacrifices offered in the law of Moses. At the end of verse 10, he then adds that it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice.

Alma 34:10, 14 — An Infinite and Eternal Sacrifice

A concept that arose in some reading I have been doing about baptism applies just as well here to the doctrine of atonement. In Jewish ritual, they performed ritual purifications by immersing in a font called a *mikvah*. The Israelite priest cleansed himself each time before officiating every Sabbath, and at the seasonal festivals. For us, baptism happens only once. We are buried in the water once, and we belong to Jesus Christ. At baptism, we make covenants once and for all, and now belong to his family. Accordingly, Amulek taught that while their priests were making many sacrifices, repeated washings, and covenant renewals, when Christ comes, there will be one infinite sacrifice to cover everything.

In what ways is the Atonement infinite? The Atonement is of a *divine nature*. It was *made by an infinite being* who redeems his people. God is an infinite being, infinite in the sense of being eternal and being immortal. The Atonement is made by a being who is more than human.

It also is infinite in the sense that it has *universal application*. First of all, the Fall is overcome, and as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive, and that is universal.

The Atonement also cures death, which was caused by the Fall of Adam. In addition to death, sin, imperfection, corruption, and work also came into the world when Adam and Eve fell. The state of existence in the Garden of Eden was at a higher degree of glory than the one that we enjoy now. Whatever changes came about by the fall of the first Adam will be fully corrected. The extent of the Atonement is complete and infinite in that regard as well.

It is also infinite in *magnitude, coverage, and potential*. The word *potent* means *powerful*. So, it is really also infinite in terms of potency and power. It is infinite in *coverage*. It applies not only to every person that has lived or ever will live on this earth, but countless earths like this. Through Christ, all can become begotten sons and daughters unto God. That is why it can be the great and last, because it is sufficient and necessary to atone for all breaches of trust and relationship between deity and us.

It is infinite in its *applicability to all*. Everyone will be resurrected.

Regarding sin, the Atonement is also potentially infinite in scope, but its application depends upon repentance. It is like having an infinite amount of money in your bank account, but you still have to go and present your I.D. to draw the money out. You have

to do something to make it applicable to you. However, that account is never going to run out. There will never be a lack of funds.

It transcends all boundaries of *time and space*. The Relief Society motto says, “We are beloved spirit daughters of God and our lives have meaning, purpose and direction.”

It is infinite in *mercy*, and also *love*.

It was infinite in terms of *suffering*. Jesus took upon him all of the sins and burdens and bled from every pore

It was infinite in terms of *willingness*. There was nothing that the Atonement was not willing to cover. It was *voluntary* in every respect. Jesus said, “Not my will, but thine, Father be done.”

And in *obedience*, with no reservations of any kind.

The Atonement is really in a different realm of existence than this secular world. It is in a spiritual realm. It can take us out of this world; it can cure the problems that we have in this world; it can overcome the sins that we have created. There is something beyond this physical, finite, temporal world— that is why we call it *temporal*, because it is *temporary*. It is of a non-infinite nature. The concept of a boundary or a set with limitations necessarily implies that the set is incomplete and that something exists beyond it.

The Atonement is infinite in *time*. It answered all the demands of justice with no claims to be made about when that act was performed.

The Atonement, then, is also *perfect* in its function. In Alma 7:11–12, it says that he will take upon him death, “that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people and he will take upon him their infirmities.” He will suffer pains, afflictions, temptations of every kind that he may take upon himself all of these to meet all of the demands. In Alma 7:9 we read, “It is expedient that an atonement should be made for according to the great plan of the eternal God there must be an atonement made.” Amulek likewise says in Alma 34 that this is according to the eternal plan. It is eternal in the sense that it was laid down before the creation of this world, which means it is coming to us from an eternal sphere; it is infinite in origin, being a part of God’s eternal plan.

We love to use allegories to try to describe what is happening in the atonement process. For example, we tell about a bully in school who steps forward to take the beating for some child who has been mistreated. And again, there is another story about a person who has fallen into the ice on a frozen lake and a rope is thrown out and they grab on to the rope and hold on to it so they can be pulled out. There are stories like *The Touch of the*

Master's Hand, in which we have an old, battered violin and nobody thinks it is worth anything, but the influence of the master's hand made the violin much more than the people thought it was worth. What is our worth? It is not much unless the master touches us.

All these metaphors are good, but they are all incomplete. They each describe one different aspect of the whole atonement process, but I do not think any analogy can accurately encapsulate the entirety of the Atonement. We might even say that the Atonement is infinitely infinite. It is infinite in every way possible. Nothing else is like it completely.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Must There be an Infinite and Eternal Sacrifice? (Alma 34:12)," *KnoWhy* 142 (July 13, 2016).

Tad Callister, *The Infinite Atonement*, (Provo, UT, Deseret Book Co. 2000).

Alma 34:9–16 — Amulek's Figure of Speech Conveys the Atonement

There is a certain Jubilee metaphor in Amulek's words. At the Jubilee celebration, every fifty years, debts were excused, people who had sold themselves into slavery for debt were freed, and lands of inheritance were returned to their owners, at least, that was what the Mosaic law expected (see Leviticus chapter 25 for details.) Just as the Jubilee redeemed all of these debts that are owed, Jesus will redeem all mankind, on the one condition of repentance and obedience, and none of our sins will count against us anymore. Imagine the poor people from Antionum being told by Alma and Amulek that the redemption will take care of all of the spiritual debts and sins.

As far as figures of speech are concerned, there is an interesting eight-element chiasm in Alma 34:9:

- A For **it is expedient**
- B that an **atonement** should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an **atonement** made,
- C or else all mankind **must** unavoidably **perish**;
- D **yea, all are hardened**;
- D **yea, all are fallen and are lost**,
- C and **must perish**
- B except it be through the **atonement**
- A which **it is expedient** should be made.

Why did Amulek express the idea of the atonement using this chiasmic figure of speech? The answer may be that a chiasm starts at one place, and goes to a center, where it turns around and comes back to where it started. A chiasm thus adds a sense of completion and integrated wholeness. Since the word *atone* etymologically means to make “*at one*,” there always is a kind of reunion and a reunifying that the Atonement brings about. In a literary sense, a chiasm unifies the words expressing a thought in much the same way that the feeling of atonement gives you, namely the sense of reunion with God after the transgression, after the sin, and then after being encircled.

Christ taught the people on the earth through parables. He knew that some people would understand some aspects of some of the parables, and others would understand other things. We have to keep looking and striving to understand the one great wholeness to all truth.

The ancient Egyptians dwelt on the focal point of how we will all be judged in the final judgment according to our works. In the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, all the deceased are brought before the judgment throne of the god Osiris. Before approaching the god, the deceased had to have their heart weighed on a set of scales against the weight of the feather of truth. If your heart was lighter than the feather, it went up, and all was well. But if your heart was heavy and hard, if you were found to be a hard-hearted person, your heart’s side of the scale would go down. If the heart was found unworthy, the jaws of the death monster, the crocodile, would be waiting beneath to eat the descending heart.

In verse 11, Amulek used image of logic to appeal to the minds of the Zoramites, who apparently agreed with one point of the law, namely that if you kill someone, you must be killed. You could not buy your way out of a homicide; and if a person killed someone, the dead person’s relatives had the obligation to avenge his death. If someone had committed a murder and was about to die for it, there was no way that someone else could substitute for the perpetrator. The person who killed had to be punished. It was non-delegable and there was no other way out of it.

Amulek raises this very point using their law as a metaphor: “Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another. If a man murdereth, behold will our law, which is just, take the life of his brother? No.” (Alma 34:11–12). The law required the life of him that murdered. Therefore, Amulek taught, there can be nothing that is short of a divine and infinite atonement that will suffice, because if Christ were only a man, then his death, as a man, could not count for our transgressions. We can see the logic of it even if we might disagree with it, since today if a man murders, we do not in all states require the capital death penalty. But the point still has force and effect. Many things we do cannot be repaired. Restitution is not always possible. Therefore, nothing short of divine help, beyond our limited human powers and

resources, can fix all the damage that can be done. It is always easier to tear down than to build up.

Alma 34:17–27 — Amulek Teaches to Pray Always

We know that the Zoramites left Zarahemla because, among other things, they were not willing to observe the performances of the church of praying daily to avoid entering into temptation. The Zoramites were praying only once a week (Alma 31:10, 12).

Thus, building on what Alma had taught about prayer in Alma 33, Amulek taught in this chapter that people must indeed pray morning, noon and night. The invitation and mandate to pray to God in the Temple was sung countless times in the Psalms. David set the orthodox example by praying and crying aloud “evening, and morning, and at noon” (Psalms 55:17), as Amulek also insisted. In Jerusalem, the Shofar would blow at the times designated for daily prayer as well as on the full moon, the new moon, and on feast days (Psalms 81:3). The Zoramites objected to that. Alma and Amulek wanted to be sure that their unobservant behavior was counteracted. They taught their people to pray constantly so that guidance and revelation could continue to be given throughout their daily lives.

Alma 34:18–25 — Amulek’s Poetic Writing on Prayer

Continuing his comments on prayer, Amulek composed eight simple lines of poetic language that appear in Alma 34:18–25:

Yea cry unto him for mercy, for he is mighty to save ...
 Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, yea, over all your flocks

Cry unto him in your houses,
 Yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening.

Yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies.
 Yea, cry unto him against the devil, who is an enemy to all righteousness.

Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them.
 Cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase.

These lines are not nearly as eloquent as Zenos’s longer poetic masterpiece. But Amulek may have wanted to reach a simpler audience. The poor, although spiritually wiser, may not have been as linguistically sophisticated as the upperclass Zoramites. Here we see eight short lines written in alternating couplets. In Hebrew poetry, you will often have a parallelistic format of some kind, either as antithetical parallelisms or as synthetic parallelisms. Here we have synthetic parallelisms (bringing together the time and place of prayer; or equating flocks and fields, houses and households, or crops and flocks), synonymous parallelisms (equating human enemies with the enemy of all righteousness),

and antithetical parallelisms (juxtaposing the Lord’s mercy and salvific might against the devil’s presumptuous preemptive power).

Instead of just seeing these lines as four couplets (four pairs of two lines each), we can see this as two pairs of two couplets (each of which begins with *yea, cry, cry, yea*; and then *yea, yea, cry, cry*), which are themselves paired. In effect, we have here eight lines constructed as an overall pair of four pairs, each of a pair of lines, in other words a pair of pairs of pairs. This is an exceptional example of parallelistic writing. The center point of this parallelism is the singular point that we should cry unto the Lord “both morning, mid-day, and evening,” one of the big issues for the Zoramites.

We do not know whether Amulek wrote this poem himself. Whether he did so or was inspired merely to quote it at this juncture, it is very impressive. He may have been imitating Zenos or even quoting from an otherwise unknown text of Zenos, since this poem is similar to Zenos’ poetry quoted in Alma 33 and even adds the admonition to pray in your closets or closed rooms, in your secret places, and even in the wilderness, as did Zenos (as discussed above). Meaningfully, Amulek’s eight lines use the imperative *cry* the significant number of 7 times.

Alma 34:18–41 — Amulek’s Conclusion

In his final remarks, Amulek circles back around to the second and first points made by Alma at the beginning of their instruction, namely (2) bringing forth fruit unto repentance and righteousness (34:30–36); and (1) humbling yourself, worshipping God patiently in whatever place you may be (34:38), even if you are afflicted and cast out (34:39–41).

Amulek added to the point about the fruits of repentance the need to be charitable (34:28–29), and the urgent need to not delay repentance (34:30–36). Some people wonder about Amulek’s statement that there is no time for repentance “after this day of life” ends and the “night of darkness” comes (34:33). But that “awful crisis” would seem to refer to when the unrepentant resurrected being stands before God to be judged (33:22), and not to the time when the spirit moves into the spirit world (34:34). Thus, the “space between death and the resurrection of the body” (Alma 40:21) would seem to be included in the full time mercifully granted by God as the probationary time in which “to repent” and deny the devil the ultimate power to “seal you his” (42:4–5).

On humbling oneself, Amulek adds the need to “live in thanksgiving daily,” to be “watchful unto prayer continually,” and to “not revile against” those who treat you badly (34:37–41). Amulek knows personally what it means to be treated badly by people you know and thought were your friends and neighbors. The best antidotes for the poison of seeking revenge is feeling grateful, counting your blessings, and praying continually for your enemies and also for yourself.

Alma 35

This chapter shows that while Alma may have won the skirmish against the Zoramites, thereby destroying their “craft” (35:3), they may have lost the larger battle. The Ammonites take in the Zoramite refugees (35:9), but then the Ammonites are forced to leave their land in Jershon to go to Melek (35:13). Meanwhile, the Nephites prepared the land of Jershon as a battleground, arming the poor Zoramites to be able to defend the lands there that had now been given to them “for their inheritance” (35:14), as the Lamanites and the Zoramites entered into an alliance (35:11). This was a high price to pay, and at home the Nephites became “offended because of the strictness” of the word and the law (35:15) that had to be enforced as the Nephites braced themselves for what would become seven years of prolonged military conflict. The realities of *real politik* are always stifling.

Alma 35:16 — Alma Taught His Sons Individually

Finally, Amulek’s teaching about the atonement in chapter 34 aligns beautifully with Alma’s bringing his sons together to teach them at the end of this block of chapters. They had been with Alma on the mission to Antionum. They had seen some amazing success. As a very conscientious father, he did not neglect his sons.

Typical of Alma’s public preaching but now in more detail, he spoke to his sons about his own conversion and then historically, how the Lord had surely delivered them from bondage and captivity. He testified that he knew that, through the Atonement, the Lord would deliver all who would cry to Him for salvation and redemption and would choose to repent and serve Him in wisdom, patience, justice, and mercy. He assured them that they would overcome death and be lifted up at the last day, a serious concern that that generation would have had as the engines of war were again revving up their weapons of destruction and death.

As we think about Christ’s Atonement, we too can take reassurance in the knowledge that the Lord has risen and overcome death. Where would we be without that knowledge? How blessed we are to have His influence, His eternal wisdom and infinite power to make us something completely better than we could ever possibly be by ourselves, and without which we would be, of all men, most miserable.

Alma gave each his sons a personal charge, “separately, concerning the things pertaining to righteousness.” In these patriarchal blessings and high priestly promises, he also gave to each of them personal “commandments,” which we are fortunate to have, coming up next in Alma 36–42, and particularly to know that they are the very words of Alma “according to his own record” (35:16).

ALMA 36–38

John W. Welch Notes



Before reading and discussing Alma 36–38, it is a good idea to remember and consider, to the extent possible, what can be known about the setting in which Alma delivered these three very distinct messages to his sons Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton, in the 18th year of the reign of judges.

Alma 36–42 — Alma and His Sons

Alma was a diligent and devoted father. He had worked and traveled with these sons. He trusted them among his missionary companions when he went to Antionum in an effort to correct the situation with the Zoramites there. Alma knew the needs and characters of each of these individual sons. While his words to them do not sound to our ears like patriarchal blessings, in an important way these chapters preserve the father’s blessings given by Alma to his boys. Alma the Elder was a good father to Alma the Younger, and he in turn was a faithful father to these three sons. His blessings and instructions in chapters 36–38 will soon turn out to be a major part of his legacy to them, as Alma will depart later that same year from their midst and this life (Alma 45:18).

When he left, Alma had equipped his sons well. Corianton will repent of his youthful misbehavior and will “go forth among the people” with his brothers “to declare the word” (Alma 43:1). Helaman will become the high priest and head of the Church, as well as the leader of the Ammonite stripling warriors. When Helaman dies only 17 years after his father’s blessings, Shiblon will become the faithful keeper of the sacred records (Figure 1), likely because Helaman’s son Helaman was too young to assume that full responsibility. But soon Shiblon will pass the records on to Helaman, the son of Helaman, when Shiblon dies only four years after his brother Helaman had died (Alma 63:1, 10). Both of them died relatively young, perhaps due to disease or hardships

Who Kept the Records in the Book of Mormon?

Lineage of Lehi



Record Keeper	Dates*	Comments	Reference
Nephi ₁	615 B.C.	Born in Jerusalem	1 Nephi 1:4
	600 B.C.	Begins record when about 15 years old	1 Nephi 1:1
	540 B.C.	Dies about 75 years old	
Jacob	592 B.C.	Born son of Lehi, brother of Nephi ₁	1 Nephi 18:7
	544 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Jacob 1:1
	495 B.C.	Dies about 97 years old	Jacob 7:27
Enos	515 B.C.	Born son of Jacob	Jacob 7:27
	420 B.C.	About to Die	Enos 1:25
	417 B.C.	Dies about 98 years old	
Jarom	440 B.C.	Born son of Enos	Jarom 1:1
	420 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Jarom 1:1
	361 B.C.	Gives plates to Omni	Jarom 1:15
	355 B.C.	Dies about 85 years old	
Omni	390 B.C.	Born son of Jarom	Omni 1:1
	361 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Jarom 1:15
	317 B.C.	Writes 3 verses on plates in 44 years	Omni 1:1-3
Amaron	315 B.C.	Dies about 75 years old	Omni 1:3
	350 B.C.	Born son of Omni	Omni 1:4
	317 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Omni 1:4
Chemish	277 B.C.	Dies about 73 years old	Omni 1:8
	330 B.C.	Born son of Omni, brother of Amaron	Omni 1:9
	279 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Omni 1:9
Abinadom	250 B.C.	Dies about 80 years old	Omni 1:9
	270 B.C.	Born son of Chemish	Omni 1:10
Amaleki	180 B.C.	Dies about 90 years old	Omni 1:10
	210 B.C.	Born son of Abinadom	Omni 1:12
	150 B.C.	Nephites move to Zarahemla	Omni 1:13
	138 B.C.	Dies about 72 years old	Omni 1:30

Benjamin and Mosiah



Record Keeper	Dates*	Comments	Reference
Benjamin	190 B.C.	Born son of Mosiah ₁	Omni 1:23
	140 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Omni 1:25
	121 B.C.	Dies 69 years old	Mosiah 6:5
Mosiah ₂	154 B.C.	Born son of Benjamin	Mosiah 6:4
	91 B.C.	Dies about 63 years old	Mosiah 29:46

Lineage of Alma₁



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

Amos ₂	A.D. 174	Born son of Amos ₁	
	A.D. 194	Becomes record keeper	4 Nephi 1:21
	A.D. 305	Dies about 131 years old	4 Nephi 1:47
Ammaron	A.D. 190	Born son of Amos, brother of Amos ₂	
	A.D. 305	Becomes record keeper	4 Nephi 1:48
	A.D. 320	Dies about 130 years old	Mormon 1:5

Mormon and Moroni



Record Keeper	Dates*	Comments	Reference
Mormon ₂	A.D. 311	Born	Mormon 1:2
	A.D. 321	Told by Ammaron that at age 24 he would become the record keeper	Mormon 1:2
	A.D. 326	Visited by the Lord; leads Nephite armies	Mormon 1:15
	A.D. 335	Becomes record keeper	Mormon 2:18
	A.D. 385	Delivered plates to Moroni; buried other plates in the hill Cumorah	Mormon 8:1
	A.D. 401	Killed about 90 years old by the Lamanites	Mormon 8:3
Moroni ₂	A.D. 360	Born son of Mormon ₂	Mormon 8:1
	A.D. 385	Becomes record keeper	Mormon 8:1
	A.D. 421	"soon go to rest," about 61 years old	Moroni 10:34

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*dates are approximate

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

Inflicted on their bodies during the miseries of the seven years of war in the twenty war-chapters here in the last part of the Book of Alma.

In spite of these challenges, they passed the mantle of recordkeeping and spiritual leadership on down through the lineage of Alma, clear down to the end of Nephite history when the records were finally entrusted to the youthful leader Mormon. No doubt the words of Alma, found in the seven chapters Alma 36–42, were deeply inspiring to all of Alma's posterity.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "'The Age of Man' and Longevity in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Collegium Aescalapium* (1985): 35–45.

Alma 36–42 — Alma’s Counsel and Commandments to His Sons

When Mormon introduces chapters 36 through 42, he states, “And we have an account of his [Alma’s] *commandments*, which he gave unto them [his sons] according to his own record” (35:16; emphasis added). Notice that Alma’s words to his sons in these chapters are described as *commandments*. We often refer to them as Alma’s blessings to his sons, and there are indeed words of blessings in them, but these are not what we would consider to be Patriarchal Blessings. They do not read like that.

Alma begins his speech to Helaman by saying, “Hear my words and learn of me” (Alma 36:3). The very first thing that Alma taught both Helaman and Shiblon was: “[I]nasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land” (Alma 36:1). Alma also added the inverse at the end for Helaman: “and ye ought to know also, that inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence” (Alma 36:30). For Shiblon, Alma began with both promises of the covenant at the beginning—clearly his main teaching point to Shiblon: “[I]nasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence” (Alma 38:1). With Corianton, Alma began his speech by sorrowing that his son had not kept the commandments of God.

Judging from Alma’s words of commandment, we learn a little about the personalities, attitude, and characters of these three sons. Coupled with that, let us consider what kind of a relationship Alma may have had with each one of them. Did Alma know his sons well? I believe he did. We might ask what lesson may be in this for parents? Before we try to counsel our children, we may need to get to know them a little better than we sometimes do.

Alma’s sons probably lived in his home. He did not just send them off to public school or away to boarding school, which didn’t exist in those days. Who would have taught them in a home setting? In the Hebrew and Israelite tradition, it was the responsibility of the father to teach his sons (Deuteronomy 6:7–9). We know that King Benjamin taught his sons. He instructed them not just how to be good leaders but also many other things, including languages such as Egyptian and Hebrew. Benjamin had been their tutor and mentor, and therefore he surely had a lot of contact with them. In the modern world, parents have not always had that same level of interaction with their children. We send them off to school. We send them off to Primary, Young Men and Young Women, and that is good. But do we know them as well as we ought to?

When Alma gave these commandments to his sons, did he think that these would become part of world religious literature and that people all over the world would be

reading his private communication to his family members? I don't think so. It was likely Mormon who decided that this needed to go into the Nephite national history. These were found in Alma's records—we are privileged here to look into personal his family history.

When Alma wrote out these lessons, he apparently took great thought and care for their wording and content. He certainly worked with the Spirit, and he also worked with his literary skills. He was giving his very best in every way, even though his remarks were likely only for his three sons. That is really the audience here, isn't it? One son for each of his three messages. What does that tell you about the time, preparation, and attention that we ought to give when we sit down to write a letter to our children? Would we be better parents if we wrote the kind of wisdom literature—world-class writing—that Alma gave to Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton?

Alma 36–42 — A Possible Passover Setting for These Chapters

Thirty-five years ago (about 1985), I was sitting around a table with some of my colleagues. We were sharing our thoughts on the Book of Mormon, and one of them had just read an account of what happens during a Jewish Passover. The Passover is a family celebration—usually observed with extended family. After eating the Passover meal, they gather together in a type of Family Home Evening in which they sing and tell stories. Similar to how we may act out the Christmas Story at Christmas festivities, they act out the story of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, including the painting of the doorposts with blood, Pharaoh and his soldiers being smitten, and God delivering them. Family members celebrate the Passover story by taking on assigned roles. Following the Passover reenactment, the father asks three boys in the extended family one question each. This is done to keep the law, which was specified in Exodus 10:2, that commands the Jews to “tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt.” We know that this was not just a traditional custom in antiquity—it was a required part of keeping the Law of Moses.

From the plates of brass, which Alma had, he would very likely have done something similar on Passover. For example, the Passover commemorates the *destroying angel* passing over the faithful Hebrews in Egypt. In Alma's conversion account, he spoke about the angel coming and threatening to destroy him. Indeed, the word “destroy” is mentioned six times in Alma's narrative in Alma 36, seven times in Alma 37, and four times in Alma 42. In the Passover story, God prepares his people and delivers them from bondage and captivity. Alma also talked about being delivered from bondage and captivity (36:2, 29; 38:5). Being freed from slavery in Egypt was like being given a new life, like being born again and becoming his sons and daughters, belonging to him and serving him alone as Lord. In these and other ways, Alma's commandments to his sons thematically interact with the ancient Passover traditions.

Although we do not have Passover records going back as far as we would like in early Israelite history, we can trace them back to about the time of Christ and probably earlier. According to recorded Passover traditions, after gathering his family, the father instructed his sons and answered their questions. His words were not fixed but were “to fit the knowledge and understanding of the child” and were supposed “to spell out the sequence of sin, suffering, repentance, and redemption.” The father was to select three different sons and ask each boy one of three questions, based on his character and personality.

The first question was, “What is the meaning of the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you?” The use of the word “testimonies” in this question meant the *ēdhōth*—the records. That question comes from Deuteronomy 6:20. According to recorded Jewish history, the wise son was assigned the role to approach the father and ask, “What is the meaning of the records, the statutes and the judgments?” The father would then address the wise son and give an answer to that question. Obviously, Helaman was the wise son in this scenario. We do not have the question that Helaman might have asked, but we do have the answer that Alma gave in chapter 37. Alma’s words to Helaman were all about the records and about the meaning of the statutes, and how they were a type and symbol of things. Alma’s words fit very nicely into a Passover setting as he, the father, instructed Helaman.

Another son was then supposed to approach the father and ask the question from Exodus 12:26: “What mean ye by this service?” This question was supposed to be asked by a son playing the role of a less righteous son. His assigned question was, “What is going on here? Why are we doing this? Why do we celebrate Passover?” According to Jewish practice, the father was supposed to tell this son—in stern terms and in a way that would set the son’s teeth on edge—that he will be punished for his own sins and that he would not have been redeemed had he been in Egypt during the first Passover with Moses. Corianton fits this role snugly (see Alma 41–42). But, in this situation, he would not have just been role-playing. Corianton really needed this advice from his father because he had been involved in unrighteous acts.

Finally, the third question comes from Exodus 13:14. It is a very short question: “What is this?” It is the understanding of the Jews that this question is intentionally ambiguous. Whether it is sarcastic or serious, we do not know. Regardless, in the Israelite tradition, this question was supposed to be asked by a son who played the role of an uninformed son—one who needed to be taught. The father was to answer by giving that son preventative instruction to keep him away from any risk of breaking the law. This happens to be a very good description of the instruction Alma gave to Shiblon in Alma 38.

Although it is uncertain if Alma’s exhortation to his sons directly coincided with the Nephite remembrance of the Passover, the method and content of his instruction was certainly reminiscent of Passover themes, including suffering in captivity and affliction, crying for deliverance, the appearance of a powerful angel, and deliverance from darkness and bitter pains. As you read Alma’s words to these three sons, and as you study more about the Passover, how many Passover connections can you find here? Perhaps Alma and his family had gathered for a Passover celebration and that is why Alma gathered his sons together on this occasion and chose to give fatherly instruction in at this traditional time.

And here is another lesson for us in these chapters. On special family occasions—like graduation or celebrating Easter—we should celebrate as a family with more than opening presents and decorating with Easter bunnies, or things like that. We should gather our family together on these serious traditional moments and take the opportunity to teach them and impress upon them the things they must do to continue in righteous living.

This perspective on a Passover setting for these chapters in Alma was first discovered and identified by Gordon Thomasson in 1984—more than thirty years ago. It was introduced in a chapter in the book *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Were Nephite Prophets Familiar with the Passover Tradition? \(Mosiah 13:30\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 429 (March 29, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Did Alma Counsel His Sons During the Passover? \(Alma 38:5\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 146 (July 19, 2016).

Gordon C. Thomasson and John W. Welch, “[The Sons of the Passover](#),” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 196–198.

Alma 36

Alma 36 — Chiastic Structure in Alma’s Words

In the 2020 *Come Follow Me* manual, p. 115, the lesson rightly points out that “Alma 36 is a great example of a form of Hebrew poetry called chiasmus, in which words or ideas are presented in a certain order, leading to a central idea, and then repeated in reverse order.” This definition is a perfect description of Alma 36. For further information, the

manual invites readers to consult the *Book of Mormon Student Manual* which has been used for many years in seminary and institute classes.

That manual presents material based on the groundbreaking articles I have published over the years about chiasmus, beginning in *BYU Studies* in 1969 and in the *New Era* in 1972, listed below. There and elsewhere I have specifically discussed chiasmus in Alma 36, both in LDS publications and also in scholarly books and reference works. Of all the passages in world literature that have ever been found to be chiasmic, Alma 36 is among the very best examples of this form of composition. It truly ranks as a masterpiece of world religious literature.

This is not the place to revisit all of these publications about Alma 36, but I would like to draw attention here to a couple particular introductory points.

First, I have often told the story about my discovery of chiasmus in King Benjamin's Speech on August 16, 1967. It's readily available on [YouTube](#). But I have not before told the story of the discovery of chiasmus in Alma 36, the details of which I just recently ran across in a stack of letters that I wrote home in 1968–1969.

I had returned home from the mission field to resume studying as a Junior at BYU in September 1968. I began reporting my findings about chiasmus to my professors and directors of the Honors Program, and soon was invited to speak in classes and firesides about this new discovery. I was also called to be the Gospel Doctrine teacher in my student ward, and that year the Sunday School curriculum covered the Book of Mormon. On Friday, March 7, 1969, I was introduced to a beautiful and charming graduate student. I would never again date anyone else. On Saturday, March 8, I went to the Manti Temple with my ward, my first time to that amazing pioneer house of holiness. Then, on Sunday, March 9, I taught a Sunday School lesson that “went real well—we drew up a character sketch of Alma Jr.,” as my letter home stated. In the process of considering what Alma cared most about, we read his accounts of his conversion, in Mosiah 27, Alma 5, and Alma 36.

It was in that context that I first found the chiasmic structure of Alma 36. Writing in pencil in the margins of the printing of the Book of Mormon I was using, I noted nine elements in the first half of Alma 36 and the same nine elements in the second half in the opposite order. At the turning point in the middle I just drew an arrow, and at the top of the page wrote “Great!” That Sunday night when I wrote my weekly letter home to my parents, I noted, just in passing, “I also just found a gorgeous pattern in Alma 36.”

That has to be one of the greatest weekends in my life. I believe I was blessed for going to the temple and for taking my church calling seriously. I was blessed by finding what I

Chiasmus in Alma 36

My son give ear to my *words* (v. 1)
Keep the commandments and ye shall *prosper in the land* (v. 1)
 Do *as I* have done (v. 2)
Remember the captivity of our fathers (v. 2)
 They were in *bondage* (v. 2)
 He surely did *deliver* them (v. 2)
Trust in God (v. 3)
 Support in *trials, troubles, and afflictions* (v. 3)
 Lifted up at the *last day* (v. 3)
I know this not myself but *of God* (v. 4)
Born of God (v. 5)
 I sought to destroy the church (vv. 6-9)
 My *limbs* were paralyzed (v. 10)
 Fear of being in the *presence of God* (vv. 14-15)
Pains of a damned soul (v. 16)
Harrowed up by the memory of sins (v. 17)
 I remembered *Jesus Christ, a son of God* (v. 17)
 I cried, *Jesus Christ, son of God* (v. 18)
Harrowed by the memory of sins no more (v. 19)
 Joy as exceeding as was the *pain* (v. 20)
 Long to be in the *presence of God* (v. 22)
 My *limbs* received strength again (v. 23)
 I labored to bring souls to repentance (v. 24)
Born of God (v. 26)
 Therefore *my knowledge* is *of God* (v. 26)
 Supported under *trials, troubles, and afflictions* (v. 26)
Trust in him (v. 27)
 He will *deliver* me (v. 27)
 And *raise me up at the last day* (v. 28)
 As God brought our fathers out of *bondage* and captivity (vv. 28-29)
 Retain a *remembrance of their captivity* (v. 29)
 Know *as I* do know (v. 30)
Keep the commandments and ye shall *prosper in the land* (v. 30)
 This according to his *word* (v. 30)

Figure 2 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Chiasmus in Alma 36," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 132.

think is the greatest chiasmic composition ever written. I was also blessed by finding the wonderful woman to whom I have been married now for fifty-one fabulous years. Life's blessings don't get much better than that.

Second, I want to thank and celebrate the many people who have independently refined and reformatted the layout and typesetting of the distinct chiasmic structure in Alma 36. In several of my various publications involving Alma 36, I have modified my presentation from time to time, depending on the purposes and typesetting options available in different book or journal settings. In my 1989 report on Chiasmus in Alma 36, I replicate seven different layouts that had been published, to that date, by myself and others. Here is a [standard chart](#) (Figure 2), following number 132, that is often used to highlight the basic inversion and central turning point in Alma 36:

Since then, in the last twenty years, there have been several other proposals advanced, as careful examiners continue to analyze and appreciate the skill with which Alma tells his conversion story here in Alma 36. The best and most detailed recent studies have been published by Noel Reynolds and Stephen Ehat.

Further Reading and References

John W. Welch, "[Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon](#)," *BYU Studies* 10 no. 1 (Autumn, 1969): 83; reprinted in John W. Welch, "[Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon](#)," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 206; reprinted also in Lawrence J. Trudeau, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, vol. 321 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2016), 211.

John W. Welch, *A Study Relating Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon to Chiasmus in the Old Testament, Ugaritic Epics, Homer, and Selected Greek and Latin Authors* (M.A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1970), 129.

John W. Welch, "[Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon: Or the Book of Mormon Does It Again](#)," *New Era*, February 1972, 9.

John W. Welch, "[Chiasmus in Alma 36](#)" (*FARMS Report*, 1989), 43 pp. plus Appendix 1, "Table of Words Appearing Only a Single Time in Alma 36, First Half and Second Half," and Appendix 2, "Table of Words Appearing More than Once in Alma 36, First Half and Second Half."

John W. Welch, "[A Masterpiece: Alma 36](#)," reworked in John L. Sorenson and Melvin Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT; FARMS, 1991), 114–131.

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Stephen Kent Ehat, "Words, Phrases, and Ideas in Macro-Chiasms," in *Chiasmus: The State of the Art*, ed. John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: BYU Studies and Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 335–339.

Noel B. Reynolds, "Rethinking Alma 36," in *Give Ear to My Words: Test and Context of Alma 36–42*, ed. Kerry M. Hull et al. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2019), 451–472.

Alma 36 – Chiasmus in the Full Text of Alma 36

In Alma 36 and 38, Alma tells his conversion story twice. Once to Helaman, which is an outstanding example of Hebrew poetic form. For present purposes, as I go through Alma 36, the lines have been numbered in order to coordinate with the similar elements included in Alma's second telling, to Shiblon in Alma 38, discussed much further below.

Because the web allows for unlimited space, here you have the complete text of Alma 36, so you can see the development of this structure in its full context. As seen here, it is obvious that not everything is identically reversed, and some sections are longer or shorter than are their matches. There are reasons for these differences, which you can ponder quite productively. For example, this is because certain things—such as the pain and wickedness in the first half, and the joy, successful preaching, and mighty deliverance in the second half—call for great attention in those places respectively. Also, as the articles by Ehat and Reynolds have shown, these longer subsections often have their own internal well-ordered structures. And overall, accommodating these apparent infelicities, the first half of Alma 36 and the second half of Alma 36 are very closely balanced in total words, in individual word pairs, and in several other minute respects, as is tabulated in Appendices 1 and 2 in my 1989 Report.

Alma said to Helaman and wrote in his record:

- 1) My son, give ear to **my words**;
- 2) for I swear unto you, that **inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land**.
- 3) I would that ye should do **as I have done**,
- 4) in **remembering** the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the
- 5) God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and **he surely did deliver them** in their afflictions.
- 6) And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth, and therefore, I beseech of thee that thou wilt hear my words and **learn of me**;
- 7) for I do know that whosoever shall **put their trust in God**

8) shall be **supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions**, and shall be **lifted up at the last day**.

9) And I would not that ye think that I know of myself—not of the temporal but of the spiritual, not of the carnal mind but **of God**.

10) Now, behold, I say unto you, if I had not been **born of God** I should not have **known** these things;

11) but **God has**, by the mouth of his holy angel, **made these things known unto me**, not of any worthiness of myself;

12) For I went about with the sons of Mosiah, **seeking to destroy the church of God**; but behold, God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way.

13) And behold, he spake unto us, as it were the voice of thunder, and the whole earth did tremble beneath our **feet**; and we all fell to the earth, for the fear of the Lord came upon us. But behold, the voice said unto me: Arise. And I arose and stood up, and beheld the angel. And he said unto me: If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God. And it came to pass that I fell to the earth; and it was for the space of three days and three nights that I could not open my mouth, neither had I the use of **my limbs**. And the angel spake more things unto me, which were heard by my brethren, but I did not hear them; for when I heard the words—If thou wilt be destroyed of thyself, seek no more to destroy the church of God—I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed, that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more.

14) But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins. Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments. Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the **presence of my God** did rack my soul with inexpressible horror. Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the **presence of my God**, to be judged of my deeds. And now for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the **pains** of a damned soul.

15) And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was **harrowed up by the memory of my many sins**,

16) behold I **remembered** also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people

17) concerning the coming of one **Jesus Christ, a Son of God**,

18) **to atone** for the sins of the world.

[Up to this point, Alma has gone through the basic elements leading up to the moment of his conversion to Jesus Christ. That was the moment when Alma remembered and called on Jesus Christ to have mercy upon him. That was the turning point of his life. He makes it the turning point of this elegant chapter, the most extensive of his several retellings of his conversion story.

From this central turning point, Alma works his way back out, through the same pervious content but now in the reverse order. In the second half, his words and phrases will be largely the same as in the first half, but in the opposite order. Each step of that way, Alma's attitudes and behaviors have now completely changed and are opposite to what he had previously experienced.]

18) Now, as my mind caught hold upon **this thought**,

17) I cried within my heart: O **Jesus, thou Son of God**, have mercy on me who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

16) And now, behold, when I thought this, I could **remember my pains** no more;

15) yea, I was **harrowed up by the memory of my sins** no more. And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.

14) Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, 'God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God' [1 Nephi 1:8]; yea, and my soul did long **to be there**.

[In the first half of this text, Alma had feared to even be brought into the presence of God. Now he longs to be there in God's presence. As in each step along this way, his attitudes have completely switched.]

13) But behold, **my limbs** did receive their strength again, and I stood upon **my feet**, and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God.

12) Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, **that I might bring souls unto repentance**; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. Yea, and now behold, O my son, the Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy in the fruit of my labors; For because of the word which he has imparted unto me,

- 11) behold, many have been **born of God**, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen;
- 10) therefore they do **know** of these things of which I have spoken, as I do **know**;"
- 9) and the knowledge which I have is **of God**.
- 8) And I have been **supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions**; yea, God has delivered me from prison, and from bonds, and from death;
- 7) yea, and I do put my **trust in him**, and he will still deliver me.
- 6) And **I know** that he will raise me up at the last day, to dwell with him in glory; yea, and I will praise him forever,
- 5) for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea; and he led them by his power into the promised land; yea, and **he has delivered them** out of bondage and captivity from time to time. Yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem and he has also by his everlasting power, **delivered them** out of bondage and captivity from time to time. Yea, and he has brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; and he has also, by his everlasting power, **delivered them out** of bondage and captivity, from time to time
- 4) even down to the present day; and I have **always retained in remembrance** their captivity; yea, and ye also ought **to retain in remembrance**, as I have done, their captivity.
- 3) But behold, my son, this is not all; for ye ought to know **as I do know**,
- 2) that **inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land**; and ye ought to know also, that inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God, ye shall be cut off from his presence.
- 1) Now this is according to **his word**.

We can see here how everything builds up to and then away from the central turning point when Alma remembered that his father had prophesied about the coming of Jesus Christ, and when he cried out, "O Jesus Christ, thou Son of God, have mercy on me." This is the submissive plea that sends Alma's life and his story going in the opposite direction.

Note also that Alma gave his oldest son, Helaman, a "doubled story" of his conversion, while Shiblon's blessing in Alma 38 will repeat only (but almost exactly) the first half of this account. Perhaps this was done meaningfully by Alma for a subtly symbolic purpose. Under Biblical and Jewish law the oldest son, the firstborn son, was entitled to get what was called the "double blessing"—a double portion of his father's estate (Deuteronomy 21:17). When the father died and his estate was divided, the oldest son would receive twice as much as what the other sons each would receive. In Alma's case, assuming he just had three sons, his estate would have been divided into four parts—Helaman would get two of those portions of the estate, while Shiblon and Corianton

would each get one. Because the eldest son had the responsibility to take care of his mother, his unmarried sisters, and the other women in the family whose circumstances required his care, the double portion was given to him to allow him to fulfill those responsibilities.

We do not know whether Alma owned much by way of land, goods, or money. I would not expect that he did. He had spent his entire life preaching. He had been the high priest, so his job had been working in the temple and taking care of sacred things—not working in a profession that would have profited him materially. Alma knew that worldly things did not matter as much as the spiritual testimony he could share, and so he gave Helaman a double portion of what he had—a doubled text of his testimony and conversion story. And was that related to Alma then requiring and enabling Helaman, the oldest son, to perform special responsibilities? Yes. As would have been expected, in chapter 37, Alma gave Helaman major responsibilities, particularly a charge to keep the records and sacred artifacts as the leader of the Church.

In sum, this stunning composition is truly amazing. It meets all of the “Chiasmus Criteria” generally accepted for determining whether or not a text should be identified as chiasmic, as Neal Rappleye has most carefully defined. Moreover, Alma uses chiasmus in Alma 36 for many reasons, all of which are discussed in my chapter asking the question, “What Does the Presence of Chiasmus Prove?” These articles are conveniently listed here below. Moreover, assuming that Joseph dictated his translation of this intricate text to Oliver Cowdery at their normal average rate of about 15 words per minute, Joseph would have only had about one hour and twenty minutes to bring this text forth, going through it one time only, with no opportunity ever for revisions or adjustments. As I’ve said many times before, this is phenomenal.

Further Reading

Neal Rappleye, “[Chiasmus Criteria in Review](#),” in *Chiasmus: The State of the Art* (Provo: BYU Studies and Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 289–310.

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John W. Welch, “[A Masterpiece: Alma 36](#),” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 114–131.

John W. Welch, “[What Does the Presence of Chiasmus Prove?](#)” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 199–224.

Alma 36:1–3 — Father’s Blessings

As parents, we have the authority to bless our children. Worthy fathers also have the priesthood power to promise them serious things in a father’s blessing. When moved by the spirit, we know that the Lord’s promises are available and we can promise our children what the Lord will support. Do we do that very often? We usually bless our children with little more than a general blessing. It is not often a very specific or concrete blessing.

I know that when we give a blessing and are moved by the spirit, the Lord will not let us down if we feel inspired to go out on a limb. We go out on that limb by beginning to speak, and then letting the words of the Lord fill in the rest. If we begin by saying, “I promise you,” we have to stop and think what the promise is going to be. Then the Lord can tell us what it should be. If we do not begin, we may never open the channels of revelation to receive the words of a much-needed promised blessing.

Alma 36:35 — Confessing the Follies of Our Youth

Notice that Alma begins his words to both Helaman and then to Shiblon by saying something like, “This is what I did when I was a young man.” How many of us begin talking to our children by saying, “Let me tell you all the mistakes I made when I was in high school”? Most of us would rather pretend those things never happened. I don’t think I have ever told my children all about the unwise mistakes of my youth.

Would it help our children if we were to open up more so that they could share their experiences or difficulties with us? When should we share this personal information with our children? When they are young, when they are teenagers, or when they are young men? Alma advised Helaman, “learn wisdom in thy youth” (37:35). If young children hear about your mistakes and what you learned from those experiences, they may better relate with you, love you more, and accept you more. I wonder, if you wait to share your vulnerabilities and the mistakes you have made until they are 16 or 17, they may feel betrayed by suddenly realizing that you are not as perfect as they thought you were. In their later teens, your children have already built up a certain impression about you. Maybe “learning wisdom in youth” means that we need to be open to discussing some of these things when our children are still relatively young.

Alma 36:22 — Alma’s Joy and His Quotation of Lehi

While Alma spent three days in some kind of spiritual state—shock, coma, or something not defined—he was cognizant of what was going on. He had agonized, his soul was being wracked with eternal torment. He said he felt the pains of a damned soul, but then he remembered his father had spoken “concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world” (36:17). He then felt “joy” and “marvelous light” (36:20).

Alma explained, that his “joy” was “as exceeding as [had been his] pain!” He then stated, I “thought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded by numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God.” Alma is directly quoting Lehi’s words found in 1 Nephi 1:8. Why didn’t Alma put quotation marks around the quoted text? Quotation marks did not exist in Alma’s day. Punctuation marks were invented in Late Antiquity or in the Middle Ages. Greek and Hebrew texts of antiquity had no punctuation marks at all. Instead of using quotation marks, authors of ancient texts would say something like, “as Lehi said.” The reader was expected to realize that a direct quote was being used. And here, Alma quotes Lehi precisely. That’s pretty amazing, when you stop and think about it.

Further Reading

On a few of the several, precise, intertextual quotations within the Book of Mormon, see John W. Welch, “[Textual Consistency](#),” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 21–23.

Alma 37

Alma 37:1–8 — The Value of Sacred Records

After Alma gave the plates to Helaman, he explained the sacred responsibility that Helaman had over them. The plates of brass contained their genealogy, which was important, however, Alma pointed out that the plates also “contain these engravings, which have the records of the holy scriptures upon them” (Alma 37:3). The plates were to be handed down from generation to generation, and “kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord” (Alma 37:4). In other words, the plates were of such significance to the Lord that he would directly assist those charged with responsibility over them. The Lord had a plan and purpose for the records. As Alma explained, “they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon.” I wonder how Helaman felt about this heavy responsibility.

Verse 6 begins, “Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me.” Helaman had just been told that parts of these brass plates would end up going forth to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Has that prophecy been fulfilled? Of course, we do not have the brass plates preserved as one distinct book, but we certainly have large parts of the record in the Book of Mormon—the Isaiah material, the Zenos text that was used in Antionum, and his Allegory of the Olive Tree in Jacob 5. All of those holy passages came off the brass plates, and a lot of unique material from the brass plates has gone forth to the whole world in the Book of Mormon, as well as through the Book of Moses and

through the canonical Bible. This important prophecy is reiterated in D&C 133:37 where it states, “And this gospel shall be preached unto every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.”

Joseph Smith also made a similar prophecy. When my wife and I were at the John Johnson farm, we were shown a place behind the house where a few early priesthood holders had met with the Prophet. The men at that gathering were talking about the priesthood and Joseph asked them to bear testimony of the priesthood. After their expressions of testimony, Smith said to them, “Brethren, I have been very much edified and instructed in your testimonies here tonight, but I want to say to you before the Lord, that you know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother’s lap. ... It is only a little handful of Priesthood you see here tonight, but this Church will fill North and South America—it will fill the world” (see [Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith](#)).

That was an amazingly courageous prophecy to make. You can stand at the John Johnson farm today and look 360 degrees, in every direction, and see nothing. There was nothing there at the time Joseph made this prophecy, and there are only a few fields there now. It is amazing that Joseph could stand in a place of no real significance, among a few men, and prophesy that the Church would fill the earth. We have seen part of this prophecy come to pass in our own lifetimes. Not long ago, my wife and I housed a student in one of our spare bedrooms who spent her time translating the Book of Mormon into Malagasy for the Island of Madagascar. In a relatively short time, and now with the Internet especially, we have seen this work go to every far corner of the world.

Why has the Lord chosen the Book of Mormon as a means of spreading his gospel to the entire world? Alma gave the following explanation as to why the plates were going to be so valuable and useful: “[F]or behold, they 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). Those three purposes still stand today as reasons why the Book of Mormon is what this world needs now.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Is the Book of Mormon Like Any Other Nineteenth Century Book? \(Alma 37:6\).”](#) *KnoWhy* 502 (February 16, 2019).

Alma 37:14–22 — Alma Encourages Helaman in His Responsibilities

Alma didn’t want Helaman to feel overwhelmed with the burden of preserving the plates. Alma had given him a heavy load and entrusted him with enormous responsibility. However, this responsibility came with a promise: “And now remember, my son Helaman, that God has entrusted you with these things, which are sacred, which

he has kept sacred, and also which he will keep and preserve for a wise purpose” (37:14). Alma continued: “For [God] will fulfill all his promises which he shall make unto you, for he has fulfilled his promises which he has made unto our fathers” (37:17).

At times, we may feel overwhelmed by the trials we face as we endeavor to fulfill our life missions. If we do, we can think about the promises that God has made to us. There are important promises in the covenants we have made with God—especially in his temples.

Alma 37:25–34 — The Lord Uses the Jaredite Record to Teach His Children

Alma then gave another set of plates to Helaman—the 24 gold Jaredite plates. This set of plates was not filled with good news for people of the future, but it could be read as a warning. The people of Jared were destroyed and obliterated. They fought to the bitter death, and their civilization fell, was destroyed, and lost.

Alma taught Helaman that God had said, “I will bring forth out of darkness unto light all their secret works and their abominations” (37:25). In the face of injustices and struggles, it is at least of some comfort to know that all things will be brought out into the open. There is nothing that is hidden that will not eventually be brought to light and to judgment. There may be trials, troubles and tribulations, but they will not last forever. And we will eventually be lifted up at the last day if we are faithful.

Speaking of the destructions and curses on the land, Alma added:

And now, my son, remember the words which I have spoken unto you; trust not those secret plans unto this people, but teach them an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity. Preach unto them repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ; teach them to humble themselves and to be meek and lowly in heart; teach them to withstand every temptation of the devil, with their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ. Teach them to never be weary of good works, but to be meek and lowly in heart; for such shall find rest to their souls. (37:32–34)

Alma’s words enabled Helaman to see the brighter side of a very difficult situation. This can help us in our world today. We live in troubled times, but there are things we can do to be happy, find peace, and remain positive as trials of the world surround us.

Alma 38

Alma 38:2 — Alma Has Joy in Shiblon

I like what Alma does when he talks to these sons. In Alma 38:2, he said to Shiblon, “And now, my son, I trust that I shall have great joy in you.” Wow! Our children need to

know that we are confident and that they are going to give us joy. They need to know that they are loved. As a grandparent, have you told your grandchildren that you are happy with who they are—that they give you joy? If so, it surely meant a lot. Alma then described two specific attributes of this young boy—“steadiness” and “faithfulness unto God.” “Steadiness”—that is a remarkable adjective to use to describe a young person. Do we build up confidence in our children and our grandchildren by describing their positive attributes?

Alma 38:1–8 — Shiblon Receives a Single Blessing

Alma’s teaching of his conversion to Shiblon follows the same pattern as the conversion story given to Helaman in Alma 36, but Shiblon was given only the first half of it. Each line of both narratives led directly to the main central point. However, the story given to Shiblon ends at the center and does not continue working its way out and back to the beginning.

[Note: The line numbers in the discussion below refer to the element numbers in the chiasitic structure of this account given to Helaman in Alma 36 above.]

Alma begins in Alma 38:1 with the words, “My son, give ear to my words.” This matches line 1 in the beginning of the blessing given to Helaman.

Next, still in 38:1, Alma says, “For I say unto you *even as I said to Helaman* [expressly recognizing these repetitions], that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land.”

These words match words in line 2 in Alma 36.

At the end of 38:4, Alma recognized that Shiblon had faced many trials and bore them with patience “and now thou knowest that the Lord did deliver thee.”

Those words are found in line 5 in Alma 36.

In 38:5, Alma said, “Now my son, Shiblon, I would that ye should remember, that as much as ye shall put your trust in God [see line 7] . . . ye shall be delivered out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions, and ye shall be lifted up at the last day” see line 8.”

Then in 38:6 he says, “Now, my son, I would not that ye should think that I know these things of myself.” That matches line 9. “But it is the spirit of God which is in me.” In other words, Alma knew this by the Holy Ghost, which is line 11.

Continuing in 38:6, Alma says to Shiblon, “For if I had not been born of God I should not have known these things.”

That is in line 10 in the Alma 36 telling.

Alma then states in verse 7: “But behold, the Lord in his great mercy sent his angel.” This has reference to the angel in line 13.

This is followed in verse 7 with other words from lines 12 and 13, as Alma continues in 38:7, “to declare unto me that I must stop the work of destruction among his people.”

In 38:7, Alma added a bit of important information that was not mentioned when he spoke to Helaman, “Yea, and I have seen an angel face to face, and he spake with me and his voice was as thunder . . .”

Then, after that addition, Alma resumes with line 13 in the Helaman version, “. . . and it shook the whole earth.”

Verse 8 states, “And it came to pass that I was three days and three nights in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul.”

These details about the “three days and three nights” and “pains” were mentioned in line 14.

Alma continues in 38:8, “Never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins.” And with that, we have reached the words in the turning point of Alma 36, line 15’.

And finally, to Shiblon, Alma said in 38:8, “But behold, I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul” and “a remission of my sins.”

In 36:19, Alma had similarly told Helaman, “I could remember my pains no more” and was “harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more” lines 16’ and 15’.

Shiblon’s blessing ends at the center of Helaman’s blessing. While the climax of Alma’s conversion story is reached essentially at the same point in both speeches, for Shiblon Alma gave just half the account he had given in his blessing to Helaman.

And then, as Alma continues, he gave Shiblon a short section of wise practical advice in the rest of Alma 38, whereas he had given Helaman a long set of administrative instructions in Alma 37.

Thus, in effect and on two counts, Helaman got a double blessing, and Shiblon got the single blessing, all of which is consistent with the normal rule that the oldest son was entitled to the double blessing.

Alma 38:9 — Christ is the Source of True Wisdom

In Alma 38:9–15, Alma pleads with Shiblon to “learn wisdom,” that salvation comes only in and through Christ. “Behold, he is the life and the light of the world. Behold, he is the word of truth and righteousness.” Alma goes on to give Shiblon about a dozen valuable lines of proverbial wisdom and spiritual advice to guide and encourage him in his life.

Alma 38:10–12 — Boldness, Not Overbearance

Alma told Shiblon to “continue to teach.” Sometimes we stop teaching too soon. We should not give up. Shiblon was also told to be diligent and temperate in all things. This couplet strikes a delicate balance. Diligence can become compulsive, and temperance can become too mild. Avoiding pride is crucial, but boasting may be fine, so long as it is not about our own wisdom or strength.

Likewise, to speak with boldness, but not overbearance. This also makes an important and fine distinction. For example, parents do not want to be overbearing with our children. But at the same time, we certainly do not want to dodge discussing important issues, be ambivalent, or send mixed messages. We should be clear when communicating; this is an important parenting skill that we could all work on.

Alma 38:13–14 — How to Pray

Alma continued advising Shiblon, giving him, and us also, guidance in how to pray. Shiblon was told not to pray like the Zoramites. Do not pray “to be heard of men” or “to be praised for . . . wisdom.” Do not say, “O God, I thank thee that we are better than our brethren.”

Alma also mentions something we should include in our prayers: “Oh Lord forgive me my unworthiness, and remember my brethren in mercy—yea, acknowledge your unworthiness before God at all times.” Alma 38:14 is a model for something we can include in our prayers.

Alma 38:15 — What Does Alma Mean by “Sober?”

Alma’s last word of advice to Shiblon was, “Be sober.” The word “sober” may derive from the root “*sofia*” which means “wisdom.” Now days, when we describe people as “sober” (other than in an alcoholic context), we are saying that they are deliberate, they are thoughtful, they are in control. These are all strong attributes. Also included could be serious, sensitive, and solemn, as well as practical, dignified and restrained. Thus, Alma’s admonition to be sober is closely related to his most famous advice given to Shiblon, in verse 12, to “see that ye bridle all your passions,” together with the most consequential contrast of them all, “that ye may be filled with love.”

ALMA 39–42

John W. Welch Notes



Alma 39–42 — Alma Uses a Different Pattern of Speech for Corianton

When Alma spoke to Helaman and Shiblon, he used wonderful expressions, aphorisms, and wisdom statements that are meaningful even when they stand alone. When Alma addressed Corianton, the density of the wisdom literature is not as great here, partly because the pearls are scattered among many other things that Alma needed and chose to address. There are enough wisdom sayings to see that these chapters were written by the same Alma, but he was having to use a much different style because of Corianton’s very different and crucial needs.

Thus, as you read, notice the number of times Alma makes strong, personal declarations, uses imperatives, asks blunt rhetorical questions, and poses bold statements of incontrovertible axioms of truth. We will do well to ponder each one of these propositions and consider how they might apply to our lives, as much as they applied to Corianton’s. For example,

- “I would not dwell upon your crimes to harrow up your soul if it were not for your good” (39:7)
- “Ye cannot hide your crimes from God” (39:8)
- “Seek not after riches nor the vain things of this world, for behold, you cannot carry them with you” (39:14)
- “Time only is measured unto men” (40:8)
- “No unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of God” (40:26)
- “If their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good. And if their works are evil they shall be restored unto them for evil.” (41:3)
- “The decrees of God are unalterable” (41:8)

- “Do not risk one more offense against your God upon those points of doctrine, which ye have hitherto risked to commit sin” (41:9)
- “It was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness” (42:8)
- “Except it were for these conditions of repentance in this probationary state, mercy could not take effect except it destroy the work of justice” (42:13)
- “But there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted” (42:22)
- “...God would cease to be God” (42:13, 22, 25)
- “Do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice?” (42:25)
- “Only let your sins trouble you, with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance” (42:29)
- Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point because of your sins” (42:30)

In addition, although we need to read between the lines in these four chapters, it is not difficult to detect what Corianton’s doctrinal questions and religious problems were. Many of these problems came straight out of the complaint-book of Nehor and Korihor. For instance:

- Corianton apparently believed that forgiveness for sin was easy to obtain (39:6)
- He thought he could hide his crimes from God (39:9)
- He was not at ease with the idea of knowing future things before they actually happened (39:17)
- He was worried about the resurrection of the dead (40:1)
- He wondered why no one had been resurrected yet (40:2)
- He saw it as a problem that all people could be resurrected at the same time (40:17)
- He probably doubted the physical nature of the resurrection (40:24)
- He twisted and wrested the meaning of the word “restoration” (41:1, 15)
- He did not see how a just God could or would punish sinners (42:1), and
- He flatly denied the justice of God (42:30)

As you read, pay attention to the many ways that Alma rebutted and corrected these persistent errors, adapting his previous public answers to these questions to now suit the individual needs of his youngest son Corianton. Notice how delicately he uses sincere pleading, testimony, scriptures, words of the prophets, linguistics, air-tight logic, commandments, and humble admissions that he does not know it all.

Ultimately, Alma chose, in effect, to correct Corianton by focusing on the last two of the seven elements in what he had called the “Word” in Alma 33:23, which he said that all people should “plant ... in your hearts.” Those two final elements were that the Lord Jesus

shall “bring to pass the resurrection” and that “all men shall stand before [God] to be judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works” (33:22). Alma focused here on the doctrines of the resurrection in chapter 40 and on the doctrines of the judgment in chapters 41–42.

As you individually or with your family read the ninety-one verses in this very tightly woven and maturely sophisticated text, consider carefully how all of Alma’s profound words address our needs today, both in general for Latter-day Saints as a people and also to you and your family in particular:

Which of Corianton’s problems are still with or around us today? How do Alma’s responses still offer compelling and satisfying answers?

What has helped you personally to recognize the seriousness of sin and to inspire someone else on the path of turning away through repentance?

How can you help your family members increase their faith in the principle of resurrection and in the reality of the world to come?

How can one spiritually internalize more deeply the very core of Alma’s explanation that God can be, and indeed must be, both just and merciful?

Alma 39

Alma 39:2–4 — Corianton Followed the Harlot Isabel

Corianton’s story may well capture your attention as it has captured the imagination of many writers, dramatists, and artists, including the famous Book of Mormon painter Minerva Teichert. She once painted a small Corianton scene on 18” x 12” sketchbook-sized paper. Until recently, it was unknown to art collectors, but it came on the market and was purchased not long ago by a private buyer who has shared it generously in *BYU Studies*. The sketch likely dates to around 1949–1951. Even members of the Minerva Teichert family had never seen or known of it. [I am happy to show it here](#) (Figure 1).

The scene depicts Corianton with someone, presumably his brother Shiblon, trying to pull him back, while he is being lured by Isabel, who is in the middle with her dancing friends in the background. The painting did not have a name, but when we published it in *BYU Studies*, I gave it the name of *Isabel’s Seduction of Corianton*.

The painting, is clearly based on Alma 39:3–4,

Thou didst do that which was grievous unto me for thou didst forsake the ministry and did go over into the land of Siron among the borders of the Lamanites after

the harlot Isabel. Yea she did steal away the hearts of many, but this was no excuse for thee, my son.



Figure 1 *The Seduction of Corianton* by Minerva Teichert.

The painting was owned by an old Wyoming rancher, to whom Minerva had given it when he lived across the street from her when he was only about 10 years old. He was not a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but according to his story, Minerva may have thought that it would help him to resist temptation someday or might interest him in the Book of Mormon.

The story of Corianton had long been very popular, and beginning in 1889, B. H. Roberts, who was 32 years old at the time, ran a series of articles about the Corianton story in the *Contributor*, an old magazine that was run by the Sunday School program. The stories started with Alma 31 and the mission to Antionum. Roberts wrote of all the problems that were involved, the conversion needed there, and how Alma surely needed Corianton's help in trying to correct the problems of the Zoramites. But Corianton was evidently influenced by some of the people he was trying to convert. The series ended with Corianton's repentance, and was very a dramatic, fictionalized expansion of the story.

Shortly after that, playwright Orestes U. Bean turned it into a dramatic script, and in 1902 it was performed in the Salt Lake Theater to some acclaim. Twenty years later, Lester and Byron Park helped Bean turn it into a film, but it did not meet with much success.

In 1902, the young Minerva Teichert was taken to the stage production of *Corianton* by her art teacher, and she wrote in her diary how impressed she was. Elements in the script for the stage play and also in the content of B. H. Roberts' series are detectable in the painting. It was her way of conveying that story in paint.

The story of Corianton is compelling perhaps because it does not go into the details. It can represent many kinds of serious transgressions that we encounter in our own lives or are asked to help with in our ministering to others. Whether we are Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, ministering brothers or sisters, or a bishop, we can emulate Alma's example of kindness directness in helping his son come to the point of repentance.

Further Reading

Herman du Toit "[Minerva Teichert's The Seduction of Corianton](#)," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, No. 2 (2015): 162–165.

Alma 39:5–9 — Corianton's Sins Were Serious

Alma did not shy away from acknowledging the severity of Corianton's sins in Alma 39:5. And from 39:6, it appears that Corianton believed it to be easy to obtain forgiveness for sin, but Alma admonished him: "Yea, I say unto you my son, it is not easy for [a person who knowingly transgresses against the light and knowledge of God] to obtain forgiveness." It sounds as though Corianton had tried to excuse himself and to dismiss his awful transgressions by downplaying their severity. Alma taught that these are very serious transgressions, and warned, "Behold, ye cannot hide your crimes from God." This statement only makes sense if Corianton had been under the impression that he could hide his sins from God. Alma followed that by making his point clear, "Now my son I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes" (Alma 39:9), still referring to Corianton as "my son," in a kindly manner.

In Ammonihah, in Alma 12–13, Alma fought for his *own* life. Here, however, he is fighting for his *son's* life. There is a greater feeling of love and concern, and a real desire to be very clear in a way that was harder when Alma was addressing a whole nation, as in Alma 5, when he could not be quite as specific as he was with Corianton. This guidance for Corianton was likely given toward the end of Alma's life, as this is the last thing heard from him. It is almost as if he saved the best for last. He may have realized that this was his last chance, and decided to give Corianton all he could. Last words, or last testimonies, tend to have something special about them, such as King Benjamin's last testimony or

Elder Bruce R. McConkie's final testimony. Alma did not indicate that he was going to be gone, but it may be that some such intuition intensified his text.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Was Corianton's Sin So Serious? \(Alma 39:5\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 147 (July 20, 2016). "In effect, Corianton metaphorically 'murdered' the testimonies of those he was commissioned to bring unto Christ when he was lured away by Isabel."

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Does Alma Say about Avoiding Sexual Sin? \(Alma 39:9\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 326, (June 14, 2017).

Alma 39:11 — When They Saw Your Conduct, They Would Not Believe in My Words.

Alma was distressed not only because of the eternal danger in which Corianton had placed himself, but for those who saw his example and failed to accept the gospel because of it. This is a good example of the principle that sometimes our choices can have very far-reaching consequences. The impact of Alma's son Corianton on the Zoramites is a good example of this principle. One may well wonder, where does my right to do what I want end and my duty to not injure others begin? Although popular philosophy often discounts, if not ignores, the moral imperatives of our duties to other people, the concept of duty is given priority by the Golden Rule and the second great commandment, to love others as we love ourselves, and to do unto others as we would want other people to do unto us.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Impact Do My Actions Have on Others? \(Alma 39:11\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 390 (December 14, 2017). "Sometimes, we may try to rationalize our sins by thinking 'I'm not hurting anyone else.' But before we do this, we would do well to think about the wide-reaching effects of Corianton's sin, and consider the impact our sins might have on others."

Alma 39:17 — Would Christ Would Really Come?

Alma did not explicitly say what Corianton was upset about in this regard, but it appears that Corianton was preoccupied with some of the fundamental truth-claims of the Gospel. How could he know that Christ would come so long before Christ actually came? How could he know that there will be a resurrection? These were common questions in the Book of Mormon before the first coming of Christ. They are still pressing questions as the world awaits the Second Coming.

If people reject the coming of the Savior, or do not believe in resurrection, then a corollary is that sin is not a serious matter. In 2 Nephi, that same point had been raised. Some people believed in the resurrection of the dead, but the issue was contested frequently, even among the Nephites. For example, in Mosiah 26:1, we are told that the rising generation “could not understand the words of king Benjamin, being little children at the time he spake unto his people,” and in Mosiah 26:2, “they did not believe what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead.” That was the generation that Alma the Younger had been a part of. One of the concerns that Alma the Younger had was that an increasing number did not believe in the resurrection. Likewise, in Alma 30, Korihor did not see how a just God could punish a sinner. Nehor also argued that God would not punish people and that everyone should be saved.

If we look back over the previous chapters in the book of Alma and examine all of Corianton’s problems, the same undercurrents of argument kept arising. We might have thought that Korihor had been put to rest when he was convicted, smitten, and trampled. However, the last place he went to was the city of Antionum. That is where Corianton had served a mission, so maybe he had encountered some of those ideas among the Zoramites. Korihor had been quite successful in the city of Zarahemla; Nehor also had many followers.

These were clearly not new arguments. Alma had heard them before, and he gave us very carefully thought-out answers to each of these questions. Sometimes, he just rebutted them with his testimony; at other times he quoted scripture. When he taught about the resurrection and how the body would be raised to a perfect form, he quoted his missionary companion, Amulek. In Alma 10 and again in Alma 34, Amulek taught the same doctrines. Here in Alma’s teaching of Corianton, these principles were brought together and crystallized.

Alma 40

Alma 40:6–9 — Time Is Measured Only unto Men

Alma taught about resurrection, life, and death, teaching specifically about a time and “space” being allowed between death and the resurrection. In this chapter, in which he said, “Time only is measured unto men” (Alma 40:9), he explained that we measure our lives by our time on the earth. God does not. He sees the whole picture. In that sense, God is not subject to a limitation on time. Only God knows how long our time in various stages will be, and He knows the right time for us to be resurrected as well as to die. That is the real subject matter of this chapter. God relates to time in an infinite way with infinite cognition. We can only really look at our current span.

Alma 40: 11–12 — Time in the Spirit World

Alma described what happens during this space of time between death and resurrection. After death—as Alma had learned from “an angel” after he had “inquired diligently” (40: 3, 11)—all men, “whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life” (Alma 40:11; see also 40:21). Our spirit then goes to what we commonly call “the post-mortal spirit world,” either into a state that is called paradise, “a state of rest, a state of peace,” or into another state that is called prison.

Both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young said that the spirit world is really all around us, and even the spirits who are in what we call spirit prison are not locked up. They function in some ways as we do here on earth, but many there have not yet have the required saving ordinances so that they can do all that most of them would like to do. They are not resurrected yet. The resurrection comes after our time in the spirit realm and at the appointed time for each person. To call someone forth to be resurrected is to be understood as a priesthood ordinance.

Further Reading

Brigham Young, “The Spirit World,” in Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young, chapter 38 (1997): 279.

Spencer W. Kimball, “Our Great Potential,” General Conference April 1977.

Alma 40:15–20 — Consignation to Happiness or Misery in the Spirit World

Apparently, there had been some confusion in Alma’s day about the status of spirits and the time of judgment in post-mortal life. The assignment to paradise, for example, is a judgment based our earthly lives: what ordinances we have received, how we have used our stewardship, etc. Alma refers to that as the “consignation to happiness or misery.” This, he points out, is not to be confused with the first resurrection, which refers to the time when a first group of spirits are resurrected.

Alma reinforced the idea that, although the consignation to happiness and misery is a form of preliminary judgment, that is not the same as “the first resurrection,” nor does the resurrection occur for all people at the same time. As Alma said, people do not all die at the same time (40:8), so why do they need to be resurrected at the same time? We do not know how that will happen, or when it will happen, but eventually these points of judgment will occur.

Alma 40:21–22 — When We Are Resurrected, We Will be Judged

Alma specified that after the resurrection, we will be brought to stand before God with our bodies and be judged (Alma 40:21). Before that, there will be a level of judgment that will determine where people will reside in the spirit world, but the final judgment comes

after our spirits and bodies are reunited (40:21). Thus, according to doctrine in the Book of Mormon, after resurrection, when we will stand before God to be judged, we must appear with and in our bodies. Thus, the Book of Mormon sees a need to return and report with our bodies to be judged according to the things that we have done in our bodies. For example, as Jacob said:

O how great the plan of our God! For on the other hand, the paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous, and the grave deliver up the body of the righteous; and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect. *Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge* of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness (2 Nephi 9:13–14).

We will know then that the judgment given to us is just, because we will remember perfectly, both physically and spiritually, as is somehow necessary. (If we have repented, of course, we will not have a recollection of those sins and the Lord will remember them no more. This may mean that some of us may not have much to remember on that occasion, if we have repented well enough!) But, how we know and what we know must somehow be embedded in our physical makeup. In another setting, the Doctrine and Covenants similarly says that knowledge—the degree of intelligence that we have attained to in this life—will rise with us in the resurrection (130:18). This is the good news that Alma wanted Corianton to recognize. But with it comes the corresponding bad news that the same degree of darkness and error that we have attained to in this life will rise with us also, unless we have by that point in time truly repented.

Alma 40:22–26 — The Restoration Spoken by the Mouths of the Prophets

Alma's discussion of the word *restoration* highlights the consequences of our actions. Nehor spread the doctrine that God had created all men, and He would restore them to the state of purity that they had started. To the Nehorites, the word *restoration* meant that God would *return* us all to the Garden of Eden, or some paradise. Nehor thus believed that all people would be saved, and therefore sin is not an issue. Alma clarified that the full restoration, which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets (v. 22) comes after the judgment (v. 21): "And then shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of God. But behold, an awful death cometh upon the wicked; for they die as to things pertaining to things of righteousness" (Alma 40:25–26). The correct understanding of the meaning of the word *restoration* is then the main topic in Alma 41.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why and How Did Alma Explain the Meaning of the Word 'Restoration'? \(Alma 41:1\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 149 (July 22, 2016).

Alma 41

Alma 41:1–4, 10–15 — Not Everyone Will be Resurrected to the Same Glory

Alma continued to clarify the meaning of the word *restoration*. Because there are natural consequences to sin, when we are bad, things are unhappy in our lives. There are consequences to our family and society; and there are consequences to us individually. We cannot expect to be brought into a state of happiness if we have not cultivated a character of happiness. You cannot be given good if you have not given out good. "Wickedness never was happiness" (v. 10). The whole point that Alma is making about the resurrection is that we will be brought before God with our whole body and soul. We will be resurrected so that a just judgment can be given out, so that all of the things that we have done, both spiritually and in our body will have an effect in the judgment. Then all appropriate blessings will be restored: "For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored; therefore, the word restoration more fully condemneth the sinner, and justifieth him not at all" (Alma 41:15). Alma was making sure that Corianton understood that the word *restoration* did not mean that his sins would be taken away and he would be restored to being perfect as he had been created. Alma wanted to make sure that his son realized that unless he repented, his sins would rise with him.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why and How Did Alma Explain the Meaning of the Word 'Restoration'? \(Alma 41:1\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 149 (July 22, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Can Wickedness Never Bring Happiness? \(Alma 41:10\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 329 (June 21, 2017).

Alma 41:13–14 — Chiasmus for Corianton Too

There is an interesting detail in these verses. I hope you will look carefully at the word orders used by Alma in presenting this principle of restoration. In Alma 41:13, he pointed out that restoration will mean "evil for evil, carnal for carnal, devilish for devilish." Then he added the good side (the side that he wanted Corianton to take note of), this means:

- (a) good for that which is (a') good,
- (b) righteous for that which is (b') righteous,

(c) just for that which is (c') just,
 and (d) mercy for that which is (d') merciful.

Then Alma applied this to Corianton's behavior, but in the reverse order: "Therefore, my son, see that ye:

are (d') merciful,
 deal (c') justly,
 judge (b') righteously, and
 do (a') good continually.

He went through these four terms exactly again. Remember, a good chiasm needs to be well balanced. In the first sequence, we have two *goods*; and in this first reversed list, we only have one *good*, so far. But keep reading! What does Alma go on to say? "Therefore, if ye do these things, you will get your reward," and what will you get? You will have:

(d) mercy restored unto you,
 (c) justice restored unto you
 you will have a (b) righteous judgment restored, and
 ye shall have (a) good rewarded unto you.

Very clever! First Alma went through a list of pairs, "*good for good*." The first *good* is the reward, and the second *good* is the quality a person must have to get that reward. Thus, *good* is the reward that we will get if we have the quality of being *good*. Then, after he had gone through this first "list of pairs," Alma went on to give two lists, "a pair of lists," in the opposite order. He listed the qualities he desired of Corianton in the reverse order, and then he listed the commensurate rewards that he would receive in that same reverse order. Thus, he balanced the chiasm. It is very interesting and creative how he has done this. As we have seen, Alma's blessings and commandments to Helaman in Alma 36 is a great chiasm, but here Alma constructed an equally brilliant chiasm of a much different sort for Corianton. Remember that in Alma 36 Alma used chiasmus to help convey the sense of conversion, the turning point in Alma's life. He was one thing, but now he is something else, so it all revolved around that turning point. Here in Alma 41, this very

cleverly balanced chiasm reinforces that same sense of restoration, hoping that Corianton will change to be one set of things so that he can be restored in the end to those characteristics and qualities.

By the way, when I read the German translation of this passage in 1967, I was disappointed that Alma had come close but was not precisely chiasmatically here, because the German rendered the first half of this text as follows:

- (a) Gutes/Gutes,
- (b) Rechtschaffenes/Rechtschaffenes
- (c) Gerechtes/Gerechtes
- (d) Barmherzigkeit/Barmherzigkeit.

But then in the second half, the order was:

- (d) Barmherzig
- (b) Rechtschaffen
- (c) Gerecht
- (a) Gutes.

Seeing it that way, I went on. It wasn't until several months later that I read this passage in English and there it was in perfect chiasmatic order! The German defect easily had occurred because the words in German for "justice" and "righteousness" are more interchangeable than they are in English. Seeing this was an added confirmation for me that Joseph Smith's translation is indeed miraculously accurate, even better than very diligent translators had done in the early twentieth century!

And now I'm happy to report that the 2003 German translation has fixed this dislocation and, indeed, that the Church handbook of instructions to translators in all languages now alerts all translators to be mindful of such literary patterns as chiasmus and to preserve them in the target language whenever possible.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why and How Did Alma Explain the Meaning of the Word 'Restoration'?](#) (Alma 41:1)," *KnoWhy* 149 (July 22, 2016).

Alma 42

Alma 42:1–9 — The Need for Mercy

When mankind was placed on this earth and Adam and Eve fell, God still had a choice of what to do for us. As Adam and Eve had sinned, He could have just cancelled the plan and obliterated the whole situation, according to verse 6. But, as Alma pointed out, it was part of God's strategy not to do that. He placed instead some boundaries and a flaming sword around the tree of life so they could not lock themselves into an eternally fallen state. He gave laws with blessings and punishments, so that Adam and Eve could make choices.

This point is important for Alma's logic. Because God chose to bear with us, He did so by appointing that we would die. We would not be stuck in this lone and dreary world forever. Providing us a way to return home to Him was an essential part of His loving plan. And so, He gave us time. We will not know how long our individual times will be, but we do know that we have time, a probationary time. That merciful gift is the heart of God's great plan of mercy, redemption and happiness.

Alma 42:10–13 — Mortality is a Probationary State to Repent

This is a very subtle point that undergirds Alma's extraordinary explanation of God's justice and mercy that runs throughout Alma 42. Why is the granting of time to repent so essential? Let's suppose that you commit a sin two minutes from now. If justice were the only virtue that God had, what would prevent God from punishing you for that sin, for allowing the full consequences of that transgression, to be felt in your life immediately? Indeed, if He is *just*, what justifies any delay in the imposition of that penalty? In our law, we have the concept of due process, and we give notice, and we give people time to gather their witnesses, to think about their arguments, and let them ponder over the consequences of the possible verdicts. Judges need time to hear all the arguments, read the law, and consider all the factors before issuing a judgment or verdict. But God does not need to gather any more evidence against us. He knows everything about our case already. And God does not need to study the law and wonder about the proper imposition of consequences in this particular case. He always judges rightly, and He does not need to delay, to double-check for mistakes or anything that has been overlooked. What is there, then, that stops Him from being perfectly just in acting right now? The answer is mercy. But He must also be merciful, since He perfectly embodies all virtues, and mercy is a virtue, and so He mercifully allows time for us to repent.

Of course, you cannot repent until you have committed sin, and if God were to immediately punish us the instant we sinned, there would be no chance at all to learn, no meaningful opportunity for choice and progression, let alone any need for or purpose to

the law of repentance. Alma explicitly connected the granting of this probationary time with the concept of mercy (Alma 42:23). It is the mercy of God that stands in the way of the sword of justice falling upon us immediately.

Yet, mercy cannot rob justice. And so, eventually, in its appointed time, justice will be met because God must be just. Thus He is both merciful and just, and therefore a perfect God in every sense.

In the 2007 film *The Bucket List*, a survey asked, “Would you like to know how much more time you have before you die?” In the movie, ninety-nine percent of the people in the survey said, “No, I would rather not know.” This film is about two people who are dying of cancer. They know their death is imminent, and the question is, how are they going to respond to it? Perhaps we do not like to think about the fact that we will die. We would rather not know whether we have 32 years or 32 days left, because we just do not like to confront the inevitability of our mortality. But in reality, there is a time allotted. God through His mercy has given us some amount of time, and we need to be sure to use that time for repentance.

Alma 42:5–16 — The Plan in All its Phases

Comprehending God’s justice and mercy require an understanding of God’s plan, for it is in the context of that plan that all of His many attributes operate and are made manifest. Thus, throughout Alma’s words to Corianton, Alma speaks often of what we usually call the Plan of Salvation, but he also points to different aspects of that plan of the Father. He spoke of the word “plan” ten times, used in the following terms:

- the plan of *restoration* (Alma 41:2),
- the great plan of *salvation* (Alma 42:5),
- the great plan of *happiness* (Alma 42:8, 16),
- the plan of *redemption* (Alma 39:18; 42:11, 13), and
- the plan of *mercy* (Alma 42:15, 15, 31).

We like to talk about the great plan of happiness or the plan of salvation. But when was the last time you spoke of or heard somebody talking about the plan of restoration or the plan of mercy? I do not think these are just synonymous names for *the plan*, because when you look at the context in which these different aspects of the great plan are spoken of, Alma was addressing different phases, different dimensions, different ways in which the plan is moved forward and its results, as well as who is moving the plan forward, how and in what ways, and for what purposes.

When Alma referred to the plan of mercy (Alma 42:15), he very movingly said, “and now the plan of mercy could not be brought about except ...” Mercy is essential, but it is a

means to an end, not an end in itself. Realize that Alma talks about restoration, salvation, justice, and the requirements that must be met, as well as mercy. He had described justice as necessary. He explained that justice requires certain things, and in order to achieve the eternal goals, there must be repentance. And in order for repentance to apply, Alma taught of all the factors that must come into play, and the last of many is the plan of mercy, which “could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore, God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:15). God himself needs to be merciful for His own great plan to work. And Alma knew this from his own conversion (Mosiah 27:28; Alma 38:7), and he had mentioned before that God’s “arms of mercy are extended” unto all men (Alma 5:33) and that, by His Atonement, His “bowels maybe filled with mercy according to the flesh” (Alma 7:12). But until Alma answers the deep theological questions of his son Corianton, we do not see him explaining mercy, and not just as a dimension of His plan, but as a necessary attribute of God.

Thus, to think that “the plan of mercy” is somehow just another way of talking about “the plan of salvation” misses many things. It is not just people on earth that must try to satisfy the plan of mercy. God himself is necessarily a party to this plan. He must provide for an atonement in order for the plan of mercy to work. God himself *must* be *merciful* as well as *just*. As Alma stated, He must be *a perfect, just God*. Thus, He must express all virtues. It is not enough that His children be merciful. They must learn to be as He is, which includes all the virtues that are brought into the plan. In Alma 42:13–14, Alma talked about justice and how justice cannot be destroyed; if God would let justice be destroyed, then He would cease to be God; but that cannot happen, and so we know that justice *must* exist, and also mercy, the time within which to satisfy the just demands of repentance. Most eloquently, Eliza R. Snow stated this full doctrine in the final verse of the hymn “How Great the Wisdom and the Love,” which reads, “Where justice, love, and mercy meet in harmony divine!” (Hymn 195, verse 6).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Are There So Many Different Names for the Plan of Salvation?](#) (Alma 42:5, 8, 13, 15),” *KnoWhy* 312 (May 12, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Does Alma Mention “the Plan” Ten Times in His Words to Corianton?](#) (Alma 42:13),” *KnoWhy* 150 (July 25, 2016).

Alma 42:13-15 — Mercy and Justice Are Crucial to the Plan of Salvation

The words *mercy* and *justice* in Hebrew have gender. *Wisdom* and *mercy* are represented by female concepts, whereas *justice* is often male. We do not know the Nephite language,

so we do not know if this was so in their language. However, Alma did indicate that they are opposites: “For behold, justice exerciseth all *his* demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is *her* own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved” (Alma 42:24). It is interesting that he expected God to be *both* just and merciful in order to be a perfect God. Perhaps the translation retained the male and female designations to say that, at one level, while *justice* and *mercy* are opposites of each other, they are both created in the image of God and they are necessary partners and counterparts to each other. In other words, males and females are both human beings, but are both manifestations of the same divine nature.

Along these lines, Elder James R. Rasband devoted an entire General Conference talk to this subject, how God’s judgment can, does, and must satisfy both the divine virtues of justice and mercy. The entire talk is a very clear and cogent sermon drawing primarily on Alma 42. He commented, in part, as follows:

A vital and peace-giving contribution of the Book of Mormon to our understanding of the Savior’s Atonement is its teaching that Christ’s merciful sacrifice fulfills all the demands of justice. As Alma explained, “God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” [Alma 42:15]. The Father’s plan of mercy—what the scriptures also call the plan of happiness or the plan of salvation—could not be accomplished unless all the demands of justice were satisfied. (Rasband, General Conference, April 2020).

In contrast, traditional theologians have often denied that God can be both *just* and *merciful*. They see this as a conflict, a contradiction, and God must be consistent. That problem may have arisen when the early Christian concept of God was defined by such philosophers as Augustine and Plato, who argued that God or the pure form can have no body and is beyond space and time. They argued that as God is eternal and timeless, and to be both *merciful* and *just* simultaneously would be philosophically impossible, and thus in their view, God must ultimately be one (mercy, love) or the other (justice, exacting). We do not believe in an abstract God like that. We believe in a God who not only had a body that exists in space, but also manages time, even uses time, and can grant a window of time for the benefit of his people. He can be just through His use of time and space to give a period of mercy.

Alma was not constrained by these philosophical limitations placed on the scriptural doctrine of God by Christian theology. Alma understood the nature of God, and his plan. He had encountered it in his own personal life and experience. Alma thus had both experience and revelation on his side.

Elder Rasband noted Alma’s sorrow as the demands of justice weighed on him: “Remember that as a young man, Alma went about seeking ‘to destroy the church.’ In fact, Alma told his son Helaman that he was ‘tormented with the pains of hell’ because he had effectively ‘murdered many of [God’s] children’ by leading ‘them away unto destruction’ (Alma 36:13–14). Then he noted what caused Alma’s joy and relief:

Alma explained to Helaman that peace finally came to him when his “mind caught hold” on his father’s teaching “concerning the coming of ... Jesus Christ ... to atone for the sins of the world” (Alma 36:17). A penitent Alma pleaded for Christ’s mercy (Alma 36:18) and then felt joy and relief when he realized that Christ had atoned for his sins and paid all that justice required. ... Part of Alma’s relief must have been that unless mercy interceded, justice would have prevented him from returning to live with Heavenly Father (Rasband, Conference April 2020).

Further Reading

James R. Rasband, “[Ensuring a Righteous Judgment](#),” General Conference April 2020.

Alma 42:23–25 — All Men Will Be Judged According to Their Works

What we as humans really hope for is for all of us to return to God, and to stand before Him to be judged. Many people fear the judgment of God. Righteous or repentant people, however, can and should look forward that day, because they know that all of this doctrine is true. As Alma said, death and dying is a necessary part of happiness, and without going through death, we would not be able to be raised, glorified, and restored. We think about the hope that we feel in situations of death, where we hope to see one another again. Knowing that the Gospel is true, we realize that the more we know it to be true, the more we repent, and the more that hope becomes a reality.

Alma 42:30 — Mercy Depends on Repentance

Alma expected his son to no longer deny the role of justice. Corianton had been led to believe that God would not punish people, thus there was no need for repentance. That is a sinner’s vain hope—an infinitely merciful God who does not apply the laws of justice, and therefore there is no point in repentance. They talk themselves into believing in a God who will just beat us with a few stripes and all will be well. As Nephi prophesied,

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. Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts,

and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark. (2 Nephi 28:8–9).

Corianton had probably learned that from Korihor and the Nehorites (see also the discussion above of Alma 39:17). Alma, on the other hand, clearly hoped and expected that Corianton would understand that justice and mercy go hand-in-hand together, and that repentance is a necessary component of God's plan of mercy, redemption, restoration, and of eternal salvation and happiness.

As we will see in the rest of the book of Alma, Corianton apparently took his father's advice and remained in good standing (Alma 42:31; 43:1–2; 63:10). What ways occur to you in which you can internalize more deeply the very core of Alma's explanation that God can be, and indeed must be, both just and merciful?

ALMA 43–52

John W. Welch Notes



In this very long block of chapters and also in the next, we will be covering the whopping total of twenty-one chapters that comprise the last third of the Book of Alma. This section in the Book of Mormon is often called “the war chapters.” And it can be a battle for average readers to get through them. I will save the discussion of warfare for the next installment of these Notes, so that all of these chapters can be analyzed together from the perspective of military science. In this set of Notes, we will look primarily for spiritual and other kinds of lessons that can be learned.

At this outset, pause to notice that the nature of the Book of Alma shifts here quite decisively in two ways: First, Alma leaves. He will soon depart and not return. His son Helaman will emerge as the leading high priest of the Church until he dies, as reported in Alma 62:52. So one might wonder, Why wasn’t this block of text presented as a separate book called “the Book of Helaman, the Son of Alma”? One answer, as we will see, is that this seven-year period of war is the direct aftermath of problems that began in Alma 28–35.

Second, Mormon takes greater charge of the narrative. At this point, Mormon will become much more prominent as historian, abridger and narrator. This makes good sense because four hundred years later Mormon himself was the Nephite military commander. He had studied these records from the perspective of war. He appreciated the practical and spiritual lessons that his predecessors had learned, as well as those that they should have learned, from the high costs and risks of war. He knew that we, as his latter-day readers, would need to learn many of these same lessons, most of which Mormon’s own people failed to learn, which led to their destruction. Thus, even though Mormon does not mention himself by name anywhere in the Book of Mormon until 3 Nephi 5:12, we can tell that these war chapters could only have been produced by someone like Mormon, the

prophet and commander in chief. These military chapters are indeed very meticulous, precise, and purposeful.

But pause again, and think about that for a moment. Joseph Smith did not know anything about ancient military science. And, from the records he had translated up to this point, as far as we know, he didn't yet know the name of the abridger of this record that he was bringing forth! While the names of Mormon and Moroni are on the Title Page of the Book of Mormon, Joseph did not translate that the Title Page until after he had translated the Book of Moroni—since the Title Page was at the back of the plates of Mormon, as Joseph Smith once said. It is possible that the Angel Moroni told Joseph a few things about his father Mormon, or that he may have learned something about Mormon in translating the 116 pages that got lost; but until 3 Nephi 5:12, the name of Mormon had not come up in the translation of the books of Mosiah or Alma. Before 3 Nephi 5, Joseph would not yet have known from the record anything about Mormon's purposes, his personality, his interests in warfare, let alone his apparent fondness for "the Waters of Mormon" (mentioned 12 times in Mosiah 18). Nor would Joseph have had any hint that Mormon might have named his own son Moroni, after the bold Captain Moroni, who figures prominently throughout these war chapters. Naturally, we think of Mormon's role in these connections as we read these war chapters, but they make sense to us only because we already know how the story of the Book of Mormon will end. But imagine Joseph Smith's sense of surprise and discovery as these intertwining details first emerged to his understanding as the text of the Book of Mormon unfolded before his eyes.

Alma 43

For each of the following chapters, here are some study questions for you to consider as you read. I used these questions to start class discussions. I hope they will also help you to see spiritual lesson from these chapters of military history.

1. What can you do to be sure that you are preaching "the word and the truth according to the spirit of prophecy and revelation"? (43:2)
2. How can people today best "support their lands, and their houses, and their wives, and their children"? (43:9)
3. Can young people help the world in special ways to be prepared, with innovative ideas, that will help people today to win life's battles? (43:17–20)

4. Captain Moroni was smart and faithful enough both to gather information and to consult with the prophet before he went into battle (43:23). Have you ever done something similar when you faced an important decision in your own life? How did it turn out for Moroni? How did it turn out for you?
5. What justified the Nephites' defensive use of military force in going to battle against their enemies? (43:46–47)

Alma 43:1–2 — Alma and His Sons Preached the Gospel

At the outset, what did Alma and his sons choose to do? They chose to “go forth among the people, to declare the word unto them” (Alma 43:1). Alma’s words to Corianton in Alma 42 had a negative, though kindly, tone to them. Corianton had a lot of doctrines wrong, and Alma was straightforward and blunt in talking to him. When we finish reading that powerful chapter, we as readers are almost gasping for air! And then we turn the corner into Alma 43, and what did Alma do after delivering all of those powerful instructions to his three sons? They all picked right up and got back to work! Alma himself took his sons—Corianton included—and they went to work together. Work will win when wishing won’t. Work is a big part of what we can and should do in facing our most challenging times.

We have not talked much about Mormon up to this point in the Book of Mormon. It is his book, and we need to realize that he was not far in the background deciding which points we would need most. While Mormon was a great general, that was only his day job. He was grounded in the gospel first and foremost (as we will learn firsthand from his words later on).

In Alma 43:2, Mormon declines to elaborate more about their preaching, even though that is something we would love to know more about. He assumes we can figure that out from all he has included in Alma 5, 7, 12–13, and 32–42. But here, Mormon did add, “except to say that they preached *the word* and *the truth* according to the spirit of *prophecy* and *revelation*, and they preached *after the Holy Order of God* by which they were called.” At this point, Mormon wanted us to know that, whatever they specifically said about the plan of eternal salvation, they delivered that message in a holy way. They were motivated by the spirit of prophecy, they spoke as revelators, and they stayed within the scope of their holy priesthood authority and calling. Thus, they were able to give the people exactly what they needed most in order to righteously fill their needs at that time.

Alma 43:2 — How Do We Teach by the Spirit of Prophecy and Revelation?

What can we do to ensure that we “preach the word and the truth according to the spirit of prophecy and revelation”? What can we do to be sure that we are preaching *the word*?

What was *the word* in Alma's vocabulary? In Alma 33:22–23, *the word* was shorthand for what we would call the Plan of Salvation, and especially its central focus on the Atonement and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Alma's sons went out and continued to preach *the word*, as they had in Alma 31–34. They focused on *the word*, and we should do the same, remaining focused on what matters most and being certain that *it* is what we are ultimately teaching as we minister today.

This text speaks of preaching *the word* and preaching *the truth* according to the spirit of *prophecy* and *revelation*. What might be the difference here between *prophecy* and *revelation*? Presumably, these are not just synonyms. And are there differences between *the word* and *the truth*? The gift of the spirit is that we can see things as they were, as they are, and as they will be. Seeing everything—that grand sweep of time, as when Moses saw the great unfolding of things from beginning to end. Perhaps you have the gift of seership to see the past, the spirit of prophecy to foresee the future, and the revelatory power of unveiling the way things actually are in order to speak the present. This can help us be sure that while we are proclaiming the message to the nations and to our families, we are also striving to focus on all three domains of truth—past, present, and future—and to do this in a way that will help people embrace the fullness of the gospel.

Alma 43:3 — How Are the War Chapters Relevant Today?

If you have any doubt about how relevant the “warfare” chapters of Alma are for our day, think back over your lifetime and count the years when there were not wars occurring somewhere in the world? There have been “hot” and “cold” wars, and a continuous array of the problems that the Book of Mormon addresses. How far does this condition go back? All the way back to the War in Heaven! As long as we live in an age of agency and accountability, there will be people making choices, and pressures will be placed to persuade people to go one way or another. We have to stand up, be counted, and be engaged in every possible way or things will turn out a way they should not. There are important lessons for us to learn here.

In the ancient world, wars were not named as we might name them today, but we may think of them as we would our own historical campaigns. The wars in the Book of Mormon were not all the same. There were different parties involved in each of these wars with different and specific causes. We can see why these wars were fought. They were fought with different technology, with different strategies, and with very different outcomes. This is precisely what Chart 137 shows (Figure 1), as it names 15 wars, giving their dates, locations, causes, and outcomes. I hope this chart will help you understand how each was as a very unique conflict. All wars were not created equal. So, avoid approaching each of these war chapters with the attitude, “Oh, here we go again with just

another war.” Strive to discover what really happened in each case and what you can learn from it. Conflicts today are likewise unique and complicated.

Data on Wars Involving the Nephites

War	Dates	Location	Causes	References	Results
1. Early tribal wars	6th–2nd century B.C.	Land of Nephi	A popular and fraternal hatred; resentment; desire to destroy the Nephites	Jacob 1:10, 14; Enos–Omni	Nephites did not thrive and later left land of Nephi
2. Wars of King Laman’s sons	160–150 B.C.	City of Nephi, land of Zarahemla	Lamanite fear of growing Nephite strength; Lamanite belief that Nephi had wronged his elder brothers	Mosiah 9–10; Omni 1:24; W of M 1:13–14	Established land of Zarahemla as Nephite territory and land of Nephi as Lamanite territory
3. War of Amlici	87 B.C./ 5th year of reign of judges (R.I.)	Zarahemla, hill Amnihu, river Sidon	Political unrest caused by changing the government from a kingship to a judgeship	Alma 2–3	Uneasy peace in Zarahemla with Alma as chief judge
4. Destruction of Ammonihah	81 B.C./ 11 R.I.	Ammonihah	Lamanites seeking revenge on the Nehorites for causing a civil war	Alma 16:1–11; 24:1–25:14	Virtual elimination of Nehorites as a political force
5. War of the Ammonite secession	77 B.C./ 15 R.I.	Zarahemla, land of Jershon	Lamanites attack in retaliation for the Ammonite secession	Alma 28	Ammonites established in land of Jershon
6. Zoramite war	74 B.C./ 18 R.I.	Between Antionum and Jershon	Lamanites attack in retaliation for the Zoramite secession	Alma 43–44	Important use of innovative armor; a Zoramite oath never to attack again

War	Dates	Location	Causes	References	Results
7. First Amalickiahite war	72 B.C./ 20 R.J.	Ammonihah, Noah, east seacoast near the narrow neck of land	Political unrest caused by Amalickiah, who dissented from Nephites with political ambitions	Alma 46:1–50:11	Amalickiah defeated, but he swore to return and to kill Captain Moroni
8. Second Amalickiahite war (seven years' war)	67–61 B.C./ 25–31 R.J.	Throughout land of Zarahemla	Return of Amalickiah, coinciding with the armed revolt of the king-men and his brother Ammoron's assumption of the Lamanite kingship	Alma 51–62	A very costly Nephite victory
9. Rebellion of Paanchi	52 B.C./ 40 R.J.	City of Zarahemla	Dispute over Pahoran, son of Pahoran, becoming chief judge	Hel. 1:1–13	Paanchi executed; Pahoran assassinated
10. War of Tubaloth	51 B.C./ 41 R.J.	Cities of Zarahemla and Bountiful	After the turmoil of Paanchi's rebellion, Coriantumr tried to capture the throne of Zarahemla	Hel. 1:14–34	The rise of Gadianton robbers
11. War of Moronihah	38, 35–30 B.C./54, 57–62 R.J.	Land of Zarahemla	Continuing dissension in the church	Hel. 4	Half of Nephite lands occupied by dissenters; Nephi resigns judgment seat

War	Dates	Location	Causes	References	Results
12. War of Gadianton and Kishkumen	26–19 B.C./ 66–73 A.D.	Entire land, but centered in the land of Zarahemla	Assassinations of chief judges Cezoram and his son; Gadianton robbers attain power	Hel. 6:15–11:20	The famine declared by Nephi ended the war as Gadianton's band dissolved
13. War of Giddianhi and Zemnarihah	A.D. 13–22	From Zarahemla to Bountiful	Gadianton robbers come out of the hills to obtain food and to regain control of the government	3 Ne. 2:11–4:28	Unification of the victorious Lamanites and Nephites against the threat of the robbers
14. Rebellion of Jacob	A.D. 30	Land of Zarahemla	Lachoneus tried to expose corrupt judges, who in retaliation tried to make Jacob king	3 Ne. 6:14–7:14	Collapse of reign of judges; degeneration into tribal society
15. Final Nephite wars, phase I	A.D. 322, 327–28	Land of Zarahemla and northward	Overpopulation; infestation of robbers	Morm. 1:6–2:9	Nephites driven back to the narrow neck of land
Final Nephite wars, phase II	A.D. 346–350	Lands of Zarahemla, Jashon, and Shem	Continual Lamanite aggressions	Morm. 2:16–3:1	Nephites enter ten-year peace with Lamanites
Final Nephite wars, phase III	A.D. 361–385	Narrow neck of land and all the land northward	Lamanite greed; gross wickedness on both sides	Morm. 3:4–6:15	Eventual annihilation of Nephite people

Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Data on Wars Involving the Nephites," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 137.

Alma 43:3 — Mormon as an Editor (see also Alma 46:8)

In this verse, Mormon says, "And now I return to an account of the wars" When Mormon abridged the large plates of Nephi, as a military commander himself, he no doubt was extremely interested in this material. Yet, there are also important religious

messages here. It seems to me that Mormon had been more restrained when editing before this point. Previously, he more often let those people speak for themselves. However, from this point on in the Book of Mormon, you will see Mormon's voice coming through more directly and urgently.

Alma 43:4 — The Nephites Prepare for War

This brewing conflict goes back to Alma 35. When Alma the Younger went to try to convert the apostate Zoramites, Alma feared that they would create an alliance with the Lamanites and cause armed conflict. He took with him the best people he could, went north to Antionum, and tried to convert them. It did not quite work. This conflict now was the result of the partial failure of Alma's mission.

Preparatory blessings and commandments are included in Alma's parting words to Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton (Alma 36–42). These powerful chapters act as a hiatus between the brewing war in Alma 35 and the actual outbreak of conflict here in Alma 43. Those blessings may have been placed in the midst of those increasing tensions in order to show that, although he had not had all the success that he had hoped for in Antionum, Alma came home and said to himself, "We need to prepare. I need to strengthen my people. I need to be sure that my sons have all the blessings and instruction that they possibly can have."

The righteousness that allowed the Nephites to win in Alma 43 and 44 is, in part, attributable to the preparation that Alma the Younger consciously interjected. He wanted his sons and future generations to know that the way to be prepared for conflicts is to understand the doctrine, be committed, and follow the ways of righteousness, as he laid out in his sons' blessings.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Was the Zoramite Defection So Disastrous? \(Alma 35:11\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 143 (July 14, 2016).

Alma 43:5 — Who Was Zerahemnah?

The Lamanites' leader in this war was Zerahemnah. We do not know his origins, but his name hints that he was probably a Mulekite, a descendent of Zarahemla. Thus, he may have been chosen as a leader because of his knowledge of the land. At least as far as his honor goes, Zerahemnah seems to have been a good leader; he refused to take the oath to Captain Moroni because he knew of an oath's importance. The Lamanites and Zoramites may not have valued an oath that much, but the Mulekites had been more integrated into the Nephite worldview. They had sworn a covenant under King Benjamin, and knew the importance of solemn oaths, which the Zoramites had repudiated.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Would Zerahemnah Not Swear an Oath to Moroni?](#) (Alma 44:8),” *KnoWhy* 152 (July 27, 2016).

Alma 43:7–8 — Why Were the Zoramites Angry?

But what were the Zoramites, who were behind all of this, so angry about? Why were they attacking? In Alma 31:8–10, we learn that the Zoramites decided not to observe the Nephite religious requirements, especially the performances of the Church. The Zoramites left, and Alma the Younger tried to convert them back. Did he win any converts? Yes, but who were they? The poor and the working classes. As in all ancient societies, the rich, like those who had built the Rameumptom and a synagogue, needed cheap human labor more than anything else, but Alma the Younger had taken the working-class Zoramites to the land of Jershon.

The people of Ammon and other refugees from the land of Nephi-Lehi were already in the land of Jershon, and some of the Lamanites were also already angry about their having left, as was seen in the War of the Ammonite Secession in Alma 28, when there had been a terrible battle in which the Lamanites unsuccessfully tried to get them back. So, it is logical here that the Zoramites and the Lamanites would combine their forces to set right a similar grievance.

Alma 43:9 — What Must We Defend?

As the armies of the Lamanites invaded, led by Zerahemnah, the mission statement of the Nephites was clear: “To support their lands, and their houses, and their wives and their children, that they might preserve them from the hands of their enemies and also that they might preserve their rights and their privileges, yea, and also their liberty that they might worship God according to their desires.”

How can we best be mindful of these same needs and objectives today? We can build the kingdom of God, because that is where our strength will be, in our organization. In the meantime, we must be good citizens. All this can start in the home, with a father and a mother who are true and faithful and who can teach children to be firm and steadfast.

One of the greatest things that people can do in this regard is to appreciate and value our land (the earth), our houses (communities), and our families, rather than looking to material possessions that are not so satisfying. We can read the Proclamation on the Family and follow its counsel. That is an inspired document, revealing the truth about the way things are and shall be. About protecting those things, Isaiah 54:13 said, “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord and great shall be the peace of thy children.” The peace is not only the peace of knowing the Lord; we also learn continually throughout the

Book of Mormon that He is on our side when we are obedient to his commandments. This is another form of peace that will be found as our wives and children thrive. The blessing of Isaiah is a millennial promise, but we can have a little bit of heaven and of the millennium here in our families already if we will live those principles.

Alma 43:13 — The Lamanite Troops Are Listed by Tribe

The Zoramites have done some serious political lobbying here. The invading soldiers are a compound of the sons of Laman and Lemuel, and also the sons of Ishmael, so we have Lamanites, Lemuelites, Ishmaelites, combining with all who had dissented away from the Nephites in the land of Zarahemla. The Amalekites are included in the list here. Who were the Amalekites? It is uncertain. Research done by Royal Skousen indicates that they may relate to Amlici and his rebellion from Alma 2 to 4. The Zoramites and the descendants of the priests of Noah are also listed. The Amlicites and the priests of Noah were most involved in destroying the city of Ammonihah, leaving in their wake the land called the Desolation of Nehors. There had been a lot of political work behind the scenes. This is a massive force now aligned against the Nephites. Alma's previous worries that the Zoramites would form such an alliance are shown here to have been well founded. And it appears that the Zoramites were the major instigators of this development.

Alma 43:17–20 — What Is Significant about Captain Moroni's Age?

Mormon now goes out of his way to remind us of the youthfulness of Chief Captain Moroni as he leads the forces of the Nephites against this onslaught. He was only twenty-five years old. Mormon himself was a young leader, so he could especially relate with Moroni.

One of our keys to success in the modern world is looking to our youth, empowering them, and relying on them to help give us answers in a world that they are in greater touch with. Can young people help us to be prepared with innovative ideas that will help us in our life's battles? When Captain Moroni comes on the scene, the first thing that he says is, "We must have better armor. We must have better weapons." And that worked! It worked so well that, when the Lamanites were defeated, they essentially said, "It is not that your God gave it to you, it is just that you had these new-fangled kinds of armor."

Those defensive and innovative ideas, I think, came from the young Captain Moroni. It did not come from old military leaders entrenched in their own ways of doing things. It helped to have someone not too deeply or rigidly committed to doing things the way things were done before.

The Savior himself was not very far beyond that age-group when he took upon himself the battle of the Atonement. Neither was the Prophet Joseph Smith. The average age of

the first Quorum of the Twelve called in 1835 in Kirtland, Ohio was under 30. These were people who were idealistic and were ready to cast their lot with Joseph Smith. They did not have vested interests and built-in resistance. In fact, the ones who had the hardest time getting on board with the gospel were the older ones—Martin Harris, an establish landowner, and David Whitmer, who liked certain doctrines the way he had always known them. As all the new revelations were coming forth, some people could not keep moving with the Prophet Joseph. In many ways, the Restoration was, and is, a young people's movement, a Church of those who are continually young at heart.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [*“Why Was Moroni’s Young Age an Advantage? \(Alma 43:17\),”*](#) *KnoWhy* 151 (July 26, 2016). “Moroni followed divine counsel in wartime preparations and by so doing succeeded in the face of impossible odds. He not only preserved the Nephite people from a dangerous adversary, but he also secured his place in Nephite history. President Nelson directly declared, of the millennial generation of the church—those who are close to the same age as Moroni was when he assumed command of the Nephite armies: ‘As a True Millennial whom the Lord can count on, you will make history too! You will be asked to accept challenging assignments and become an instrument in the Lord’s hands. And He will enable you to accomplish the impossible.’” (See President Nelson, “Becoming True Millennials,” at [lds.org](#)).

Alma 43:17 — Mentoring the Youth Is of Utmost Importance

The missionary training manual, *Preach My Gospel*, is based on implementing especially the principle of personal revelation. As young missionaries go about their Church service and forming their own families, they are going to be more in tune with what is revealed to them than ever before. They are being taught that pattern. We send our young missionaries to represent the Church, but we do not use them much when they come back. Maybe we ought to listen more to what they say and what they are finding out. Elder Neal A. Maxwell used to plead with us to mentor our younger folks, which is one thing that we can always do better. We should be working today in a different way than we were twenty years ago.

Alma 43:23 — Captain Moroni Sought the Prophet’s Advice

Moroni was smart and faithful enough to gather his own intelligence and to consult with the prophet before going into battle. There is a two-pronged attack here that we can follow. We must know what is going on, and then follow the spirit to get revelation to know our course of action. Captain Moroni followed through and it worked. He learned exactly what he needed to do, and he went and did it.

Alma 43:44 — They Fought Like Dragons

The Lamanites fought like dragons! This is an interesting image. In Mesoamerica, soldiers saw themselves as fighting like dragons, and they would even put on masks—jaguar masks especially—to make themselves look more ferocious and try to intimidate and dishearten the other side. This idea of fighting like dragons is a window into a part of their warfare that we can appreciate.

Captain Moroni was the Nephite leader, and he led them personally into battle. He was not sitting on the back lines just calling the shots. Napoleon sat back in his tent or on his horse. But the greatest conqueror of the world, Alexander the Great, was always the first man over the wall when they took a city. He was the first man over the wall in Sidon, the first man over the wall in Tyre. He led his men just like Captain Moroni, and there is something to be said about that, at least in their way of fighting. I do not know that it would work the same way today.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Does Jacob Choose a 'Monster' as a Symbol for Death and Hell?](#) (2 Nephi 9:10)," *KnoWhy* 34 (February 16, 2016).

Alma 43:46–47 — Were the Nephites Justified in Using Stratagems?

The Nephites were on the defensive here, defending their families "even unto bloodshed." If Captain Moroni had been on the offense, or if this had been some kind of war for aggrandizement or conquest, it would have been much less honorable to use trickery or deception. There was no ancient equivalent of the Geneva Convention, but there were customary rules of engagement and ways in which wars were fought. However, the Nephites were defending themselves from an attack and their enemies were not playing by the rules.

One of the rules of engagement under Deuteronomy 20:10–12, was that an Israelite attacker had to announce to a city that they were going to attack it. "We are about to attack you, and you have a choice; you can surrender, here are the terms, or we will obliterate you."

The Zoramites and their new allies were coming in from three directions. They had warriors coming from the north, west, and south. These armies were coming from different lands, and the Nephites were caught in the middle. Even under those conditions, Moroni was apologetic about having to use a *stratagem*, but I think he was justified. At the same time, as the battle raged and their stratagems were paying off, what really got the Nephites through was their loyalty and commitment to their cause. They were not imperialistic or in search of conquest; they were defending their land, their people, and their sacred things.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“How Can the Book of Mormon Provide Peace and Meaning to Those in Military Service? \(Alma 43:47\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 496 (January 1, 2019).

Alma 43:51–53 — What Was Significant about the Battle at Sidon?

Captain Moroni had consulted Alma. The Prophet told Moroni what the Lord had revealed to him about what was going to happen. The Lord would not have revealed it, if he did not expect Moroni to follow through. Moroni and his men now knew that God was on his side, and this must have been of great comfort to the Nephites, who were underdogs in this conflict. They likely did not have as many soldiers under arms as their opponents. They succeeded partially because of the terrain; they knew the value of the high ground. When you have the higher ground, and you can attack people who are slowed as they are wading through a river or coming up out of the valley. There you can inflict a lot of damage. So it worked for the Nephites. They were much better prepared, and events proceed in their favor in this particular war.

Alma 44

Here are some study questions to consider as you read this chapter:

1. Why would Zerahemnah not swear an oath of perpetual surrender? (44:8). What oaths have you sworn in your life? Do you take them as seriously as he did?
2. Why and how did Moroni show mercy to Zerahemnah and his soldiers? Is this a model of how God shows mercy to us?
3. How important is it to give the dead a proper burial, especially our military dead? (44:22). How do you feel when you go to a cemetery, especially a war cemetery?

Alma 44:6–7 — Why Did Moroni Let Them Go with Only an Oath?

The Nephites believed that oaths had enormous power and effect, and that if one’s oath were to be violated there would be severe consequences. For example, when Nephi was making an oath to Zoram, it was binding if they swore an oath on anything living. They truly believed in curses, oaths, vows, and solemn promises sworn with conditions that “if I break this oath, may very severe consequences follow.” They took these oaths seriously. Could this be a model for us?

There is continuity here between Alma 42, where we are taught that the essence of mercy is the granting of time to repent. Mormon may have preserved Alma’s teaching in Alma 42 knowing that in Alma 44 we would see an instance of its application. After all that

Zerahemnah and his allies had done, Captain Moroni was still willing to say, “I will give you time. You can fix this. You can repent.”

It is a very practical application of the very doctrine that Alma the Younger was teaching—that God gives us time. That is his mercy to us, and we see Captain Moroni putting that into effect under a very difficult situation. It would have been easy for him to say, “You guys have killed a lot of my friends and soldiers. Let us just finish you off right now.” He is willing to extend the same kind of mercy that God would.

Alma 44: 8 — Why Did Zarahemnah Refuse to Make an Oath?

Zerahemnah was given a chance to swear an oath, and he responded, “Behold, here are our weapons of war; we will deliver them up unto you, but we will not suffer ourselves to take an oath unto you, which we know that we shall break, and also our children.”

Captain Moroni’s terms included the following conditional: “if ye will go your way and come not again to war against us” (Alma 44:6). To Zerahemnah, that meant, “You will not come again, and you will not have your children come either.” He counteroffered, “Take our weapons of war and suffer that we may depart into the wilderness.” In other words: “Just let us go. You can have our weapons, but we are not going to swear this oath.” But Moroni refused.

Why would Zerahemnah rather risk losing his head than swear that oath? That is all he needed to do, and Moroni would have let him go free. Why would he not do that? He knew that neither he nor his posterity would keep it, but so what? Would someone today worry about that? It goes back to how they viewed oaths in the ancient world as binding commitments enforceable by God, and he was not prepared to deal with the consequences of breaking the oath.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Would Zarahemnah Not Swear an Oath to Moroni? \(Alma 44:8\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 152, (July 27, 2016). “The elements of Alma 44 combine to show that both the Nephites and Lamanites, including even the wrathful Zerahemnah, respected the seriousness of oaths, especially oaths sworn in God’s name. This in turn demonstrates the rich complexity of the Book of Mormon as well as it supports its ancient provenance.”

Alma 44:11 — Why Did Moroni Say He Could Not Recall His Words?

“I cannot recall [meaning that he could not *recant*] the words which I have spoken.” Because he had said, “I command you in the name of that all-powerful God” (See Alma 44:5), he had made his demand something that he alone could not recant. Only God could retract it.

Alma 45

Here are some questions to ponder as you read this chapter:

1. What questions did Alma ask Helaman when he interviewed him before blessing him, prophesying to him, blessing and cursing the land, and blessing the church? (45:2–8). How important are interview questions like these for us today?
2. Helaman was neither sustained nor accepted by the people of the Church (45:23–24). Why not? What does this tell you about the importance of sustaining our new Church leaders at the time they take office?
3. Would you count the events in this chapter as one of the greatest moments in Helaman's life? What do you find most impressive about them?
4. What prepared Helaman to righteously and successfully meet those challenging opportunities and responsibilities? Have you similarly prepared?
5. In what ways did Helaman carry forward the teachings and objectives of his father Alma the Younger and grandfather Alma the Elder?
6. In what ways does the life of Helaman inspire you? What lessons of life and encouragement do you learn from him, personally and spiritually?

Alma 45:2–8 — Alma Interviews Helaman

Shortly before his death, Alma the Younger spoke with his son Helaman and asked him to take the plates and continue to write so that their descendants would know what had occurred. He asked him to hold on to those scriptures. This interview in Alma 45 was one of Helaman's great moments.

This little block of text, seemingly separate from the rest of the narrative, provides a window into Alma's ecclesiastical administration. Alma was interviewing Helaman as he prepared to pass on his responsibilities. Perhaps he sensed that he was not coming back from the city of Melek. According to the text as we have it, these are the last things that he would say to his eldest son, as Alma held his final father's interview with his son. There are only three questions here.

1. Alma begins by ascertaining that Helaman understood the task. "Believest thou the words which I spake unto thee concerning those records which have been kept?" (Alma 45:2). In other words, do you believe the scriptures? An appropriate and important question for any father to ask his children.

2. "Believest thou in Jesus Christ who shall come?" (Alma 45:4). That is still the vital question for us in our world today. We know that he came in the flesh, but we do not ask, in temple recommend interviews or other settings, "Do you believe that Christ is coming again?" We are asked, "Do you believe in God the Eternal Father and in his Son Jesus Christ and in the Holy Ghost?" Not "Do you believe in the Second Coming?" But that question has powerful implications in our life. It was also a concern that Alma had addressed throughout his life.
3. "Will you keep my commandments?" (Alma 45:6). This question referred to the commandments given by Alma the Prophet as the Prophet. And Helaman did not just answer "yes." He answered, "With all my heart" (Alma 45:7). "Then Alma said unto him: Blessed art thou; and the Lord shall prosper thee in this land" (Alma 45:8). Usually when we answer our bishop's questions, we just say yes; but maybe, "With all my heart" would be a better response.

How important are interview questions like these for us today? I hope you share with me a great feeling of gratitude and appreciation for the privilege it is to have interviews with our bishops and stake presidency, and to have a stewardship accounting, to be blessed by the opportunity to respond verbally and affirmatively to questions such as these as we renew our commitments to living the gospel, keeping the commandments, and doing everything we can do, as Alma and his people did, to be ready to work against conflicts that rage and swirl all around us. I am grateful for the support of the priesthood and of the guidance that we get from our Church leaders in the righteous living of our lives. I do not know of anywhere else that one can go to find anything like it.

Alma 45:2–8 — How Old Was Helaman at this Time?

One of the more sobering moments in Helaman's life comes in chapter 45, when his father, in his farewell speech, prophesied that the Nephite nation would dwindle in unbelief and eventually be destroyed. Helaman received a blessing, the interview, and then this prophecy from his father. Alma gave Helaman good news but ended with the bad news that the people would not remain faithful. Then he departed as if he were going to the city of Melek, and he was never heard of again. How old was Helaman when his father went missing in action?

Helaman was blessed and interviewed by his father in the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges (Alma 45:2). He was likely born only a few years before the commencement of the reign of the judges, since Alma was still a young man when he and the sons of Mosiah were stopped by the angel. And so one may figure that Helaman must have been about twenty-two at that time, in order to allow Shiblon and Corianto to have been old enough to have gone on the mission to Antionum and to go astray as Corianton did. So, it would

seem that Helaman couldn't have been much more than twenty-two at the time his father left him with a very daunting challenge.

Alma 45:17–18 — Alma Disappeared from the Land

What would the effect have been on Helaman, a first-born son, when his father left? When a father left this world under biblical law, the eldest son became responsible for his mother, for his unmarried sisters, and for his single aunts. He would take responsibility for the family estate, and, as in this case, he inherited certain priestly duties. How did Helaman respond when he realized that his father was gone?

As far as we know, there was no psalm-type mourning, as there had been from Nephi when Lehi died. For Helaman, the situation may not have been much different than when his father Alma had left on previous occasions. Helaman had been left behind when Alma had gone on other missions, and there was no technology to send frequent messages and updates back and forth as we have today. It may have been some time before they realized that Alma was not coming back. Helaman just carried on doing many things as he was already doing when his father had departed before.

Alma 45:21–22 — Helaman and His Brothers Declare the Word of God

There had been some contention and disputes, “many little dissensions and disturbances among the people.” The text says, “It became expedient that the word of God should be declared among them.” Alma was gone. Helaman and the family probably mourned over his loss, although they did not know for certain that he was dead, and there was no body to bury.

There would likely have been an interlude, a time when they continued to think that Alma might yet return, and then a time when Helaman finally said to Shiblon and Corianton that they knew well what their father would have wanted them to do. They knew they needed to hold the place together, so they went forward, they “regulated” the church, and put new priests and teachers in place. That was what Alma had done. When he went to the city of Gideon, he appointed priests and teachers as needed. So Helaman and his brothers went and did the things that Alma himself had done.

Alma 45:22–23 — The Significance of Establishing Churches

Alma and Helaman established churches *before the coming of Christ*. They were covenant churches related to those that Alma the Elder established when he brought together the people who had been baptized at the Waters of Mormon. When they arrived in Zarahemla, Alma the Elder obtained a special decree from King Mosiah for them to live in separate covenant communities; they called them churches. The word for *church* in both

Hebrew and Greek means a gathering or a collection, a community. There were seven of these churches in Alma the Elder's day.

Alma the Younger established similar covenant communities in various cities, and his son Helaman continued the same activity. While these may not have been churches exactly in our modern manner, they were organizations that encouraged people to keep their covenants. Perhaps they were more akin to what the ancient Jews called a synagogue, a house of scripture reading and prayer and community concern and celebrations.

The Book of Mormon gives us something that is not in the Bible, namely records of the transition of a group of Israelite people, who started out in Jerusalem and developed over six hundred years. There were covenantal changes with King Benjamin, and organizational changes under Alma, and finally they were prepared as a people for the Savior to come and institute such things as the administration of the sacrament by twelve appointed disciples. In the Book of Mormon, the church can be seen emerging, unlike in the Bible, where nothing is contained for the years between Daniel and the birth of Jesus.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Alma and Amulek Preach in Synagogues? \(Alma 16:13\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 124 (June 17, 2016).

Alma 45:23–24 — “They Would Not Give Heed to the Words of Helaman”

The culprit behind this movement was a “large and strong man” named Amalickiah, who, through flattery, had convinced many “lower judges of the land” to “support him and establish him to be their king” (Alma 46:3–5). Not only was he popular among Nephite society at large, but “there were many in the church who believed in the flattering words of Amalickiah” (Alma 45:7). For those Nephites familiar with their own history, this state of affairs would have indeed seemed “exceedingly precarious and dangerous” (Alma 45:7). Less than twenty years earlier, King Mosiah had, in allusion to King Noah, reminded them of “how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction” (Mosiah 29:17).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Did Seeking a King Get in the Way of Sustaining a Prophet? \(Alma 45:23\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 153, (July 28, 2016).

Alma 46–48

In these three chapters we are presented with a stark contrast between two polar opposites, Captain Moroni and the treacherous Amalickiah. Several things are notable and memorable in these chapters. As you read these pages, consider some of the following questions as they might intrigue you. Hints are given below, but full answers still remain to be developed:

1. Who was Amalickiah? Where did he come from? What did he want? How did he go about trying to get what he wanted? Why was he able to attract such devoted followers? Why did he attack at this time, and why did he think he could succeed?
2. In contrast, who was Moroni? How did he behave? What did he want? How did he go about accomplishing his objectives? How did he mobilize his soldiers?
3. While we obviously recognize that no human being is either completely good or completely bad, how does it help you in your life to revere ideal figures such as Moroni and to shun clear autocrats such as Amalickiah?
4. Can you tell the story of a person whom you respect because he or she acted courageously and admirably under difficult situations?
5. How many times in these chapters do you encounter words such as “intent” and “desire” or “desiring”? Why do you think Mormon placed such emphasis on these words in these accounts? What factors influence the things that you want or desire? How can you improve the intents or your mind and the desires of your heart?
6. In Alma 46:24–25, Moroni quotes some interesting words from the ancient patriarch Jacob about a piece of Joseph’s coat. How does Captain Moroni know these words? What contemporary use did he make of those ancient words? How foundational was that ancient covenant image in motivating the loyalty of the Nephite soldiers and population throughout all of these war chapters?
7. Throughout these chapters, some interesting points are to be found about military conventions, martial law, and their order of battle. What use might we make of these points in our personal and social lives today?

Alma 46:1–4 — Who Was Amalickiah?

In Alma 46–48, many facets in the lives of Captain Moroni and Amalickiah are presented. It is very interesting to contrast them: what were their stories? what were they interested in? and what were their strategies? As their lives are examined, one will hopefully find

many things in Captain Moroni's behavior that is worthy of emulation, and things in Amalickiah's life that one would like to avoid.

Amalickiah was an imposing man and was able to push many people around. He was a Nephite, but in Alma 46:3 it states that he was wroth against his brethren. In Alma 46:1, we read, "It came to pass that as many as would not hearken to the words of Helaman and his brethren, were gathered together against their brethren." Amalickiah became the party leader, no doubt in part because of his physical size and strong will. But this man was a member of the church, who had no doubt listened to Helaman preach and had rejected his authority as the successor to Alma.

A point about his descent. Amalickiah was a Nephite, but remember that the group known as "Nephites" incorporated Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites. Do we know which of those groups Amalickiah came from? In fact, in Alma 54:23, his brother, Ammoron, tells Captain Moroni that he was a descendant of Zoram. Most of the Zoramites had formed an alliance with the Lamanites and gone down to the land of Nephi. There had been Zerahemnah's attack, and while all that occurred, Amalickiah was apparently still living in the Land of Zarahemla. His trademark was treachery; he may have been biding his time for a moment when he could conquer Zarahemla from the inside.

Alma 46:1 — Why Did Amalickiah Start His Revolt When He Did?

When Helaman regulated the church, he and his brothers established the church in all the land. In each city, they appointed new priests and teachers. Some of them may have been new appointees, and some may have been the same priests and teachers reinstated under their new leadership. When King Benjamin passed the kingship to his son Mosiah, the same thing was done, as was the pattern in the ancient world in general. The text does not state whether Helaman reinstated the same people as priests and teachers, but it also may be that he actually did not. Perhaps it was time for a change. We, today, believe in change, and accept it as a normal part of giving other people an opportunity to serve in the kingdom. But for some, those changes mean a loss of power, leading to resentment.

At the beginning of this era, Alma the Younger had held three roles: High Priest, Chief Judge, and military leader, but he divided up some of his responsibilities. When he died, all of his original appointees were gone, and political instability arose. The same thing will occur again at the end of the Book of Alma. In chapter 63, all leaders of this generation died, and in Helaman 1, the three sons of Pahoran—Paanchi, Pacumeni and Pahoran—squabbled over who would be the next leader. That squabble became such a serious problem that it opened the way for Kishkumen, the founder of an insurgent party—the Gadiantons—who plagued the Nephites for the next fifty years. It was transition-in-power moments that opened the way for dissenting voices to come in and seize the opportunity.

Alma 46:3–4 — Amalickiah Attempts to Become King

This Nephite government was a new experiment in governing without a king. The reign of the judges was only a generation old, and in the first five years of Alma's time as chief judge, he had to literally fight Amlici and his followers, who believed they ought to reinstate the kingship. When Alma the Younger departed and his son Helaman took his place, the same problem arose again, leading to a perilous situation which Amalickiah saw as an opportunity.

When the new system was adopted, judges were called by the voice of the people in some type of popular vote. Some Nephites may have believed that anyone who wanted to be elected could put themselves forward as a candidate. However, the system apparently operated most like the way appointees are sustained in the modern church rather than elected by campaigning. That is most likely what King Mosiah intended when he spoke of the role of the "voice of the people."

This background helps put Amalickiah's case in perspective. There were many people in this society who could have been dissatisfied with the way things had gone. They were likely unhappy with Helaman telling them that they needed to repent. For an opportunist like Amalickiah, there were religious, political, economic, and personal dissatisfactions which he could use to his advantage. As a Zoramite, he saw his opportunity, and he took it.

Alma 46:8 — Mormon Was Actively Editing the War Chapters

As Mormon abridged and edited the record, he often used the phrase, "and thus we see." He could not restrain himself from letting the people know how all this happened; he already knew the end from the beginning. In Mormon's own day, he said that the Nephites had become so wicked that he could do nothing but stand as an idle witness to their downfall. It must have been terribly heartbreaking for him to look back on these days and wish that his people could have been more like these stalwart people.

He wanted that so badly that he named his son Moroni. It isn't known how many sons Mormon had, perhaps not many, as he was very young himself when he was given formidable duties. He named his son Moroni after this Chief Captain Moroni who also was in the field as a military leader at a very young age. With this in mind, we can see the Book of Mormon becoming Mormon's book much more powerfully than before.

Alma 46:11 — Captain Moroni Was Angry Because of Amalickiah

Amalickiah stirred his followers, as well as his opponents, to anger. This included Captain Moroni, who was angered at what was occurring. Some might excuse it, saying it was justifiable anger, and it probably should not be thought of as being in a rage. But it was anger, nonetheless, and if we do not restrain ourselves, we can slide from naturally strong

feelings into harmful rage and fury. Something of an impulsive side of Captain Moroni will emerge again when he exchanges letters in frustration and urgency with Pahoran. Perhaps it is something of a flaw for him., but Mormon states that “if everyone were like Moroni, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever” (Alma 48:17). He was still a very good man and a strong military leader. But as good as someone might be, we all may have flaws, and it is important to remember to temper ourselves in that regard.

Alma 46:12 — The Significance of Tearing a Coat in Covenants

Captain Moroni does not just write down his Title of Liberty and put it on a nice plaque on a wall somewhere. Instead, in a very dramatic way, he impresses upon the people the significance of these words. He tore his shirt or his coat, and put that piece “on the end of a pole” (46:12, 13). It likely wasn’t as large of a piece of cloth as is depicted in popular art, but still, there is something extremely important and personal about a man’s coat in the ancient world. So, Moroni was making a very powerful personal statement. In the ancient world, when people tore their garments, it was a sign of deep emotion, grief, great concern, and willingness to put their lives on the line. “I am willing,” Moroni was saying, “to fight for these things even until I am dead. I will give my life for this.” He tore his personal coat as a symbol that he was willing to be torn himself. This simile curse must have been a very dramatic thing for his people to witness.

Further Reading

Mark J. Morrise, “[Simile Curses in the Ancient Near East, Old Testament, and Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (1993): 124–138.

Donald W. Parry, “[Symbolic Action as Prophetic Curse](#),” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1992), 206–208.

Alma 46:13–15 — Believers in Christ Are Ridiculed as Christians

Name-calling was a part of Amalickiah’s rhetoric. The text tells us that Amalickiah’s followers began calling their opponents *Christians*. It does not appear that this was meant to be a flattering name. Today, we think of Christians as a very noble term, and Latter-day Saints are concerned when others deny us the right to call ourselves Christians. Why might this word have been used as a slur here? Amalickiah’s followers had dissented from the Church, and generally did not believe that the Messiah (the Anointed One or the Christ) would ever come. It was a fundamental axiom of these dissenters that the believers could not know that he would ever come. Thus, calling them “Christians” was not a compliment, and might even have branded them as targets. However, the faithful Nephites gladly adopted that name and took that name upon themselves, perhaps at considerable risk.

Alma 46:20 — The Nephites Gathered around the Title of Liberty

The Nephites did not have a standing army. There was generally no such thing in the ancient world. When a nation went to war, the farmers had to leave their plows and their fields. They knew where to gather, because a commander would walk around the town or the land holding a pole up in the air. This was a traditional signal to come report for battle. I recall reading a brief account in Roland de Vaux's impressive work, *Ancient Israel*, about a group of surveyors who were mapping the hill country in Palestine a century ago. They put their sighting picket on the top of a hill and then were unnerved to see the local men charging up the hill asking, "Where's the battle?" Captain Moroni evidently knew of this ancient tradition as well, for the thing that brought the people running with their weapons was the "pole" (mentioned in 46:12–13). The covenantal declaration on this piece of cloth, not the pole, was the innovative thing. Captain Moroni then also ran a good public relations campaign, as he placed those words on similar banners on the walls and towers of the Nephite cities.

Further Reading

Kerry Hull, "[War Banners: A Mesoamerican Context for the Title of Liberty](#)," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24 (2015): 84–118.

Alma 46:21–22 — The Nephites Entered a Covenant with Moroni

After Captain Moroni had torn his coat, the people tore their own garments to participate individually in the covenant. In this covenant they are essentially saying, "We agree with this and we will fight." They threw their coats on the ground right in front of Moroni—right at his feet. But why at his feet? They were agreeing to be led by him and saying in effect, "We are below you. We will follow your command." Captain Moroni probably walked around on their coats. While the text does not say this explicitly, it is implied by the words of the covenant:

We covenant with our God, that we shall be destroyed, even as our brethren in the land northward, if we shall fall into transgression; yea, he may cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot, if we shall fall into transgression" (Alma 46:22).

This dramatic symbolism of the making of a covenant, either civilly or religiously, and then depicting the punishment that would follow if they did not keep it was a standard part of covenant-making in the ancient world. For example, there are texts from the Hittite area, which is eastern Turkey today, in which people would make a contract or a covenant and they would take a small animal, sometimes a lamb or a dog, and they would cut off the animal's head, or slit its belly open, and as they did, they would say, "May this happen to me if I do not keep this contract." They would invoke that curse or consequence upon

themselves. It was a way of saying “I am taking this very seriously.” That kind of symbolically dramatized covenant-making, not only among these soldiers but also with God, is what is happening here among the Nephites. War in the ancient world was always seen as involving God (or the gods) in many crucial ways.

Further Reading

Mark J. Morrise, “Simile Curses in the Ancient Near East, Old Testament, and Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (1993): 124–138.

Stephen D. Ricks, “‘Holy War’ in the Book of Mormon and the Ancient Near East,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 58.

Stephen D. Ricks, “‘Holy War’: The Sacral Ideology of War in the Book of Mormon and in the Ancient Near East,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 103–117.

Alma 46:23–27 — Why Did Moroni Refer to Joseph in Egypt?

The coat of Joseph, Jacob’s son, represented his life and who he was. In Genesis 37, Joseph’s brothers took his ripped coat back to Jacob, who was blind, sitting at home, and in verse 33, it says that “he knew it.” That may just mean he recognized it, but some scholars think the Hebrew there may mean that he knew by the smell, which means the coat smelled like Joseph. That convinced Jacob that Joseph was dead.

Moroni pointed to Jacob’s observing that a part of the coat had not decayed over the many years and thus to Jacob’s seeing that as a symbol that a remnant of his seed would be preserved. Moroni said, “Let us preserve our liberty as a remnant of Joseph” (Alma 46:24).

And now who knoweth but what the remnant of the seed of Joseph, which shall perish as his garment, are those who have dissented from us? Yea, and even it shall be ourselves if we do not stand fast in the faith of Christ” (Alma 46:27).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Did Moroni Quote the Patriarch Jacob about a Piece of Joseph’s Coat? (Alma 46:24),” *KnoWhy* 154, (July 29, 2016).

Alma 46:29–33 — Amalickiah Fled from Moroni’s Army

Amalickiah was not the first one to attack. He gathered all the men loyal to him, and Captain Moroni started assembling troops to go after him. Because the numbers were not in his favor and because he doubted the conviction of his followers (Alma 46:29), Amalickiah then fled to the land of Nephi, taking only a few men with him and

abandoning the rest. He was a coward, and loyal to only himself. As soon as he saw Moroni's troops, he fled—for Moroni had headed Amalickiah off. Captain Moroni had wanted to talk and make a covenant.

Amalickiah was smart, a very shrewd man. He knew that he did not have the strength at that point to follow through, so he did not stay. When he returned, he came using his Zoramite heritage to his advantage. He appointed other Zoramites as the leaders of his army, because the Zoramites knew the landscape. They knew the strengths of the Nephites, and they knew their weaknesses. There is nothing as useful as an insider, someone who knows the land and is able to make an effective attack.

Alma 46:29 — Amalickiah's Followers Doubted Their Cause

Amalickiah was more interested in destroying than building up. One cannot see any positive agenda here. He very selfishly wanted to be the king, but he was mostly *against* things, not for things. That was a bad sign and his followers recognized it. In this verse, the text explained, "He also saw that his people were doubtful concerning the justice of the cause in which they had undertaken."

Alma 47

Alma 47:1–2 — The Lamanites Were Too Scared to Fight

When Amalickiah arrived in the Land of Nephi, he convinced the king of the Lamanites to gather troops to war against the Nephites. Did these soldiers have a choice? In fact, many of them did not want to participate. They could well have said something like, "Wait a minute! It was only a couple of years ago we got beat pretty soundly up there," or more exactly, as Mormon states, "they feared to displease the king, and they also feared to go to battle against the Nephites lest they should lose their lives."

We can almost hear them complain: "Those Nephites knew what they were doing. We were fighting on foreign land. We were much too exposed. We did not have supply troops. We were over-extended, and they had better armor. We do not want to go back." But they were afraid and did not want to offend the king.

Alma 47:3 — Amalickiah Uses Force and Fear to Gain Power

There was no opportunity for the soldiers to feel individually committed to Amalickiah's cause. That stands in stark contrast to the way in which Captain Moroni gathered his men, and it is interesting to note that Amalickiah did not even gather his troops himself. He did everything by delegation. Who knows what he was doing meantime? He was probably relaxing at the palace of the king while others were out doing the hard work. That is not

like Captain Moroni, who had other men who helped him, but very clearly went recruiting himself. They are two drastically different types of leaders.

Alma 47:10–12 — Evil Is Persistent

The Lamanite soldiers who did not want to fight took shelter at the top of the hill. Amalickiah tried to get them down. He was smart enough, again, to know not to place the hill under siege. He enticed them to come down, and they finally did come down, but still would not surrender. He wore them down into supporting him in his ambitions, selling out his own troops. That persistence was another one of his strategies. We need to take great care about the evil forces arrayed around us. Ofttimes they are persistent people whom we wish would go away. We may ignore them, but they just keep coming back, and sometimes we give in.

Alma 47:24–29 — The Lamanite King is Murdered and His Servants Flee

Amalickiah had his servants slay the king of the Lamanites, and he falsely accused the king's servants of the treachery. It is interesting that when those falsely accused servants of the king's servants ran, they escaped to the lands of the Nephites, specifically to Jershon. Why did they there, of all places? They must have had friends there. At least the initial inhabitants of Jershon had been the people of Ammon. It also may be that the underlying records of the king's murder were partially furnished by these servants.

Alma 47:33 — Why Did the Queen Ask Amalickiah to Spare the City?

Why did the queen request Amalickiah to spare the city? In ancient warfare, when a new general captured a land, he could do whatever he wanted. If he felt like the people were not going to play ball (so to speak), it was very common for a captured city to be simply obliterated. They did not have effective ways to keep captives of war; there were likely no prison camps. Even the ancient societies that we think of as more enlightened, such as the Athenians and the Spartans, killed all the men when they conquered a city or island, and all the women and children were sold off into slavery. That was one of the common realities of ancient warfare.

Alma 47:33–35 — Amalickiah Gains the Kingdom through Fraud

Amalickiah took the queen to wife. How and why did he do that? By murder, fraud, and deceit, he had placed himself at the head of the Lamanite armies. With the king dead, he took the throne. In the ancient world, a new king had the legal right to take the wife (along with the other women) of his predecessor. Amalickiah knew the tricks of the trade and exactly what he needed to do. By marrying the queen, the queen's children were now his children, and he had eliminated the potential future problem of claims by the heirs of his predecessor or of sons who might otherwise arise as pretenders to the throne.

Alma 48

Alma 48:1–3 — Amalickiah Spreads Propaganda

Amalickiah appointed men to speak from towers against the Nephites. Walls, towers, and hillsides acted as natural amphitheatres where speakers could be heard a long way off. This was undoubtedly a smear campaign about all the bad things that the Nephites had supposedly done. Most of the Lamanites, of course, were still quite willing to accept the idea that their forefathers, Laman and Lemuel—and by extension their people as a whole—had been wronged by Nephi in the desert, and that they were wronged by Nephi when he took the plates. There was plenty of rhetoric to be broadcast in reiterating these old party lines. The flames were fanned again. However, it is also interesting that Amalickiah sent his men to do it. Amalickiah did not even go out and do that much himself. Perhaps that would have looked too obviously like the pot calling the kettle black.

Alma 48:13 — What Was the Oath Moroni Swore?

Moroni and the Nephites had previously sworn an oath that they would fight when they essentially promised, “May we be trampled upon just as we are trampling on our coats, if we do not fight valiantly.” Now we learn in this verse (48:13) that Captain Moroni, who was “a man who was firm in the faith of Christ,” had himself sworn “to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood.” This contrasts with an oath that Amalickiah had made: “He did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his blood” (Alma 49:27)! “On the other hand,” it says, “the people of Nephi did thank the Lord their God, because of his matchless power in delivering them from the hands of their enemies” (Alma 49:28).

When men are ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood, it is with the making of an oath and a covenant. When men and women receive their endowments in the temple, they make covenants. That word *covenant* is just another word for an oath. There, we just say, “yes.” But what does Jesus say about swearing oaths? Don’t swear by the heavens or the hair of your head; but “just let your speech be yea, yea, [or] nay, nay” (Matthew 5:37; 3 Nephi 12:37). When done right, that is how we are supposed to swear oaths: we say *yes*, and we mean it.

Alma 48:14 — The Nephites Did Not Instigate War

Moroni taught his people never to give offense; but to fight to preserve their lives; and to follow the oracles of the Lord on where to go. A few years ago, President Hinckley said the following:

There are times and circumstances when nations are justified, in fact have an obligation, to fight for family, for liberty, against tyranny, threat and oppression. When all is said and done, we of this Church are a people of peace. We are followers of our redeemer the Lord Jesus Christ who was the Prince of Peace, but even he said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34).

Further Reading

Gordon B. Hinckley, “War and Peace,” General Conference April 2003.

Alma 48:17–19 — Nephite Heroes

How is the word *hero* defined? Perhaps someone that is viewed as admirable because of difficult choices or difficult things they did. Heroes can come from all walks of life. They can be ordinary or unusual, but they leave an indelible mark. The world changed because they were there.

There is great value and importance in having these heroes set forth for us. Mormon knew that. He knew that people in the latter days would need Captain Moroni as a hero. The war chapters set out the behavior of Captain Moroni and Amalickiah in some detail. Mormon recorded those details so that readers could understand what made Moroni heroic, and Amalickiah despicable.

We need to be more conscious and careful of the heroes that we pick. Some people pick the wrong kind of hero, and that can be a problem. Of course, from the Greeks with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is where we get the concept of heroes. Odysseus and Achilles and those figures became models of behavior for better or worse among the Greeks. In our own literature, we have heroes like Joseph Smith and Moroni and others that will serve us even better.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Did Mormon See Captain Moroni as a Hero? (Alma 48:17),” *KnoWhy* 155, (July 29, 2016).

Alma 48:21–23 — Why Were the Nephites Reluctant to Fight?

Did Moroni like this war? Moroni was a professional soldier. At least he would be classified as such today, but he was still a reluctant participant in the war. He sorrowed that it had to happen this way. “[The Nephites] were compelled reluctantly to contend with their brethren, the Lamanites.”

“Compelled reluctantly” is a picturesque phrase. They were forcefully driven, compelled, and yet remained reluctant. They were very mindful of the oath that they had sworn. All

of these people had made a vow, and vows in ancient Israelite religion were virtually irrevocable. They were taken very seriously. So Captain Moroni was compelled not only by the circumstances, but by the oath that he had made before God and all of those witness that he would fight, as unpleasant as it became.

He tried to avoid the situation, “Let us cut them off; let us give them the choice of the covenant.” He tried everything else he could, and now, in the end, he was compelled to lead armies in actual combat. This expression hints at the turmoil he must have felt as he was torn in two directions by a very hard situation.

Alma 49

In this chapter we have the following episodes:

- Amalickiah’s chief captains decide not to attack Ammonihah but go against the city of Noah instead, lose badly, and are all killed, having sworn an oath that they would destroy the Nephites in that city (49:1–25)
- In anger, Amalickiah swears an oath to drink Moroni’s blood (49:26–28)
- The Nephites thank God and give heed to the word of God (49:28–30)

Discussion questions to think about:

1. The chief captains of Amalickiah decided to attack Ammonihah and Noah because they thought those cities were weak places but were strategically important. What weaknesses do you think Satan is attacking right now in your life and family? Is he going after your weak places? How can we anticipate Satan’s attacks?
2. After great successes, Moroni did not stop preparing for further attacks. How can we prevent our temporary successes from lulling us into a sense of false security?

Alma 49:1–3 — Rebuilding Ammonihah

Two of the rare times in the Book of Mormon where an event is dated to the day relate to the destruction and rebuilding of Ammonihah. It had been destroyed on the fifth day of the second month of the eleventh year of the reign of the judges (Alma 16:1). It was rebuilt “in part” by the tenth day of the eleventh month of the nineteen year. In other words, nine months and eight years later. Apparently, initial attempts to refortify it had only recently begun. Strategically, it must have been located in an important place. Perhaps it had not been reoccupied sooner because, in some cultures, a seven-year period was required to purify contaminated land. We don’t know that this idea of a sabbatical cleansing had factored into the resettling of Ammonihah, but if it wasn’t a concern, one wonders why

Mormon was so concerned about giving us these two precise dates here. And it makes sense in our lives to give our solved problems a cooling off period. Letting things heal and cure well is usually a good thing.

Alma 49:3 — The Lamanites Tried to Attack Ammonihah

The chief captains over the combined Lamanite forces knew the Nephites' territory. They were Zoramites, they knew the lay of the land, and where the weakest parts had been. Here, the Lamanites thought, "Let us just go get some easy pickings." They thought they knew of a weak spot and went after it. But that did not work out.

Satan does the same kind of thing. Does he know what your strengths are? Is he going to waste his time on going after them? He usually does not. How have you found that in your life? Do you think he knows your weaknesses well enough that he can head for them?

If we concern ourselves really with what the Lord thinks, then we will be in harmony with the Spirit. Then, if someone does not like us, at least we know we are in harmony with the Spirit. Do you think the adversary will try and make you believe that you are inadequate so that you will become preoccupied with the wrong things?

The adversary can be removed from our presence with light. Doctrine and Covenants Section 52 teaches the pattern of the gospel, and if we understand that pattern, we can chase the adversary away. He always follows the path of least resistance, and some believe that he will not spend time with a heart and mindset in the right direction because he will look for souls that are more easily influenced. We can take our model from Captain Moroni. Put up our defenses, and it will work. It is reassuring to know that there are ways that you can drive Satan away from you.

One may wonder how we can anticipate his attacks. He is not overly original. The Adversary will do what he has done before, and we know what he has done, both from what is written in the scriptures and from what he has previously done to us. He has his strategy and is going to want to try to keep with that program. He believes it is going to work.

If we look at what has happened before—remember what Amalickiah did with Lehonti—the adversary operates in much the same way. He just keeps sending us the same message. As we study the scriptures and remember, we know what is going to come and can be better prepared for it.

Alma 49:8 — Moroni Fortifies the Cities

It is important to be a step ahead of where Satan might come. We have to pray, we are told, that we not be led into temptation. If we know we have a particular weakness, we

need to pray for strength in that area, that the Lord will help us and strengthen us. The more specific that the Saints are in our prayers, the more the Lord can help us.

If you know the moves that your opponent is going use, you can anticipate their moves. If you are just a little bit ahead, you can stop that move before it has any momentum. Timing is important. It would be nice if we knew more. In the case of the Adversary, we do know quite a bit. We have been warned, we have been told. We just need to execute. That is something to learn from this otherwise rather unpleasant story.

The Nephites were always one step ahead of the Lamanites in terms of technology. Moroni's defenses were things that had never been done before in the five hundred years of Lehiite history. They had begun building actual defenses on their cities. For some reason, this had not been done before, and it came as a tremendous surprise to the Lamanites.

Alma 49:17, 27 — The Lamanites Swear Evil Oaths

When we think of an oath, we suppose that someone making it would have extreme integrity and honesty. However, here these Lamanite chief captains have sworn an oath to do evil, and they would do everything in their power to keep it.

Oaths have power for good or for evil. The Gadianton robbers swore oaths to each other, usually promising to support one another. The Nephite oaths were usually to obey God's law or fulfill his will. The oaths of the Gadianton robbers were so vile and fearful, that they were not published. The brethren did not want anybody to know about those oaths, because there was a wrong way to swear oaths and that created problems. Beware, even today, the oaths of secret combinations.

Alma 49:19–22 — The Lamanites Attempt to Pierce Nephite Defenses

It is so interesting to read of the Lamanites trying to dig down the banks of earth that they might obtain a path. They were swept off by stones, and the ditches were filled up in a measure with their dead. That is because they fought with waves of men coming, and they just kept sending them, and as they were killed with stones, arrows, or whatever, they were collapsing into the ditch and they could not pull them out even to rescue them if they were to trying to save the wounded. That creates an amazing and quite horrific picture.

Alma 49:23 — The Lamanites Receive Talionic Justice

Moroni did not boast of his success. In Alma 50:1, he sent the people immediately back to work constructing more fortifications. This defeat in Ammonihah and Noah was a kind of poetic justice for the Lamanites, who fought until their chief captains were all gone. This can be seen on other occasions in the scriptures, where justice in the ancient world was talionic. Whatever they were planning to do to their enemy (such as kill them all) would happen to them (they were killed). For example, if you dig a pit for your neighbor,

you may fall in it. That is talionic justice. Abinadi was burned, and he warned, “What ye have done to me is going to happen to you.” This in the teachings of the Savior in several places. If you forgive, you will be forgiven, and if you do not you will not be forgiven. Whatsoever measure you use for measuring, that yardstick that is going to be used to measure you (Matthew 7:2).

Alma 49:28 — The Nephites Credit Their Victory to God

The Nephites credited God’s matchless power in delivering all of them from their enemies. They were thankful for that power. When they won, they did not credit themselves and instead gave thanks to the Lord. The Nephites had sworn an oath that they would fight. When an oath or vow was made in the ancient world, they said to God, “If you will give us victory, we will sacrifice or dedicate or do something for you.” After a victory like this, it is very natural that they would have had an explicit obligation to give God thanks in some way. Perhaps this thanksgiving is mentioned here to let readers know that they fulfilled the obligation that they had incurred when they swore their own oath. Their thanks was not just in word, but also in deed, as they did not rest but continued to prepare for the next wave of attacks.

Alma 49:30 — Corianton Actively Preaches Again

In Alma 49:30, Corianton is mentioned as being back and working with his brethren. It appears that his repentance was effective and complete. It is interesting that Mormon takes care to be sure that readers know this. He does not just say Helaman and his brothers, but specifically names Corianton, together with Shiblun and the sons of Mosiah, to ensure that this point is duly noticed.

Alma 50

In this chapter we have the following episodes:

- Moroni does not rest in making more preparations for war (50:1–6)
- Moroni drives out all Lamanites (soldiers and civilians) in the surrounding lands and increases his army (50:7–12)
- The Nephites have a building and economic boom, and enjoy a time of peace and great happiness (50:13–24)
- Morianton tries to take the people of his city into the land northward; but he mistreated a servant girl who told Moroni, and their flight was stopped (50:25–36)
- Pahoran succeeds his father as chief judge in Zarahemla and takes an impressive oath of office (50:37–40)

Discussion questions to think about:

1. After great successes, Moroni did not stop preparing for further attacks. How can we prevent our temporary successes from lulling us into a sense of false security?
2. Do officials in our country today take oaths of office? Why or why not?

Alma 50:1–6— The Nephites Continually Strengthen Their Defenses

Once the Nephites had won, one might think they deserved a vacation. However, Moroni put the troops back to work, “And now it came to pass that Moroni did not stop making preparations for war, or to defend his people against the Lamanites” (Alma 50:1). Sometimes, after a successful Family Home Evening, or a great talk in Sacrament Meeting, we can be tempted to adopt the attitude, “Well, I do not have to worry about that next week, or keep it up for a while.”

The question here is, how can that syndrome be prevented? It is a normal inclination to want to let up once something is going well. It is a form of the pride cycle. When the grass is mowed and the weeds all pulled, one wants to rest, but they do not stay the way we want them. As Captain Moroni showed us, we have to keep working in order to keep up with the next development. He moved people out of the way when they were in a dangerous situation and populated strategic parts of the land with Nephites so that they would be a deterrent to the Lamanites. He did many other things in order to keep ahead of the game.

The first time the Lamanite/Zoramite forces approached, they came from the south up to the cities of Ammonihah and Noah (in Alma 49), and found that they were unexpectedly fortified, but the next time, things were different. They went up the east side of the Nephite lands, planning to attack Nephihah, then Lehi, and then they would make a sweep up along the seacoast until they came to Mulek and the borders of Bountiful (51:22–30). Bountiful guarded the narrow neck of land and was the most important piece of Nephite geography.

If the Lamanites could get to Bountiful, the Nephites would have had no way to escape into the land northward. Wherever that narrow neck was, it was a place that everyone needed to go through it. It would also prove to be just as important in Mormon’s final battles at the end of the Nephite people, and perhaps that is why Mormon knew that territory so well and focused on this campaign in particular. The Nephites were desperate to ensure that this advance in particular did not continue. They were somewhat prepared, but not quite prepared enough for this change of attack.

Alma 50:17–23 — Why Was This a “Happier Time” for the Nephites?

Meanwhile, Mormon pauses to speak of the prosperity and strength of the Nephites at this time. In Alma 50:20, Mormon quotes Lehi who had promised long before, “Blessed art thou and thy children and they shalt be blessed inasmuch as they keep the commandments.” Then in verse 22, Mormon adds, “And those who are faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times,” and then in verse 23, “But behold, there never was a happier people.” How Mormon had wished that people in his time had been this faithful.

If we keep the commandments, will we be a happy people? What were the conditions that made things so happy for Captain Moroni and his people at this time? Peace and happiness were about to come unraveled very quickly.

It is important to remember that this is Mormon writing and looking back. He said there was never a happier time among the people of Nephi, but was this a happier time than the first four generations in 4 Nephi? The text actually states, “Never was there a happier time since the *days of Nephi* than *in the days of Moroni* even at this time in the twenty-first year.” So Mormon was saying, down to that point in Nephite history, there had never been a happier time, even in the days of King Benjamin.

What made this such a happy time? Their faithfulness in keeping the commandments? The Nephites had been through very difficult circumstances, and never had there been such a mobilized, unified force. Could it be said that the pioneers’ crossing of the plains was the happiest time in the Church? It was hard, but they came singing their way across the plains, putting what they had been taught to the test. They put themselves in very dangerous circumstances, believing that God would deliver them and he did.

Never in known Nephite history had the centers of their territories been invaded. There had been other wars and skirmishes, but never had these outside armies come in and invaded them. They responded by mobilizing and unifying. It is also important that they had some faithful, charismatic leaders who were capable of uniting those who were willing to follow. They had confidence in them. It was not just the leaders who were strong but the saints who were willing to follow.

Alma 50:37–38 — Nephihah Refused to Take Charge of the Records

After the account of the plot by Morianton to take his people and flee to the land northward, his plot was revealed by a brave servant girl, he was killed in battle, and his people were restored by Teancum to their lands (50:24–46). We learn in Alma 50:37–38 that the chief judge Nephihah had been Alma’s first choice to receive the records, so his son Helaman had been his second choice (perhaps because of his young age). Nephihah’s

unwillingness to take that responsibility may have encouraged Alma to ensure that Helaman certainly did believe and was well instructed. When Helaman said, “I will keep thy commandments with all my heart,” he was not just saying this because he was obliged to take the responsibility. He knew that others could replace him.

Alma 50:39 — Pahoran’s Oath to the People

Pahoran then became the chief judge, the head of state: “The son of Nephihah was appointed to fill the judgment seat in the stead of his father; yea, he was appointed chief judge and governor over the people.” According to Alma 50:39, he swore to “Judge righteously, and to keep the peace and the freedom of the people, and to grant unto them their sacred privileges to worship the Lord their God, yea, to support and maintain the cause of God all his days, and to bring the wicked to justice according to their crime.”

The text says that this was “an oath and sacred ordinance.” *Sacred* means it is holy, in other words that the Lord was involved. In those days, where the Law of Moses still applied, an oath like this may have involved a sacrifice or a votive offering to accompany the vow. The taking of this oath and ordinance likely was a kind of public ceremony, done in or around the temple.

What are some modern examples of oaths like this one? They are different, but there are oath-taking occasions throughout our lives. When we raise our arm to the square that we will support our Church leaders, or when we say “yes, we will be a ministering brother or sister.” It is not the oath of public officials, but it is a promise to God that we will fulfill that obligation. Raising our arms to the square is not verbally saying it, but it is publicly committing.

Alma 51

In this chapter we have the following episodes:

- The king-men try to alter a few particular points of the law but are politically defeated and silenced (51:1–8).
- Amalickiah now attacks in person (51:9–12).
- The king-men refuse to take up arms (which was a capital offense) and are killed or imprisoned under martial law without normal legal trials (51:13–21).
- Amalickiah marches through the east and north lands, winning easily (51:22–28).
- Teancum kills Amalickiah at night, in his tent, on New Year’s Eve (51:29–37).

Discussion questions to think about:

1. What justified Moroni's severe treatment of the king-men and Teancum's killing of Amalickiah? How far must we go in ensuring due process before we take extreme measures?
2. Mormon says, "there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni." What circumstances have brought about the happiest times in your life?

Alma 51:2 — What Did the King-men Want?

In the twenty-fifth year of the reign of the judges, the Nephites were experiencing internal conflict led by a group called the "king-men." What did these king-men want? They wanted power, and they again wanted a king. But how were they going to accomplish it? The ending of Alma 51:2 reveals their plans. The king-men did not try to change everything at once, but only claimed that a few "particular points of the law should be altered." What were these few points? The text does not say.

In today's world, are we a little too pliable? Willing to change just a few things here and there? Perhaps a small thing is changed every year, but at the end of a decade all those cumulative changes have had a large effect. We would not have bought into some proposals all at once, but changing a little bit at a time can take us to the same place. While this can be sometimes used to positive societal change, how concerned should the Saints be about this kind of mission-creep or slippery-slope in their own lives? Not only is this an issue in the public sphere, but in personal lives as well. Small changes administered strategically over time may have larger consequences than one would think.

Alma 51:7 — What Is the Difference between Liberty and Freedom?

Here we find the terms *liberty* and *freedom* both used. Today, we use the word *law* to mean many different things, and a richer vocabulary may help explain some differences. Is there a difference in the way the word *law* is used in the Book of Mormon? Likewise, we may wonder, is *liberty* talking here about something different from *freedom*? The English word *liberty* comes from the Latin *libertas*, and *freedom* comes from the German *freiheit*, but are *freedom* and *liberty* synonyms? In Greek, it is *eleutheria*, and it means *not a slave*, to be free meant not having a master.

The Book of Mormon has at least two senses in which the words *liberty* and *freedom* are used. There is the freedom to worship God and then there is liberty, meaning freedom from slavery. It isn't certain whether the words are always used to mean one or the other, but two different meanings did develop and so it is possible that there is a difference between them. In this particular case, the phrase "people of liberty" stood in contrast to

those who wanted a king, a master-ruler. The “cause of freedom” then referred to the social right to practice their religion.

Alma 51:8 — Who Were the King-Men?

The text shows that most of the king-men were of high birth. They were aristocrats. They were landed people. None of the sons of Mosiah had wanted to be king twenty-five years earlier, but opinions may have differed among some of his nephews or people in the court of King Mosiah. When it says “of high birth,” there must have been some sort of bloodline involved. They may have been otherwise unknown descendants of King Mosiah the Elder, or of King Benjamin, or King Mosiah, or they could have been descendants of King Zarahemla, the last king of the Mulekites.

Note that they are called *king-men*. The Hebrew word for *king* is *Melek*. In Hebrew, there are no vowels, so *Melek* and *Mulek* look the same, just *m-l-k*. A *Melek-man* could be seen as either a *Mulek-man* or a *king-man*. There may be a play on words going on here. It is certainly possible that the Mulekites could have thought the Nephite experience was not going well from their point of view. If things were going well, the residents of Zarahemla seemed to be quite happy. But now, with the Zoramites opposed the Nephites, perhaps some of the Mulekites were wondering why they were getting caught in the middle of all this, saying, “Why do we have to go fight this Nephite battle? This is not our war.” We can understand politically how that could be their view. These Nephites, after all, moved in with King Mosiah 120 years ago, and they had been in charge a long time. Maybe some of them were thinking they ought to reassert their rights.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Should Readers Pay Close Attention to the Mulekites? \(Omni 1:19\),” KnoWhy 434 \(May 17, 2018\).](#)

Alma 51:14–17 — Moroni Fights the King-men Regime

Captain Moroni was very angry because the Lamanites were a present and powerful threat to his people, but the king-men were refusing to help. He was stern. But what justified his severe treatment of the king-men? The Nephites had their backs against the wall. If they did not use every possible resource at their disposal, Bountiful would be taken and they would be encircled, their lands invaded, and it would all be over.

It is important to notice that Moroni obtained authority to impose martial law here. He went to the people and got authority as commander-in-chief of the military to be able to deal with the king-men. Alma 51:15 tells us that, “He sent a petition, with the voice of the people, unto the governor of the land, desiring that he should read it, and give him [Moroni] power to compel those dissenters to defend their country or to put them to

death.” He gave the king-men an opportunity to take an oath. If they would not fight to defend the country, which was a normal legal obligation of all able-bodied men, they could then be put to death for not fighting. He could require them to swear the oath of allegiance and could put them to death for not swearing the oath. He put at least some of them in jail, and they sat there for six years until this war was over. The situation was urgent, so he planned to take care of the dissenters, but not immediately.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Moroni Speak of Pulling Down Pride? \(Alma 51:17\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 430, (May 3, 2018).

Alma 51:33–35 — Amalickiah Is Killed on the New Year

The twenty-sixth year of the reign of the judges in the land of Zarahemla began in a most unusual way. Having stemmed the tide of the advancing Lamanites in the first year of a seven-year offensive, Teancum and a servant “stole forth and went out by night, and went into the camp of Amalickiah.” The Lamanite soldiers being fatigued and asleep did not awaken as Teancum crept alone “into the tent of the king, and put a javelin to his heart.”

Undetected, Teancum returned to his camp and told his men what he had done (Alma 51:33–35). Few people have made much of the fact that this event happened on New Year’s Eve. But the book of Alma goes out of its way to identify the date of that precise occurrence, noting that when the Lamanites awoke the next morning, which was “on the first morning of the first month,” they found their king dead. And looking across the battle terrain, they also “saw that Teancum was ready to give them battle on that day” (Alma 52:1), which was New Year’s Day. This is another one of the rare times in the Book of Mormon that the specific day, month, and year is reported for an event. It is not certain, but it appears that the new-year kingship rituals may have something to do with Teancum’s choosing to slay Amalickiah on that very day, which was unconventional but crucial. On the day when the king would normally have been re-enthroned and celebrated as a demi-god, Teancum chose to leave a javelin in his heart. He knew that nothing could have demoralized Amalickiah’s soldiers more dramatically than this.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Teancum Slay Amalickiah on New Year’s Eve? \(Alma 51:37\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 160 (August 8, 2016).

Alma 52

In this chapter we encounter the following with some interesting morals:

- The soldiers awake to find their King Amalickiah dead (52:1–2): timing is everything!
- Moroni, Teancum and Lehi work together, each in his own way, and thus they were able to retake the city of Mulek, and accepted the surrender of many, but took others captive who would not deliver up their swords (52:5–40): teamwork triumvirate!

Alma 52:1–2 — A New Year’s Day Surprise

In warfare, timing can be everything. Gaining the advantage by a surprise attack is an important part of any military strategy. In the mentality of ancient warfare, making timely use of the religious meanings and symbolic powers associated with certain days of the year was even more so. We don’t know for sure, but it would seem likely that New Year’s day held some special significance in Lamanite or Zoramite culture.

New Year’s Day is not particularly meaningful to people today, but this was not so in ancient and premodern civilizations. Then, New Year’s Day was largely about the celebration and observance of such critical values and institutions as kingship, covenant renewal, the regeneration of the world and of the political order, the driving out of evil, and the reestablishment of correct leadership and goodness in the land. Much has been written about the year-rite in a wide variety of ancient cultures.

For example, the classic work by James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: The Roots of Religion and Folklore*, first published in 1890, reports that in some places “a king was put to death at the end of a year’s reign, and a new king appointed” in his place (1.225–26). Sometimes a temporary king or a pretender to the throne might sit on the throne for a few days, and then the real king would return and depose or even kill the phony king (1.228–34). On New Year’s Day in many cultures, special steps were taken in various ways to drive out evil and to protect the land from disease or misfortune by animal or substitutionary sacrifices (2.193–94).

In ancient Israel, the New Year, or Rosh Hoshanah, was the time of formal coronation of kings, the renewal of kingship, and the determination of destiny. The king’s restoration to the throne during this year-rite festival symbolized his continuing ability to stabilize the society and the elements of nature. If the Lamanites had in any way adopted any such commonly held beliefs, would not those expectations or superstitions have had a powerful effect on the Lamanite soldiers when they found their king dead on the morning of the very day when he would have been expected to reassert his rightful role as king and to drive evil out and to give assurances of good fortune?

Did the Lamanites at that point even know who had killed their king? The text says nothing about whose javelin was used. Maybe Teancum used Amalickiah's own royal weapon, which would have made his people wonder even more who had done it. All that uncertainty would only have added to their sense of calamity upon seeing a javelin stuck into King Amalickiah's heart. In sum, the total effect on the Lamanite army was sudden and powerful. Knowing that their king was dead, they immediately fell into fear and disarray. "They were affrighted and abandoned their design in marching into the land northward, and retreated with all their army into the city of Mulek, and sought protection in their fortifications" (Alma 52:2).

Teancum's actions could have appeared bold and courageous on any night, but his timing on New Year's Eve would have been completely astounding. His timing more than explains the ensuing fear and abrupt retreat of the entire Lamanite army. Having wrung out the evil past, he rang in a propitious new beginning.

Further Reading

Robert F. Smith and Stephen D. Ricks, "New Year's Celebrations," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 209.

Alma 52:8–10 — Moroni Wrote to Teancum

Moroni next sent quite a few instructions to Teancum:

- Retain all the prisoners who fell into his hands to be used for ransom for Nephite prisoners (v. 8)
- Fortify the land Bountiful (v. 9)
- Secure the narrow pass which led into the land northward, lest the Lamanites should obtain that point and should have power to harass them on every side (v. 9)
- Be faithful in maintaining that quarter of the land, which he did, "as much as was in his power" (v. 10)
- Take again by stratagem or some other way those cities which had been taken out of their hands (v. 10)
- Fortify and strengthen the cities round about, which had not fallen into the hands of the Lamanites (v. 10)

The Lamanite captains had taken an oath to take the city of Noah or die in the attempt, and they did indeed die. In the fight at Mulek, Jacob, the Zoramite leader who had an "unconquerable spirit" also would die (Alma 52:35). Moroni had asked only for the best that Teancum could do. He went beyond those specific orders.

Further Reading

For more on the Israelite New Year, see Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 160–73.

Alma 52:19 — The Nephite Leaders Work Together

Moroni, Teancum, and Lehi worked together, each in his own way, and thus they were able to retake the city of Mulek. They held a council of war. Moroni was the strategist, Teancum would be the decoy, and Lehi would be the backup, then Moroni would go into the city. It worked because each did their part. The leaders were all united. Note the camaraderie between these three leaders who loved each other. In war, it is often said, soldiers do not die for their country, but for their friends.

Alma 52:36 — Avoid Rash Decisions in Confusing Times

Since Jacob the Zoramite had died, the Lamanites soldiers found themselves without a leader. Some threw down their weapons, and others “being much confused they knew not whether to go or to strike.” War is rarely organized and rational. Confusion leads to fear, which sometimes leads to very bad decisions. To avoid that in our own lives we should always strive to be patient and find sanctuary. Do not act rashly. Attend the temple if possible, or counsel with a leader or with the Lord in prayer.

ALMA 53–63

John W. Welch Notes



Premodern Warfare

The eleven chapters in this lesson continue the lengthy coverage given by Mormon to the seven years of war at the end of the Book of Alma, spanning the 25th to the 31st years of the reign of judges. Mormon puts on display here three of his areas of expertise: (1) as abridger, he masterfully understands and selects from the records that he had at hand and straightforwardly narrates the main storylines, (2) as prophet and spiritual leader of his own struggling generation, he conveys meaningful messages that he knew would be pertinent and memorable for his future readers in their times of need, and (3) as commander in chief of the total Nephite nation at war, he displays his firsthand expertise in all areas of the order of battle in premodern times, that is, how military conflict was carried out in the world before the invention of gunpowder.

Much has been written about the multiple subjects involved with warfare in these chapters. Two of the scholars who have most effectively led the charge in this area and have helped us understand this subject literally from the ground up are Hugh Nibley and Bill Hamblin. Nibley served throughout World War II, carrying out strategic duties in Army Intelligence. In this capacity, he studied the vast records of military history from ancient to modern times. It is not an exaggeration to say that he found everywhere repeated confirmations of the reality of Mormon's war chapters. His story is told by his son Alex in the book *Sergeant Nibley*, and by his son-in-law Boyd Peterson in the biography, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life*. Both books are nigh to impossible to put down.

Bill Hamblin, with a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, was a cultural historian who drew extensively from every kind of subject imaginable dealing with warfare, anywhere

in the world, before the Middle Ages. His works on weapons, armor, fortifications, and military tactics offer readers an expert tool kit for getting a handle on truly comprehending the brutal costs of armed conflict in the ancient world. Hamblin was instrumental in organizing a large symposium at BYU in 1989 on warfare in the Book of Mormon, which resulted in the publication of a book and several subsequent articles, dealing with everything from the purposes and importance of warfare in the Book of Mormon, to military policies and leadership, the sacred aspects of “holy war,” the legal aspects of martial law, the weapons, logistics, weather, and geography of the conduct of military engagement.

For example, there are seventeen instances of particular or extensive warfare in the Book of Mormon, each with identifiable dates, locations, causes, tactics, and outcomes. Throughout these conflicts we learn of:

- the sacral nature of consulting with omens and prophets before going to war
- the need for purity, covenants, and ritual preparations for battle
- one-on-one stand-offs between leaders themselves
- the elevation of heroes who excel and who become essential role models
- the use of sacred implements, such as the sword of Laban
- the duty of all able-bodied men to serve
- tribal affiliations and organizing roles
- the perpetuation of the military arts by a military caste
- numbering the men, and almost putting women under arms (Alma 54:12; 55:17)
- granting limited exemptions and requiring alternative forms of service
- the use of mercenaries and the formation of alliances
- the compulsion of subjugated people to support the war effort
- the array of enemies, including formal armies, bandits, robbers, and rebels
- personal weapons, slings, stones, bows, arrows, clubs and slashing handheld weapons
- suspension of judicial process and legal rights during times of extreme crisis (Alma 51:19)
- the powers of captains and chief captains
- restrictions on the freedom of travel during seasons of war
- warnings and exchanging of taunts, and offers of peace
- fortifications, walls, stone and earthen embankments
- geographical constraints and targeted significance
- seasonality of war during specific months, probably due to weather
- daytime engagements only, as the normal rule
- ethical problems with the use of stratagems
- taking captives, and what to do with them
- releasing captives, usually with an oath

- the prominent use of religious rituals, regularly seeking divine intervention and protection
- prohibitions against taking personal plunder or booty (Mosiah 2:13)
- the importance of new innovations and improvements in military technology
- counting the troops, and knowing how to deploy them effectively
- feeding the troops, and the need for large-scale farming
- moving the troops, the need for roads and local knowledge of the terrain
- commanding the troops and maintaining order and loyalty
- tense interactions between the officers in the field and the political leaders at home
- burying the dead
- the economic costs and public health consequences of war
- grudges and irreconcilable enmity between certain leaders, leading to prolonged eras of intense militarization among competitors for power and control
- wars of extermination, and the annihilation of opposing populations

All of this extensive coverage is fairly astonishing. Whoever wrote the Book of Mormon basically knew everything a person would need to know in order to conduct warfare in the ancient world. Here we see accurate reports reflecting the complexities and developments of premodern warfare. Embedded in these records are deliberate decisions expertly made according to proven and professionally standard best practices. Warfare as reported in Mormon's record comports with the military practices developed and used in major civilizations in the pre-technical world prior to the times of gunpowder, rifles, canons, and before all the changes that came with them.

Through the intense examination of vast libraries of ancient historical records and numerous new archaeological discoveries, the patterns and practices of ancient warfare are better understood today than ever before. And there may well be much more yet to come. By the use of the new LiDAR technology in just the last few years, archaeologists now know more than anyone could previously imagine about the prolonged eras of intense militarization among competitors for power and control two millennia ago in Central America among the Maya and their neighbors.

Further Reading

William J. Hamblin, "Warfare in the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 241–248.

William J. Hamblin, "The Importance of Warfare in Book of Mormon Studies," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 523–543.

Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, eds., *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1990).

Alex Nibley and Hugh Nibley, *Sergeant Nibley: Memories of an Unlikely Screaming Eagle* (Salt Lake City, UT: Shadow Mountain, 2006).

Boyd J. Peterson, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2002).

Alma 53

In this chapter we encounter the following episodes with several interesting morals:

1. The Nephites put the Lamanite prisoners to work (53:1–5). This was the typical treatment of prisoners of war in the ancient world; they were treated as slaves, if they weren't killed. But there were no "prisoner of war camps" as such in the ancient world. One might see their work as a lesson to do the best you can under the circumstances. Eventually, willing Lamanite captives were rewarded with property in the land of Jershon (62:17, 27).
2. Dissensions and intrigue cause trouble for the Nephites on the west seacoast in Moroni's absence (53:8–9): When the cat's away, the mice will play. From this, good leaders (and parents) can learn the importance of remaining attentive, even from a distance.
3. The 2,000 stripling Ammonite young men went to Helaman, the High Priest, and asked him to be their commander, and he agreed (53:10–22): Youth can see here the importance of actively seeking out the most righteous leaders they possibly can find. Under their guidance, you can realize your highest potentials!
4. These young men take an oath (53:17) and they were needed to fight in the south. A lesson here: Make righteous commitments, and do your share!

Alma 53:3–7 — Ancient Fortified Sites in the Americas

Although not all people consider central America as the site of these Book of Mormon events, it is interesting to note that a civilization existed there with fortifications strongly similar to those described in the Book of Mormon, and which date to the right time period. Twenty-five years ago, John L. Sorenson's book, *Images of Ancient America* (pp. 128, 132), broke new ground by showing fortified sites discovered by archeologists from this era, beginning about 600 B.C. To quote Professor Sorenson:

Not many years ago archaeologists were confident that very rarely were sites in pre-Spanish Mesoamerica fortified. The last twenty-five years have seen a huge body of data come to light to the contrary. We now know of over three hundred places that were fortified or sited in relation to protective terrain, and they date from no later than 1000 BC, up to the Spanish Conquest. Instead of being the rarity it was considered a few years back, military fortification now appears to have been a normal cultural pattern for Mesoamerica with many interesting variations.

	Definite Fortified Sites	Possible Fortified Sites
Before 600 B.C.	0	3
Late Pre-Classic: 600-50 B.C.	35	3
Proto Classic: 50 BC- 200	26	8
Early Classic: 200-400	14	8
400-650	11	13

Again, quoting Professor Sorenson:

The most basic form was begun by digging a dry moat. The earth from the excavation was thrown up to form an inner embankment. Atop that, a palisade of tree trunks was erected. The combined moat and bank provided defenders a downward sloping field of fire for their weapons that gave them substantial advantage over attackers.

The Book of Mormon describes some of the same forms of fortifications. In the simplest type, the Nephites “cast up dirt around about to shield them” (Alma 49:2; see 49:4). “The highness of the bank which had been thrown up, and the depth of the ditch which had been dug round about” prevented the Lamanite enemy from climbing over or digging away the ridge without being exposed to deadly fire from above (Alma 49: 18; 49:22). A refined form had “works of timbers built up to the height of a man” (Alma 50:2) atop the earthen ridge. Protected towers were erected overlooking those palisades from which defenders could gain even more height to rain down weapons against attackers (see Alma 50:3–5). The original city of Nephi had a stone wall around it, apparently modeled upon the wall at Jerusalem in Israel (Nephi, the city’s founder, had firsthand knowledge of Jerusalem; see Mosiah 22:6), and the Nephite armies also constructed small stone-walled redoubts to protect garrisons (see Alma 48:8) (Sorenson, 132).

Sorenson's bold presentations of this evidence challenged the received opinions that the inhabitants of the Western hemisphere were peaceful and largely rural peoples. But especially with the new breath-taking LiDAR discoveries, reported especially in 2019 by Stephen Houston, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nxh3MjL9Y6Q>), and by the National Geographic (<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/2019/03/lasers-reveal-maya-war-ruins/>), all of those previous views are now being totally revised.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Was the Nature of Nephite Fortifications?](#) (Alma 50:6)," *KnoWhy* 158 (August 4, 2016).

Sorenson, John L., *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life*; (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 128–132.

Alma 53:10–22 — The Stripling Warriors Volunteer to Serve

The 2,000 stripling Ammonite warriors wanted Helaman to be their commander and he agreed. The young men volunteered to fight in place of their fathers who had taken an oath "that they never would shed blood more" (Alma 53:11). As previously mentioned, oaths were powerful forces, and Helaman encouraged these older Ammonites to keep their solemn vows: "They were overpowered by the persuasions of Helaman and his brethren" (v. 14). Fortunately, they had 2,000 sons (and 60 more arrived later) who had been too young at that time to have taken that oath back in the land of Nephi. Now they were willing to help in the battles to save their lands and offered to do what their fathers could not do (v. 16). The young men entered into their own covenant, pledging

to fight for the liberty of the Nephites, yea, to protect the land unto the laying down of their lives; yea, even they covenanted that they never would give up their liberty, but they would fight in all cases to protect the Nephites and themselves from bondage to protect the land to the laying down of their lives (v. 17).

They were only one generation away from those in their fathers' generation who laid down their lives rather than break their covenants. These were covenant-keeping people. The many afflictions and tribulations of the most recent war had moved them with compassion. It is interesting to note that these Ammonite youth now called themselves *Nephites* (v. 16)—probably at the time of the covenant-making.

The young people needed a leader, and they wanted Helaman to fill that role. Helaman was the High Priest, the leader of the Church; they knew they could trust him.

Verse 20 tells us that they were exceedingly valiant for courage, for strength, and for activity. They were true at all times, men of truth and soberness, taught to keep the commandments of God in their youth. In fact, they were, “true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted,” reminding us of the Scout Law: “A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful...” How does being trustworthy develop strong relationships and build confidence within the people around us? Love cannot exist where there is no trust. I remember well the Director of the BYU Honors Program once saying to me, “Remember, it is better to be trusted than to be loved.” I wondered about that arresting idea at first, but then realized that the desire to be loved is kind of a selfish wish, whereas the desire to be trusted is an unselfish virtue of seeking to be a dependable servant to others.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Old Were the Stripling Warriors? \(Alma 53:20\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 161, (August 9, 2016). “Their notable youth also amplifies the greatness of their courage. In the face of an older, larger, more menacing army of blood-thirsty Lamanites, these striplings “did not fear death” (Alma 56:47). No wonder Helaman remarked, ‘Never had I seen so great courage, nay, not amongst all the Nephites’ (v. 45).”

John A. Tvedtnes, “[What Were the Ages of Helaman’s Stripling Warriors?](#)” *Ensign* (September 1992), 28.

John W. Welch, “[Law and War in the Book of Mormon](#),” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990), 65. “In ancient Israel, ‘twenty appears to have been the age at which Israelite males became obligated to serve in the military’ (see, e.g., Numbers 1:3).”

Alma 52–55 — Mormon’s Vocabulary Comes through in these Chapters

In these war chapters, careful readers will spot a number of interesting words and phrases that one does not encounter elsewhere in the Book of Mormon. These bold and colorful expressions may reflect the exigencies and experiences of war. They may reflect parts of Mormon’s vocabulary and personality, which come through more directly here than in other parts of his writing. This list is just a few of these new wordings that jumped out at me. Others may occur to you. Ask yourself: In what context do they appear? What do they say to me personally today? Can I relate to these situations in light of some past experience in my own life? What lessons can I extract from the way Mormon has crafted the narratives in these chapters?

- “they were affrighted” (Alma 52:2; also 62:24, only these 2 times in the Book of Mormon. Ancient war, with its hand-to-hand combat and face-to-face encounters, was a theater of fear.)

- “power to harass them on every side” (52:10; the word harass appears only 4x in the Book of Mormon, all of them in this section; 51:32, 52:9, 52:13, 52:13)
- “as much as was in his power” (52:10; careful commanders are constantly assessing their strengths and weaknesses, the limits of their power)
- “to wait for the coming of Moroni” (52:17; this phrase reappears in 58:3, 58:4, 58:7, 60:30, infrequent in this sense in the Book of Mormon, but the anxieties and uncertainties of soldiers needing to wait are intense, and unforgettable; we too must learn to wait and not jump too soon)
- “held a council of war” (52:19, only here and in Alma 24:5 and Mosiah 12:17; these councils must have been high-level, high-stakes meetings; we hold ward councils, which also are high-stakes meetings, but in another sense)
- “that he might decoy the Lamanites out” (“to decoy,” used here as a verb, see 52:21 and 58:1, the only 2 times this language is found in Book of Mormon; the use of stratagems and ploys are always high-risk experiments that hope for good luck and good fortune)
- “having an unconquerable spirit” (52:33, “unconquerable spirit” also appears in 3 Ne 3:4, the only other time in the Book of Mormon; obviously the way that a commander such as Mormon would describe the quality of courage in a strong man of war)
- “conquer” appears only six times in Book of Mormon, all of them in writings composed by Mormon (Alma 44:8; 56:17; 58:12; 61:8; Moroni 9:2, 6)
- “being much confused” (only in 52:28, 56:51; reflects awareness of the actual chaos and tumult of battle; the word “confusion” only in 52:28, 52:37; and note Isaiah 8:5; 2 Ne 19:5, in particular where it is the “battle of the warrior” that “is with confused noise”)
- “they rejoiced in each other’s safety” (53:2; safety appears dominantly in 48:12, 49:27, 53:2, 62:10, 3 Ne 2:12, in these military contexts, and is no small matter in a military setting, but also something that should be rejoiced over in ordinary daily life as well)
- “they were beloved by each other, and also beloved by all the people of Nephi” (53:2, used prominently here, as Mormon knows the power of deep gratitude for those who render services at great expense)
- “they were exceedingly valiant for courage, strength and activity” (the word valiant appears only in 53:20, 56:13, and in Isaiah 10:13; 2 Nephi 20:13 as a high term of honor and praise)
- “they were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted” (the word “entrusted” appears only in the sense of military duty, in 53:20, but otherwise when

- talking about being entrusted with records or ministry, Alma 37:1, 14, 39:4; Mormon 6:6; being trusted is the first order of importance in the Marines, *semper fideles*)
- “they were men of truth and soberness” (53:21; “truth and soberness” are words that come from Benjamin in Mosiah 4:15, otherwise used only here and by Alma in 42:31)
 - “they were taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before him” (“walk uprightly” is found here in Alma 53:21 and 5 other times in the Book of Mormon, 1 Ne 16:3; Mosiah 18:29; Alma 1:1; 45:24; 63:2; it being a prominent virtue mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures, see Psalms 15:2; 84:11; Proverbs 2:7; 10:9; 15:21; 28:18, Isaiah 33:15; Micah 2:7, inviting people today to consider what this word is trying to tell us)
 - “I am in my anger” (54:13; see Deuteronomy 31:17; also Mosiah 12:1; 20:15)
 - “I will avenge his blood upon you” (Alma 54:16; “avenge themselves of the blood” Mormon 3:9; in Ether 14:24 we find that this was part of the forbidden Jaredite oaths)
 - “we will wage a war which shall be eternal” (the term “wage war” is found in the Book of Mormon only in Alma 54:5, 20, 24; 55:1; and 57:7, an expression one would expect from Mormon)
 - “it was not a just cause that had caused him to wage a war” (55:1, reminding us that one must be careful to wage war only on just grounds)
 - “he did not delight in murder or bloodshed, but he delighted in the saving of his people” (55:19, in this description Mormon is no doubt reflecting his own deepest personal desires as well as his abhorrence of murder and bloodshed)
 - “if their wine would poison a Lamanite it would also poison a Nephite” (55:3, 32, perhaps reminding us of our own limitations, we are not invulnerable; poison was mentioned in Alma 47:18 because it had been used to kill King Lehonti, and in Ether 9:31 it appears as a Jaredite tactic, but the use of poison would have been considered by Mormon well beyond the scope of justifiable rules of military engagement)

Alma 54

In this chapter, Mormon tells how, amidst insults and curses, negotiations broke down between Moroni and Ammoron in their negotiations over the exchange of captives and ultimate demands (54:1–55:3). In the heat of such strong feelings and rudeness, negotiations will never succeed. But at least they tried to negotiate!

Alma 54:1–11 — Negotiation for Prisoner-Exchange

Moroni and his army had not taken women and children as prisoners (nor would it have been possible them to do so, seeing that the invading Lamanite armies were surely mostly composed of men); but Ammoron and his troops had. Ammoron now wanted to use them as bargaining chips (keeping them would have been costly and burdensome) and accordingly had requested a trade of prisoners, presumably offering the women and children for captured soldiers (obviously he would have wanted more men to fight in his ranks and fewer Nephite prisoners to feed). Moroni, obviously liked that idea, for the same military reason. However, Moroni was very strategic in his answer. He called Ammoron to repentance for waging the war, warning him of the consequences of his evil designs and effectively for his mistreatment of women and children. Moroni's terms for the exchange required Ammoron to withdraw his purposes, go back to the Land of Nephi in the south and stop the war (v. 10). He also required the prisoner exchange to consist of one man and his wife and children from the Lamanites for every man to be released by the Nephites (v. 11). Capturing women and children was allowed under Israelite law, but they had to be treated humanely and taken in as family members (Deuteronomy 21:10–14). The Lamanites were breaking those laws.

Alma 54:11–13 — “Behold, I Am in My Anger”

This chief captain Moroni became angry: “Behold, I am in my anger, and also my people; ye have sought to murder us, and we have only sought to defend ourselves” (Alma 54:13). Whether it was anger in the sense we use it today, or whether it was great passion for what he believed and knew was right is debatable, but he did call Ammoron “a child of Hell,” and his tone was one that suggests this was real anger. Maybe we can suppose it was righteous anger. In Alma 59:13, we later read that Moroni was again angry, this time with the central government. The letter he sent to Pahoran was even more excoriating than the one he sent to Ammoron here. His anger would have been justified, but maybe he should have held his tongue. Although such insults may appear to project a strong negotiating posture, being insulting is usually not a good way to work out a peaceful settlement.

Alma 54:20–23 — Ammoron and Amalickiah Were Zoramites

Recall that Amalickiah, the king of the Lamanites, by treachery had been killed in his sleep by Teancum on New Year's Eve. Ammoron, his brother, had taken over as the king and commander. In this verse, which is part of Ammoron's response to Moroni, we learn that Amalickiah and Ammoron were direct descendants of Zoram: They were Zoramites. Ammoron ends his letter with the normal ending, a statement of personal identification.

As a clarification of what Ammoron saw as his purpose, and as an indicator of his bitterness, Ammoron wrote as his identity, “I am Ammoron, and a descendant of Zoram,”

then added, “whom your fathers pressed and brought out of Jerusalem.” In verse 17, in the earlier part of his letter, he had claimed: “For behold, your fathers did wrong their brethren, insomuch that they did rob them of their right to the government when it rightly belonged unto them.” He claimed, then, that these wars were fought to avenge those wrongs. (See above in Alma 46:1–4 — *Who Was Amalickiah?*).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Was Ammoron Determined to Avenge the Blood of His Brother?” (Alma 54:16), *KnoWhy* 162 (August 10, 2016). “The dynamics fueling Ammoron’s worldview and objectives are complex. At a most basic level, this is a rather obvious example of tribalism and ethnic tension. While political aspirations were undoubtedly tied up in Ammoron’s declaration, it is important to note that he appealed to a deeply rooted tribal or clan rivalry as the motivation for his political goals. In perpetuating this tribal antagonism, Ammoron promoted an ideology fundamentally at odds with the egalitarian and anti-tribal ideals of Nephite prophets (cf. 2 Nephi 26:33; Mosiah 4:19; 4 Nephi 1:2, 17)”.

Ze’ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times* (Provo, UT and Winona Lake, IN: BYU Press and Eisenbrauns, 2001), 72. Regarding revenge by the tribal redeemer of blood, Professor Falk has written: “Cases of murder, as mentioned above, were not originally considered to be of public concern but only of consequence to the relatives of the victim. Besides the obligation placed upon the redeemer of the blood, there also existed the religious idea of pollution, which in turn was connected with the institution of the asylum and the distinction between intentional and unintentional acts [*mens rea*] (Exodus 21:12–14; Numbers 35; Deuteronomy 19:1–13). Biblical law, in fact, represents the transition from tribal revenge to judicial procedure, the latter being necessary once *mens rea* was recognized as a prerequisite to crime.” While all of that is very true under normal circumstances, in the case of Teancum, Amalickiah and Ammoron, not only did this occur in wartime, but Amalickiah himself had committed treachery and murder.

Alma 55:4–26 — The Nephites Rescued the Prisoners

In this chapter Mormon tells at length the following episode: Using both a stratagem and a former Lamanite, a man named Laman (one of the servants falsely accused of killing the Lamanite king), the Nephite prisoners in the city of Gid are liberated (55:4–26).

Moroni would not accept Ammoron’s terms—“Behold, I will not exchange prisoners with Ammoron save he will withdraw his purpose”—because he did not want to give Ammoron any more power than he already had. Nor would he take the “new terms” that Ammoron was suggesting, which was to surrender to the Lamanites and allow them to exercise what they regarded as their right of government. Ammoron accepted the prisoner

exchange deal that was clearly in his best interest, but Moroni was not willing to reciprocate unless Ammoron withdrew his purposes, which Moroni considered fraudulent (see v. 1).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Did Moroni Change His Mind about Exchanging Prisoners with Ammoron? (Alma 55:2)," *KnoWhy* 163 (August 11, 2016).

Alma 56

In these chapters, Mormon wants us as his readers to ponder and appreciate the greatest moments in the life of Helaman, the son of Alma. As you think about what you know about Helaman and as you read Alma 55–57, think of the following:

1. What would you count as the greatest moments in Helaman's life? What do you find most impressive about his character and how he rose to meet truly amazing challenges?
2. What prepared Helaman to righteously and successfully meet those challenging opportunities and responsibilities?
3. In what ways did Helaman carry forward the teachings and objectives of his father Alma the Younger and also his grandfather Alma the Elder?
4. In what ways does the life of Helaman inspire you? What lessons for life do you learn from him? How do his great moments encourage you personally and spiritually?

Alma 56:1–14 — What Were the Nephites Up Against?

The Lamanites from the Land of Nephi had invaded from the South and captured Manti and Zeezrom. Zeezrom is a fairly new, probably small, city that is never mentioned again. Then they took Cumeni, then Antiparah. They were threatening the city of Judea, which was closer to Zarahemla.

Alma 56:16 — Helaman Marched with His "Sons"

Helaman reported the activities of the young Ammonites in his letter to Moroni. He had marched at the head of his "sons" to the city of Judea where Antipus, who had been appointed the leader, and the citizens were fighting by day and reinforcing the city by night. They knew that Judea was next to be attacked. The people of Judea were "depressed in body as well as in spirit" there, but they took "great hopes and much joy" (v. 17) when Helaman arrived.

This is a rare occurrence of the term “depressed.” The people had suffered many afflictions, and they sensed the inevitability of this next city to be taken. They toiled even by night. Moroni had left the west coast to get up to Bountiful, so there was not much of an army left there to meet the Lamanites.

Alma 56:18–57 — Helaman’s Sons Fight and Are Not Killed

When Ammoron’s army saw the arrival of the new battalion of young men, they retreated and delayed their attack on Judea, allowing time for the Nephites to work on reinforcement. “And thus were we favored of the Lord; for had they come upon us in this our weakness they might have perhaps destroyed our little army; but thus were we preserved” (v. 19).

Helaman and his young warriors moved out as bait appearing to go to a neighboring city (v. 30); the Lamanites pursued them; Antipus, the Nephite commander, and his army chased the Lamanite army. Eventually Helaman turned back, not knowing what had happened to Antipus, and arrived at the battle just in time with his 2,000 brave warriors to allow the weak and worn out Nephites to regroup and surround and conquer the Lamanites. Although Antipus had been killed, not one of Helaman’s sons had fallen. The city was spared on the third day of the seventh month (v.42). The seventh month of the year was Passover month. This event occurred on the third day of the seventh month about 66 B.C., and Passover was celebrated on the fourteenth [in the evening] and fifteenth days. As it were, the destroying angel passed over these young soldiers on this occasion. They had great courage (v. 45), did not fear death, and fought for the liberty of their fathers having been taught by their mothers “that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” (v. 47).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [How Realistic are Nephite Battle Strategies? \(Alma 56:30\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 164 (August 12, 2016). “These seemingly sudden, illogical actions ... speak volumes about the authenticity of the text and the military expertise of the author, as when all of the clues provided in the text are examined in depth, the logic becomes apparent” (David E. Spencer, *Captain Moroni’s Command: Dynamics of Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2015)).

Alma 57

Alma 57:1–4 — Ammoron Desired a Prisoner Exchange of Helaman

Ammoron wrote to Helaman asking to exchange Lamanite prisoners for the city of Antiparah. Note that the date Helaman gives was the end of the “twenty-eighth year of the judges.” Surprisingly, this request for a prisoner exchange occurred somewhat before the famous prisoner-exchange-negotiations between Moroni and Ammoron, which was at the beginning of the twenty-ninth year of the judges. Recall that Helaman was writing a letter to Moroni about what had previously happened, a history. Another brief flashback.

Ammoron was fighting the city of Mulek, and was desperate for more soldiers. Getting back his prisoners would have greatly enhanced his military strength. Here he wanted to exchange them for a city. Helaman refused to trade prisoners for the city, and the Lamanites voluntarily abandoned Antiparah to Helaman without bloodshed. About a year later, Ammoron wanted to exchange prisoners, this time with Moroni, who refused, and promptly rescued the prisoners.

Alma 57:6 — Helman’s Army Receives Reinforcements

At the same time that Ammoron was asking Moroni for a prisoner exchange, in the commencement of the twenty and ninth year (Alma 54:1 and Alma 57:6), Helaman received a supply of provisions, and additional soldiers. They received a unit of 6,000 men from Zarahemla, and sixty more young men of the Ammonites. His statement was, “we were strong, yea, and we had also plenty of provisions.” An army marches on its stomach. This saying, which attests to the importance of forces being well-provisioned, has been attributed to both Frederick the Great and to Napoleon, who also said, ‘C’est la soupe qui fait le soldat.’

Alma 57:7–12 — Why Did the Lamanites Give Up So Easily?

Helaman, being alert to the importance of provisions, surrounded the city of Cumeni “a little before the Lamanites there were to receive a supply of provisions” (v. 8). Helaman’s band picked off the Lamanite supply trains going into the city, and took them and their prisoners of war far away to Judea. Cumeni was retaken after the Lamanites lost all hope of receiving supplies and left without conflict.

Alma 57:13–17, 28–36 — Unruly Lamanite Prisoners

Helaman recounted that there were so many Lamanite prisoners that this band of Nephites were unable to keep them under control. Helaman said, “our prisoners were so numerous that, notwithstanding the enormity of our numbers, we were obliged to employ

all our force to keep them, or to put them to death” (Alma 57:13). The prisoners would burst into rebellion, and large numbers of them—about 2,000—ended up being put to death in the fights. Helaman expressed that this was after they had surrendered themselves as prisoners of war; he was apparently uncomfortable with the situation. Hebrew law forbade the execution of prisoners. Helaman considered the circumstances as critical.

In addition to the unruliness of the prisoners, there were barely enough provisions for the army, but even so, executing prisoners was not his first choice. “It became a very serious matter to determine concerning these prisoners of war” (v. 16). They decided to transport them to Zarahemla. Part of the army were given charge over the prisoners to march them from the area of Cumeni to Zarahemla. Gid, the leader of the party, returned the next day, fought to help liberate Cumeni, then explained that the prisoners had been stirred up into rebellion at news that the Lamanites had an army marching toward Cumeni. Many prisoners had died, and many had escaped.

Alma 57:18–27 — Gid’s Army Helps Save Cumeni

The Lamanites did indeed march forth and attack Cumeni, seeing that Gid and many soldiers had left for Zarahemla. But Gid returned just in time to help Helaman’s band win the day. Heavy losses were suffered, but not by the stripling warriors.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did the Stripling Warriors Perform Their Duties ‘With Exactness’? \(Alma 57:21\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 165, (August 15, 2016).

Alma 58

Alma 58:10–11, 37 — Divine Assurance

Helaman and his troops, along with those fighting with them were trying to find a way to retake Manti from the Lamanites. They were, however, without provisions, short on manpower, and unsure of what tactics to use. Supplies were apparently not coming; the wait was “many months,” and the situation was dire. They went to the best source for help. “Therefore we did pour out our souls in prayer to God, that he would strengthen us and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies” (v. 10). Before the provisions and additional troops arrived, they were strengthened by the Lord, who, they said, “Did visit us with assurances that he would deliver us; yea, insomuch that he did speak peace to our souls.”

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Did Helaman's Army Maintain Faith While Being Cut Off from Provisions? \(Alma 58:37\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 167 (August 17, 2016). "The logistics of maintaining a force in the field in Mesoamerica, either defensively or on the attack, was a serious challenge under ancient conditions. ... Typically, a supply of food was carried by soldiers on their backs from their home communities, ... [and then] supplies continually brought from the home base by a transport column were required or desirable" (John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013), 419).

Alma 58:13–38 — Manti Is Retaken

The retaking of Manti was accomplished without bloodshed after a long siege with few provisions: The Nephites had been unable to use the previously successful decoy tactics, and attacking them in their fort was impractical. Finally, provisions arrived after a very long wait, accompanied by 2,000 men to help. With this assistance, Helaman's striplings prepared to attack Manti. The troops of Gid and Teomner hid to cover the right and left flanks in the wilderness, while Helaman remained at the camp. The Lamanites, who had already determined that the Nephites had less manpower, brought out the whole army from Manti and marched toward them. Whereupon Helaman and his young warriors retreated rapidly into the wilderness area, passing through the hidden troops of Gid and Teomner, and drawing the Lamanites after them. Gid and Teomner slipped in to retake Manti; "Now this was done because the Lamanites did suffer their whole army, save a few guards only, to be led away into the wilderness" (v. 22). By marching at night, Helaman's army got back to Manti before the Lamanites returned. The Lamanites fled into the wilderness and "out of all this quarter of the land."

In the end of this campaign, here are a few questions to discuss or think about:

1. What have you found that helps you to combat depression? What gives you hope?
2. How can we be like the parents of the striplings and increase the faith of our youth?
3. What events in your recent life can you "justly ascribe to the miraculous power of God" (Alma 57:26)?
4. What might you do to better "obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness" (Alma 57:21, another unique word here)?
5. What other lessons of life can you extract from the stories in each of these episodes?

Alma 59

Alma 59:1 — Moroni Was Glad to Receive Helaman’s Epistle

Moroni received and read the letter at the beginning of the thirtieth reign of the judges. He was very happy to receive this letter from Helaman “because of the welfare, yea, the exceeding success which Helaman had” He had not, until the letter came, known much about what had actually been going on.

The most common writing material used in Mesoamerica and widely throughout the western hemisphere was fig bark or a tree bark that they would cut, peel off, smooth out and dry. It made quite a good writing surface. It was smooth and when it dried, it was like a good parchment, and was quite durable. They would stitch pieces together and stack them to make accordion folds, so it was all in one piece. The runner was not carrying a big flier. The Spaniards thought that these documents were all pagan, so they burned thousands and thousands of them, which is a real catastrophe. They proudly reported that they were eradicating all the pagan beliefs.

Further Reading

John L. Sorenson, “[The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record](#),” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1997), 391–521.

Alma 59:3–13 — Moroni Becomes Angry at the Government

Moroni needed as much help as he could get, but his first concern was about the immediate need of Helaman and the 2,000-plus stripling warriors. They had taken all that part of the land back from the Lamanites, but did not have very much manpower to maintain it.

First, Moroni asked for help from Pahoran to strengthen Helaman and the troops that were sustaining that part of the land. However, then Moroni discovered that Helaman had done so well in defending the city of Manti, that all those Lamanite soldiers had fled from Manti to Nephihah, an area that Moroni was trying to defend. Now Moroni had double trouble. He tried to hold on, but ultimately lost the city of Nephihah. This loss caused him to worry about the wickedness of his people, and he feared that they may lose their lands to the Lamanites.

And famously, “And it came to pass that Moroni was angry with the government, because of their indifference concerning the freedom of their country” (v. 13).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Was Moroni's Correspondence with Pahoran Significant?](#) (Alma 59:3)," *KnoWhy* 168 (August 18, 2016). "The correspondence between Moroni and Pahoran also provides important glimpses into the personalities of these men. Although a man of great faith, it is clear that Moroni was also susceptible to anger, frustration, doubt, and misplaced outrage at those whom he assumed had slighted him. At the same time Pahoran is revealed in his letter to be a man of patience in the face of being wrongfully accused."

Alma 60–61

Alma 60:1–36 — Moroni Writes to Pahoran

What adjectives would you use to describe Captain Moroni's letter? His tone? His attitude?

- He is angry. This is about the fourth time that we read that Moroni was angry. This is usually not considered a great virtue.
- Moroni was discouraged with the people that he had tried so hard to teach.
- This war had been going on now for about a dozen years, so he was likely worn down and weary.
- He was harsh, but he thought he was justified. I think he was making some big assumptions and being judgmental against the government. He had no idea what had really been going on at the capital.
- Perhaps he was impulsive. He certainly jumped to conclusions.
- Discouraged and desperate. They had no supplies, no reinforcements, and many had fallen by the sword. I think he really cared about the people.

It may be easy for us to assume that Moroni was quite a hothead. However, Teancum killed Amalickiah with extraordinary daring, and maybe even foolhardiness—as we shall see when he tries to do it a second time. In this war, their backs were against the wall, and desperation sometimes requires more than just kind efforts to persuade. He did get Pahoran's attention.

Moreover, he may have worried that a less pointed or bold correspondence would result in inaction by whoever was responsible for the deprivation of the Nephite armies. After all, he had already written once and received no answer. Pahoran revealed in his reply that he was up to his neck in his own problems. Perhaps the letter was delivered to Zarahemla after Pahoran had left. It may have not been delivered—on time anyway.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Moroni Refer to Vessel Impurity in Condemning the Central Government? \(Alma 60:23\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 169 (August 19, 2016).

Alma 60:1 — Who Was Directing the War in Zarahemla?

Just before the beginning of the book of Alma, all governmental power was held by one man—the king. He was the supreme ruler of the whole country, of everything. However, Alma divided up the powers. He kept for himself the responsibility of high priest and the head of the church, but he eventually gave to someone else the chief judgeship, and he also assigned to someone else the military, so they had a division of power. We do not know exactly how they tried to balance power, but we (in the United States) have a balance and separation of powers within our federal and state systems. Alma probably realized that for a democracy to work, for the voice of the people to really have a chance of surviving, all the power could not be concentrated in the hands of one person. Pahoran, as chief judge, then, probably did not have control over the military, over Moroni.

Without good people, a democracy is never going to work. This type of government causes a very real struggle for the voice of the people. Maybe that is one of the big themes of the whole Book of Alma—trying to make this experiment work.

We are so comfortable with the idea of democracy, the American Revolution, and how successful our efforts in this regard have been, that we forget what an enormous and risky undertaking it was. No one had ever tried to do something like what America did, and it was not easy to make it work.

We know that Pahoran was rather reluctant to take office, and was drafted into his position. When Nephiah stepped down, Pahoran did not even want to take the records, and he was not eager to get into this, but who would have been? They were in a war-torn situation. Pahoran was certainly not like Captain Moroni who was willing to charge right into things.

Alma 60:27–29 — Moroni’s Use of Warnings in His Epistle

Moroni offered some pretty strong warnings. He essentially told Pahoran that he would come to the city and stir up insurrections among the people if they desired freedom. He threatened to come in and clean house if the government languished in their luxury. That was more than a warning, it was a threat.

Also characteristic was his use of warnings of divine retribution: “Except ye do bestir yourselves in the defence of your country and your little ones, the sword of justice doth hang over you; yea, and it shall fall upon you and visit you even to your utter destruction” (v. 29).

There are a lot of good adjectives to use here. I think too often when we talk about this letter, people only think of how angry he was and how impetuous he appeared to be, jumping to a conclusion when he did not really know all the facts. We need to be careful about putting ourselves in that situation. However, chief captain Moroni had a great reputation and he had certainly paid a very heavy price for everything that he had done. He deserved, in a way, to be able to speak his mind openly.

He was certainly an honest man. He was not mincing words or hiding behind any kind of protocol, and maybe we can give him the benefit of the doubt for his circumstances.

In the end, Pahorah wrote back to Moroni (61:1–21). Pahoran himself had fled to the city of Gideon when Pachus and his deserters had taken over Zarahemla.

Alma 62–63

Holding no grudges, Moroni rushed to the aid of Pahorah in Gideon. Pachus was killed, and the kingmen were tried. Moroni sends aid to Helaman, Lehi, and Teancum. Willing Lamanite captives were then settled in the land of Jershon (62:17, 27). They produced and supplied provisions to the army.

Nephihah was recaptured without any losses by use of ropes and ladders at night (62:23). Moroni drove the Lamanite army from the land of Lehi to the land of Moroni, where they camped (62:30–32). At night, Teancum crept into the enemy camp and killed Ammoron, and Teancum himself was also killed (62:35–37), but the war ended (62:38–39). As you reflect on this long campaign, you might wonder what you have learned from this and done in building your character to be sure that your heart has been softened and not hardened by trials and difficulties in your life (62:41). This seems to be something that Mormon wants his readers to think about. See Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Was Teancum Captured and Killed?](#) (Alma 62:36)," *KnoWhy* 170 (August 22, 2016).

Moroni retired and died only two years later (62:43; 63:3). Was his death premature? Was it the result of war injuries, disease, or other stresses of seven years of high-tension conflicts and challenges?

In addition, Helaman regulated the church and but then also died, only one year later (62:45–52).

Helaman's brother Shiblon took charge of the plates, but he also died only three years later (63:1, 10).

Helaman's son Helaman, still quite young, was at least a little older and could take charge of the plates (63:11).

Pahoran returned to the judgment seat but he too will die only four years later (62:44; Helaman 1:1).

Obviously, all of these deaths, along with the numerous casualties sustained during the past years of warfare, must have taken a high toll, leaving a power vacuum and weakening the central Nephite governmental and depth of church leadership.

Hagoth and others, including Helaman's youngest brother Corianton, began moving to the land northward or sailing away (63:5, 9). They were never heard from again, as far as we are told. See Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Mormon Mention Hagoth? \(Alma 63:8\)](#)," *Knowhy* 171 (August 23, 2016).

The Book of Alma in Retrospect

As you think back over the entire book of Alma, which threads do you find most significant and the most meaningful to you? How have those threads laced the 63 chapters of Alma together as a unified text?

And which of its religious themes and spiritual lessons do you find the most interesting, memorable, and compelling? For example, how and when does the pride cycle circulate through the book of Alma? See Book of Mormon Central, "[How Does Chiasmus Teach Us to Reverse the Pride Cycle? \(Alma 62:48\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 468 (September 18, 2018).

As you think ahead to the end of the Book of Mormon, how has Mormon laid the groundwork to prepare us as readers to understand what will ultimately happen in the finale of the Book of Mormon by including all these episodes in such detail and at such great length in the book of Alma?

HELAMAN 1–6

John W. Welch Notes



Once again, and as it always seems to be the case with the Book of Mormon, many interesting and inspiring things can be said about everything found in this next block of six chapters. The following sections raise only a few of the possible points, but they produced many useful classroom comments and discussion questions, as I hope they will likewise do for you in your family scripture study and personal reflection.

Helaman 1

Helaman 1:1–2 — Serious Difficulty among the Nephites

At the beginning of the fortieth year of the reign of the judges “there began to be a serious difficulty among the people of the Nephites” (Helaman 1:1). Mormon here has clearly understated a very dire situation. Helaman (Alma 62:52), Moroni (Alma 63:3), and Shiblon (Alma 63:10) had all recently died. Within five years, the Nephites had lost several of their finest and most admirable leaders—men who had been pivotal in holding their nation together during the long defensive military campaign against the Lamanites.

As might be expected, the death of Chief Judge Pahoran had created a disturbance among the people as to who should be his successor (Helaman 63:2). When Pahoran died, perhaps suddenly, his three sons—Pahoran², Paanchi, and Pacumeni—all “did contend for the judgment-seat; therefore, they did cause three divisions among the people” (Helaman 1:4).

Brant A. Gardner points out the fragility of the situation:

Not only was the chief judge’s death a time of transition, but it was the first time that the surviving chief judge had not declared his ruler. ... Complicating things even more, the crisis of succession came at a time of increasing internal divisions

among the Nephites. Pahoran's death became a spark that ignited already-smoldering divisions.

Further Reading

Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 5:42.

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Was a Void in Leadership Dangerous for the Nephites? \(Helaman 1:2\),](#)" *KnoWhy* 172 (August 24, 2016).

Helaman 1:5–13 — Dissent Leads to Tragedies

Pahoran, the peaceful chief judge of the Nephites who responded so patiently to the angry captain Moroni, died without having selected a successor. Three of his sons claimed right to the judgeship. Following are their names and their successive fates:

- Pahoran the younger (Pahoran₂) was "appointed by the voice of the people to be chief judge and a governor over the people of Nephi" (v. 5). He was murdered by Kishkumen.
- Paanchi and his followers were angry that he had not been selected as chief judge. Paanchi was tried and executed because he "raised up in rebellion and sought to destroy the liberty of the people" (v. 8). A group of his followers sent forth an assassin named Kishkumen to kill Pahoran the younger. Kishkumen's band of conspirators took oaths to protect Kishkumen. They were the core of the gang that became the Gadianton Robbers.
- Pacumeni had graciously stepped down when his brother, Pahoran the younger, had been selected. He was subsequently appointed "according to the voice of the people" to be chief judge after Paanchi was executed (v. 13). Pacumeni was then killed by Coriantumr during his invasion of Zarahemla (v. 21).

Thus, between the beginning of the fortieth year and the end of the forty-first year, in addition to Pahoran the elder, the Nephites had lost three chief judges in rapid succession. What would this have meant for the Nephite world in general?

Helaman 1:7–8 — Paanchi Takes Steps to Incite Rebellion

In the trial and execution of Paanchi, we encounter another legal question about that point at which speech becomes illegal action. The earlier trial of Korihor had tested the limits of free speech under the laws of Mosiah guaranteeing the freedom of belief and presumably the expressions thereof. The issue now became whether Nephite law allowed or required Paanchi to be punished for expressing intent to rebel against the government. This case is only briefly reported, but from this case came the Nephite precedent that legally defined the point at which conspiratorial planning becomes legally actionable as treason.

In all societies, crimes involving conspiracy and incitement are always difficult to define and even harder to enforce. Given the difficulties that the Nephites experienced with the secret combinations of the Gadianton robbers during the time covered by the book of Helaman in the second half of the final century before the coming of Christ, it can be surmised that this legal concept became a key point in Nephite law at this time. Perhaps for this very reason, the case of Paanchi was positioned by the writers and abridgers of the book of Helaman at the very outset of this book as a leading legal issue during this period of Nephite history. Mormon will interject his own comments on a few occasions as he goes along in his abridgement of the book of Helaman, most notably in Helaman 3:12–14, where he states that the problems of conspiracy and secret combinations would eventually prove to be “the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi.”

Interestingly, Paanchi’s crime was merely that of being *about to* incite a rebellion. The text says twice that he was “about to” set his plan into action: “therefore, he was *about* to flatter away those people to rise up in rebellion; . . . as he was *about* to do this . . .” (Helaman 1:7–8). Apparently, he was apprehended and stopped just after he went beyond some critical point of preparation to set his plan into action. He had laid specific plans to call the people to rebellion. He may have been in a public place, just about to call the people to revolt. Thus, it seems evident that Nephite law recognized the immanent incitement of rebellion as a completed crime; that point of law clearly stood behind by the arrest, conviction and execution of Paanchi. From several cases in the book of Alma, the Nephites had learned that a stronger stand needed to be taken more quickly to quell incipient rebellions before they generated a head of steam.

Other legal documents from antiquity can be cited in which it was already considered a capital offense at the point when plans were made and preparations had actually begun to incite a rebellion or to be on the brink of setting a plan of rebellion into action. According to these early sources, preparing a rebellion was itself a capital offense. Whether or not the plot ever got off the ground was legally irrelevant. One such case comes from an Egyptian account of a trial in 1164 BC concerning a conspiracy and rebellion. The Judicial Papyrus of Turin records the trial and execution of one Pai-bak-kamen. Like Paanchi, he was the leader of a group whom he incited, calling them to “gather people and stir up enemies to make rebellion against their lord”; many others who had colluded with him, and some, who were only remotely implicated, were also executed, mutilated, or left to commit suicide. Recent paleo-forensic examinations of the mummies indicate that the rebellion was indeed successful and later was put down, but the public legal records would have wanted to deter any further rebellions by imposing the death penalty upon the uprisers as early in the process as possible.

Reflecting similar precautions, some very early ancient Near Eastern treaties required vassals to prevent conspiracies against the overlord. A third-century BC treaty between Ebla and Abarsal placed heavy legal burdens on the rulers of Abarsal “to denounce any conspiracy against the ruler of Ebla.” Disloyalty or conspiring against a king could always land the perpetrators in serious trouble.

During the early Israelite monarchy, conspiracy was severely punished. The case of the priest Ahimelech, who had unwittingly given bread and a sword to David, shows that king Saul could treat even such incidental conduct as treasonous. King Saul executed Ahimelech and all of the members of his family, together with eighty-five priests (1 Samuel 22:13–18), on the ground that they had “conspired against [the king]” (1 Samuel 22:8), even though (as one must presume) most of the people who were executed had taken no actual specific action against Saul.

Another pre-exilic Israelite case of conspiracy is found in 2 Chronicles 33:24–25, when servants of King Amon, the son of Manasseh, “conspired against, and slew him in his own house.” All people who were in any way part of the conspiracy were killed, even though some of those victims probably had done no more than give their encouragement or acquiescence to the perpetrators. This assassination of Amon, which occurred in Jerusalem in 640 BC, would have been well known to the prophet Lehi, who was an Israelite youth at that time. While we do not know exactly how far Paanchi had gone, it was held “by the voice of the people” that, for legal purposes, he “*had raised up* in rebellion and sought to destroy the liberty of the people” (Helaman 1:8).

In spite of the involvement of the public in this proceeding, the execution of Paanchi evoked a powerful objection among Paanchi’s followers. They enlisted Kishkumen to kill the chief judge Pahoran (see Helaman 1:9). From this one may assume that Pahoran had been instrumental in seeking for justice in the case against Paanchi before the people. And indeed, Kishkumen approached the judgment seat in disguise and murdered Pahoran.

With Paanchi and Pahoran both dead, their brother Pacumeni was appointed chief judge and governor by the voice of the people “to reign in the stead of” Pahoran, “according to his right” (Helaman 1:13), whatever that might mean. Kishkumen and his confederates then “entered into a covenant, yea swearing by their everlasting Maker, that they would tell no man that Kishkumen had murdered Pahoran” (Helaman 1:11). Because Kishkumen and his band then intermingled with the population, they could not easily be identified and prosecuted—although “as many as were found” were “condemned unto death” (Helaman 1:12). Apparently, these oath-swearing conspirators—like robbers or outlaws who had placed themselves outside of the law and therefore were not entitled to legal

protections (as in the summary execution of the robber Zemnarihah in 3 Nephi 4:28)—were held incontestably guilty upon arrest.

As the Nephite government struggled in its campaign against these terrorists at home, matters grew worse due to external pressures. Within a single year, sensing a moment of weakness in the shaky leadership of the Nephite government, a Lamanite army invaded Zarahemla, and Pacumeni was killed by Coriantumr (see Helaman 1:21). Coriantumr was “a descendant of Zarahemla” (Helaman 1:15). As a descendant of the Mulekite king of the land of Zarahemla, Coriantumr could plausibly stake a legal claim to kingship, and he had little trouble being appointed leader of a Lamanite army to invade the land of Zarahemla (Helaman 1:16–17).

Meanwhile, with Pacumeni now dead, another “contention” arose among the Nephites “concerning who should fill the judgment-seat” because there was “no one to fill the judgment-seat” from Pahoran’s family (Helaman 2:1). The populace turned back to the family of Alma for leadership, and Helaman, the son of Helaman and the grandson of Alma the Younger, was legally appointed “by the voice of the people” to serve as the new chief judge (Helaman 2:2).

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “[The Case of Paanchi](#),” in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008), 311–322.

Helaman 2

At this point in the Book of Mormon, we are introduced to the continuing lineage of a marvelous family who comprise the backbone of so much of the latter part of the Book of Mormon. This is a good place to look again at the family of Alma in a multi-generational context.

- **Alma the elder** was converted by Abinadi, who probably died before he knew the extent of his success with this convert.
- **Alma the younger (Alma₂)**, son of Alma, gave up his position as chief judge to focus all of his energy as chief high priest. He served a long and honorable mission.
- **Helaman₁**, Alma the younger’s son, was the chief high priest who led the army of young Ammonite warriors.
- **Helaman₂**, son of Helaman₁, became chief high priest after the death of his father and also became the chief judge after the disaster of Pahoran’s sons.

- **Nephi₂**, Helaman₂'s son, was named after Nephi₁, the son of Lehi who came from Jerusalem.
- **Nephi₃**, son of Nephi₂, was one of the twelve Nephite disciples chosen by the resurrected Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon (3 Ne. 1:2–3; 19:4). This prophet prayed mightily to the Lord in behalf of his people

The righteous traditions of this remarkable family continued throughout many generations. It is unusual in the scriptures to have so many generations of one family through which the records were passed, and in which the memory of their ancestors meant so much.

What was the relationship of Nephi₂ to Alma the younger? How many generations were there between them? Nephi₂ was Alma₂'s great-grandson. There was Alma the younger, then his son Helaman₁, Helaman₂ the grandson, and thus Nephi₂ was the great-grandson. Nephi₂, the son of Helaman₂, the great-grandson of Alma the Younger, and he never knew Alma or even his grandfather Helaman₁. He did not even know his father for very long, as Helaman₂ died when Nephi was quite young. You might wonder how that affected Nephi and his younger brother Lehi as they were growing up.

Fortunately, Nephi₂ was able to know quite a lot about his great-grandfather, although not by personal experience, but through the records his family had kept. Alma the Elder and Alma the Younger, Nephi₂'s ancestors, not only had great experiences and wonderful thoughts, they wrote them down. They made sure that their descendants had these records and preserved them. Nephi₂ had knowledge of the story of Alma, Zeezrom and Amulek because he had been taught from the records. He probably knew many of his ancestors' speeches by heart.

Not only did this family make records, they read and used the records—they learned and were taught what was on the records. It is possible that they begot a righteous posterity because they left their words and made sure that they were taught. The righteous posterity also took responsibility to learn and use those very records. The scriptures were a living thing for them—we can see that as they quote them and use them.

Helaman 2:1–2 — Helaman₂ Becomes the Chief Judge

Again, we have the judgment seat empty, and again it was filled by “the voice of the people” (Helaman 2:2). Helaman₂, son of the previous high priest, and grandson of Alma the younger was selected for this role. His father, Helaman₁ had not been the chief judge, but rather had been the high priest. Helaman₂ would have become the High Priest when his father left, because it is more likely that that office was inherited, as prescribed by the Law of Moses. Now, he also became the chief judge. In the forty-second year of the judges, Helaman₂ courageously took responsibility. Being both the chief judge and the high priest

only heightened the risks of the situation. His brave decision was one of the great moments in Helaman₂'s life. At about age twenty-four, he was the only one to whom the people could turn for leadership. Throughout the next few chapters, we will see the wise character of this new chief judge.

Helaman 2:4–9 — Kishkumen Attempts to Assassinate Helaman₂

Persuaded by the flattery of “one Gadianton, who was exceedingly expert in many words, and also in his craft, to carry on the secret work of murder and of robbery” (Helaman 2:4), Kishkumen, who had previously assassinated Pahoran, “went forth towards the judgment-seat to destroy Helaman” (v. 6). Gadianton, who was now the leader of the band of conspirators, had promised that if they assassinated Helaman₂, he would take over the judgeship and place members of his band in “power and authority among the people” (v. 5). Just when Kishkumen was about to assassinate Helaman₂, one of the chief judge's servants who had discovered the plot, stabbed “Kishkumen even to the heart, that he fell dead without a groan” (v. 9). This may have been deliberately conducted in this manner, waiting until Kishkumen had gone far enough that he had played his hand and could be legitimately killed. Kishkumen was clearly a member of an organized conspiracy group and, when dealing with a secret society, one rarely knows who is truly part of the conspiracy and who is not.

Though Kishkumen had died, with him out of the way, the crafty Gadianton expanded his influence out in the wilderness, and this group, in legal terms, became a band of robbers with him as the power broker. Mormon, who already knew what the Gadianton robbers would become, interjected: “And behold, in the end of this book ye shall see that this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi” (v. 13). We will see more of the progression of this group's influence in Helaman 6.

Apparently, these oath-swearing conspirators—called robbers, bandits, or outlaws—had placed themselves, as a band, literally outside the law and therefore were not entitled to protections under the law. They were held incontestably guilty upon arrest. Once again, the Nephite law that required more than mere intent before a person could be punished must have been satisfied by the element of the conspirator's oath. Taking that binding step went legally beyond the protected line of mere belief.

Socially and politically, the trial of Paanchi apparently left in its wake conditions very similar to these that have given rise elsewhere in the world to the phenomenon identified as “social banditry.” Typically included among those preconditions are the disruptions caused by prolonged wars, famines, economic inequality, administrative inefficiencies, sharp social divisions, and political marginalization of minorities. But the main factor listed by social scientists regarding the conditions that have consistently produced social

banditry in many pre-technical societies is a sense of indignity and injustice. Things required by the local rulers are felt to be intolerably unjust. Thus, the outcomes and repercussions of the trial of Paanchi surely incubated the rise of the militant Gadianton robbers and the other bands of social brigands that became such a serious threat among the Nephites for the next seventy-five years. (See further discussion of thieves and robbers at the end of the discussion of Helaman 6, below).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "What is the Difference Between 'Robbers' and 'Thieves' in the Book of Mormon? (Helaman 6:18)," *KnoWhy* 432 (May 10, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, "Why was Helaman's Servant Justified in Killing Kishkumen? (Helaman 2:9)," *KnoWhy* 173, (August 25, 2016).

John W. Welch, "Theft and Robbery in the Book of Mormon and Ancient Near Eastern Law," *FARMS Preliminary Report* (1985), 1–41.

John W. Welch "The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: BYU Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008), 311, 319, 351–56.

Helaman 3

Helaman 3:3–5 — Some People Migrate to the Land Northward

Four years later, in the forty-sixth year of the judges, there were many groups of people migrating into the land northward—especially from among the Ammonites. These were the sons and possibly the grandsons of the pacifists who had sworn the oath to resist taking up arms. They had prospered, partly because fewer of them in their population group had died. They may have felt that they did not really belong in the Land of Nephi. In some ways, they were still Lamanites—they had their own history and traditions. They may have realized that they had been a cause of much of the continuing conflict between the Lamanites and the Nephites. The Lamanites were still trying to reclaim parts of the Nephite land to get the Ammonites back. As pacifists committed by righteous conversion and covenant, the Ammonites decided to move through the narrow neck of land and to relocate in the land northward.

Helaman² probably approved and politically allowed this extraordinary migration, in the same spirit that his father had taken the extraordinary step of marching at the head of the young Ammonite soldiers. There must have been a good relationship between Helaman² and the Ammonite people personally. This was probably the case because of the debt

owed by the Ammonites to Helaman₁, even though Helaman₂ may not have spent very much time with his father, who was out in the battlefield for much of his son’s youth.

Helaman 3:7 — The People in the Land Northward Use Cement

In Helaman chapter 3, we learn that the migrants did a lot of building. The Ammonites were innovative, and the record says that they moved to where there was not much timber. What were they to build with? They solved the problem innovatively by building structurally with cement. The cement they learned how to use was very high-quality cement—it was not just mortar holding blocks together. These migrants discovered and used a new technique.

There are several places in the western hemisphere where there are pits of natural dry lime plaster. It can be put in sacks and transported more easily than blocks of stone. When mixed with water, this natural lime makes a very high-quality cement. Several locations in Mesoamerica you can walk on today have slabs of cement poured 2,000 years ago that are in better condition than an average driveway today—mine included!

After the Book of Mormon was published in 1830, some people doubted that people in the ancient western world had become “exceeding expert in the working of cement.” Where were the remains of their cement structures? Subsequently, the discovery of such structures came to light. Teotihuacan, an enormous ancient archeological site in the Valley of Mexico, is one location where structures were constructed of cement. Archeologists can date the origin of those buildings. A master’s thesis written at Johns Hopkins University in the 1940s dated the introduction of concrete or cement structural building techniques to about the middle of the first century B.C. Indeed, the forty-second year of the judges was 50 B.C., precisely the middle of the first century B.C. I have liked to call this “concrete evidence for the Book of Mormon.” As a fact stated in the Book of Mormon itself, any proposed real-world location for the Ammonites’ relocation into a land northward needs to reckon with this remarkable detail included in Helaman 3:7. This use of cement must have been a very stunning invention. No wonder the Nephite records mentioned it, and Mormon—who came grew up in the land northward (Mormon 1:6)—preserved this detail in his abridgement.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[When Did Cement Become Common in Ancient America? \(Helaman 3:7\),](#)” *KnoWhy* 174 (August 26, 2016).

Matthew G. Wells and John W. Welch, “[Concrete Evidence for the Book of Mormon,](#)” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 212–214.

John L. Sorenson, *"How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?"* *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002).

Helaman 3:23–25, 32 — The Nephites Celebrate a Jubilee

Helaman₂, the son of the Helaman₁ who led the stripling Ammonite warriors, served as chief judge for twelve years, from the forty-second to the fifty-third years of the reign of the judges (50–39 B.C.). After an assassination attempt against him in his inaugural year, his reign was the most peaceful of any Nephite chief judge. He saw no wars, and nine of his years were notably marked as times of peace. He was especially remembered for his "justice and equity" (Helaman 3:20), which says a lot.

Most significantly, the forty-ninth and fiftieth years of the reign of the judges appear to have been something of years of jubilee. The forty-ninth year would have been the seventh sabbatical year (a reasonable time for great celebration and rejoicing) and the fiftieth year was the jubilee itself (a time of continual peace and great joy). The jubilee laws under the Law of Moses are found in Leviticus 25–26. The forty-ninth and fiftieth years are mentioned in particular in Leviticus 25:8–10.

The jubilee celebrated by Helaman₂ and his people was not, however, like other fifty-year jubilees dictated by the Law of Moses. This seems to have been a quasi-jubilee, rightly celebrating the fiftieth year of the reign of the judges. Apparently, the Nephites were still celebrating the festivals under the Law of Moses. But now they had two calendars going: (1) the ancient Mosaic calendar, marking festivals such as Passover and the Day of Atonement that were required to be celebrated according to law on the Plates of Brass, and (2) the Nephite calendar that counted the years since instituting the reign of judges, marking dates for the occasions of celebrating their own unique anniversaries. Whatever the actual nature of the Nephite jubilee, Mormon apparently could not pass by the forty-ninth and fiftieth year of the reign of the judges without commenting that "thousands did join themselves unto the church and were baptized unto repentance" (3:24) and that they had "peace and exceeding great joy" and then "continual peace and great joy" in those two years (v. 32). Mormon significantly emphasized the public religious celebration that took place at this time.

At the same time, it is important to note that during this brief season of peace, growth, and prosperity, the Gadianton robbers were already secretly infiltrating Nephite society. The secret actions of the Gadiantons were not known to Helaman₂ and other officials of government (v. 23), but Mormon could insert that information because he knew the story with hindsight gained from other records he was abridging. A chronological overview of the reign of Helaman as chief judge is helpful:

Helaman as Chief Judge

Years 42–53 of the Reign of the Judges

References	Year	
Helaman 2:1–12	42	Peace achieved with the Lamanites Kishkumen killed attempting to assassinate Helaman Gadianton flees and becomes robber leader
3:1	43	No contention among the Nephites, but a little pride
3:2	44	No contention
3:2	45	No contention
3:3	46	Much contention and many dissensions Many migrate into the land northward
3:19	47	Great contention continues
3:19, 22	48	Contentions eventually diminish
3:23–25	49	Peace, prosperity, very dramatic church growth Continual rejoicing all year long Gadianton robbers secretly infiltrate settled lands
3:32	50	Continual peace and great joy
3:33–35	51	Peace and sanctification Rising pride among church members
3:36	52	Peace prevails despite increasing pride
3:37	53	Helaman ₃ dies in office

Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Helaman as Chief Judge," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 38.

Helaman 3:33–35 — How Do We Grow Firmer and Firmer in Faith?

The righteous people here were managing to stay faithful in the midst of great difficulty—tribulations caused by people who were actually sitting next to them in church. Some of the congregation were creating problems for the rest of the congregation. “[T]hey were lifted up in pride, even to the persecution of many of their brethren” (v. 34). The distinction is made that pride did not enter into the church of God, “but into the hearts of the people, who professed to belong to the church of God.”

It must have taken great effort for the faithful to remain strong in that day when they had little organizational support and not much access to information. They undoubtedly had to be spiritually self-sustaining. Those who were persecuted were trying to be good members of the church, gathering to teach and learn the gospel with others in order to make sure their testimonies were firm in the face of everything that was happening in the outside world around them. They were humble. In the midst of all that was going on among members of the church, these humble people became firmer and firmer in their faith. That is remarkable! How can we become firmer and firmer in our faith in the midst of trials? Their example is worth noting:

Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God (v. 35).

One of the things that is so interesting in these Helaman chapters is information about what was truly in the hearts of the people—something that is not necessarily apparent on the outside. For the good and the bad, many of these people were not necessarily what they appeared to be on the outside, and that is an important recognition. Part of what Mormon was trying to teach us today is the need to be very discerning, by the spirit, as we see what is happening within the lives of others, particularly as we try to preserve our own testimony, our own faith and strength.

Helaman 3:37 — Helaman, Son of Helaman, Dies Young

Helaman₂ died while in office in the fifty-third year of the reign of the judges. We do not know much about this man. Why? Well, may we all be blessed to live a boring life! When all was peaceful, what do the historians have to say? What do newsrooms have to report? Helaman₂ died when he was about thirty-five years old. If his son, Nephi, was born when Helaman was twenty, that Nephi would have been about fifteen years old when his father died. There was not a lot of father-to-son continuity in this situation. This young Nephi barely knew his father and Helaman’s second son, Lehi, had known him fewer years.

The commentary on Helaman's time in office, however, pointed out that he followed in the footsteps of his father: "Helaman did fill the judgment-seat with justice and equity; yea, he did observe to keep the statutes, and the judgments, and the commandments of God; and he did do that which was right in the sight of God continually; and he did walk after the ways of his father, insomuch that he did prosper in the land" (v. 20). A similar commentary on the nature of the reign of Nephi² likewise stated, "He did fill the judgment-seat with justice and equity; yea, he did keep the commandments of God, and did walk in the ways of his father" (v. 37).

Helaman 4

Helaman 4:1–4 — Pride Creeps in among the People

In chapter 3, pride had crept in and out among members of the church quite rapidly. In Helaman 3:1, we read that there was no contention, "save it were a little pride ... which did cause some little dissensions." This appears to have been resolved by the forty-fourth year. But then, in Helaman 3:3 (just two verses later), dissension rises again, in the forty-sixth year—enough contention that many people emigrated. There was a brief respite during the two jubilee years, but by the fifty-fifth year, pride crept in again, "even to the persecution of many of their brethren" (Helaman 3:34).

Here in chapter 4, even in the first verse, we see that matters had become even more serious: "[I]n the fifty and fourth year there were many dissensions in the church, and there was also a contention among the people, insomuch that there was much bloodshed." The pride and dissension were bad enough, but the old story popped up again. The dissenters left and joined the Lamanites and succeeded in "stirring them up to anger against the Nephites; and they were all that year preparing for war" (v. 4). The wars began in the fifty-seventh year, at which time the Lamanites, aided by these dissenters, captured the Nephite lands—even Zarahemla.

Helaman 4:12–13 — Root Causes of Failure to Prosper

The commentary in these two verses provides a list of core failings that led to disaster. They are the very things King Benjamin warned against. The Nephite people failed because of:

- The pride of their hearts;
- Their exceeding riches;
- Their oppression of the poor, withholding their food from the hungry, withholding their clothing from the naked;
- Their smiting their humble brethren upon the cheek;

- Their making a mock of that which was sacred;
- Their denying the spirit of prophecy and of revelation;
- Their murdering, plundering, lying, stealing, committing adultery;
- Their rising up in great contentions; and
- Their deserting away into the land of Nephi, among the Lamanites.

Perhaps this sad condition spread so rapidly because these material successes arose dramatically in an unregulated decade of post-war boom. Perhaps people felt insecure due to lingering worries about Gadianton terrorism. Perhaps disgruntled political partisans saw opportunities to expand their positions at a time when the central government was young and inexperienced. Whatever the economic or political causes, their spiritual failures to act righteously and to keep the commandments of God exposed the church and the people to impending disasters.

Because they boasted in their own strength and did not rely upon the Lord, these people did not prosper. In fact, they lost possession of almost all their lands.

Helaman 4:14–16 – Three Great Leaders

There were three strong leaders trying to help these rapidly failing people who had lost sight of their God.

Nephi² and Lehi², the sons of Helaman², were dealing with the government and the spiritual affairs. Meanwhile, Moronihah, the son of the great spiritually focused military leader, chief captain Moroni, was doing what he could with the military situation. This noble son of a noble father “did preach many things unto the people because of their iniquity” (v. 14). Because of the preaching and prophesying of these great leaders and their dire situation (having been overtaken by the Lamanites), the Nephite people actually began to repent, “and inasmuch as they did repent they did begin to prosper” (v. 15).

In a somewhat startling moment of self-awareness, the Nephites came to their senses and acknowledged their sins, problems, and weaknesses. The Nephites became greatly afraid when “they began to remember the prophecies of Alma, and also the words of Mosiah,” as well as when “they saw that they had been a stiffnecked people, and that they had set at naught the commandments of God” (Helaman 4:21). Only when they repented could Moronihah “venture to lead them forth from place to place, and from city to city, even until they had regained the one-half” of what they had lost (Helaman 4:15–16).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“How Did the Nephites Become Weak in Such a Short Time? \(Helaman 4:25\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 175 (August 29, 2016).

Helaman 5

Helaman 5:1–4 — Nephi Delivers Up the Judgment Seat So He Can Preach

At this point, Nephi² had served exactly ten years as chief judge, and then he gave the judgment seat to Cezoram in the sixty-second year of the reign of the judges. The laws had become corrupted, so he stepped down—just as his great-grandfather Alma had done to try to address the root problems underlying political and social troubles. Alma had served for nine years as the chief judge and, realizing that the word of God was mightier than the sword, desired to see if preaching the word would have a better effect. Nephi² had been in the position of chief judge for ten years and was merely twenty-five years old when he gave up the position, and he chose to go on a mission, again just like his great-grandfather had done. He and his brother, Lehi, dedicated themselves to preaching the word of God for the remainder of their days, traveling around the Land of Nephi.

Would it have been hard for Nephi² to relinquish that kind of political control and walk away from being the leader of his nation? Would he have felt as though he was abandoning ship? He handpicked his successor, a man named Cezoram. The new appointment did not go out for a vote of any kind—at least it is not mentioned in the record. We have no idea who Cezoram was, but with a name with a root word “zoram,” chances are he was a Zoramite with a prefix, “Ce-Zoram.”

In the sixty-sixth year of the reign of the judges, Cezoram was murdered. This makes one wonder if Nephi would have been murdered if he had stayed in office. However, he had strong family credentials and maybe he would have been a more difficult target. These various scenarios can be pondered several ways, leaving us to wonder if Nephi² himself fretted over what he should do when he decided to focus his attention on the land of Nephi. This could not have been an easy decision for him.

In Helaman 5:4, the record bluntly states that Nephi² was weary of iniquity. I do not know of any other prophet who was described as being “weary.” Yet, it is understandable that he reached a point of frustration and weariness with the situation he was up against. So, Nephi² and his brother, Lehi, answered the call, which perhaps their father had inspired them to think about, to preach the word of God.

And, what a great brother Lehi was—he chose to go with his brother. Being the second son of Helaman², Lehi could likely have chosen to take over the judgment seat. Undoubtedly, he was always in his older brother’s shadow. Lehi could have stepped out of that shadow and taken hold of power that could have been his. Instead, he chose to go with his brother and preach the gospel.

We encounter Nephi² at the beginning of chapter 5. He will be the colossus of prophecy and the central figure all the way through to the end of chapter 11—seven entire chapters. Fully half of the Book of Helaman is about this man Nephi² and what an amazing man he was! Yet, I venture to say, like Moronihah, we do not talk about Nephi² very much. Why are these men in the Book of Helaman so obscure? Why do we not know their stories very well? We know the stories of Moroni and the stripling warriors, and we know the story of Alma and Amulek. Why aren't we as familiar with these Helaman narratives? Are we just too tired when we get to the Book of Helaman? Are the stories not as easy to condense into short form?

Perhaps one reason these stories are less familiar to us is that the narrative of the entire Book of Mormon is suddenly transposed during this period of time. The supposed good guys (in Zarahemla) are now the bad guys, and the bad guys (the Lamanites) become the good guys. We may not be comfortable with the reversal. The Lamanites who convert are deeply converted, and Samuel the Lamanite, who is introduced at the end of the Book of Helaman, was one of those amazing converts. He may have been one of hundreds, for all we know. We will talk about that later, when we get to the Samuel narrative. The point is, there was a lot of very effective preaching now being done by Lamanites to the Nephites right in the center of the land of Zarahemla.

Bear in mind that as Nephi² was serving as a missionary, he was not an ordinary 19-year-old missionary. He was the high priest. No doubt, he had been working in the temple every day—sacrificing and seeing that the ordinances were properly performed. Think of the strength that would have given him. In a modern-day analogy, it is similar to the prophet serving a lifetime mission, calling upon the powers of heaven to assist his efforts. The Lord will bless every missionary, but some leaders have a special calling, with special authority and with special powers. Fortunately, we have those general authorities among us today. We have people who have accepted the call to spend the rest of their days in service to the Lord, teaching and preaching the gospel—the prophet, the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve, and the First Quorum of Seventy. These men serve lifetime appointments.

Helaman 5:5–13 — When Was Helaman's Advice to His Sons Recorded?

Helaman² may have already died before his advice to his sons was recorded. We do not know when the words in Helaman 5:5–13 were first spoken. Helaman² had died ten years earlier, when his sons Nephi and Lehi were about 15 and 13 years old. However, we are told specifically that they “remembered” the words of patriarchal advice from their father.

We often read Helaman 5 as though Helaman² was offering missionary advice immediately before sending his boys out on a mission. But he would not have given this

counsel to his sons in that context. They were still very young children. So, Helaman₂ was probably doing this fairly close to the time he died. These may have been his deathbed words to them—his final desires. It was like bestowing a patriarchal blessing—similar to what his grandfather, Alma, had done, speaking to Helaman, Shiblon and Corianton, shortly before he left. They too remembered those words, as they were counseled to do.

Helaman₂ likewise used the word “remember” in this section of verses, fourteen times to be precise. Fourteen is two times seven and thus is a significant number in Hebrew. Helaman₂ counselled his sons to remember the significance of their names. These two sons were named after Lehi and Nephi who came out of Jerusalem. Remembering the significance of their names may have helped them recollect the works of their forebearers. When they recalled the words of these ancient prophets, they would remember their father’s advice—“remember, remember.” Look at Helaman 5:9, where Helaman₂ uses the word “remember” four times alone. Perhaps Helaman thought, “I am going to double this doubled imperative so that my two sons will remember not only my words but also remember the words of King Benjamin.” These seem to be the anguished words of a man who is dying too early—a father who was trying hard to leave a legacy for his two sons. Helaman₂ deeply desired them to remember what he was saying. He took this opportunity to give direction to his boys, so that they could carry on the family legacy of righteousness.

Notice that Helaman₂ explained the end-result he desired for his sons after they lived a life of good works. In verse 8, Helaman stated that he wanted his sons to do good “not ... that ye may boast” (which, of course, is a King Benjamin phrase), but “that ye may ... lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, yea which is eternal, and which fadeth not away; yea, that ye may have that precious gift of eternal life.” This advice sounds like it is coming from someone who is thinking a lot already about his immanent passing into the next life.

Helaman 5:6 — Why Did Helaman Name His Sons Nephi and Lehi?

Why did Helaman₂ name his sons Nephi and Lehi? The repeated appearance of these two names applying to several people throughout the historical record sometimes makes it difficult for us to recognize who is who in the Book of Mormon. We sometimes have to stop and ask, “Who was the father of this Nephi? Was this the same Helaman that led the stripling warriors? Etc.” This Nephi and Lehi are the grandsons of the stripling warrior leader. But, while it is hard to keep them all straight, these names were important in asserting and maintaining direct connections with the legacy of Lehi and entitlements to the land of promise. The kings following the original Nephi called themselves “second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth” (Jacob 1:11). By calling his first son Nephi and his second son Lehi, Helaman may have been reinforcing the claim of the Nephites to certain traditional rights in the land of Nephi.

The names may certainly have inspired these two sons to want to serve, at some point in their lives, in the land of Nephi, which they magnificently accomplished. It helped them to remember their origins and their genealogy. Remembering the goodness and righteousness of these ancestors strengthened the characters of Helaman's sons and gave them a sense of their heritage. Bearing these names was a constant reminder to them to try to be like these great progenitors. The names had deep meaning in terms of identity construction—of whom Helaman wanted his sons to become.

This Nephi's son will also be named Nephi, the Nephite leader at the time of the birth of Christ and also at the time of Christ's appearance after his resurrection. So, the name held special value among the leading Nephite families.

Helaman wisely gave his second son the name of Lehi. Notice that the younger son received the name of the patriarch of the Nephite and Lamanite nations—reversing the order of the names of the Nephite predecessors. There was also some political significance in the name Lehi. Helaman's son Lehi was born in the thirty-seventh or thirty-eighth year of the reign of the judges, after peace had been achieved between the Nephites and the Lamanites. The name "Lehi" was all-inclusive, subtly strengthening the political statement that all the posterity of Lehi could be joined in peace.

Further Reading

Matthew L. Bowen, "['He Is a Good Man': The Fulfillment of Helaman 5:6–7 in Helaman 8:7 and 11:18–19](#)," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 17 (2016): 167–168.

Helaman 5:9–11 — Salvation Only Comes through Christ

The words in Helaman 5:9 compare well with Mosiah 3:17–18. Quotation marks could easily be put around the phrase, "There is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Christ." Quotation marks were not used in ancient languages, but there is no doubt that Helaman had taught his sons Nephi and Lehi the words of King Benjamin. They were using the recorded words of King Benjamin and other prophets as one of their core scriptures at this point. Mosiah 3:17 and 18 are the central chiasm of the entire speech of King Benjamin. By quoting these particular words, Helaman focused on the apex of King Benjamin's speech. Helaman's ability to quote King Benjamin so effectively and directly indicates that he and his people learned and probably knew the entire speech by heart.

Helaman 5:12 — We Must Build on the Foundation of Christ

Helaman gave his sons—and all of us indirectly—crucial advice at the beginning of Helaman 5:12: "[R]emember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation." Throughout history, laying

the foundation of a building with a precisely fitted and positioned stone was the key to creating a structure that would last. Without properly laying the foundation, the structure would sink, crumble and collapse. Today we do not use stone as the foundation for building structures—we pour reinforced concrete. Anciently, however, stone was used as the foundation. A builder would begin by carefully measuring and laying a chief cornerstone for the structure. The chief cornerstone for the temple of Herod was enormous and remains in place today. It was very solid—as big as a good-sized semi-trailor. We have no idea how the ancient builders moved this particularly cornerstone into position, but it created a monumentally sure foundation—a solid base upon which the temple could be built. This was crucial. Herod’s temple was destroyed, but the foundation, the platform, and the retaining walls are still there two thousand years later. This is what tourists see when visiting the site of Herod’s temple. The foundation for Herod’s temple will be there for a very long time. What a powerful image!

Similarly, in Mesoamerica the Maya, and in Peru the Incas, knew how to build with rocks. They knew how to build rock foundations for structures that have lasted hundreds of years. People living in ancient times would have easily identified with this strong image of building on a rock foundation. In Helaman’s analogy, it is the Messiah, Christ, Jehovah, the Son of God who is our sure foundation. Whatever else is built upon the wrong foundation will pass away.

Interestingly, ancient buildings had several stones that were carefully measured and laid in the foundation—usually four cornerstones. However, there was only one “chief” cornerstone that was often placed ceremonially in important government, royal or sacred structures. To place a chief cornerstone, a corner of the foundation was opened. A stone box with a lid was made to fill the opening and important inscriptions were put inside the box. This “rock” became part of the stone foundation of the building. Metal plates or clay tables in stone boxes were often found to be the chief cornerstones of ancient temples or palaces.

This is similar to what we do today when new temples are built. A symbolic cornerstone for each temple has meaningful documents and items placed inside a box. The “rock” is then put in place and done by ceremony, with the prophet or an apostle sealing the cornerstone with mortar. This modern-day celebration follows a very ancient tradition. That is what made this particular cornerstone a special “chief” cornerstone.

The Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 2:20, referred to the church and its members being built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. Anciently, the chief cornerstone of significant building structures contained the record of why the building was being built, under what authority it was being built, and other relevant information. The chief cornerstone contained “the word” or

authorizing decree of the king or the builder. That is what made it the “chief” cornerstone. This is an interesting symbol of Christ, who is not only there as the foundation, but also as the explanation of authority and reason for the structure. Symbolically, Christ and the chief cornerstone both contain and constitute the “word” of God.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Helaman Compare Christ to a Rock? \(Helaman 5:12\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 176 (August 30, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Helaman Want His Sons to Remember to Build upon the Rock? \(Helaman 5:12\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 332 (June 28, 2017).

Helaman 5:12 — The Gulf of Misery and Woe

In the ancient world, another interesting symbol associated the temple itself as “the rock,” “the hill,” or “the mountain.” Psalm 24 states, “Who shall ascend into the hill [mountain] of the Lord?” This Psalm is speaking of the temple. In Jerusalem today, the location where the temple of Herod once stood is known as the Temple Mount—and it is a big rock. The scriptures talk about this rock as being—to put it in modern vernacular—the plug that sits on top of the underworld that prevents the floods from coming up and destroying the world. If the rock were not there, there would be no plug to prevent destructive floods from coming up out of the underworld.

These ancient people believed that they lived within an ecosphere with water above that was held off by the firmament and water below that was held off by the plug. If the windows of heaven were opened, the rains would come down—as occurred with the floods of Noah. In their view, there had to be the right balance between the heavenly waters and the subterranean waters. The temple was what maintained that order, according to the ancient mind. The rock, which represented the Lord, prevented them from being overwhelmed by the storm and by the hail, and from being dragged down into the gulf of misery—those underworld waters that would consume them.

In Christ’s parable given in the Sermon on the Mount, the man who built on the rock was safe. When the storm came down and the floods happened, his house stood firm. Alternatively, the opposite would happen if he built on a sandy foundation—he would be destroyed.

Several Book of Mormon writers spoke of the “gulf of misery.” Besides Helaman’s use of this phrase in chapter 5 verse 12, there are other places in this book of scripture where the “gulf of misery” is discussed:

- Nephi reported that the angel who reviewed his father’s vision mentioned that “a great and a terrible gulf divideth [those in the great and spacious building from the word of God]” (1 Nephi 12:18);
- Nephi gave an interpretation of his father’s dream to his brothers and stated “that it was an awful gulf, which separate the wicked from the tree of life” (1 Nephi 15:28).
- Lehi must have used this phrase when describing his vision because of two scriptural narratives which appear to support this fact: (1) the angel referred to the “gulf” when reiterating the vision to Nephi; and (2) Lehi stated the following when speaking to his sons near the time of his death: “O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe” (2 Nephi 1:13).
- Ammon mentioned the gulf in his famous joyous speech in Alma 26:20: “Behold, [the Lord] did not exercise his justice upon us, but in his great mercy hath brought us over that everlasting gulf of death and misery, even to the salvation of our souls.”
- Mormon used the gulf imagery very effectively in one of his “thus we see” interludes: “Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God” which will “lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked” (Helaman 3:29).

Helaman 5:12 — Christ Is the Rock that Saves Us from the Gulf of Misery

Helaman concluded his remarks to his sons by giving a beautiful description of Christ and his mission. This description gives us hope that if we build our foundation on the rock, which is Christ, we will not be pulled down into the gulf of misery—we “cannot fail.” Helaman explained that the Lord has power to save and that this was the plan that was laid from the foundation of the world—Christ would be the Redeemer and Savior of the entire world.

Helaman’s missionary preparation course ended with verse 12. Helaman 5:5–12 was all that was included in the record to equip these boys for their missions. They were not given a copy of *Preach My Gospel* (a 300-page manual), but they had been instructed in these few lines about the most important things. They were asked not only to remember Christ—they were also to remember to repent. Verse 11 explains that the conditions of repentance bring forth the power of the Redeemer unto salvation. We must remember that the entire process of repentance is necessary as we call upon the power of the Savior to open up the way of salvation, which can only come through Him and in that way.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Helaman Want His Sons to Remember to Build upon the Rock? \(Helaman 5:12\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 332 (June 28, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Helaman Compare Christ to a Rock? \(Helaman 5:12\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 176 (August 30, 2016).

Helaman 5:14–17 — Nephi and Lehi Begin Their Mission

After reviewing the advice from their father, Nephi and Lehi left on their mission. First, they went to the city of Bountiful—a strategic location. Likely, they were hoping to keep people from migrating into the land northward as others had done. Then they went to the land of Mulek where they had little success. Ultimately, they traveled through all the cities of the Nephites. If Nephi was weary before, he must have been exhausted now. They continued southward, trying to teach the Nephites until they came to the city of Zarahemla, which was now held by Lamanites.

Despite the trials, these faithful missionaries had some success among the people of Zarahemla who had dissented from the Nephites and joined the Lamanites. Many of the Nephite dissenters repented, were baptized, and rejoined the Nephites. These converted dissenters went among the Nephites “to endeavor to repair unto them [the Nephites] the wrongs which they had done.” When you think of the trouble that these dissenters had caused, could they repair those wrongs? I do not think so. At least not completely and certainly not by themselves. They could not go back and undo all of the disaster that had been caused—the wars, the sickness, the death, pain, and the property loss. Notice it does not say that they actually repaired the wrongs they had done. The damage was probably irreparable. But they did “endeavor” to make repair. That is all we can do, and all that is ultimately required.

The converted dissenters undoubtedly knew how hard it was going to be to teach the Nephites, but they tried. This was part of their repentance process. Alma had taught a great lesson to his sons Helaman and Corianton that contained clear instructions on the principle of restitution as a part of repentance (Alma 36, 39–42). That Helaman was the great-grandfather of these two boys, so they had reason to regard this teaching highly.

Helaman 5:18–19 — Nephi and Lehi Receive Power, Authority, and Revelation from God

Nephi and Lehi received personal revelation as to what to say and were also given the power to say it. They were given both authority and the content. We must be spiritually prepared to receive gifts of the Spirit. The Holy Ghost often needs something to work with. We talk about being “moved” by the Spirit—the Spirit “moves” us to do something. However, we have to put something inside our hearts, minds, or souls for the Holy Ghost

to move around. If you load your mind with good things, they can be brought to your remembrance in the moment you need it.

Thus, Nephi and Lehi had great success, “insomuch that there were eight thousand of the Lamanites who were in the land of Zarahemla and round about baptized unto repentance, and were convinced of the wickedness of the traditions of their fathers” (v. 19).

Helaman 5:20–22 — Nephi and Lehi Are Imprisoned in the Land of Nephi

Following great success in Zarahemla, Nephi and Lehi decided to go south into Lamanite territory—the land of Nephi. Generations before, Ammon and the four sons of Mosiah had gone to the land of Nephi at a time when there had not been much, if any, previous contact between Nephites and Lamanites. At that time, there was resentment between the two nations and the Lamanites were very defensive. Any Nephite coming into Lamanite territory was thrown in jail until it could be determined who they were and the purpose of their presence in Lamanite lands.

Now, generations later, Nephi and Lehi were going into an even worse possible enemy situation. However, there was possibly one bright spot among the hostilities and takeovers between the two nations over the previous years—there were instances of mercy and good faith shown by a few Nephites to the Lamanites. Twenty-two years previous, in the forty-first year of the judges, Moronihah defeated some Lamanites who had come in to invade the center of the land of Zarahemla. Very much in character with his father, captain Moroni, Moronihah showed mercy and “caused that the Lamanites who had been taken prisoners should depart out of the land in peace” (Helaman 1:33). Perhaps Nephi and Lehi were helped by some of those former prisoners who could vouch for them and report that Nephites were not all bad.

The two missionaries could travel wherever they wanted in the land of Zarahemla, but now they were in enemy territory and were quickly arrested. We do not know if they had any opportunity to preach before they were arrested.

Interestingly, just a year following these events, the Nephites and Lamanites changed their travel policies, allowing open borders. Both Nephites and Lamanites were given freedom to travel as well as openly trade in both the land north and the land south. This very dramatic change, which was caused by Nephi and Lehi’s success, is discussed below in the section on Helaman chapter 6.

Helaman 5:23–24 — Nephi and Lehi Are Surrounded by Fire

Joseph Smith’s First Vision marks the beginning of the Restoration of the Gospel in this last dispensation. It is the foundation of our testimonies that the Father and the Son appeared in a pillar of fire to Joseph Smith. The Prophet Joseph described this vision in

one of his accounts as being so bright that he thought all the trees in the forest would be consumed. A similar experience occurs at the beginning of the conversion of a whole Lamanite nation. This was their “First-Vision experience,” and it bears quoting and telling just as much as we relate the First Vision story in every missionary discussion today.

Two missionaries, Nephi and Lehi, were arrested after arriving in Lamanite territory and held in a Lamanite prison for many days. When the Lamanites came to kill them, they had a Shadrach-Meshach-and-Abendnego-type of experience. In Helaman 5:23, the two were “encircled about as if by fire” and the Lamanites were afraid to touch them. Verse 24 describes the scene in more detail—the two missionaries were encircled by a “pillar of fire.” There is mention of a pillar of fire in other scriptural accounts. For example, as the Lord led Israel out of Egypt through the wilderness, there was a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day. The Old Testament makes it clear that the pillar of fire manifested the presence of the Lord. In the modern-day account of Joseph Smith’s First Vision, he relates, “I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head” (Joseph Smith—History 1:16). Two personages, God the Father and Jesus Christ, appeared in this pillar of light.

Nephi, and Lehi, were about to be killed. The pillar of light encircling the Lord’s high priest and brother was a manifestation of the divine presence surrounding them and providing protection. The Lamanites instinctively seemed to know not to touch the fire. They stood as if they were struck with amazement; they could not speak.

Helaman 5:26–28 — The Prison Begins to Shake

Nephi and Lehi told the Lamanites to not be afraid for “it is God that has shown unto you this marvelous thing.” Then the earth started to shake. The effects on the earth may have also been part of the divine presence. There was a lot of energy in this event—perhaps some kind of force field. This prison and surrounding area had been built with stones—cement had not been used in that part of the land. Stones were stacked on top of each other and they shook suddenly. It is interesting that the prison walls did not fall down. Even though the walls were shaking, they did not fall. Today, as in ancient times, there are earthquakes and volcanoes especially in the central parts of the Western Hemisphere. The hand of the Lord could both tear down and raise up.

There were many people in the prison—not just Nephi and Lehi. The record reports that both Lamanite dissenters as well as Nephites were imprisoned—though we have no idea how big the room was where Nephi and Lehi were interred.

Following the shaking of the prison walls, the very bright light that surrounded them receded and everything was dark—at least until their eyes adjusted. A dark cloud now enveloped these people. Again, this was a divine manifestation—similar to the Israelite experience with God manifesting Himself with the cloud by day to go with the pillar by night.

Helaman 5:29–33 — The Voice of the Lord Commands the Lamanites to Repent

I love the description of the voice these people heard: “[I]t was not a voice of thunder, neither was it a voice of a great tumultuous noise, but behold, it was a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper, and it did pierce even to the very soul” (Helaman 5:30).

This is a wonderful effort by someone trying to describe a unique spiritual experience. This person heard the voice and tried everything he could to reproduce the experience—recounting the nature of the voice that was heard and felt. Ancient people, of course, did not have iPhones where they could record the voice by simply pushing a button. They tried to record the experience in words. Even though the voice was heard and understood by a large number of people, it affected them personally, for “it did pierce even to the very soul.”

Perhaps the experience was memorable because of the contrast between the rumbling and the shaking of the earth and the voice. The Lamanites were terrified and they knew that they had been wicked. At this point, they realized that the sky was falling in on them, and instead of the judgments of God coming down upon them, what were they given? They received a very soft, sweet, invitation. It was intimate. Even though there were 300 people there, the text says that it pierced each one of them. It got through to their hearts. What an experience!

The voice of God is not always a great booming voice. The voice heard by the people in this narrative in Helaman is similar to the description of the voice of the Father introducing his Son to the crowd gathered around the temple in Bountiful in 3 Nephi 11.

The apostle John spoke of the quietness of the Spirit: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

The ancient Old Testament prophet Elijah also gave a similar description of the voice of the Lord:

And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. (1 Kings 19:11–12)

Let us think about whispering. If you want your children or grandchildren to pay attention to you, does it work better to yell at them or to whisper? Sometimes the Lord yells at us, sometimes he whispers in a still, small voice. Why, on this occasion do you think it was a whisper? Whomever you are speaking to, it is important to be sure that they

hear your message in the way that they should. The Lord knew how and what he needed to say to these people to get their attention.

Helaman 5:33 — What Was So Sacred That It Could Not Be Spoken?

The voice spoke three times, and on the third time we are told that “the voice came, and did speak unto them marvelous words which cannot be uttered by man.” Once again, we must remember that Nephi was the high priest over the church. What was one important thing that the high priest could say that no one else could? It was the sacred name of Jehovah. In the temple, the high priest actually wore a little gold plate on his forehead that had the name of Jehovah on it to indicate that he had taken upon him the name of God. It could be read, but it could not be spoken except on the Day of Atonement. Even then, only the high priest could speak that name. Under Jewish tradition, the name of God had to be spoken ten times—a perfect number of times.

Perhaps the voice the people heard in this prison experience said, “I am.” That was the name that was sacred and could not be spoken. Perhaps the Lord explained, “I am Jehovah, I have done this, I have brought people out of bondage, I have brought you here.” If the Lord used his name, maybe even ten times, that would be something that could not be spoken.

Helaman 5:36–39 — Aminadab Sees Nephi and Lehi in the Fire

The observers could tell that something significant was happening, but it took Aminadab who was “a Nephite by birth, who had once belonged to the church of God but had dissented from them,” to explain to the people what was going on. The description of what Aminadab saw Nephi and Lehi doing used a subjunctive “as if” statement. He saw the two missionaries looking to heaven “as if talking or lifting their voices to some being whom they beheld” (v. 36). That is a powerful way of bringing the reader into an affirmative evaluation as to what, exactly, was happening. It invites an affirmative response by understatement—Yes, Nephi and Lehi had indeed beheld a heavenly being and were communicating with that being.

Aminadab was a dissenter and yet he was instrumental in guiding the Lamanites through this spiritual experience. What does that tell you about some people who are not physically active at Church as much as we think they should be? We ought not to be so surprised when someone like Aminadab steps up to assist in God’s work. Aminadab was a key player in this prison narrative. He had “belonged to the Church of God” at one time and so he knew enough that he could recognize and explain what was really happening when the others were bewildered.

Interestingly, Mormon found this man important enough that he told us his name—Aminadab. In Hebrew, “Ami” means “my people” and “nadab” means “are generous.”

Aminadab’s parents had given him a name through which he was to remember that “his people are generous people.” In this situation, Aminadab responded generously.

Helaman 5:43–49 — Every Soul Is Encircled by Fire

This event was a powerful, powerful experience that involved pillars of fire. How would an artist depict this scene? There were 300 people, each with a pillar of fire around them, and Lehi and Nephi standing in the midst of them. What an experience that must have been. What a light show! Talk about rock stars. That very, very powerful experience ended with the quiet statement, “Peace, peace be unto you” (v. 47). This was a peaceful spiritual experience in spite of all that was present—pillars of fire, a voice from heaven, and ministering angels.

At a time of confusion, pressure, trial or doubt, you may have received a wonderful feeling of peace letting you know that things would be fine. This peace can be very reassuring and can be a beautiful blessing. We can recognize these moments of peace as gifts of the Spirit when they come.

The foundational doctrine, as was taught earlier in the chapter, is repeated again—“Peace, peace be unto you, because of your faith in my Well Beloved, who was from the foundation of the world.” We must put our faith in Christ, who is the rock provided from the foundation of the world who will save us.

After angels came down and ministered to them, the three hundred converts were asked to minister to the rest of the Lamanite people and share their experience. They were able to convince the majority of the Lamanites of the reality of what had happened to them.

Helaman 5:51–52 — The Lamanites Return Nephite Lands to the Nephites

These Lamanites then gave up their weapons of war to show their repentance; they are like the Ammonites. They returned all the Nephite lands they still occupied. These lands encompassed half of the Nephite territory—the cities and land that Moronihah could not win back by military force—remember those places? “Therefore they did abandon their design to obtain the remainder of their lands” (Helaman 4:19). Now the Nephite lands were returned by the Lamanites—not by the sword, but by the Lamanites’ own volition. This is a major change of affairs.

Helaman 6

Helaman 6:1 — A Major Turning Point

There is a short phrase that is easily overlooked in the Book of Mormon that reports the state of affairs at the end of the sixty-second year of the judges. This phrase signifies a

huge swing of the pendulum in Book of Mormon history. Speaking of the large number of converted Lamanites, we read that “their righteousness did exceed that of the Nephites, because of their firmness and their steadiness in the faith.”

Helaman 6:3 — Lamanites Teaching and Converting Nephites

The Nephite people of the church had great joy in hearing of the conversion of many Lamanites and the establishment of the church among the Lamanites.

The Lamanites had repented and restored the lands to the Nephites. What did the Lamanites do next? They went out ministering to and teaching the Nephites—likely sharing their conversion stories. Can you imagine being a Nephite at that time? Just a short time before, the Nephites were fighting the Lamanites. Now the Lamanites were among them, wanting to share their testimonies and spiritual experiences. Wow!

Helaman 6:7–13 — Freedom of Travel between the Nephites and Lamanites Proclaimed

The next section of scripture is an annual report that was likely recorded on the large plates of Nephi by a very diligent record-keeper. At the end of every year, a scribe would record a summary of what happened that year on the large plates of Nephi. Mormon usually abridged or summarized the details from these records. Therefore, we do not have many verbatim copies of these annual reports.

The report in verses 7–13, however, is such a beautiful and important annual report that we most likely have it in its entirety and, I think, in its perfect original form. What reason would Mormon have had to modify this annual record? It’s not too long. It states the essence of the year’s main events. It was a gem of a record. This annual report is also written in a pure chiasmic form. This chiasm is not only brilliant—it is also a beautifully written annual report. Some scribe, over two thousand years ago, decided he was going to write into the records of eternity this amazing development of freedom of travel that took place in the sixty-fourth year of the reign of judges. He did a wonderful job of writing the summary by using the ancient chiasmic literary form. The natural balance inherent in a chiasmic structure perfectly represents, in a literary way, the newly instituted balance between these two lands. It is one of the best examples of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. On top of its equally matched details in the first and second halves, the central turning point of this chiasm works even better in Hebrew than in English—where “the Lord” and the name “Zedekiah,” with its theophoric suffix *-iah*, meaning “Jehovah” or “the Lord,” dominate the central focal point of the chiasm.

The chiasmic structure is as follows:

Chiasmus in Helaman 6:7-13

And behold, there was *peace* in all the land,
 [Freedom of travel and trade in *both lands* is discussed]
 And it came to pass that they became exceedingly *rich*, both
 the Lamanites and the Nephites;
 and they did have an exceeding *plenty of gold, and of silver*, and of
 all manner of *precious metals*, both in the *land south* and in the
land north
 Now the land *south*
 was called *Lehi*, and
 the land *north*
 was called *Mulek*;
 which was after the son of *Zedekiah*;*
 for the *Lord*
 did bring *Mulek*
 into the land *north*
 and *Lehi* into
 the land *south*.
 And behold, there was *all manner of gold* in *both* these *lands*, and
 of *silver*; and of *precious ore of every kind*;
 and there were also curious workmen, who did work all kinds
 of ore and did refine it; and thus they did become *rich*
 [Economic prosperity in *both lands* is discussed]
 And thus the sixty and forth year did pass away in *peace*.

*The Hebrew word for *Lord* constitutes the theophoric
 suffix *-yah*, which is at the end of the name Zedekiah.

Figure 2 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Chiasmus in Helaman 6:7-13," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 13.

Notice that, in verse 7, the annual report and the chiasm begin with *peace* in the land. The report and chiasm ends in verse 13 with *peace*.

After the peace, there is mention in verse 8 that the people now for the first time have *freedom of travel and trade in both lands*. This correlates nicely with *economic prosperity in both lands* in verse 12.

As a result of their prosperity, both the Lamanites and Nephites became *rich*—a statement made in parallel at the beginning (in verse 9) and end of the report (in verse 11).

The extent of their riches is also described in parallel phrases. The statement that there was *plenty of gold and silver and precious metal* in *both* the *land north* and the *land south* (at

the end of verse 9) is coupled with the report that there was *all manner of gold, silver, and precious ore* in *both these lands* (at the beginning of verse 11).

Verse 10 marks the absolute middle of the chiasm. Notice all ten of the chiasmic parallelisms in this one verse: It states, "Now the (a) *land south* was called (b) *Lehi*, and the (c) *land north* (d) *Mulek*, which was after the son of (e) *Zedekiah*, for the (e) *Lord* did bring (d) *Mulek* into the (c) *land north* and (b) *Lehi* into the (a) *land south*."

Remember, up to this point if anybody wanted to travel from one land to another land, he would be forced back home as soon as he started to move out. If a Nephite or Lamanite stepped on foreign soil, he could be killed on the spot or imprisoned or taken before the king of that land. Now, both Nephites and Lamanites had freedom to travel between Nephite and Lamanite territory.

The logic for the change in policy is expressed in verse 10 (the center of the chiasm). Since the Lord brought people into both lands, the Lord intended both lands to be filled with people. There was a reciprocity in the dealings of the Lord with the people in both lands. Therefore, the people should legitimately be allowed to travel between lands. A theological justification was offered for this revolutionary freedom of travel policy.

If the parallelism is to be complete, how can "Zedekiah" stand as the parallel to "Lord" in this chiasm? For one thing, both Zedekiah and the Lord are kings. More compelling is the fact that the name "Zedekiah" is linguistically based on two Hebrew words: "Zedek" means "righteous" and "iah" (yah) is the theophoric suffix that means "Jehovah" or "the Lord." So, Zedekiah's name means "righteous is the Lord." This results in the word "Lord" being mentioned in immediate succession at the center of this chiasm.

I noticed this chiasm for the first time in March, 1987, and it was published in May, 1987 as a FARMS Update, and soon was made widely available in the 1992 compilation *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*. I mention this timing because I remember well the late Wednesday night when this chiasmus came to my awareness. I was the bishop of the BYU 36th ward, and students needed interviews with the bishop for many reasons as the end of the winter semester approached. All the other students had come punctually on time. One in the middle of my scheduled list was still missing. It was getting late. I was tired, and I needed to teach my Honors Book of Mormon class the next morning. I decided to wait, as long as it took. I opened my copy of the Book of Mormon and sat on the couch in the apartment lobby and began to read the next day's assignment, which spilled over from Helaman 5 into Helaman 6. This annual report separated itself from the surrounding text as a treasure left by an unnamed but very diligent ancient scribe. When the young man sheepishly stuck his head into the lobby, I invited him in. I told him that the Lord had just blessed us both by him being a little late. I shared with him what I had just found. We had

a great interview, in spite of his worries. I hope this text has meant as much to him as it has to me all these thirty-three years later.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Was Chiasmus Used in Nephite Record Keeping? \(Helaman 6:10\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 177 (August 31, 2016).

John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, [“Helaman as Chief Judge,”](#) in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, (FARMS, 1999), chart 133

John W. Welch, [“Chiasmus in Helaman 6:7–13,”](#) in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 230–232.

Helaman 6:17–18, 22–25 — The Gadianton Robbers Return

Thieves were treated differently than robbers under ancient law. Significantly, the same distinction was made under the law in the Book of Mormon. Throughout the Nephite record, robbers were typically organized bands who separated themselves from society, opposed the government, and largely subsisted by plundering their enemies. Thieves, on the other hand, were generally members in the community who were guilty of stealing from fellow citizens. In simple terms, robbers were organized groups of “outsiders” (acting outside the law and the community), whereas thieves were community “insiders” who acted alone. From the viewpoint of the dominant government, robbers were vile menaces to the community and the order of government. Thieves, on the other hand, usually acted alone and did not disrupt the normal operations of government.

From the viewpoint of the marginal, disenfranchized elements of society—the robbers were seen as heroic Robin Hoods. Social banditry emerged from circumstances in society that were perceived by the masses to be unjust and intolerable, including administrative inefficiency, sharp social divisions, economic crises, famines, or prolonged wars. These movements were often rural, giving the poor effective methods of social agitation. They were often led by marginalized military or political figures, usually enjoying the support and protection of their village, and drawing strength from people who had been dislocated, displaced, or otherwise alienated from mainstream society. Social brigands were frequently heroes among the poor, acting as defenders and champions of the common people and sharing the basic values and religion of the peasant society.

There are sixteen characteristics that historians and anthropologists have identified as behavioral characteristics of bandits or robbers—the perennial plague of ancient civilizations. Below is a comparison between profiles of “robbers” and “thieves” in the ancient world. Because the accounts in the book of Helaman mention so many of these

factors, let me take this opportunity to run through this profile of robbers and bandits, as contrasted from mere thieves who stole things rather harmlessly from their local villagers:

1. Robbery was committed blatantly in the open; theft, in secret, a minor offense.
2. Robbers were outsiders and were therefore outside the protection of the law; theft usually occurred within the society.
3. Robbers usually acted with greater force and violence than did thieves.
4. Robbers acted in a group or band (hence, they are called “bandits,” highwaymen, brigands); thieves mostly acted alone.
5. Robbers were organized in professional groups. Usually bands of 15 to 40 men, but one had 10,000 men. They often had their own leader, code, priests, and so on, sometimes drawing together dissidents, foreigners, and social outcasts.
6. Robbers bound themselves together with oaths and sacrifices, making them heretics as well as criminals.
7. Robbers kept their hideouts secret, accentuating their sinister reputation.
8. Robbers operated with raids, assassinations, and terrorism.
9. Robbers would harass the highways or disrupt commerce, primarily to weaken local governments.
10. Robbers posed a great military threat to the society.
11. Robbers often demanded ransom or used extortion.
12. Robbers were considered outlaws and could be dealt with under martial law or no law at all.
13. The government bore the duty to clear the highways and keep the bands of robbers in check. These bands were usually short-lived.
14. Robbers could be executed; thieves could not.
15. Captured robber leaders were treated especially harshly.
16. Robbers were considered instruments of God’s wrath afflicting a wicked nation

Robbers in the Old World

In the Code of Hammurabi, a compilation of ancient Babylonian laws which date back to about 1754 BC, one of the most stringent rules was that the governor of a city had responsibility for ensuring that there were no robbers on the highways in his region. This rule was strictly enforced. If anyone lost property due to an attack by robbers, the governor was required by the Code to pay for the losses. Responsibility resided with the local government.

Bands of robbers and of pirates (the nautical equivalent) were identified as the worst enemies of the Roman Empire—especially in the area around Jerusalem and throughout the Mesopotamian region, a frontier of the Roman Empire with a very unstable border. The robbers were a constant plague. The Romans finally rid themselves of pirates a few

years before the birth of Christ by conquering the entire coast of the Mediterranean. This allowed the Romans to close off harbors from the use of pirates.

Robbers in the Book of Helaman

Whenever a central government becomes weak, groups of robbers take advantage of the situation. That is exactly what we see happening here in the Book of Helaman. In Helaman chapter 2, there was constant upheaval in government leadership in Zarahemla. The people were really struggling. They could not even protect their own chief judges. Leaders were assassinated and the robbers were able to wield power and cause contention and commotion throughout the community. We encounter the robbers again in Helaman 6:15–41, where they are even stronger and come back with a vengeance to dominate the politics in the City of Zarahemla.

Every one of the sixteen characteristics of robbers listed above is specifically mentioned in these Helaman chapters. For example, the robbers kept their hideout secret (see characteristic number 7). Every time they assassinated someone, they would run off and hide. People would chase after the robbers, but to no avail. No one could find them because the robbers found cover in their secret hideout. The robbers swore oaths that no one in their band would ever reveal where their hiding place was located.

Often, Book of Mormon robbers joined together in large groups. Many times, they had their own leader and their own law code (characteristic number 5). In Helaman 6:24, we see reference to the fact that if any robber in the band divulged the whereabouts of their hiding place or the nature of their oaths, he would be “tried.” The “trial” would not be done according to the laws of the country, but “according to the laws of their wickedness.” Thus, we know that the robbers in the Book of Mormon had their own rules within their secret society.

Behind the scenes, the Gadianton bandits increased their influence and numbers by quietly infiltrating the village and finding Nephites who were willing to protect and join them (characteristic four). In Helaman 6:38, when there was commotion in the land of Zarahemla, “the more wicked Nephites” did “build [the robbers] up and support them.” The record states that the Nephites were “seduced.” The tactic of seduction was, “You help us and you can share in the spoils.” This is, again, a very typical *modus operandi* for such people.

These few chapters in Helaman contain a complete textbook description of the classic behavior of robbers that was so prevalent throughout the ancient world. It is easy, in reading about the Gadianton robbers, to consider the stories to be fantastic or phenomenal. It is difficult to believe that people would actually organize themselves in

these ways and do these kinds of things. This, however, was exactly how such things unfortunately happened in the ancient world.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "What is the Difference Between 'Robbers' and 'Thieves' in the Book of Mormon? (Helaman 6:18)," *KnoWhy* 432 (May 10, 2018).

John W. Welch and John F. Hall, "Two Profiles of Robbers in the Ancient World," in *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), chart 3–12.

John W. Welch, "Legal and Social Perspectives on Robbers in First-Century Judea," *BYU Studies* 36, no. 3 (1996–1997): 141–153.

HELAMAN 7–12

John W. Welch Notes



Overview Questions

In these chapters, we will see that Nephi was a very great prophet who used many ways to try to get people to listen to his prophetic voice. Pondering upon the following questions may help prepare you to receive personal insights about these chapters, as you listen to the voice of the Spirit:

- What will it take to get people to listen to a prophet’s voice today?
- What do you imagine Nephi looked like and acted like as he mourned, lamented, cursed, and testified on the top of his tower in chapter 7?
- Why do you imagine that the judges themselves did not arrest Nephi in 8:1?
- Why did “democracy” not work among these people?
- What will it take to keep democracy working in our world today?
- Why do the people refuse to arrest Nephi? (8:7–9)
- Which prophets does Nephi call to his defense in chapter 8? Why did he mention Jeremiah in particular?
- What does Nephi prophesy in 8:27, and what do his enemies conclude when that prophecy is fulfilled? (9:16, 20)
- In response to this predicament, what does Nephi prophesy? (9:26–36)
- How could Seantum be put to death legally when there were no witnesses who had observed him murder his brother? Doesn’t the law of Moses require two witnesses in order to convict someone of a capital offense?
- How did the people react to the fulfillment of Nephi’s prophecy? (9:40–41, 10:1).
- How did Nephi react to this great success? These must have been very stressful days.

- What power does God give to Nephi? (10:6–10), and why does God so bless Nephi with this power? (10:4–5, 11)
- Since the people of Nephi really repented in the face of the famine caused by Nephi (11:7–23), why did they return so soon to evil and wickedness? (11:24–38).
- What can a person do to prevent falling back into old habits each time one successfully repents?
- Why does Mormon conclude that human beings are less than the dust of the earth? (12:7).

Helaman 7:1–6 — Nephi Arrived Home to Find Great Iniquity

Nephi’s teachings had been thoroughly rejected in “the land northward” such that he could no longer stay among them (v. 3), so he returned to the land of Zarahemla somewhat discouraged. The wickedness among the people of Zarahemla, who had been entirely taken over by the Gadianton robbers, caused immense sorrow. This sinking into “great iniquity” had happened very rapidly, and as verse 6 says, “When Nephi saw it, his heart was swollen with sorrow within his breast.”

Helaman 7:6–9 — Nephi Lamented Over the Nephites’ Wickedness

Nephi had several great moments in his life. This moment, in which he went up to his tower to mourn the evils of the people and call them to repentance, was certainly one of them. When he got home and saw how troubled everything was, he went up on his tower to pray and mourn. This was a very public expression of sorrow, much like they did when someone had died.

In a way, you might say that Nephi had strategically staged a fake funeral! Instead of walking around trying to call people to repentance one by one, he mourned and lamented loudly and in public. He was weeping, and “multitudes of people” gathered around his tower. They must have been asking each other such things as, “What is going on? Who has died?” It was a brilliant way to attract their attention, and Nephi began immediately to call them to repentance, explaining that he was mourning “because of the exceeding sorrow of my heart, which is because of your iniquities!”

Nephi didn’t have a modern Conference Center with a raised podium and a microphone. He didn’t have the internet, television, or radio to transmit his message to his people. Instead, he had a tower next to a highway leading to a market. And while Nephi’s message was initially intended for an ancient audience, there can be no doubt that his cry of warning was included for our day.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Nephi Prophesy Near ‘the Highway Which Led to the Chief Market?’](#) (Helaman 7:10),” *KnoWhy* 178 (September 1, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[Was Helaman 7–8 an Allegorical Funeral Sermon?](#)” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 239–41. See especially Helaman 7:11, 15. In a typical funeral, family members would wail and cry, tear part of their clothing, veil their faces, cut their beards, put on sackcloth, and sit in ashes.

John W. Welch and Robert D. Hunt, “[Culturegram: Jerusalem 600 B.C.](#),” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), especially in this case see pp. 36–37 and sources cited in note 41.

Helaman 7:10 — What Was Significant about Nephi’s Tower?

Ancient American cities had minor market areas in the outlying neighborhoods. The houses were spread out fairly far apart, in order to accommodate gardens and animals. There likely would have been main roads that converged to the big market in the center of town. Nephi’s tower may have looked like a pyramid of some kind and was probably made of stone. It was near the main market, which was prime real estate. This was probably the most valuable land in the City of Zarahemla, which was the capital city.

How did Nephi get that land? It was most likely inherited land from his father (Helaman₂) and his grandfather (Helaman₁). It was even possibly the location of Alma the younger’s (his great-grandfather), home as the chief judge of the court system. The temple was probably not far away. It was the same city and even the same neighborhood in which the Nephites gathered to hear King Benjamin’s famous speech. It is possible that this tower also served out as a look-out tower to watch for an approaching enemy.

As Nephi stood on the top of this pyramid, he apparently made enough of a spectacle of himself that a crowd gathered. There is something unusual going on here.

Further Reading

John L. Sorenson, “[Nephi’s Garden and Chief Market](#),” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992) 236–238. “Furthermore, in some Mesoamerican cities ‘garden areas were cultivated immediately adjacent to single habitation complexes,’ and low-rising pyramidal towers were enclosed within private family compounds.”

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Nephi Prophesy Near ‘the Highway Which Led to the Chief Market?’](#) (Helaman 7:10),” *KnoWhy* 178 (September 1, 2016).

Helaman 7:17–19 — Nephi Asked “Why Will Ye Die?”

When Nephi was on the top of the tower, he probably was not wearing his priestly robes, but rather sackcloth and ashes. As Nephi put on this visual performance, many of the people may have thought that this was a funeral, and that someone had died. Nephi wittingly responds, “Why will ye die?” I think Nephi was not just saying, “Why are you going to die?” (of course, all mortals will die), but more he is asking, “Why are you willfully acting in such a way that you are in effect *willingly* dying?” The question was a time-honored prophetic lament and warning (see Jeremiah 27:13; Ezekiel 18:31; 33:11; and Jacob 6:6). Nephi’s question about death also seems to foreshadow his revelation about the death of the chief judge.

Helaman 7:25–27

Nephi, as the prophet, decided that he was going to plead with the people and to speak in unequivocal terms to let them know how bad things were going to be for them. He pronounces woes in some rather harsh language:

Yea, wo be unto you because of that great abomination which has come among you; and ye have united yourselves unto it, yea, to that secret band which was established by Gadianton!

Yea, wo shall come unto you because of that pride which ye have suffered to enter your hearts, which has lifted you up beyond that which is good because of your exceedingly great riches!

Yea, wo be unto you because of your wickedness and abominations!
(Helaman 7:25–27).

When the prophet pleads with us, that is a really good time to listen. It seems that in recent years the pleadings from General Authorities has become rather pronounced and discernable. Just think of President Eyring coming to tears pleading in General Conference. I think also of the passion of Elder Holland’s talks, and the pleading of Elder Scott. They often speak straight at you with some very, very deep-seated pleadings. Nephi is in that prophetic mode here on his tower.

Helaman 8

Helaman 8:1–4 — The Judges Attempted to Have the People Arrest Nephi

The Gadianton judges did not like Nephi stirring up the people to repentance. They started accusing him and inciting people to anger against Nephi. The Judges were trying to get the President of the Church arrested, the Prophet. This was not an ordinary, daily event.

The judges believed that Nephi had broken the law. Exodus 22:28 says, “Thou shalt not curse the ruler of thy country,” and Nephi was doing just that. They thought that he had illegally reviled against the government. If these kinds of woes got Abinadi in trouble, why did the judges not arrest Nephi?

The lawsuits in this world had to be initiated by an offended party, and so they tried to get the people to bring the lawsuit. We are dealing with some corrupt judges, so it is interesting that even though they had changed the law, even though they were very corrupt themselves, this is a line that they could not cross. If they had dragged Nephi into court, these leaders, as corrupt as they may have been, still needed to retain the support of the general population.

Helaman 8:7–9 — Democracy among the Nephites

Let us ask an important question. Why did democracy fail in the Nephite world at this time? King Mosiah instituted a form of democracy in Mosiah 29, where judges operated according to the voice of the people, even if it did not look like democracy of the 21st century. However, as things progressed in the book of Helaman, the government became worse and more corrupt. We can see the failure of an effort to create a democracy.

Once at Brigham Young University, a guest speaker from the University of Texas asked each of the faculty members in the College of Humanities to read *First Democracy* by Paul Woodruff. It was about democracy and its beginnings in Athens. Although some Greek city-states were very democratic, like Athens, others were not, like Sparta.

The reason the book was really interesting to me, especially as I read it right at the same time I was reading these chapters, is that the same problems that threatened democracy in the Greek world and threaten it in the United States of America today, are specifically mentioned in these chapters in Helaman. For example, here are some of the characteristics that have to be in place in order for a democracy to work properly.

The Rule of Law

First, you have to have rule of law. Law has to be respected and in place. If you begin to corrupt or change the law, the foundations of democracy are threatened. The people who

can control and change the law can exert a disproportionate power over the society. Democracy is diminished if not eliminated. That was what happened in the Book of Helaman. The people who got into power, the Gadianton robbers, immediately begin to corrupt the laws.

Rulers Must Be Accountable to the People

Second, Woodruff says that in order to have a strong democracy, rulers must be accountable to the people. Leaders must be held responsible for mistakes, and if necessary, removed from office. If you do not have a way of holding government officers accountable, then they begin to manifest again a disproportionate amount of power, and power tends to corrupt.

Interestingly, in Greece and Rome, you could not sue a person for personal damages while they were in office, but as soon as they left office they had no more governmental immunity and you could sue them for any kind of personal injury that you suffered because of anything that they had done. Just the threat—the fear of being sued when you left office kept a lot of the Roman administrators well within the bounds of reason. That is not the way we do things today.

Insulation from Bribes and Wealth

The leaders in Helaman were not held accountable. Instead, they set up fences of immunity and were protected by their wealth. Democracy is threatened whenever people are able to use their wealth to increase their political power. Ideally, democracy means one person, one vote. However, if your vote does not count and somebody else's vote does, democracy is diminished, so anything that we can do to be sure that everybody's vote really does count is important in preserving democracy.

People are interested in voting when their vote really matters, but there is yet another thing. In order for democracy to work, if you have any representative aspects of your government, the representation needs to be proportional. If it gets too widely out of proportion, then the minorities in the community feel that their voices are not heard. They are disenfranchised, and that is not what democracy is supposed to be. We have to be on the lookout for places where minorities are not being heard or given a chance to be heard. In Zarahemla, the church is actually in the minority. The church's voice in this chapter is not being heard. In fact, the church is being drummed out of town.

Public Events in which Everyone Can Participate

It is very important in a democracy to have public events where everyone can participate as King Benjamin had. He had everybody come to the temple, and had a sense of unity

and celebration— especially celebrating common origins. The national heritage that we share in common needs to be preserved as a story that unites all of our people.

Education

Education is very important. For a democracy, you have to have an educated populace, and you do not get the impression here that much education is going on in the city of Zarahemla.

There are many things that we can do to strengthen our democracy. There is more involved here than we might have thought, but in all of these cases, in ancient Greece, in America, and in Zarahemla, democracy was being threatened. It was a difficult time in Zarahemla.

It is easy to become a little bit cynical about democracy, and there is no question that democracy is messy. It is not a neat, tidy way to run a government. However, the alternative is tyranny, as the ancient Greek world has proved. That may be clean, but it is not what we want. Especially because it often does not allow people to make religious choices to worship according to the dictates of their conscience, to do the kinds of things that we know we are here on this earth to do.

Helaman 8:13–22 — Nephi Invoked the Testimonies of Former Prophets

Let us look at the end of Helaman 8. After the corrupt judges tried to get Nephi arrested, they pushed a little more. One of the criticisms that these people had raised against Nephi was that he was only one person witnessing against the people. Nephi took the occasion to speak about prophets and prophecy. Starting in Helaman 8:16, he began invoking many prophets who had spoken the truth, and had spoken as single voices. Nephi offered the examples of Moses, Abraham, Zenock, Zenos, Esaias, Isaiah, and Jeremiah—who stood as witnesses of God, even when they were alone.

Just as Jeremiah had prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem, Nephi was now prophesying of the Nephites' destruction. We know that Jeremiah was a true prophet because of Lehi's words. After Lehi departed into the wilderness, he received a vision validating the destruction of Jerusalem. In addition to Lehi's dream, the Mulekites also attested to Jerusalem's destruction. The founding story of Zarahemla is the story of Mulek coming from the destruction of Jerusalem. Here, Nephi uses that as evidence for the truthfulness of prophecy.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Should Readers Pay Close Attention to the Mulekites?](#) (Omni 1:19)," *KnoWhy* 434 (May 17, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Nephi Rely on Earlier Testimonies of Christ? \(Helaman 8:22\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 179 (September 2, 2016).

Helaman 8:27–28 — Nephi Prophesied That the Chief Judge Had Been Murdered

Nephi concluded this speech by prophesying that the chief judge Seezoram had just been murdered by his brother Seantum. Nephi told the people what Seantum would say, what they would find, and that Seantum would confess. Lo and behold, they all ran out there and found exactly that it was so. Unfortunately, some of the people assumed that Nephi must have been complicit in the conspiracy. Perhaps they assumed that Nephi wanted his power back by being involved in the killing the chief judge. When they pushed him a little bit more, he firmly challenged them to go and see for themselves the murder of their chief judge.

Helaman 9

Helaman 9:1–4 — Five Nephites Investigate Nephi’s Claims

The people of Zarahemla sent five people to investigate and of course, they were shocked at the scene that welcomed them. Upon beholding the murder, they all collapsed. When more people arrived, they assumed that the envoys must have been the murderers. The people arrested the five and took them into custody. Despite insisting on their innocence, the accusers assert that Nephi and these five must have planned the entire thing together.

Helaman 9:12 — A Dramatic Twist of Irony

Helaman 9:12 has a touch of dramatic irony. A group of the judges who had been at Nephi’s tower were at the burial of the chief judge, and were curious as to why the five investigators had never returned. The judges asked around concerning the five they had sent to check on the murder. They asked “Where are the five who were sent to inquire concerning the chief judge whether he was dead?” They were given this as an answer, “Concerning this five whom ye say ye have sent, we know not; but there are five who are the murderers, whom we have cast into prison.”

Helaman 9:25–38 — Seantum Was Questioned and Convicted

In this predicament, where Nephi was brought in as a potential conspirator, he gave the final prophecy of exactly what would happen if the people were to go talk with Seantum. Indeed, they found the blood on Seantum’s cloak, Seantum turned pale, he answered exactly the way Nephi prophesied, and then he confessed exactly as Nephi had predicted. “And behold, the words which he [Nephi] had said were true; for according to the words he [Seantum] did deny; and also according to the words he [Seantum] did confess” (Helaman 9:37).

To those who found the five investigators lying on the floor, it looked like the five were the murderers who had been struck by divine judgement. There was a lot of circumstantial evidence that pointed in their direction. Nevertheless, the five suspects could not be convicted on circumstantial evidence under a legal system in which the often-invoked two-witness rule was inviolate.

In contrast, Seantum had blood on his garment. He went pale. While this is circumstantial evidence, he eventually did confess. However, under biblical law, in order to convict someone, there had to be two witnesses, and this is likely why the five investigators were not immediately put to death.

In fact, there are four cases in the Old Testament that illuminate this principle of witnesses. One of them is the case of Achan. Achan was one of the soldiers in Joshua's army. When the army came back from battle, Joshua told everybody to turn in their loot into a central repository. Since, much of the booty would have been metal idols, they had to be very careful about what they did under Mosaic law. They especially did not want people keeping those gold and silver idols.

Achan did not turn in his loot. He buried it under the carpet of his tent, and then the battle went badly for the Israelites. Joshua consulted the Lord and was told that somebody had not turned in all they should have. First, they asked which tribe the problem was in, and then they narrowed it to one tribe—most likely casting lots, a common way for them to determine the will of the Lord. Then they asked which family group within the tribe, and finally they asked which man had done it. When they cast again, the lot fell on Achan, who confessed his sin. They checked the floor of the tent, and there was all the gold and silver that he had gathered. They stoned him, then burnt him along with his family, his animals, his tent, and all his property. They burn it all. They obliterated him from the camp because he had defiled the whole camp.

In addition to (1) the case of Achan in Joshua 7, the other cases that allowed physical evidence to serve effectively as witnesses were: (2) the man put to death for admitting that he had killed Saul (see 2 Samuel 1:10–16); (3) the two assassins of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, who were similarly executed (see 2 Samuel 4:8–12); and (4) Micah, the son who voluntarily confessed stealing from his mother (see Judges 17:1–4). How the ancients reconciled these four cases with the rigid rule that required two witnesses has long been a subject of jurisprudential attention. Aaron Kirchenbaum finds the evidence inconclusive: "Whether this pentateuchal requirement of two witnesses, adopted as standard Israelite criminal procedure (1 Kings 21:10, 13), was construed loosely, as an alternative or supplement to confession—as would appear from David's juridical decisions—or whether it was interpreted strictly, as excluding confession—as taught by the Oral Tradition . . . —must

remain an open question to the critical scholar.” See Aaron Kirschenbaum, *Self-Incrimination in Jewish Law* (New York, NY: Burning Bush Press, 1970), 33.

Rabbis interested in Jewish jurisprudence asked how this and the three other known cases could be reconciled with the law requiring two or three “witnesses.” When divinely revealed evidence was located, and when the culprit confessed voluntarily, was that enough? And so they developed a rule to harmonize the four Old Testament cases with the law requiring two witnesses by saying that (a) if you have what we call the *corpus delicti*, physical evidence of the crime, and (b) if God is involved somehow in detecting the nature of the wrong-doing and the wrong-doer, then the divine confirmation becomes one witness, and the *corpus delicti* becomes the second witness. But the rabbis also decided that this rule should apply only (c) when the confession is given voluntarily by the culprit outside of a judicial proceeding. This summation of the rule in Deuteronomy 19:15 in combination with these four Old Testament cases was articulated and explained in the Talmud, but this precise legal synthesis is operating here in the case of Seantum.

Just as Achan confessed his guilt in Joshua 7 as soon as he was detected by the oracle of God as the soldier in the camp of Israel who had hidden the contraband booty under the carpet of his tent, so Seantum immediately confessed his guilt, having been exposed by the glance of God’s all-searching eye.

Sometimes we may wonder why we are told so many of the details of a given story in scripture. This is certainly an interesting story on its own, but every fact and detail in the trial of Seantum, it turns out, has legal significance. It all shows that Seantum, in fact, was executed legally according to the law.

Moreover, Nephi could not be held guilty under ancient Israelite law as a co-conspirator. At the most—and of course, Nephi was not involved in a conspiracy—all he could have done was plan and talk about it. Israelite law could only put someone to death if you *did* something. A conspirator is not necessarily a doer. He may have prodded people to action, but he did not actually do anything, so when Nephi was accused, they say confess your *fault*. They do not say confess your *guilt*, which is a very subtle but correct point.

Given the complicated and important ancient legal issues presented by the case of Seantum, it is little wonder that the text makes special note of the fact that Seantum “was brought to prove that he himself was the very murderer” (Helaman 9:38). No further testimonies from witnesses (of which there were none) was legally needed to convict him, and one may thus assume that he was summarily executed.

Although the case of Seantum was quite unusual and therefore probably would have had little precedential usefulness in other Nephite cases, it was significant in several other

ways. At a time when the influence of the church was in steep decline in the city of Zarahemla, God’s entrance into this proceeding demonstrated that he was aware of the corruption of political officials, to the point of openly sustaining and validating the words of his prophets. At least for a few years, many people were convinced by this episode that Nephi was indeed “a prophet” (Helaman 9:40), and some even thought he was “a god” (Helaman 9:41). Although these people soon reverted to their wicked ways, the case had been made that God knew well the wickedness of the robbers and assassins who continued to plague the Nephites. Thus, the case of Seantum sustained and encouraged the righteous few in their adamant determination to resist civil corruption and to believe in further revelation, as the righteous people did in the case of the five-year prophesy of Samuel the Lamanite, even to the point of risking their lives. No doubt for these reasons, the righteous historians at the end of this era singled out and emphasized the trial of Seantum as an important victory of God’s prophets over the factions of the wicked dissenters.

Further Reading

Welch, John W. “[The Trial of Seantum](#),” in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 323–334.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Could Seantum be Convicted Without Any Witnesses?](#) (Helaman 9:35–36),” *KnoWhy* 180 (September 5, 2016).

Helaman 9:39–41 — Some Believed That Nephi Was a Prophet

Joseph Smith was a prophet just as Nephi was a prophet, and we can listen to a prophet’s voice with confidence. Some in Zarahemla thought Nephi was a prophet. Because of his significant powers of discernment, some even thought he was a god. Interestingly, the five who had been charged with the murder were converted while in prison, so their testimonies also helped to convert other people. And the fact that those five were converted by what transpired in this case only reinforces their credibility as spokesmen after their conversion. They were more surprised than anyone that everything transpired exactly as Nephi had said. It is a remarkable story, and an important one. So it is unfortunate that most of the world has never heard of the incredible trial of Seantum.

Helaman 10

Helaman 10:1–3 — Nephi Ponders Over the Events of the Day

The people were amazed at what happened. Some believed, and some did not, but they wandered off and left Nephi standing alone. Nephi, left alone, reacted to this amazing

experience by pondering. Notice that he never gloated about how the judges were wrong. He was a humble man who was not seeking his own glory. As he was heading home, he heard the voice of God.

Helaman 10:4–11 — Nephi Received Sealing Power

The next great moment in Nephi's life was not only when the Lord spoke to him, but was also when the Lord came to bless him forever for his service by granting him the sealing power. He had labored unwearingly until the seventy-first year of the judges. In Helaman 10:7, Nephi was given the power, "that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

This blessing of the sealing power has to be the most sublime, personal blessing in all of scripture. "Behold, thou art Nephi and I am God," said the Lord. This was apparently a formal situation, in which angels were present to bear witness (Helaman 10:6). This power granted Nephi the ability to command virtually anything. Nephi withheld that power for a while, but finally decided that he was going to need to use it to institute a famine, which has some good effects. What a wonderful blessing he is given. He eventually calls the famine off, but not until three years later, which was another great moment in his life.

In verse 4, we learn why Nephi received this blessing. He received this gift:

1. Because of his unweariness. In other words, he do not become weary or tired of doing good works.
2. Because he had not sought his own life. He had been willing to sacrifice even his life, if necessary.
3. Because he had sought the will of God.
4. Because he had kept the commandments.

Well, that is quite a formula, and the take-home message that you might get out of this is at the end of verse 5 when the Lord says, "Because of this I will bless you." Why? "Because I know that you will not ask that which is contrary to my will." Nephi's will had become so aligned with the Lord's that the Lord knew that he could trust him completely and implicitly. He never asked for or used his power in a way that would not have been consistent with the will of the Lord. While that is an incredible state of spiritual achievement to have reached, it did not happen overnight. As you study the work of Nephi in the preceding chapters, you will understand the wonderful things that he did which brought him to a point where he would not ask anything contrary to the will of the Lord.

Helaman 11

Helaman 11:1–4 – God Sends a Famine Instead of Wars

Nephi was blessed to be able to “smite the earth with famine” (Helaman 10:6). In the very next verse, he was given the power to “seal” and “loose” on earth and in heaven. Because “seal” and “loose” can also mean “close” and “open,” it is possible that Nephi assumed that his power to cause famine, when necessary, was related to this ability to “close” things up in heaven.

Compare Helaman 10:7 with Matthew 16:19 and Isaiah 22:22, and it becomes clear that “sealing” and “loosing” in this verse refer to opening and closing. Nephi was literally able to close the heavens to keep it from raining. When one looks at Alma 18:30–32 and Genesis 1:1, for example, it becomes clear that in the Ancient Near East and the Book of Mormon, the heavens were viewed not only as the place where God dwells, but also the area above the earth: the sky. Thus, when Nephi is told he will be able to open and close things “in heaven” he may have taken this very literally to mean he could literally open and close the sky.

Nephi was not the first prophet to use the priesthood to cause drought. The first recorded words from Elijah in the Old Testament are his testament to the wicked king Ahab, were that “there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1 Kings 17:1). Elijah, just like Nephi, used the priesthood to “seal” the heavens to keep it from raining. Thus, it is likely that Nephi received power to “seal” in Helaman 10, and then used it to “seal” the heavens in Helaman 11. This connection between Nephi and Elijah sealing the heavens is strengthened by the many allusions to the Elijah story in the story of Nephi son of Helaman.

Elijah	Nephi
Elijah causes a famine by “sealing” the heavens.	Nephi causes a famine by “sealing” the heavens.
Elijah experiences a fire and an earthquake in connection with hearing a soft voice from God (1 Kings 19:12).	Nephi experiences a fire and an earthquake in connection with hearing a soft voice from God (Helaman 5:23, 30–31).
Elijah warns that the unrepentant will be eaten by dogs (2 Kings 9:36).	Nephi warns that the unrepentant will be eaten by dogs (Helaman 7:19).

Elijah has an experience in which he stands before the Lord ([1 Kings 17:1; 18:15](#)).
Nephi has an experience in which he stands before the Lord ([Helaman 10:5](#)).

Elijah says that “rain” will cease “according to my word” ([1 Kings 17:1](#)).
Nephi says that “rain” will cease “according to my words” ([Helaman 11:13](#)).

Elijah is taken by the spirit from place to place ([1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16](#)).
Nephi is taken by the spirit from place to place ([Helaman 10:16–17](#)).

Elijah does not have a recorded death or burial ([2 Kings 2:11](#)).
Nephi does not have a recorded death or burial ([3 Nephi 1:3](#)).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Did Nephi Use the Power to Seal on Earth and in Heaven?](#) (Helaman 11:4),” *KnoWhy* 182 (September 7, 2016).

Helaman 11:18–19 — Nephi’s Brother, Lehi

Throughout this section, there has been no information about what Lehi, Nephi’s brother, was doing. One may wonder where he was during all the amazing experiences that Nephi had. After the famine had resolved and people had repented, there is a section noting the great righteousness of Nephi, something easily observable. The people now accepted him. Helaman 11:18 records, “And they did no more seek to destroy Nephi, but they did esteem him as a great prophet, and a man of God, having great power and authority given unto him from God.” Then quite unexpectedly, with no more explanation or clarification, we are told, “And behold, Lehi, his brother, was not a whit behind him as to things pertaining to righteousness.” We would certainly like to know more about what Lehi was doing during this dramatic episode in Nephite history. What a wonderful pair of children, grandchildren, and—for Alma the younger—great-grandchildren.

Helaman 11:24–33 — Warfare Tactics of the Gadianton Dissenters

In spite of the great blessings, prosperity and peace that was then enjoyed in Zarahemla, the lingering political factions opposed to Nephi and Lehi arose again, this time with an even greater vengeance. Those dissenters again commenced war, but this time they used tactics of raiding, retreating into secret places in the wilderness and the mountains, forming a very “great band of robbers,” causing havoc, and following the ancient plans and practices. They thrived on taunting, defying, causing fear, abducting and kidnapping women and children. In these verses, Mormon gives us a clear description of their tactics.

In basic principles as well as nuanced subtleties, the Book of Mormon’s depiction of what we now call guerrilla warfare is stunningly authentic. Warfare in Joseph Smith’s day was rather different from what we read here in the Book of Helaman. During the 19th century, it was commonly expected that opposing troops would formally array themselves for battle and engage in an all-out contest on a set-piece battlefield. Guerrilla warfare, on the other hand, operates on the principles of stealth, surprise, hidden base camps, small-scale skirmishes, strategic retreats, advantageous terrain, and, importantly, propaganda. These types of tactics, although foreign and even shameful to 19th-century thinking, were used repeatedly and deliberately by the Gadianton robbers of the Book of Mormon. Daniel C. Peterson has described it as “a totally believable and coherent complex of military behaviors and responses.”

Further Reading

Daniel C. Peterson, “[The Gadianton Robbers as Guerrilla Warriors](#),” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 146–173.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Is the Book of Mormon’s Depiction of Guerrilla Warfare Realistic? \(Helaman 11:25\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 423 (April 10, 2018).

Helaman 11:34–37 — They Did Not Mend Their Ways

Mormon did not go into detail about the next few years. After the famine was over, the prosperity of the people and its associated pride caused them to forget God and allowed them to sink into the grasp of the Gadianton robbers. We learn that the Gadianton robbers were “making great havoc” (v. 27). In the “space of not many years,” the band of robbers had become great and powerful. But at the end of the eighty-first year, the misery caused people to return to their God. The brief journal entries for those years are as follows, which probably suggests that nothing of value happened:

- And in the eighty and second year they began again to forget the Lord their God.
- And in the eighty and third year they began to wax strong in iniquity.
- And in the eighty and fourth year they did not mend their ways.
- And it came to pass in the eighty and fifth year they did wax stronger and stronger in their pride, and in their wickedness; and thus they were ripening again for destruction.
- And thus ended the eighty and fifth year.

Helaman 12

In chapter 12, Mormon can no longer hold back his personal point of view. As an abridger up to this point, Mormon has been very restrained. But in abridging the book of Helaman, he repeatedly and emphatically had encountered sobering evidence of the dark side of human nature. As you read Mormon's words here (which are particularly poignant when you remember what he himself had lived through personally), what characteristics of human nature do you see that should give us all great pause?

After the famine ended, what emotions and problems beset the Nephites (11:26–33)?

How can people, individually and collectively, overcome “unsteadiness” (12:1)?

In what ways today do people “trample under their feet the Holy One” (12:2)?

How can a person increase their speed in becoming less slow to do good, to remember the Lord, and to walk in wisdom's paths? (12:4–6)

How does it help you to know that you are “less than the dust of the earth”? (12:7; recall also Mosiah 2:25).

Helaman 12:1 — Mormon's Commentary and Testimony

Mormon's commentary on the preceding events and behaviors in the book of Helaman comprises the whole of chapter 12. Verse 1 begins, “And thus we can behold...,” which is an indicator, along with “And thus we see...” or “we see,” of Mormon's upcoming commentary (see also verses 2–3).

Verse 1 acts as a kind of abstract by summarizing the main points of this chapter:

- How false, and also unsteady are the hearts of the children of men; and
- The Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him.

The rest of the chapter expands on these main points, describing the depths of man's folly and the height of the Lord's kindness, patience, and desire to bless these children of men.

This whole chapter is Mormon's testimony of the love and power of God, and his desire to bless us. It highlights man's foolishness in not paying attention and forgetting his obligations to such a loving Divine creator, trampling “under their feet the Holy One—yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity” (verse 2). Just in case we did not get the message from the account, he warns us in verse 3:

And thus, we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him.

Helaman 12:7 — Less than the Dust of the Earth

In order to illustrate the magnitude of the problem that he saw, Mormon illustrated with imagery from the world around him. He was illustrating that the story we have read demonstrated that God kept his word; if we are righteous, we will “prosper in the land;” and if we let pride get in the way, and harden our hearts, we will suffer, even eternally.

To accomplish his goal, Mormon contrasted the obedience of nature with the sinful disobedience of men. Unlike human tendencies, in response to the voice of the Lord, dust moves hither and thither, hills and mountains are transformed into valleys, and the whole earth shakes (see Helaman 12:7–12).

In response to this passage, Joseph Fielding Smith stated:

The point he is making is that the dust of the earth is obedient. . . . Everything in the universe obeys the law given unto it, so far as I know, except man. Everywhere you look you find law and order, the elements obeying the law given to them, true to their calling. But man rebels, and in this thing, man is less than the dust of the earth because he rejects the counsels of the Lord.

Further Reading

Joseph Fielding Smith in *Official Report of the Ninety-Ninth Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1929), 55, quoted in K. Douglas Bassett, *Latter-day Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 1999), 386—Quoted in Grandy, “Why Things Move,” 109, note 24).

Helaman 12:13–15 — Mormon’s Cosmic View and Imagery

Helaman 12:15, in particular, has been viewed as indicating that Mormon had a heliocentric view of the cosmos. However, our modern sun-centered model of the solar system would have been inconsistent with the beliefs of ancient cultures.

The finest academic treatment of the cosmological view of world found in the Old Testament and also in this chapter in the Book of Mormon is a very well articulated study by David Grandy, published in 2012 in *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Among many interesting points, Grandy explains,

There would be no allowance for either the sun or the earth to fully orbit the other body. This is because the earth was not imagined as a round body hanging freely in space ... Instead the earth was thought to rest on subterranean waters, which God had separated at the creation from waters now situated above the firmament...

Living in the aftermath of the rise of modern science, we might wonder how premodern people could ever attribute sentience or life principle—or at least the capacity to respond to nonmechanistic influences—to things we “know” to be lifeless. Would it not be obvious to every thinking person, regardless of background or era, that rocks are inert entities?

However, the idea that nature was inert was exactly what Mormon did not assume. For him, rocks, hills, mountains, the whole solar system, and even the smallest particles of dust, obeyed the commands of God (Helaman 12:7–10, KnoWhy 183). And actually today we know that even within the rocks are electrons and subatomic particles in constant motion. Something keeps all that molecular movement going, regularly and orderly.

Of course, this is not to imply that Mormon couldn't have received more scientifically accurate information about the cosmos through revelation. We know that Moses and Abraham, for example, received sacred knowledge of cosmic truths through revelation (see Abraham 3 and Moses 1:33–38), but in neither of those cases was there information equivalent to our modern “scientific” view that the earth revolves around the Sun. David A. Grandy explains, “Mormon’s lament about the inconsistency of man is not evidence of the Nephites arriving at a scientifically correct understanding of the earth’s motion before Copernicus.”

In fact, he goes on to say that Mormon’s statements in these verses are evidence of the Nephites understanding the earth’s motion very differently from the way we understand it today, and that Mormon’s commentary was motivated by an awareness of God’s active involvement in nature and not from a need to make a scientific correction.

Before we talk further about what Mormon actually said here in Helaman 12, let us look at what he did not say. As David A. Grandy has written,

In Helaman 12, Mormon’s concern is not about whether it is the sun or the earth that moves; or whether either body moves around the other, *about which no mention is made*. Instead, Mormon’s concern is whether entities of any sort move in response to God’s will. This view emerges from the context of the passage, and it is fully consistent with other scriptural descriptions of motion.

In other words, we tend to superimpose our view of the cosmos on Mormon’s words. There is no mention of the astronomical bodies moving around each other. Mormon is

simply expressing a view from his day, that resonates with people who believe in the divine creator, that when God instructs the earth to move in whichever direction he needs it to, the earth moves, and no doubt he knew of God’s parting of the Red Sea for the children of Israel just as we think of Jesus calming the storm on Galilee. Mormon is bewailing that we as people are not as compliant as natural matter. He was not speaking from a scientific point of view, but from a doctrinal and symbolic perspective. Thus, he probably intended for his readers to focus mainly on his moral lesson, that humans are “less than the dust of the earth” (12:7) when they disobey God.

Fortunately, despite our fallen condition and natural inclinations to go astray, we do have the agency to put off disruptive temptations, so that through the atonement of Christ and “by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel, all mankind may be saved” and ultimately can become divinely exalted beings. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf has taught,

This is a paradox of man: compared to God, man is nothing; yet we are everything to God. While against the backdrop of infinite creation we may appear to be nothing, we have a spark of eternal fire burning within our breast. We have the incomprehensible promise of exaltation—worlds without end—within our grasp. And it is God’s great desire to help us reach it.

Further Reading

David A. Grandy, “[Why Things Move: A New Look at Helaman 12](#)” in *BYU Studies Quarterly*, 51, no.2 (2012): 99–128. “Mormon devoutly desires that humans should be subservient to their Creator and Benefactor, although often they are not—as Mormon knows from his own personal efforts to lead his unruly people” (109).

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

Jared W. Ludlow “Abraham’s Visions of the Heavens,” *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid, *Studies in the Book of Abraham* 3 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 57–74.

Hugh Nibley, *One Eternal Round*, in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 19* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book, FARMS, Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, and Brigham Young University, 2010), 364–366.

Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “[You Matter to Him](#),” *Ensign*, November 2011, 20.

HELAMAN 13–16

John W. Welch Notes



Overview

Mormon's Interest in Samuel's Speech Ran Deep

In this final section of the book of Helaman, we are given an extensive record of the words of Samuel the Lamanite. It even includes the words in Helaman 14:25 that had been omitted, an oversight for which Jesus gently chided Nephi and the disciples. Samuel's words were important, and Jesus wanted to be sure that they were included among the Nephite records (see 3 Nephi 23:9–13). With that high level of attention given to the details and completeness of Samuel's prophetic speech, readers can be quite confident that Mormon would not have taken anything out of this record or tampered editorially with it, even if he might otherwise have been tempted to do so. The speech is in some ways rather raw and repetitive. But it was given under the pressures of the moment, and its bold spontaneity bares the authentic marks of a traditional prophetic curse oracle.

Mormon also had several of his own reasons for wanting to include all the words of Samuel in his record. For example, in Mormon chapter 1, he is sorry to say that he "was forbidden to preach unto [his own people], because of the hardness of their hearts" (Mormon 1:17), and that the Gadianton robbers again "did infest the land" (Mormon 1:18), as they had in Samuel's day (Helaman 11:24-37). And so, it is all the more exactly on target for Mormon to refer to the fulfilling in his own day "of all the words of Abinadi, and also Samuel the Lamanite" (Mormon 1:19). Mormon, of course, knew where his story was headed, even as he abridged it. Hence, he gave special attention to the full inclusion of these prophetic words of warning in particular.

Some Questions to Think about as You Study Samuel's Speech

- What strikes you as impressive about the courage and powerful words of this Lamanite convert?
- How well did Samuel know and use the scriptures (13:1; 14:12; 15:11; and many more)?
- What can we learn today from Samuel's words about the unrighteous behaviors and bad attitudes of the unrighteous Nephites about wealth (13:18–23), about casting out the prophets (13:24–29), and about their poor social attitudes toward the Lamanites (15:3–14)?
- What does it really mean to be “free”? What makes us “free”? Why would being “free” have been a topic of special interest to Samuel and his people at this time? (14:30–31; 15:8).
- What did Samuel prophesy would happen within 400 years? Why might that number (which is 20 x 20) have been symbolically significant? (And notice that Mormon remembers this prophecy in particular, Mormon 1:19).
- What did Samuel prophesy would happen in (or after) 5 more years? (14:2–6).
- Did he say when the signs of Christ's death would be given? (14:20–29).
- Do you think Samuel's prophecies were “reasonable”? Why did some people think they were not? (16:18–19). Should a person believe only that which is “reasonable”?

Samuel's Speech Patterns

It seems to me that Samuel's speech contains linguistic and rhetorical elements which suggest that he may not have been a native Nephite speaker or that he may have grown up using a different dialect. If so, that might have made it difficult for Nephite people to understand or accept him. As you read Samuel's words, listen for patterns of speech that might have struck his audience as unusual or “different.” Indeed, it would be surprising if the dialects spoken by Samuel and by the people in Zarahemla had not diverged over time from each other. If so, this language barrier could have added to the rejection of Samuel's message by the people in Zarahemla.

In addition, there appears to have been certain stylistic elements that may have put some of his listeners off even further. For example, Samuel's repetition of groups of words sometimes sounds redundant. In some instances, he repeated the same idea several times. He hovered over a point and repeated words in a staccato style. This could be a natural inclination of speakers of a second language when emphasizing a main point. Such speakers usually operate in the second language with a limited vocabulary. They reuse the same words, without speaking in flowery perlocutions, eloquent synonyms, or subtle euphemisms.

As a result, we can see in Samuel's words indications of very straight-forward public speaking. The Nephite anti-Christ's and other enemies of the church were often described as "flattering" and eloquent with their language. This is not said of Samuel, who may not have had that kind of training in Nephite oratory. What he did have was the truth, and he spoke it directly. Whether he had picked up the Nephite dialect or accent since his conversion or had been taught the language since birth, by the time he boldly addressed the people of Zarahemla, he had come to know the spirit of prophecy, to recognize the voice of his Lord Jesus Christ, and to understand certain Nephite scriptures very well.

Helaman 13

Helaman 13:1–39 — Samuel's Main Themes in Chapter 13

In chapter 13, the following themes are expressed:

- God's fierce anger will come unless the people repent (vv. 8–11).
- Wo on the great city (vv. 12–16).
- Why God places curses on the land, on riches, and the people (vv. 17–23).
- Wo to the people for rejecting the prophets (vv. 24–29).
- God's anger is already kindled unless the people repent (vv. 30–39).

The basic structure of Samuel's speech in chapter 13 includes five themes, and he repeats these points several times in no specific order. Three times he reiterated that the Lord would "visit them with the sword and with famine and with pestilence" (13:9) and would "visit them in my fierce anger" and shall "visit your destruction" (13:10). He uses the word "Wo" seven times in this chapter (13:11, 12, 12, 14, 15, 16, 24; and twice more in chapter 15). The word "destroy/destruction" appears nine times in chapter 13 alone. The "anger" of the Lord appears five times, and only, in chapter 13 (verses 10, 11, 30, 37, 39). Taken altogether, the large number of his expressions of "wo," of "famine and pestilence" (13:9), of cursings (13:17, 18, 19, 23, 25), and destruction are punctuated by three times as many succinct expressions involving "repent, repentance, repented, repenteth" (twenty-seven occurrences, running throughout his speech), such as, "except they repent" (13:8), "except ye repent, saith the Lord" (13:10), and "but if ye will repent and return unto the Lord your God I will turn away mine anger, saith the Lord" (13:11). Several other words appear in similarly high concentrations here.

Toward the end of chapter 13, perhaps when it was clear that the people as a whole were not accepting his warnings, Samuel was prompted to say, "But behold, your days of probation are past; ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation until it is everlastingly

too late, and your destruction is made sure" (13:38). However, he still ended this first section of his speech on a note of hope, "O ye people of the land, that ye would hear my words! And I pray that the anger of the Lord be turned away from you, and that ye would repent and be saved" (13:39).

Helaman 13:1–2 — Samuel Prophecies Among the Nephites

Samuel the Lamanite arrived in Zarahemla on this occasion in the eighty-sixth year of the reign of the judges. This was only sixteen years after the famine prescribed by Nephi, the son of Helaman, had caused the Nephite people to repent. However, after that things had gone downhill very rapidly—the Nephites were now very wicked. In Helaman 6:1, we had already learned "... when the sixty and second year of the reign of the judges had ended, ... the Lamanites had become, the more part of them, a righteous people, insomuch that their righteousness did exceed that of the Nephites, because of their firmness and their steadiness in the faith." The righteous and converted Lamanites were now preaching to the Nephites, and "many of the Lamanites did come down *into the land* of Zarahemla, and did declare unto the people of the Nephites the manner of their conversion, and did exhort them to faith and repentance" (Helaman 6:4).

What can be discerned or surmised about where Samuel came from? Might he have been one of those early Lamanite missionaries who came among the Nephites as "missionaries and witnesses" to "the land of Zarahemla," perhaps not so much to the city, but to the villages round about? They also went northward to teach, and Nephi and Lehi went with them (Helaman 6:6). It appears that until Samuel's call by God, missionaries may not have been called to preach in the great city of Zarahemla. However, now, in the eighty-sixth year, the Lord then directed Samuel that it was time to go, not only to teach, but to warn the people of impending doom if they did not repent.

It appears that Samuel was the first of the Lamanite missionaries to visit the city of Zarahemla, resulting in their anger and desire to evict him. My supposition is this: I think that Samuel the Lamanite may have been a leader among the Lamanites who had joined the church in the city of Nephi in Helaman 5, and probably had been there on the day that Nephi and Lehi converted the 300 people, as recorded in their missionary account. These Lamanites "did observe strictly to keep the commandments of God, according to the law of Moses" (13:1), and these new converts had laid down "their weapons of war" (Helaman 5:51; 15:9), as had the Lamanites who had previously followed Ammon. Samuel was now a great religious leader among his own people.

Thus, it appears that Samuel had a close relationship with Nephi, the son of Helaman. He had missionary experience. He belonged to a group of converts who were especially diligent in keeping the law of Moses and laying down their weapons in the interests of peace.

Helaman 13:3 — The Lord Calls Samuel to Preach

In Helaman 7, we learn that Nephi and Lehi had returned from the land north earlier. This was when Nephi was so shocked at the wickedness he found back in Zarahemla, that he went up on his tower to mourn over the Nephites who would not repent and to chastise the people. Several years later, Nephi was probably at home in Zarahemla at the time Samuel spoke there from the walls of the city.

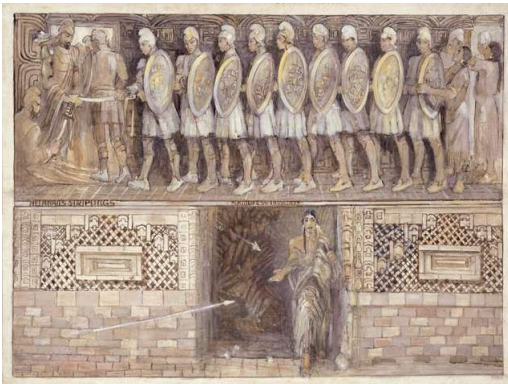
If Samuel had been a convert of Nephi, perhaps Samuel was with him or had come to visit Nephi and Lehi on their way home from teaching in the land northward. He may have been shocked, as Nephi had been, when he discovered how wicked the people had become in the city of Zarahemla. He likely prayed about the situation, and was told something like, “Samuel, I need you to deliver a serious message—and there is bad news. These people must repent. But there is good news—I want you to explain specific signs that will shortly appear so that the people will be able to believe and know that Christ has come into the world.”

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What does the Book of Mormon Teach About Prophets?](#) (Helaman 13:4),” *KnoWhy* 284 (March 8, 2017).

Helaman 13:4 — Samuel Preaches from the Wall

Samuel the Lamanite was quite a figure, but sketching or painting him is a problem because we lack information. We do not know how old he was, if he was married, or if he had children. Many Latter-day Saint artists have tried to encapsulate the event.



Minerva Teichert depicted Samuel in the bottom half of a horizontal diptych, with arrows flying at him. She seems to have placed Samuel in between two parts of a wall within a city, not upon a rampart. In the upper field, she illustrated the Ammonite Stripling Warriors, often referred to as the Sons of Helaman, being sent off by their mothers on the right and given their swords by the high priest Helaman on the left.

I believe that Teichert had noticed the place in Samuel’s speech which refers to the practice begun by the Ammonite people of laying down their weapons of war (see Helaman 15:9), and thus she connected these two groups of Lamanite converts—the recently converted Lamanites in Helaman 5 and the earlier converted Ammonites in Mosiah 24. All those Lamanites were then represented by Samuel the Lamanite.



Figure 1 Sketch of Samuel the Lamanite by Arnold Friberg.

Second, this is a sketch by Arnold Friberg, showing how he brainstormed ideas as to how to paint a picture of Samuel the Lamanite on top of a wall. If Samuel was at least five feet tall, the wall in the painting would be about 40 feet high. Friberg was using artistic license. The only problem is, how would Samuel have escaped? If he jumped off the wall, he would probably not have survived. Friberg may have overdone the drama as he composed this scene of epic proportions in the Book of Mormon. Because we do not know much about Samuel, we all have to read between the lines to really appreciate his impact as a prophet. These are amazing chapters.

Further Reading

Anthony Sweat, "[History and Art: Mediating the Rocky Relationship](#)," 2020 Fairmormon Conference Presentation, online at fairmormon.org.

Helaman 13:5–6 — Samuel Issues a Traditional War Oracle

In verses 5 and 6, Samuel the Lamanite uses a common prophetic device known as a “war oracle.” “War oracles” are prophetic warnings to the people that God’s “army” will be coming after them. The words “army” and “host” are often used interchangeably in these pronouncements. The phrase, “Lord of hosts,” is the name used for God when he is standing ahead of his army and his legions of angels who are coming to cleanse the earth and to vindicate the righteous and judge the wicked. Scholars identify phrases like “sword of justice,” “fierce anger,” and “Lord of hosts” as characteristic language in war oracles. In chapter 13, but only in that opening chapter, Samuel speaks three times of “the Lord of Hosts” (13:17, 18, 32).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can People Today Avoid Being Destroyed Like the Nephites Were?](#) (Helaman 13:5–6),” *KnoWhy* 327 (June 16, 2017).

Helaman 13:11–13 — Samuel Pronounces a Traditional Wo Oracle

There is another prophetic device known as a “wo oracle.” As one might expect, the repeated use of the word “wo” as part of a prophetic warning constitutes a “wo oracle.” How many times is the word “wo” used by Samuel? There are nine uses of the word—seven in chapter 13 and two in chapter 15. “Wo” warnings in chapter 13 include: “wo unto him that repenteth not” (13:11); “wo unto this great city of Zarahemla” (twice stated in 13:12); “wo be unto the city of Gideon” (13:15); “wo be unto all the cities which are in the land round about” (13:16); and “wo unto this people” (13:24). The two “wo” warnings in chapter 15 are: “wo unto them which are with child” (verse 2) and “wo unto this people” (verse 3).

What was the curse on the city of Zarahemla that was prophesied by Samuel? What was the “wo”? Samuel prophesied that Zarahemla would be burned with fire. Why consumed by fire? Because wickedness must be purged out by fire, and thus atonement sacrifices in the temple were consumed by fire. Less than forty years later, in 3 Nephi 8–9, many cities will be destroyed. Some cities were sunk into the sea or had the mountains fall on them, and others were devastated by earthquakes. However, only one known Nephite city was destroyed by fire—Zarahemla. Twice, Samuel prophesied of a fiery destruction of Zarahemla (13:13; 14:18). That prophecy was not forgotten by the Book of Mormon historians, and it was certainly not forgotten by the Lord. He fulfilled that very prophecy.

Further Reading

Donald W. Parry, “[‘Thus Saith the Lord’: Prophetic Language in Samuel’s Speech](#),” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 204.

Samuel Knew His Scriptures

In addition to being very adept and inspired in using various prophetic speech forms, Samuel also knew and used specific language from previous Nephite prophets, particularly Nephi the son of Lehi, Jacob, Benjamin, Alma, Amulek, and Nephi the son of Helaman. In chapter 13, see if you can find the particular words Samuel used from these sources. They come from Alma and Amulek's condemnation speeches in Ammonihah, from Nephi's and Jacob's prophetic warnings in the city of Nephi, and Nephi's words in Zarahemla. These speeches were delivered in locations where Samuel would have had some awareness and great interest.

- Helaman 13:9 = Alma 10:23
- Helaman 13:10 = Alma 9:18
- Helaman 13:14 = Alma 10:19, 23
- Helaman 13:16, 17, 24, 26 = Jacob 2:29, 31, 33, 35
- Helaman 13:21–23 = Helaman 7:18, 20–22
- Helaman 13:24 = 2 Nephi 26:3
- Helaman 13:28 = 2 Nephi 28:21, 25
- Helaman 13:29 = 2 Nephi 26:10; Alma 9:8, 10:17, 25; Helaman 9:21
- Helaman 13:30 = 2 Nephi 26:6
- Helaman 13:32, 37 = Helaman 11:8, 10–11
- Helaman 13:38 = Alma 34:31, 33

Further Reading

John Hilton III, Sunny Hendry Hafen, and Jaron Hansen, "[Samuel and His Nephite Sources](#)," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56 no. 3 (2017): 115–139.

Helaman 13:10 — Samuel's Words Reflect Alma's Prophetic Words

In particular, there is a fair amount of "Alma" material in Samuel's speech, especially from Alma 9 and 42. Alma the Younger also had prophesied that the Nephite nation would be destroyed four hundred years after the appearance of the Savior (Alma 45:10). Samuel the Lamanite reflected Alma's words as he prophesied. Samuel was alone in giving his five-year prophecy about the birth of the Savior, but he drew upon the words of Alma for the four-hundred-year and the fourth-generation prophecies about the destruction of the Nephites.

The fourth-generation prophecy stated that there would be righteousness for four generations. Then before the conclusion of four hundred years, the Nephite nation would be destroyed. That, of course, is what happened. Such precision is not common in prophecy. It seems likely that when the exact timing is included in the record, the timing itself was somehow significant. And so this number has attracted the attention of scholars.

All ancient societies had important calendar units or time periods that were carefully marked. Latter-day Saint scholar and Mesoamericanist John E. Clark has noted, “The major cycle of Maya time was a four-hundred-year period called a *baktun*.” Each *baktun* was broken down into 20 units called a *katun*, which was a 20-year cycle, and the *katun* was subdivided into units called a *hotun*, which was a five-year cycle. According to renowned Mesoamerican scholar John L. Sorenson, “Omens and prophecies ... among the Maya were commonly phrased in terms of the beginning or ending of whole calendar units.”

In this light, it is significant that both of Samuel the Lamanite’s time-specific prophecies correlate to the specific units of measurement within the Mesoamerican calendrical system. As Clark put it, “Samuel the Lamanite warned the Nephites that one *baktun* ‘shall not pass away before ... they [would] be smitten’ (Helaman 13:9).”

Another Latter-day Saint Mesoamerican scholar, Mark Wright, suggested, “Samuel the Lamanite may have been making a *hotun* prophecy when he stated that in ‘five years’ signs would be given concerning the birth of Christ (Helaman 14:2).” Interestingly, according to Sorenson, “In Yucatan at the time of the Spanish conquest, the ruler or his spokesman ... had the duty to prophesy five years in advance what fate the next twenty-year *k’atun* would bring.” In similar fashion, Samuel the Lamanite prophesied the fate of the next *baktun* (Helaman 13:5, 9), and apparently did so five years in advance (Helaman 14:2).

To put the Maya calendar discussion in perspective, Brant A. Gardner, another LDS Mesoamerican specialist, proposed, “It is important to note that the Nephites need not be using the Mayan calendar to nonetheless recognize the sacred importance of these numbers in the calendaring of their neighbors, and to even be influenced in such a way as to also give weight and import to time cycles of 5, 20, and 400 years themselves. Though commonly referred to as the ‘Maya’ calendar system, it was known throughout Mesoamerica and likely had its origins among the Olmec between 500–400 BC. The earliest long count date attested is 36 BC, on Stela 2 in Chiapa de Corzo, confirming its use in Samuel’s time.”

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Samuel Make Such Chronologically Precise Prophecies? \(Helaman 13:5\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 184 (September 9, 2016).

John E. Clark, “[Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 2 (2005): 46–47.

Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 5:177.

John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 274.

John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013), 192–195, 434–442.

John L. Sorenson, "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 409.

Mark Alan Wright, "Nephite Daykeepers: Ritual Specialists in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon," in *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of the Expound Symposium*, 14 May 2011, ed. Matthew B. Brown, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Stephen D. Ricks, and John S. Thompson (Salt Lake City and Orem, UT: Eborn Books and Interpreter Foundation, 2014), 253.

Helaman 13:14, 37; 14:10 — Reliance on the Words of Nephi, the Son of Helaman

Nephi, the son of Helaman, talked about "ripening unto destruction." In Helaman 8:26, he stated, "[E]ven at this time ye are ripening ... for everlasting destruction." Nephi used that phrase twice. Samuel's statement, "then shall ye be ripe for destruction" (Helaman 13:14) likely reflects his learning from Nephi's words.

In Helaman chapter 11, Nephi used the following phrase three times as he prayed: "O Lord, wilt thou turn away thine anger?" (see Helaman 11:11–16). Samuel also used that phrase when describing how the Nephites would pray when they saw the destruction because of their sins: "O Lord, canst thou not turn away thine anger from us? (Helaman 13:37)

Finally, Samuel used a third phrase of Nephi's when addressing the wicked Nephites. In Helaman 9, Nephi identified Seantum as a murderer. When confronted with false accusations, Nephi stated, "because I showed unto you this sign ye are angry with me, and seek to destroy my life" (Helaman 9:24). With little variation, Nephi's words were used by Samuel the Lamanite in Helaman 14:10: "[Y]e are angry with me and do seek to destroy me."

Compare further verbiage from Nephi in these passages that are also found in Samuel's speaking:

- Helaman 7:18, 20–22 = Helaman 13:21–23
- Helaman 7:23 = Helaman 15:14
- Helaman 7:24 = Helaman 15:11–13, 15
- Helaman 9:21 = Helaman 13:29.

While it is perfectly understandable that Samuel would have known and used words spoken by his mentor Nephi, especially in the same city where Nephi had said these things, it is quite astonishing that these linkages between Samuel and Nephi would have been so purposefully used by Samuel in the first place, preserved by Mormon in the second place, and included and translated by Joseph Smith with such exact continuity in the third place.

Helaman 13:21 — Samuel Warns of Divine Talionic Judgment

Samuel pronounced a massive rebuke of the pride, greed, and ingratitude of the wicked Nephites who were willing to embrace false prophets while persecuting and rejecting the righteous prophets. Samuel pulled no punches. He declared God’s divine judgment upon the people. His words reflect God’s law of reciprocal or “talionic” justice: “an eye for an eye.” Alma taught this principle when he stated, “that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored” (Alma 41:15).

Samuel’s warnings were consistent with legal thinking in the ancient world—divine talionic judgment was considered to be righteous, just and fair. In this instance, the suitable punishment for unrighteously and *tenaciously holding onto* one’s treasures would be that those very treasures would become “slippery” and no one would be able to *hold onto* them (Helaman 13:31, 36). Of note, Samuel used the word “slippery” three times, and the word “slipped” once, the opposite of “holding,” in his warning to the people (in 13:30-36).

Reliance on this ancient legal principle can be found in the text of early Nephite preaching. Jacob, the brother of Nephi, explained that the loss of prosperity was a result of divine displeasure and a sign of what would be the ultimate fate of “the rich” who “despise the poor” if they did not repent. Jacob stated, “their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their god. And behold, their treasure shall perish with them also” (2 Nephi 9:30).

Helaman put the attainment of riches in perspective when he taught his sons Lehi and Nephi—who then may have been the missionaries who converted Samuel—that they should seek intangible eternal treasure which cannot be lost: “Lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, yea, which is eternal, and which fadeth not away; yea, that ye may have that precious gift of eternal life” (Helaman 5:8). So there is a good genealogy for the transmission of these ideas through Nephite channels.

Several other ancient texts reflect the understanding that wealth and possessions can become lost in the earth because of iniquity. According to scholar, Blake Ostler, this section of the Book of Mormon and Samuel’s warnings about the land becoming cursed

“is best interpreted from an understanding of the Deuteronomic covenant which required obedience and pronounced resulting curses and blessing upon the land

for breach or obedience to the covenant respectively (Deut. 11:26-29). ... The ethic prominent throughout the Book of Mormon [is] that seeking wealth while ignoring the poor is abhorrent to God. The ability to obtain riches and keep them was dependent upon obedience to the Deuteronomic covenant: 'And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, ... ye shall surely perish' (Deuteronomy 8:17-19)."

Here also this makes sense, for Samuel and his Lamanite brethren were strict in obeying the law of Moses, and Deuteronomy would have been one of the main texts on the plates of brass where they would have gone for an understanding of the conditional covenant nature of the Lord's promises that came with the promised land in the New World.

Hugh Nibley, as well as Ostler, have drawn attention to 1 Enoch as another potential ancient parallel for the curses pronounced by Samuel. 1 Enoch 94:8-10 reads, "Woe to you, ye rich, for ye have trusted in your riches. And from your riches shall ye depart, because ye have not remembered the Most High in the days of your riches." This thought is continued in 1 Enoch 97:8-10: "Woe unto you who acquire silver and gold in unrighteousness, ... for your riches shall not abide but speedily ascent from you; ... and ye shall be given over to a great curse." Enoch (and Zenoch) seem to have figured particularly in the Nephite understanding of prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Samuel Say the Wealth of Some Nephites Would Become 'Slippery'?](#) (Helaman 13:31)," *KnoWhy* 539 (November 7, 2019).

Blake T. Ostler, "[The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source](#)," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 71-21.

Helaman 13:22 — Samuel Uses Alma the Younger's Law List to Warn against Sin

Moreover, Samuel's warning to the people of Zarahemla that they must not have "great pride, unto boasting, and unto great swelling, envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions, and murders, and all manner of iniquities" (13:22), reflects Alma 4:9 and 16:18, where Alma the Younger, as chief judge and then high priest, gave two law lists of rules required of his people in the land of Zarahemla. His lists included prohibitions against contentions, envyings, strife, malice, persecutions, pride, murders, and all manner of lasciviousness. By directly alluding to the traditional law of the land, Samuel the Lamanite was

perpetuating the rules of public conduct that Nephi’s great-grandfather had laid down right there in Zarahemla, and which the people there would have known well as the standard by which they should have been living.

Helaman 13:32–37 — Samuel Pronounces a Traditional Warning or Lamentation Oracle

There is yet another a prophetic device known as a “warning or lamentation oracle,” and Samuel used it too. It is not the strident “Wo!” as in the Wo oracle, but rather a lamenting desire that some person or some circumstance could be different. There are six prophetic laments in 13:29–39 alone:

1. “O ye wicked ... ”
2. “O that I had repented ... ”
3. “O that we had remembered ... ”
4. “O that we had repented ... ”
5. “O Lord, ... ”
6. “O ye people ... ”

“O” is a sure operative word in the traditional psalms and oracles of lamentation. Latter-day Saint scholar S. Kent Brown wrote a superb article entitled “The Prophetic Laments of Samuel the Lamanite” on the places throughout Samuel’s speech where beautiful, typical, ancient Hebrew prophetic lamentation can be identified.

Further Reading

S. Kent Brown. *“The Prophetic Laments of Samuel the Lamanite,”* in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 128–145.

Helaman 14

In Helaman 14, the center of his speech, Samuel turns his attention to prophesying about the signs of the birth of the Savior. He talks about his commission as a Lamanite. He then gives a didactic explanation of the necessity of the resurrection in order for people to be judged justly by God. He follows that teaching with prophecies about the signs of the Messiah’s death that would bring about the resurrection, and he concludes by emphasizing the necessity of repentance, which God has mercifully made possible, in order for all people to avoid condemnation. Throughout his discourse, Samuel maintains his method of returning to certain traditional words or phrases that reverberate through what he is saying. In Helaman 14:10, he draws upon Helaman 9:23–24; in 14:12, he quotes

one of the central texts of King Benjamin's speech; and in 14:16, he makes use of Alma's words to Corianton in Alma 42:9, 14.

Samuel the Lamanite's Prophecies

Concerning Christ's Birth



Prophecy	Reference	Fulfillment
Christ will be born in 5 years	Helaman 14:2	3 Nephi 1:13
No darkness for 2 days, 1 night	Helaman 14:3-4	3 Nephi 1:15
A new star will arise	Helaman 14:5	3 Nephi 1:21
There will be signs and wonders	Helaman 14:6	3 Nephi 2:1
People will fall to the earth	Helaman 14:7	3 Nephi 1:16-17

Concerning Christ's Death



Prophecy	Reference	Fulfillment
No light for 3 days	Helaman 14:20, 27	3 Nephi 8:19-23
Thunderings and lightnings	Helaman 14:21	3 Nephi 8:6-7
Earth will shake, tremble, and be broken up	Helaman 14:21-22	3 Nephi 8:12, 17-18
Mountains will be laid low and valleys raised	Helaman 14:23	3 Nephi 8:10, 13; 9:8
Resurrected people will appear to many	Helaman 14:25	3 Nephi 23:9-14

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Figure 2 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Samuel the Lamanite's Prophecies," in Charting the Book of Mormon, chart 48.

Helaman 14:2–7 — Prophecy of Christ’s Birth

Samuel gave five signs of the coming of Christ: (1) the five-year prophecy, (2) no darkness for two days and one night, (3) a new star, (4) signs and wonders, and (5) people will fall to the earth (see Figure 2). As the time neared for Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecies to be fulfilled, Nephi witnessed the growing skepticism of the people concerning the predicted earthly advent of Jesus Christ. This skepticism led to the persecution of those who believed in Christ’s coming by those who felt the time of his birth had already passed. These skeptics threatened to kill the believers, unless the sign of Christ’s birth appeared before a certain date. Possibly because the very lives of the believers depended on the fulfillment of those prophecies, Nephi paid careful attention to documenting Samuel’s precise wording as well as their exact fulfillments (see 3 Nephi 1:13, 15, 16–17, 21; 2:1).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why did Samuel Rely so Heavily on the Words of Past Prophets?](#) (Helaman 14:1),” *KnoWhy* 185 (September 12, 2016).

John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, “[Samuel the Lamanite’s Prophecies](#),” in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 48.

Helaman 14:9 — An Angel Commands Samuel to Preach

Angels often quote scriptures. For example, on the first occasion when Moroni visited Joseph Smith—and many times thereafter—he quoted scripture and sometimes explained what those scriptures meant. It was not as though the Prophet Joseph spoke with an angel, and then everything simply came to him from scratch.

As the many forms of Hebrew prophetic speech and scriptural passages in Samuel’s material are examined, we can tell that he was using certain conventions and words to make his presentation as acceptable as possible. Samuel wanted to sound authoritative; after all, he was an outsider, and he wanted to ring bells and allude to passages that would help persuade his listeners. Samuel knew what to say because, as he says in Helaman 13:3, he had angels as well as the voice of the Lord to guide and instruct him.

As we have seen above, scholars who have studied the literary aspects and elements of the Bible have identified a long list of what are sometimes called “prophetic speech forms.” This type of research is called “Form Criticism,” where the text is critically examined from formal perspectives. As the kinds of expressions used by prophets in the Old Testament are studied, a consistent pattern emerges.

For example, many prophets explained how they received their prophetic call and commission. Two Old Testament representations of this prophetic speech form include:

- Jeremiah 1:5, in which Jeremiah tells how the Lord described his prophetic calling, which was made before he was even born: “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; ... I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”
- Isaiah 6:8–12 in which the Lord commissioned Isaiah to go and be a prophet.

Both are recognized as examples of the “prophetic call and commission” formulas.

Samuel the Lamanite also gave an account of his prophetic call and commission. In Helaman 14:9 he said: “And behold, thus hath the Lord commanded me, by his angel, that I should come and tell this thing unto you; yea, he hath commanded that I should prophesy these things unto you; yea, he hath said unto me: Cry unto this people, repent and prepare the way of the Lord.”

One of the most important things that Israelite prophets were expected to do was to deliver the precise message that they had been given, and not deviate one word from what the Lord had told them to say. Here, Samuel had been told, “Cry unto this people, repent and prepare the way of the Lord,” and that is exactly what he does.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“What Does the Book of Mormon Teach about Prophets? \(Helaman 13:4\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 284 (March 8, 2017).

Helaman 14:9–11 — Samuel’s “Prophetic Lawsuit”

Yet another form of prophetic speech is called a “prophetic lawsuit.” What is a prophetic lawsuit? Prophets often delivered God’s message by presenting the facts in such a way as to lay out a type of legal case and controversy against the people—they were sinners, they had broken the law, and God was not happy with them. Thus, God had a cause of action against them for breach of covenant. They had a contract with God, and they had broken it.

Sometimes the prophets then called witnesses to testify of what the people had done. After the testimonies of witnesses, a condemnation was issued, and the prophet passed judgment on the people. Often God, speaking through the prophet, did not immediately execute judgment. The prophet let the people know that although they had been convicted and the sword of judgment hung over them, God would be merciful. He would stay the execution of the judgment and would prolong their days, giving them a little longer to repent and change their ways.

Samuel issued such a prophetic lawsuit. His entire speech takes the overall form of a prophetic judgment speech. He pointed out the weaknesses and problems of the people and then leveled specific charges against them. What had the people of Zarahemla done wrong? They had hidden up their treasures unto themselves and not to the Lord. They

had cast out the living prophets. These indictments were brought up as if the prophet was dragging the people before the judgment seat—and in a prophetic lawsuit, God is ultimately the judge.

As is indicated in at least ten prophetic lawsuits in the Old Testament, it was standard procedure that the judgment was not revoked, but rather the punishment was suspended or held in abeyance in hope that the people would repent. This is what Samuel, in effect, does, constituting very powerfully and impressively a prophetic lawsuit, a legal action by God against this people.

Samuel's Quotation of Benjamin	
Mosiah 3:8	Helaman 14:12
And he shall be called	And also that ye might know of the coming of
Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning;	Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning;
and his mother shall be called Mary.	and that ye might know of the signs of his coming, to the intent that ye might believe on his name.

Figure 3 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Samuel's Quotation of Benjamin," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 105.

Helaman 14:12 — Samuel Quotes King Benjamin's Ten-Part Name for Christ

Regarding the coming of Christ, Samuel again and most impressively quotes specific words found in the Nephite scriptures. Where and when would he have learned all this? It is possible that Samuel learned from Nephi, the son of Helaman, who would have been

his mentor, as well as from any records in Nephi's possession. Because Helaman stressed that his sons should remember the words of king Benjamin (see Helaman 5:9), it is likely that Lehi and Nephi used exact quotes from Benjamin in their proselytizing, which Samuel also likely witnessed.

So, it is interesting to note that "the name" of Christ found in the dead center of king Benjamin's speech in Mosiah 3:8 is found precisely in Samuel's text in Helaman 14:12: "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of Heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning." How would Samuel have known that exact wording except through Nephi and Lehi, who were told to "remember, remember" the words of king Benjamin (see Helaman 5:9)?

These words are the ten-part (twenty-one-English-word) title for the Lord—"Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of Heaven and of earth, the creator of all things from the beginning." King Benjamin had called his people together to give them something special—a name that would distinguish them before God and from all other people on earth. The name could not be "Jehovah" or "Jesus Christ"—many groups had already been given that name. The name that king Benjamin gave to his people was a ten-noun name: Jesus Christ, Son God, Father Heaven Earth, Creator All Beginning.

It was this new name that king Benjamin gave to his people when they entered into the covenant at the temple and took upon them the name of Christ. This was a most sacred name that the Nephites who Samuel was addressing would have already known. King Benjamin was in Zarahemla when he gave his people that name 118 years earlier. He was then on a tall tower by the temple. Samuel was also in Zarahemla. The Nephites would not let him in, so he stood on a tall wall, which was as close as he could get to entering the city. When the Nephites heard Samuel speak the sacred name from the city wall, they were angry and tried to kill him. That was going too far. It must have struck even them as blasphemous for a Lamanite to be speaking the sacred covenant name to them, the people of Zarahemla.

The Nephites had taken the name upon themselves by way of covenant. They had been carefully instructed by king Benjamin that "there is no other name given whereby salvation cometh" and that they should "know" the name. Otherwise, "whosoever shall not take upon him the name of Christ must be called by some other name; therefore, he findeth himself on the left hand of God" (Mosiah 5:8–10). That is what constituted the covenant that King Benjamin and his people made with God. As Samuel spoke to the Nephites in Zarahemla he was reminding them of King Benjamin's sacred revelation—their heritage—and this was being done by a Lamanite!

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why did Samuel Rely So Heavily on the Words of Past Prophets?](#) (Helaman 14:1),” *KnoWhy* 185 (September 12, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[Benjamin’s Speech: A Masterful Oration](#),” in *King Benjamin’s Speech* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 55–88.

John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, “[Samuel’s Quotation of Benjamin](#),” in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, Chart 105 (FARMS, 1999).

John W. Welch, “[Textual Consistency](#),” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 21–23.

Helaman 14:20–25 — Samuel Prophecies, as Zenos Did, of the Death of Christ

Additionally, Zenos had prophesied about the death of Jesus, and Samuel knew the words of Zenos. “[A] sign given of his death,” “the thunderings, and the lightnings,” “the vapor of darkness,” the rending “of the rocks of the earth,” and “the three days of darkness” — these are all phrases of the prophet Zenos that had been recorded in 1 Nephi 19:10–12. This prophesy would have been available only on the brass plates. Samuel had done his homework and was very familiar with Zenos and his prophecies. It is important to note that Nephi then followed up on Samuel’s prophecies and meticulously tracked fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Christ’s death (see Figure 2).

So, how does the precise dating of the fulfillment of Samuel’s prophecies help us date, in absolute terms, how long Jesus lived (something not known from the New Testament), as well as the dates of his death and birth? The Book of Mormon records the precise day on which the Nephites witnessed the prophesied sign of Christ’s death (3 Nephi 8:5). This exceptional diligence on the part of Nephite record-keepers may help resolve at least two questions that New Testament scholars continue to debate regarding the timing of Christ’s death.

The first question relates to the year when Christ was crucified. What year did Christ die? The New Testament accounts tie Christ’s crucifixion to a Passover festival during the governorship of Pontius Pilate (AD 26–36). Jeffrey R. Chadwick, church scholar and archaeologist, has summarized the findings of biblical scholars who have used astronomical data to calculate the timing of the Passover, and noted that scholars have determined that the three years AD 27, 30, and 33 “are the only years during the administration of Pontius Pilate when the eve of Passover, and the Passover itself, fell within a three-day window of time prior to Sunday,” the day of Christ’s Resurrection.

Of these three years, based on additional factors involved in correlating the Gospel accounts to confirmable historical details, Chadwick notes, “Most scholars . . . believe that Jesus was killed in [AD] 30.” The issue is not definitively settled, however, and some scholars still believe that Christ died in 33.

The detailed texts kept by the Nephite record-keepers give more data points beyond those found in the New Testament text. The Nephite record helps to finely narrow down the length of Christ’s life. Since Christ must have been born ca. 5–4 BC, the year when King Herod died, the Book of Mormon effectively rules out AD 27 as too short and AD 33 as too long to accommodate for Christ’s death, which happened in the first month of the 34th year in the Nephite calendar (3 Nephi 8:5). Thus, in the view of Chadwick, combining the Book of Mormon with the additional evidence from the New Testament, archaeology, astronomy, and history makes AD 30 the correct year, “beyond any reasonable doubt.”

The second question that is debated by biblical scholars relates to the day of the week Christ was crucified. Long-standing tradition holds that Christ died on a Friday, and most New Testament scholars support this tradition. However, a few scholars have suggested that Christ actually died on a Thursday. These scholars argue that a Thursday can better account for passages in the New Testament which speak of “three days and three nights” in the tomb (Matthew 12:40), and of the resurrection occurring *after* three days (Matthew 27:63; Mark 8:31), and Sunday being three days *since* the crucifixion (Luke 24:21).

Jeffrey Chadwick points to an important clue to this puzzle—John’s description of the upcoming Sabbath as “an high day” (John 19:31), meaning it was the first day of the Passover. Since certain festival days, such as Passover, were regarded as “Sabbaths,” no matter what day of the week they occurred (Leviticus 23:7-8, 11, 15, 21, 24, 39), this allows for the possibility that the Sabbath after the crucifixion was not Saturday (the regular weekly Sabbath), but the first day of Passover (a special “Sabbath,” or “high day”), which most likely fell on Friday AD 30.

While the New Testament data does not decisively favor Thursday, the Book of Mormon, a “second witness of Christ” adds some important information. Nephite prophets, including Samuel, predicted that there would be three days of darkness coinciding with the time of Christ’s death until his resurrection (1 Nephi 19:10, Helaman 14:20–27). Nephite historians, particularly Nephi, documented the fulfillment of this prophecy (3 Nephi 8:19–23; 10:9).

Due to the time difference between Jerusalem and the New World, Chadwick observes, “a Friday crucifixion leads to only two days of darkness in the New World” before Christ rose on Sunday morning. Chadwick concludes that a Thursday crucifixion “exactly fits

the timing necessary for three days of darkness to have occurred in America prior to Jesus’s resurrection” (See Figure 4).

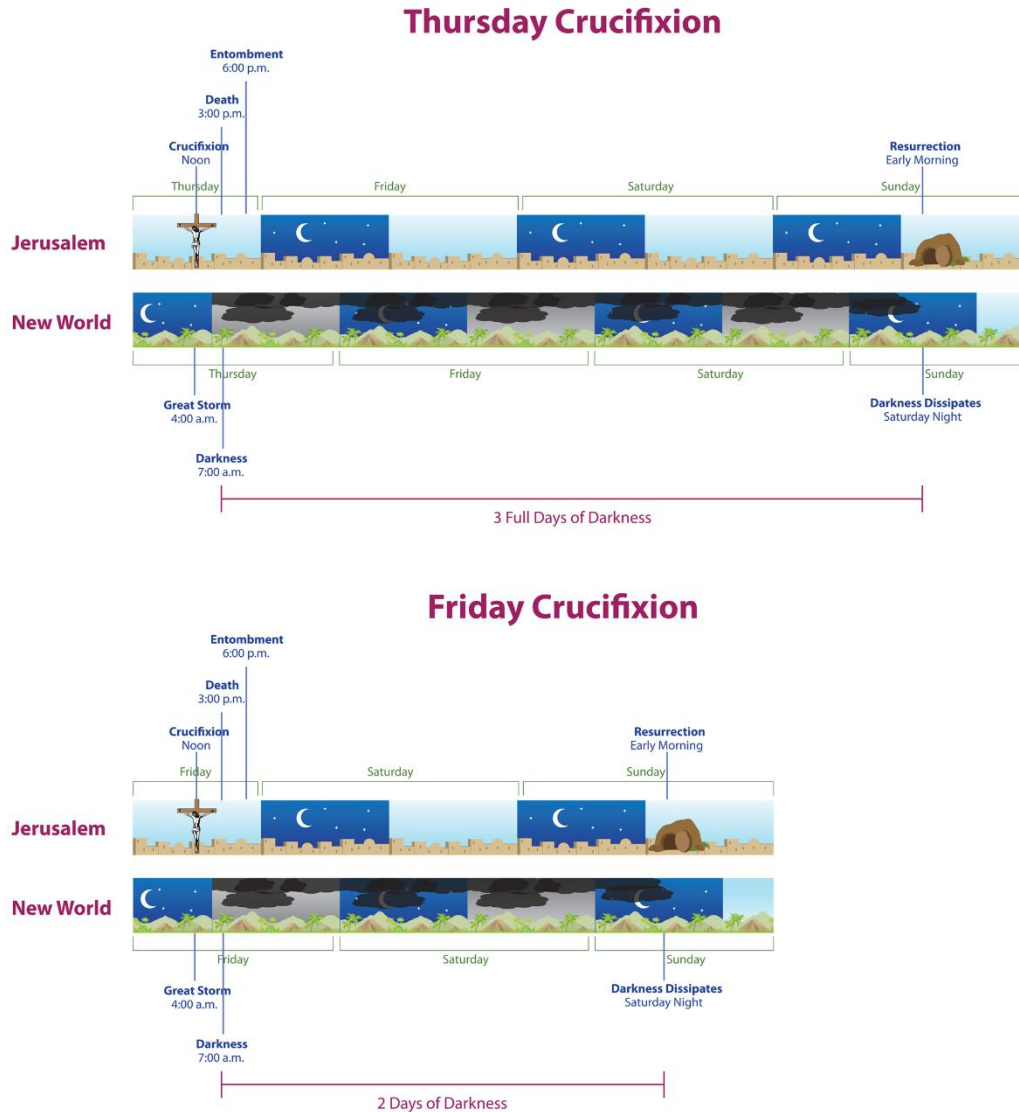


Figure 4 Chart by Book of Mormon Central.

Thanks to Samuel the Lamanite and the Nephite recordkeepers, the Book of Mormon gives crucial information that specifically pinpoints the dating of events that occurred in Jerusalem. Using both records—the New Testament and the Book of Mormon—we are able to state with reasonable certainty that Jesus died on Thursday, April 6, AD 30. His age was 33 years and 4 days at the time of his death. This dating gives profound

significance to the timing of the Restoration of Christ's church through the Prophet Joseph Smith, which occurred exactly 1800 years later.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Does the Book of Mormon Help Date Christ's Death? \(Helaman 14:20\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 300 (April 14, 2017).

Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "[Dating the Death of Jesus Christ](#)," *BTU Studies*, 54, no. (2015): 136-139.

Helaman 15

Overview

Samuel's final remarks end with three sections.

The first section is short and is a pronouncement of yet another wo oracle in verse 3: "Wo unto this people who are called the people of Nephi except they shall repent."

Second, is a long section praising the Lamanites and explaining why their days of probation had been prolonged. It is notable that Samuel referred to the Lamanites, who were mostly "in the path of their duty, and they walk circumspectly before God, and they do observe to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments according to the law of Moses" (15:5), and like the Ammonites had formerly done (Helaman 5:51), these converted Lamanites who had also chosen to bury their weapons of war (15:518–10). He explained the faith-centered motive of these Lamanites by stating, "[Y]e can see that they fear to sin—for behold they will suffer themselves that they be trodden down and slain by their enemies, and will not lift their swords against them, and this because of their faith in Christ" (15:9). One wonders what connections there may have been between Samuel's group and the Ammonites a couple generations earlier. The Ammonite people had left the Lamanites and had gone to live with the Nephites, assuming a new social identity. Samuel's father or grandfather could not have been Ammonites. However, Samuel the Lamanite may have been a member of the Lamanite royal family—a descendant or a relative of King Lamoni—who would have known about the events surrounding the Ammonites first-hand. Perhaps some of Samuel's own ancestors had been on the side of killing the Ammonites.

The third section is Samuel's parting words that there would be utter destruction upon the Nephites if they did not repent.

Helaman 15:4 — The Lord Hated the Lamanites Because of Their Wicked Traditions

Was Samuel generous in his description of his own people the Lamanites? No. He said, “[T]he Lamanites hath [God] hated because their deeds have been evil continually, and this because of the iniquity of the tradition of their fathers.” Some might view this as hate speech, but Samuel was describing his own people and maybe even himself. Samuel essentially was saying, “God hated us because we did not keep the commandments.” That is not hate speech—that is a confession. Samuel wanted the Nephites to look at themselves and realize they were in a similar situation. If they did not shape up, it was not going to be any better for them.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Samuel Say the Lord “Hated” the Lamanites? \(Helaman 15:4\),](#)” *KnoWhy* 186 (September 13, 2016).

S. Michael Wilcox, “[Samuel the Lamanite,](#)” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., Macmillan Publishing Company, NY 1992.

Helaman 15:5 — The Lamanites Walk Circumspectly Before God

Samuel’s description of the religious dedication of the Lamanites is an indication of how completely they were living the Law of Moses: “And I would that ye should behold that the more part of them are in the path of their duty, and they do walk *circumspectly* before God, and they do observe to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments according to the law of Moses.”

What does it mean “to walk *circumspectly*”? “Circum” is a Latin preposition meaning “around,” and “specto” means “I look.” The Lamanites were carefully looking around, wisely making sure they were observant in following God’s law.

That exact formulation is yet another precise quote, this time from 2 Nephi 5:10. Nephi had taken his people and left the land of first inheritance. After they had built the temple in the city of Nephi, Nephi stated, “[W]e did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses.” There are other formulae for living righteously, but this happens to be a precise quote of Nephi’s original instruction to the Nephite nation. It was foundational and Samuel knew that. He had been taught that God’s people should be strict and circumspect in living the Law of Moses in all of its different aspects.

For other verbal connections between Samuel’s concluding comments and the words of Alma, Jacob, Nephi and Nephi, compare the following passages:

- Helaman 15:3 = Alma 9:19–20

- Helaman 15:11, 13 = 2 Nephi 10:2
- Helaman 15:11–13, 15 = Jacob 3:6–7; Mosiah 1:5; Alma 9:16–17; Helaman 7:24
- Helaman 15:12 = 2 Nephi 6:11
- Helaman 15:13 = 1 Nephi 22:25
- Helaman 15:14 = Helaman 7:23

Helaman 16

Helaman 16:1–2 — The Spirit of the Lord Protects Samuel

The book of Helaman ends on several ominous notes. Those Nephites who believed and were converted by Samuel's words went to find Nephi, they repented, and asked to be baptized. However, many were angry at Samuel, not only because he prophesied that their choices would destroy them and the great city of Zarahemla, but because he used the sacred name of the Savior. They shot arrows and threw stones at him as he stood there on the wall. However, the Nephites were unable to hit Samuel because he was protected specifically by the Spirit of the Lord.

Helaman 16:3–4 — More Converts

When people realized that they could not hit Samuel, they could have reacted in several ways. However, because of God's miraculous protection of Samuel, more Nephites accepted his teachings. Nephi was preaching repentance and baptizing the converts, as well as "showing signs and wonders, working miracles among the people, that they might know that the Christ must shortly come." But Samuel was never seen again (16:8).

Elder Henry B. Eyring taught, "When we reject the counsel which comes from God, we do not choose to be independent of outside influence. We choose another influence. We reject the protection of a perfectly loving, all-powerful, all-knowing Father in Heaven, whose whole purpose, as that of His Beloved Son, is to give us eternal life, to give us all that He has, and to bring us home again in families to the arms of His love. In rejecting His counsel, we choose the influence of another power, whose purpose is to make us miserable and whose motive is hatred."

Further Reading

Henry B. Eyring, "Finding Safety in Counsel," *Ensign*, May 1997, 25.

Helaman 16:14 — Angels Did Appear unto Wise Men

Mormon declared that three years after Samuel had borne witness of the birth of Christ, in the ninetieth year of the reign of the judges, "the scriptures began to be fulfilled" as angels began to appear "unto men, wise men, and did declare unto them glad tidings of

great joy” (16:14). This statement may echo Alma 13:26, when Alma the Younger declared in Ammonihah that the coming of Christ “shall be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels,” just as it had been made known unto their fathers.

Despite these wise prophecies and knowledgeable expositions of scripture, people had their doubts. Their rationalizing portended the even greater problems that would soon surface, five years later. Here, already, people were claiming that Samuel’s prophecies were “not reasonable” (16:18). Their reason: Samuel had only spoken of the birth of Jesus; and from previous statements by Nephi and Alma, it was known that Jesus would manifest himself at Jerusalem. But, while signs of his birth and death would be seen in the New World, nothing had been said about Jesus actually coming to visit any of the Nephites or Lamanites. So, they argued, if Jesus is in fact “the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of [all the] earth” (as his revealed name said he was, 14:12), then he must “show himself in this land” too and not just “in the land of Jerusalem” (16:19). Although this position had a little bit of logic to it, it was wrong. Reason alone is rarely, if ever, enough. Angelic revelation is the Lord’s higher way.

Mormon later summarized the reasons why God sends angels to declare the coming of Christ: “For behold, God ... sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ; ... Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ; ... and thus it was until the coming of Christ” (Moroni 7:22, 25).

Mormon knew that our merciful Father in Heaven desires that his children have the ability to recognize the signs of the coming of Christ—whether in the time of father Lehi, the prophet Samuel, Mormon’s own time, or in the days leading up to Christ’s Second Coming. Our unchanging God has, and always will, send angels to visit worthy individuals who have the faith, strength, and wisdom (hence “wise men”) to declare the “glad tidings” and fortify the faith of those who have not had the same eye-witness manifestation.

All of the details discussed in these four Helaman chapters are interesting, but the most important thing for us to get into our heart and soul is that Samuel the Lamanite’s words are true, credible, reliable, and accurate. He was a prophet of God who spoke about the coming of Christ and revealed the timing of his birth five years before it occurred.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Does Mormon State that ‘Angels Did Appear unto Wise Men’? \(Helaman 16:14\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 187 (September 14, 2016).

3 NEPHI 1–7

John W. Welch Notes



Introduction to 3 Nephi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 Nephi 1

Consider the following questions as you study this chapter.

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 Nephi 1:21 — Also a Star

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

3 Nephi 2–7

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

3 Nephi 2

You may wish to consider the following questions:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 Nephi 2:1 — The Role of Signs

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

3 Nephi 2:4–8 — A New Dating System

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

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

Further Reading

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

3 Nephi 3

As you study, ask yourself the following:

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

3 Nephi 3:1–7 Giddianhi’s Letter

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 Nephi 4

Study questions to ponder:

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

3 Nephi 4:4 — The Nephites Stockpile Their Resources

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

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

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

In October 2006, President Hinckley advised the following:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 Nephi 5

3 Nephi 5 — Study Questions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 Nephi 6

3 Nephi 6 — Study Questions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 Nephi 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 NEPHI 8–11



3 Nephi 8

3 Nephi 8 — Questions to Ponder

- According to the Nephite calculation of time, when did these disasters take place?
- What was happening in Jerusalem when these upheavals occurred the Western world (8:5–18)? See also Helaman 14:20–21 and Matthew 27:45–51.
- Why was it appropriate that darkness prevail at the time of Christ’s death (8:23)? Compare with 3 Nephi 1:19 and 11:11.

3 Nephi 8:3 — Faith and Doubt

In the thirty-third year from the sign of Christ’s birth, it was approaching the time for the appearance of the sign of his death. The believing saints “began to look with great earnestness for the sign which had been given by the prophet Samuel.” Again, the doubters began disputing that a sign would be shown. One should wonder, what is the difference between doubting, on the one hand, and wondering, asking, and seeking, on the other hand? When one “wonders,” a person acknowledges and faces the fact that he or she doesn’t know something. Or when one “wonders,” a person can be inspired by the marvel or wonder of a strange or unfamiliar situation. And then when one “asks,” it involves opening his or her mind, welcoming new information or understanding, being open to possibilities, and having confidence that the person asked can help provide the answer or point the way toward a solution. And when one “seeks,” one goes looking, expends effort, works hard, and searches, wanting to find helpful and desirable items. While doubting focuses on negating and denying, looking with great earnestness is a positive, constructive process. Thus, the Lord commands us to “doubt not” (D&C 6:36; 58:29), but instead to ask, seek, and knock (Matthew 7:7).

3 Nephi 8:5–23 — Terrible Destruction at Christ’s Death

The destruction at Christ’s death was devastating. How long did the calamitous forces of nature last? Samuel’s prophecy said that the darkness was to last for three days (8:3), and the thick darkness, which could have been the result of something like volcanic action, actually lasted for three days (8:23). There was also, “a great and terrible tempest; and there was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder” (8:6). The people experienced “exceedingly sharp lightnings, such as never had been known in all the land” (8:7). Cities were destroyed—some were sunk into the ocean, roads were damaged, and “rocks were rent in twain” (8:18). Much of this, of course, had been foretold by Zenos (see 1 Nephi 19:10–12), but that would have made it all the more tragic and horrific.

The text in 3 Nephi 8:19 gives us some idea as to how frightening it would have been to live through these cataclysmic events, explaining that they “did last for about the space of three hours; and it was said by some that the time was greater; nevertheless, all these great and terrible things were done in about the space of three hours.” The earthquake and volcanic activity lasted for three solid hours! The terror must have been overwhelming.

Think about the worst natural disaster that you have experienced or seen reported on the news. Think of the pictures of wreckage and carnage caused by one storm, tornado, volcano or earthquake that typically strike suddenly and last only a few minutes or hours. How do those experiences compare with what we read about here that went on for 72 hours? It must have been unimaginably traumatic, disorienting, and frightening.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“What Caused the Darkness and Destruction in the 34th Year? \(3 Nephi 8:20\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 197 (September 28, 2016).

3 Nephi 9

3 Nephi 9:1–12 — How Many Will Be Prepared When Christ comes Again?

In spite of the fact that prophecies indicate that at the time of the second coming of Christ, the earth’s population generally will be corrupt (and only a relatively small handful will be prepared to receive him) there are those who say that Christ will not come until the human family (as a whole) is ready for him. Judging by these verses, would you say that the majority of the Nephites were ready to receive him?

There are those who say that when Christ comes again, he will not destroy the wicked because he is a God of love. How would you answer this in light of chapter 9?

3 Nephi 9:2 — The Devil and His Angels Rejoice in the Death of the Nephites

The name of Satan appears frequently in the first part of 3 Nephi. He is a very real, powerful figure who had been able to strongly influence the hearts of these people. These terrible events were more of a battle between Satan and Jesus than between the righteous and wicked on earth, as we can tell by the cosmic forces that were brought into play. Satan wanted to do what he could to stop Jesus from being successful. Satan was still furiously angry that he had not been chosen by the Father to be sent (Abraham 3:27–28). In his earthly life, Jesus stood up against Satan in the wilderness—he first had to drive Satan out so that he could do what he needed to do while on the earth. The same thing was happening here in 3 Nephi, where Satan ran even further amuck and had to be driven out.

The last time that Satan is named in this terrible era is in 3 Nephi 7:5. Once Satan has his field day, his influence dissipates. Later, the resurrected Jesus will mention Satan: “Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. Therefore, ye must always pray unto the Father in my name” (3 Nephi 18:18–19). But for the rest of 3 Nephi, the powers of the Adversary are held at bay. The whole society had undergone tragic, ugly destruction in order to purge them of Satan’s influence. After the destruction, there was silence and three days of darkness. The survivors were then able to come to the temple, ready to truly listen and to hear, when Jesus appeared to them in the newly-cleansed environment.

3 Nephi 9:3–12 — Jesus Relates the Names of Destroyed Cities

The wicked cities were completely crushed, burned, leveled, ravaged, and sunk. The reason for the great destruction was given by Jehovah as his voice was heard among all the people. In 3 Nephi 9:3–12, Christ listed the cities that had been destroyed and the devastating forces that had brought about the destruction to each one. He explained that this was done “to hide their iniquities and their abominations *from before my face*”—a very interesting expression— “that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come any more unto me against them” (v. 5). And so that there was no misunderstanding as to the Lord’s purposes for complete annihilation of these wicked cities, he repeated this explanation several more times throughout this chapter (vv. 7, 8, 9 and 11).

The entire long phrase—“to hide their wickedness and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints should not come up any more unto me against them”—is precisely repeated at the end of verses 5, 7, and 8. The phrase is slightly reworded in verses 9 and 11. In ancient cultures, when something was said multiple times, it was because the speaker wanted the listener to really hear and especially understand what had been said. It was a way of highlighting verbal information.

The words “my face” deserve particular consideration. In the Israelite temple experience, when the high priest went into the presence of the Lord, he stood before the Lord and

spoke face to face with deity. Moses spoke face to face with God. Jesus could not appear and have those wicked people before his face or, in other words, in his presence. They had been warned, and they had killed the prophets. It was important that if the people in 3 Nephi were going to become a temple-based community in which they would enter into covenants and ordinances, as well as live the laws and principles given in 4 Nephi, Satan had to be driven out. The ordinances and principles that they would be living after Christ's appearance included being baptized and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, dealing justly and honestly one with another, having no contention, marrying and living the law of chastity, and having their property consecrated and in common. Establishing that kind of a temple-based community required that Satan be banished.

Leviticus 26, a temple-related chapter, is filled with the Lord's blessings on those who keep the commandments and also includes His curses on those who are disobedient. The Lord spoke in the first person in these Leviticus passages. I encourage you to read that chapter. The Lord delineates, in direct speech, the curses that will come upon those who do not hearken to the Lord (26:14): "I will punish you," "I will bring a sword upon you," "I will send the pestilence among you," "I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation," "I will bring the land into desolation," and so forth (see 26:24, 25, 31, 32). There are also major blessings intermixed throughout Leviticus 26.

The Lord spoke directly, out of the darkness, to the Nephites in 3 Nephi 9. This experience would have been similar to what the prophets experienced in the Holy of Holies in the presence—or before the face—of God, where He would speak in the first person directly to them. In 3 Nephi, the Lord appeared after the calamities had been abated, and he stood in their presence in a place that became like a Holy of Holies because he was present there.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Is There Evidence of Sunken Cities in Ancient America? \(3 Nephi 9:7\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 429 (May 1, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, "[Is There Evidence for Great Destruction in the Land Northward at the Death of Christ? \(3 Nephi 9:9\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 530 (September 6, 2019).

3 Nephi 9:19–20 — A Broken Heart and a Contrite Spirit

Jesus spoke again to the people who were mourning in the darkness after the great destructions. Christ here proclaimed that he would no longer accept animal sacrifices and burnt offerings. Instead, the Lord declared that he would receive a sacrifice of "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (3 Nephi 9:17, 19).

This told the people that the law of sacrifice, as understood under the Law of Moses, was no longer acceptable to the Lord. The old law of sacrifice of animals that had been

practiced for millennia was no longer to be observed. What would be the new law of sacrifice? The answer to that question constitutes much of the teachings that the Lord would subsequently deliver among the Nephites.

Although the words “sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit” never appear explicitly in the New Testament, Jesus used that phrase, found in the Psalms, to emphasize the point that adherence to the essential part of the law of sacrifice—one which had existed from ancient times and with which the righteous Nephites and Lamanites most likely would have been familiar—had now been fulfilled and superseded.

The requirement to sacrifice “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” is repeatedly stated in the Book of Mormon, not only by Jesus and Moroni after Christ’s coming (3 Nephi 12:19; Mormon 2:14; Ether 4:15; Moroni 6:2), but also by the early Nephite prophets, Lehi and Nephi, long before Christ’s birth (2 Nephi 2:7; 4:32).

Moreover, this crucial phrase can be found in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms, and therefore may have been included on the plates of brass that Lehi’s family brought out of Jerusalem. Old Testament references to this principle include Psalm 51:17, which states that “[t]he sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart.” Psalm 34:18 declares that “[t]he Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” The great Old Testament prophet Isaiah, when speaking messianically, declared that the Lord’s mission was to “bind up the brokenhearted” (Isaiah 61:1).

Therefore, even under the old Law of Moses, the sacrifice of an animal on the altar of the temple was to be accompanied by a broken heart. Once the shedding of the blood of an animal under the law of Moses had been fulfilled by the shedding of the blood of Christ, the role of blood was no longer necessary. However, the broken heart and contrite spirit remained as an essential spiritual requirement of the Lord’s people.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Jesus Tell All People to Sacrifice a Broken Heart and a Contrite Spirit? \(3 Nephi 9:19-20\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 198 (September 29, 2016).

3 Nephi 10

3 Nephi 10 — Are the Righteous to Be Preserved?

The prophecies repeatedly assert that the righteous will be preserved in the day of Christ’s future coming (1 Nephi 22:17, 19; Doctrine and Covenants 63:33–35; Moses 7:61). How is this prophecy reflected in what took place at Christ’s coming to the Nephites?

3 Nephi 10:4–6 — As a Hen Gathereth Her Chickens

The Lord's comparison of himself to a hen gathering her chickens is a wonderful descriptive statement of his compassion and care. The way a hen gathers and nurtures her chickens is visually understood to be an ultimate demonstration of kindhearted provision for the needs of others. Though it is, of course, a natural mothering instinct that is often considered to be a female function, our transcendent Savior embodies all virtues. If a hen would do this for her chicks, how much more will our eternal Redeemer and Protector have an even greater level of care and concern for all of us, helping us, under his wing, to weather every storm of life?

In the New Testament, Jesus lamented on the Mount of Olives, saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37 and Luke 13:34). His willingness there was rejected.



Figure 1 Mosaic on the altar in the Dominus Fleuit church on the Mount of Olives directly across from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Photo John W. Welch

Now, after his resurrection, Jesus spoke to all the people, and He accordingly amended His previous extension of protection to say how He had in fact (in the past), how He would still now (if they would have let Him), and how He yet will (in the future) gather them on condition of repentance and returning to Him with full purpose of heart.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why did Jesus Compare Himself to a Hen? \(3 Nephi 10:4\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 200 (October 3, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, [“What Can We Learn from the Savior’s First Words at Bountiful? \(3 Nephi 11:10-11\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 341 (July 19, 2017).

3 Nephi 11

3 Nephi 11 — Study Questions

- When Jesus first appeared to the Nephites, there was a gathering of about 2,500 people (3 Nephi 17:25). At which temple were all these people gathered?
- Why might those people have been there?
- Who had assembled them early in the morning, and what were they doing, discussing, or praying for?
- What were the chances that all twelve of the men that Jesus was to choose to lead His Church were there in attendance, if that gathering were simply an informal gathering?
- How does the record describe the voice of God in 3 Nephi 11:3? How does this compare with the events in Helaman 5:30–31, 46–47. How does it compare with the experience of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:11–12?
- What do those encounters with the voice of God tell us about seeking for and receiving answers and help from God?
- The Father introduced his Son to the multitude (3 Nephi 11:7). Upon what other recorded occasions has the Father introduced the Son? (Hint: Look at Matthew 3:17; 17:5; and Joseph Smith—History 1:17).
- What important and authoritative information did the Savior provide the Nephite people on the subject of Baptism (3 Nephi 11:23–26)?
- What did Jesus say that indicated that baptism is essential to salvation and applicable to all men (3 Nephi 11:32–35)?
- What did Mormon write to his son Moroni (preserved in Moroni 8) that may explain why the Savior next mentioned that all people must repent and become as a little child, in order to be effectively baptized?

3 Nephi 11–28 — When and How Many Times Did Jesus Visit the Nephites?

It is not hard to estimate the year when the Savior appeared to the Nephites. Based on the statements of Mormon in his abridgement of this book of Nephi (the son of Nephi, the son of Helaman, as identified in the headnote to this book), several events included by Mormon were linked to a specific year, and in one case, even to a specific day. However, there is no statement of exactly when and how many times the Savior taught and ministered to the Nephites during that year. Perhaps, in a sense, the writers of the Book of Mormon wanted these events in Nephite history to be, in a spiritual sense, timeless.

Time was kept carefully before the appearance of the Resurrected Lord. In 3 Nephi 1:1, the text records that in the ninety-first year of the judges, six hundred years since Lehi left Jerusalem, Nephi prayed mightily because the deadline for the fulfillment of the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite was imminent.

Nine years later, the signs of the birth of Jesus became the origin of the new dating system under the Nephite calendar (2:6-8)—as it would later become the basis for the Christian calendar system in the Old World.

Twenty-five years later, in 3 Nephi 8:5, the record states that three days of darkness and destruction began at the *beginning* of the thirty-fourth year after Jesus' birth—specifically, “in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month.” And in 3 Nephi 9:15, before the dust had settled, the people who had survived the calamities heard the voice of the Savior at that time. Out of the darkness, He declared His identity, defined the damage, and explained His purposes in the rest of that chapter.

Then, in 3 Nephi 10:18, we have a statement by Mormon that is a bit unclear. He says, “And it came to pass *in the ending of the thirty and fourth year, behold, I will show unto you that the people of Nephi who were spared, and also those who had been called Lamanites, who had been spared, did have great favors shown unto them, and great blessings poured out upon their heads, insomuch that soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them*—showing his body unto them, and ministering unto them.” Although this complex sentence—which originally had no punctuation—has been read otherwise, it seems to me to make the best sense to understand that Jesus “did truly manifest himself unto” the people in 3 Nephi 11 “*soon after*” his “*ascension*” into heaven.

When might that have been? That “*ascension*” cannot have been the time when Jesus “*ascended to [His] Father*” (John 20:17), the morning of his Resurrection, because by that time He had not yet taught anything to anyone. Thus, that ascension would more likely refer to Jesus’s “*ascension*” forty days later, during which days the resurrected Lord had taught to the Apostles in Jerusalem and Galilee many things “*pertaining to the kingdom of God*” (Acts 1: 3). Moreover, after Jesus had taught the people in Bountiful the words

found in 3 Nephi 11–14, He told them “Behold, ye have [now] heard the things which I taught [in the Old World] before I *ascended* to my Father” (3 Nephi 15:1).

This would mean that the words “*in the ending* of the thirty and fourth year” should best be understood as having been written from the perspective of Nephi and Mormon, speaking of things as they stood at the ending of that 34th year. Many “great favors” and “great blessings” had been poured out upon the heads of these people during the rest of that year.

Knowing that the crucifixion of Jesus occurred in the spring, just before Passover in Jerusalem, the next festival on the Israelite calendar of holy days would have been Pentecost (or the Feast of Weeks, seven weeks, fifty days, after Passover). That early summer festival celebrated the “firstfruits” (Exodus 34:22) and also the giving of the law (the Ten Commandments) to Moses on Mount Sinai. If Jesus appeared in Bountiful at that time, it would explain (1) why the people had gathered at their temple, as Pentecost required; (2) why Jesus emphasized so much, especially in 3 Nephi 12, obedience to the full meaning and purposes of the Ten Commandments; and also (3) how the Nephites would have rejoiced exceedingly at the resurrection of Jesus, which is that power that yields “the first-fruits of Christ unto God” (Jacob 4:11), through baptism, the “first fruits of repentance” (Moroni 8:25).

This also helps us understand that the Savior’s visit to the multitude at the Bountiful temple was only the beginning of a series of learning sessions, church organizational steps, missionary trips, blessings, and great favors that no doubt ran throughout that year, which concluded at the end of 3 Nephi. During that time, Jesus came and went at least two more times and probably more.

Thus, at the end of chapter 18, Jesus “departed from them, and ascended into heaven” (18:39; 19:1). He returned again in 3 Nephi 19:15, after the disciples conducted baptisms and had given the gift of the Holy Ghost while attended by angels. At that time, Jesus again “came and stood in the midst and ministered unto them” (19:15), when he taught extensively about the nature of the covenant and the prophecies of the Old Testament (3 Nephi 20–26).

And later, as the disciples were preaching the things they had heard and seen, Jesus showed himself again in 3 Nephi 27:2. After talking to the twelve disciples one by one (28:1), “He touched every one of them with his finger save it were the three who were to tarry, and then he departed” (28:12). He may well have appeared other times during the remainder of that 34th year unto the disciples as they went forth establishing his word. Thus, during that entire year, Jesus poured many great blessings and favors down upon them, even more than could be fully recorded.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Is So Little Said about the Timing of Christ’s Temple Ministry? \(3 Nephi 10:18\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 481 (November 1, 2018).

3 Nephi 11:1 – The People Gather at the Bountiful Temple

There are two focal points that act as grand interchanges and moments of revelation and organization in the Book of Mormon. One of them is King Benjamin’s speech at the temple in Zarahemla, and the other is the Savior’s visitation at the temple in Bountiful. Interestingly, but not unexpectedly, they both took place at a temple.

King Benjamin had the families—men, women, and children—gathered at the temple for the coronation of his first son. In 3 Nephi, men, women and children were all there, in effect, for the coronation of Jesus, the Eternal Son of God, in their midst.

In both cases, a sacred covenant was entered into, first in Mosiah 5 and in a new form in 3 Nephi 18. The stipulations and nature of that covenant were explained both at the temple in Zarahemla and then at the temple in Bountiful. These two most important occasions are major points of intersection through which almost everything, not only in the Book of Mormon but in the whole gospel of Jesus Christ, sooner or later runs.

Both King Benjamin at the Zarahemla temple and the Savior at Bountiful offered a clear and specific culminating invitation. The words were slightly different but, if accepted, they achieve the same ends. King Benjamin’s invitation was very forthright:

Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend. And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them (Mosiah 4:9–10).

Jesus extended a similar invitation when he stated:

Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day. Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do; Therefore, if ye do these things blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day. (3 Nephi 27:20–22)

Both of these inviting statements contain important elements of application for us and to all people everywhere. To quote Jesus’s injunction following his telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan, “Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:37).

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “The Temple Context and Unity of the Sermon at the Temple,” in *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, Ut: FARMS, 1999), 23–46.

3 Nephi 11:3–7 — God the Father Speaks to the People Three Times

These people were brought to attention as they all heard a voice, a soft voice that pierced them to the center. It left them speechless. First of all, they were shocked, maybe even afraid. Their whole bodies began to quake. (3 Nephi 11:3). They certainly did not know what might happen next. Think of what they had lived through. The devastation and trauma must have still been very vivid in their minds, as it may have been only about forty days since the devastating destructions. They may have wondered if the calamitous events would start again or if it was the beginning of another storm. They did not know yet that this day was going to be very different.

Then their hearts started to burn (3 Nephi 11:3); they were beginning to feel the presence of the Holy Ghost. Twice they heard, but did not understand—however, they understood the third time. When we want to be heard, we petition repeatedly. The three-fold repetition indicated that God wanted to be heard. This also sounds rather like a ritual setting, where things are repeated three times. It is also a little like what happened to Nephi’s father and uncle Lehi in the Lamanite prison in Helaman 5:46.

3 Nephi 11:8 — The Savior Descends Slowly from Heaven

Jesus did not arrive in an instant. Following the triple announcement by the voice from heaven, He descended “in a white robe,” apparently slowly, as the people were awestruck. Was it significant that Christ came down in a white robe? Was the white robe temple-related? Was it related to purity? Perhaps it signaled that something very sacred was about to happen. The whole multitude turned to Christ, and they did not dare speak.

The ancient temple in Israel has been called “a sanctuary of silence” (based on Habakkuk 2:20). In the temple in ancient Israel, people sang hymns and there were noises associated with the preparation and burning of sacrifices, but for the most part, the worshippers were silent so they could hear the words of the Lord and hear the words of the priests. When we go to our temples, we are encouraged to be silent. There is an inscription posted in the Idaho Falls Temple from Habakkuk 2:20 which states, “The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.” Being silent, then, is also a part of the temple experience, so we can listen and hear what the Lord has to say. Amazing things happen

in greater abundance the more silent we are. How can we hear the word of the Lord if we are too busy talking?

As Jesus began to prepare to take His leave after the first day, the crowd may have wondered how He would leave. His presence was extremely bright and they may not even have been aware of the sun going down. He did not depart in an instant—He left deliberately and slowly, beginning with His being enshrouded in a protective cloud (3 Nephi 18:38–39). The people may have identified seeing Christ leave in a cloud with the cloud that guided ancient Israel through the wilderness in the daytime and the pillar of fire over the tabernacle at night, both of which signaled His very presence. We later learn that Christ took His Twelve with Him into the cloud (Moroni 2:3), much like Moses took twenty-four elders up into Mount Sinai where they also saw and heard the voice of God.

3 Nephi 11:10 — Jesus Introduces Himself

Putting them all at ease, the Resurrected Lord said: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.” As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland described this scene, “The God who turns the darkest night into morning light had arrived.”

Much of the book of 3 Nephi from this point forward is written in the first-person. Nowhere in ancient scripture do we have the risen Lord speaking more directly, using first-person pronouns. This is not someone else talking about Jesus—it is Jesus himself talking. Imagine the expressions that would have been on Jesus’ face as He said each line as if He were talking to each one of them individually. There is a face of earnest instruction in His words—getting their attention to be sure each one understands. There is a face of warning—letting them know the gravity of casting holy things before dogs or swine, lest they trample them under their feet. There is also a face of love—inviting them to know that He is the Good Shepherd and that He will gather them all into His fold.

I cannot imagine seeing those faces and not knowing that Jesus loves and wants each of His brothers and sisters—each of Heavenly Father’s choice spirits—to have the dew of resurrection (a name for the anointing oil of the Holy of Holies) applied to each of us. “This is eternal lives—to know the only wise and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent. I am He. Receive ye, therefore, my law” (D&C 132:24; John 17:3). I know that if we will make even the slightest efforts in his direction, Jesus Christ will carefully bring us along the path—the straight and narrow path—that will lead to life eternal.

Further Reading

Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City, UT; Deseret Book, 1997), 250-251.

3 Nephi 11:11 — The Temple of Bountiful Becomes a Holy of Holies

Under the Law of Moses, the offering of the blood of an animal on the altar of sacrifice at the temple was used to make atonement for sins—to reconcile the people with God by removing their impurity. Previously, the people here had heard the voice of the Lord telling them that sacrifice by the shedding of blood had been discontinued (3 Nephi 9:17, 19), but they had not been instructed as to how they now were to rid themselves of the defilements of their sins. After appearing and identifying Himself to the people, Jesus Christ now explained that He had “drunk out of that bitter cup” and had taken upon himself “the sins of the world” (11:11). This was new revelation to the people. They were learning, for the first time, the new version of the law of sacrifice.

As on the Day of Atonement at the Temple, words of forgiveness would have been spoken by the high priest. Jesus’ statement in verse 11 would have immediately identified Himself, effectively, as the new high priest.

The whole multitude responded by falling to the earth. This was yet another temple-related response. We sometimes kneel in our temple experience. More often we bow our heads. When we kneel or bow our heads, we are symbolically signifying our obedience and submission to God’s will, as Jesus had “suffered the will of the Father” (3 Nephi 11:11). In Matthew 5:3, the first Beatitude states, “Blessed are the *poor* in spirit.” The word for “poor” in Greek is an ambiguous word. It means “the poor,” but also “the submissive.” It derives from the verb *ptōssō*, which literally means to fall or crouch down, to bow timidly, or to cringe or beseech like a beggar. Being “poor in spirit” refers to being a beggar with respect to the spirit, humbly beseeching or reducing oneself to the dust. The use of the word in this Beatitude refers to the poor who have “fallen down” or have bowed their heads in complete submission. This “falling down” (or kneeling down) is a very important recognition of our personal willingness to submit our will to the Father.

Thinking back to Lehi’s vision recorded in 1 Nephi 8, there were four groups of people who came to the tree. Remember, there was only one of the four groups of people who made it to the tree, partook of the fruit, and actually stayed. The members of this one group fell down in gratitude and thanksgiving for being there. In revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, at the Second Coming of Christ, “every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess” that Jesus is, indeed, the Christ (D&C 88:104). This is exactly as it ought to be.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did the People Fall Down at the Feet of Jesus?](#) (3 Nephi 11:17),” *KnoWhy* 202 (October 5, 2016).

3 Nephi 11:12 — The People Remember That Christ Would Show Himself unto Them

In Alma 16:20, Alma had prophesied that the Messiah would appear in the Nephite world: “[T]hey were taught that he would appear unto them after his resurrection; and this the people did hear with great joy and gladness.” Even so, the arrival of Jesus was a surprise to the Nephites in Bountiful. Their current prophet, Nephi, had not referred to such a prophecy. When the incident occurred, they “remembered” what Alma said (3 Nephi 11:12), but they had not come to the temple expecting this to happen.

3 Nephi 11:14–15 — The People Meet Their Resurrected Savior One by One

There can be nothing more profound and so intimate to contemplate or even imagine than having one-on-one, direct physical contact with the Savior—to have Him embrace you, allow you to touch Him and to have Him cover you with the robes of His righteousness. What a blessing that would be. Every doctrine and every ordinance in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a shadow of that culminating experience. The Hebrew word for “atone” may relate to the word “to cover.” Thus, while the atonement will cover sins, more than that the atonement is a personal embrace, becoming “at one” with the Savior. As Lehi said, shortly before his death, “I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love” (2 Nephi 1:15). Nephi, Lehi’s son, similarly stated, “O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness!” (2 Nephi 4:33).

The arms of our Savior are extended to us always. That is what is real. That is what real existence is all about. It is not just about a relationship; it is about an eternal relationship—a relationship that becomes the model and provides the power that will allow us to have eternal relationships with our spouse, with our children, with all of our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

When I take myself into that moment, I am stopped and overcome with awe and wonder. This would be, on any terms, a miraculous experience. There is a reason why the English word “miracle” comes from the ancient root words that mean “wonder” and “amazement.” When a miracle happens, the only true human response to it is absolute astonishment. I love how the Book of Mormon describes the silence of the people as they stood and watched the Savior; how they “durst not open their mouths, even one to another” (verse 8). In most situations, it would be very hard to repress the urge to comment, “Did you see that? Look at what is happening here!” But the experience of being in the presence of Jesus Christ was so overwhelming to them that it was unspeakable.

I cannot visualize myself going to the Savior first and my wife going second. Nor can I imagine her going first and leaving me to go second. In this situation, I think of myself not as my body, but as the eternal couple that she and I are as an eternal essence. I cannot imagine that we would not be there together. I do not know that I would be watching her

while we stood before the Savior, but we would be side-by-side and it would be an experience that we would not even have to talk about because we would have shared it so completely. We would smile. We would embrace. We would look at the Lord and know that it is through him that we have the power and the promise to be together forever. That is what this experience would mean to me.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Jesus Minister to the People One by One?](#) (3 Nephi 17:21)," *KnoWhy* 209 (October 14, 2016).

3 Nephi 11:16–17 — The Nephites Shout Hosanna

The people at this temple were invited to come forward, one at a time, and see for themselves, and feel Christ's wounds with their own hands. In doing so, they were able to internalize the reality of the crucifixion and death of Jesus as well as the reality of His resurrection. After participating in this amazing experience, "they did cry out with one accord" (3:16). Most likely, somebody initiated and led the chorus. However, they all knew this hosanna shout—it was part of their ancient temple liturgy. They knew this from Psalms 118:25.

There was no better expression for these people to use in welcoming Jehovah, the Lord they had worshipped, into their midst—"Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God!" The ancient interpretation of the word "hosanna" means "save us now." "Hosanna" was used to respectfully address the God who saves, saved, will save, or is saving now. They had heard the Savior explain that He had completed the mission He was foreordained to accomplish. He had suffered greatly—"drunk out of that bitter cup"—to take upon Himself the sins of the world to save all mankind (11:11). They had felt and seen the scars that represented the depth of His divine suffering and understood that this had been done for them personally. The hosanna shout was the best expression of their deep love and gratitude to the Lord. The hosanna psalm continues, "God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light; ... Thou art my God, and I will praise thee; ... for his mercy endureth for ever" (Psalms 118:27–29).

The people then fell down at the feet of Jesus and worshipped Him. Anciently, people fell down in the presence of the high priest. There are many reasons why the people fell down before Jesus Christ. One likely explanation (evidenced by the fact that this took place in a ritual setting at the temple) is that the people were acknowledging Jesus as the Great High Priest. They were acclaiming Christ to be the true Eternal High Priest.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why did the People Fall Down at the Feet of Jesus?](#) (3 Nephi 11:17)," *KnoWhy* 202 (October 5, 2018).

3 Nephi 11:18–21 — Nephi is Called as the First Disciple

Assuredly, the greatest moment for Nephi, the son of Nephi, occurred next in the Savior's visit in Bountiful when he (the former high priest) was recognized and called out of the multitude by Jesus Christ (the eternal high priest; see Psalms 110:4). Nephi bowed down and kissed the feet of the Savior. That was a very tender moment. Jesus then called Nephi to even greater service and gave him, along with others, the authority and power to baptize the people. Jesus taught this and many of the primary core Christian principles that He had taught in Judea before his ascension (3 Nephi 15:1).

The visit of the Savior increased Nephi's knowledge and authority as he was called to a leadership role in Christ's church and was given further training. Nephi was present for the most glorious occasion of the Sermon at the Temple with its associated stages of ritual ascent. Although these experiences would be enormously great moments for everyone and anyone, Nephi must have been most deeply affected by them. He made special efforts to record these details. He also continued the rest of his life to serve the Savior along with his people, whom he loved, with all diligence, as did his son, yet another Nephi.

Records were kept leading up to the coming of the Savior. Meticulous records were then kept of the very words that Jesus spoke as He appeared to and taught the Nephite people. It seems to me that as the high priest, Nephi would have been the one who at least oversaw, if not actually conducted, the recording of these most sacred records.

Under the Law of Moses, only one person—the high priest—was allowed to go alone into the Holy of Holies in the temple. Thus, how amazing it must have been to him and to his people, that he could now share the glorious blessings of the Holy of Holies with all of them. Now, all of his people had the blessing to stand in the presence of the Lord—one by one—and see his countenance smiling upon them.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Should 3 Nephi Be Read as the Book of the High Priest Nephi? (3 Nephi title and heading)," *KnoWhy* 577 (September 8, 2020).

3 Nephi 11:22–24 — Jesus Called the Twelve Disciples

The entire book of 3 Nephi is a story of spiritual maturation and of ascent. Beginning with the depths of darkness and the earthquakes, the early chapters in 3 Nephi are tumultuous—not only physically, but also politically. Why did the events of 3 Nephi begin with so much darkness? Why did it begin with Satan reigning with blood and terror, with political upheavals, and the whole government essentially collapsing? The old society that Nephi and the other apostles had grown up in was now completely obliterated. The newly appointed leaders who had survived the cataclysmic events were starting from Ground Zero, and the next step was to embody a priesthood brotherhood.

Nephi, as the leader of these people, had been able to prophesy. Through revelation, he knew of things that were going on in Galilee and in Judea as they were transpiring. He was able to teach, and some believed. It is my belief that the twelve men that Jesus called as his disciples had already been through the fires of temptation and trial together. They had experienced hardship and the testing of everything that could stretch a person to the limit. They had seen Nephi raise his brother from the dead, but they had also seen people being butchered and killed.

As these men were instructed by the Lord, they would have brought to the Lord their own needs arising out of these past experiences—needs for comfort and assurance. They would have had new levels of understanding and expectation explained to them. As they heard the words of Jesus throughout 3 Nephi, and as they experienced new covenants and ordinances, were ordained and given power, and brought up through the progression of one principle of the gospel leading to another, they must have felt the Lord's hand, guiding, directing, reassuring, and establishing his Kingdom on earth.

Jesus knew the hearts of the Twelve whom he called. He knew that they were absolutely trustworthy and that he could reveal to them even greater things pertaining to God's Kingdom on earth—some revelation that the multitude would not receive. As the people trusted in these disciples and as the Twelve trusted in the Lord, they would grow in strength to handle the burdens that would be placed upon them. Even though they had been given great power and authority, the disciples observed and experienced the Savior ministering to them with mercy and love. These men would have learned to model their life after what the Savior had done.

When the New Testament is read alone without Restoration scripture, some people, including many scholars, are uncertain whether Jesus actually ordained twelve apostles and how He did that. In 3 Nephi in the Book of Mormon, we know that Jesus laid His hands upon the heads of those twelve men and gave them power first to baptize, and later that day to give the gift of the Holy Ghost, and later yet to administer in all the ordinances of the Priesthood.

Interestingly, as a priest made a sacrifice under the Law of Moses, He would lay His hands upon the sacrificial animal. That act would transfer to the sacrificial animal the impurities of the person for whom the sacrifice was being made. The sacrificial animal would vicariously carry away and suffer the burden of that person's uncleanness and sins.

What we see here, of course, was the laying on of hands by Jesus on the heads of these disciples, symbolically making them sacrificial animals. The Twelve were to sacrifice their lives, if necessary. As they administered in the ordinances of the new order of the priesthood, they would be able to carry away the sins from people—sins and problems that

the people could not remove by themselves. However, the Twelve disciples would only be able to do that if they, themselves, were willing to sacrifice all things unto the Lord.

3 Nephi 11:24–28 — Christ Established His Church among the Nephites

Some may wonder what the catalyst was that initiated Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery's concern about baptism and the authority to perform this ordinance. During the process of translating the Book of Mormon, Joseph and Oliver "on a certain day [in the month of May] went into the woods to pray and inquire of the Lord respecting baptism for the remission of sins" (Joseph Smith—History 1:68). In response, the Lord sent John the Baptist to confer upon them the Aaronic Priesthood, to instruct them concerning the nature of its authority, and then to command them to ordain and baptize each other (Joseph Smith—History 1:68–72).

It is interesting that it was in the middle of May, 1829, that the Prophet and Oliver Cowdery were in the midst of translating 3 Nephi in the Book of Mormon. Also of note is Oliver Cowdery's recollection, "No men in their sober senses, could translate and write the directions given to the Nephites, from the mouth of the Savior, of the precise manner in which men should build up His Church, ... without desiring the privilege of showing the willingness of the heart by being buried in the liquid grave, to answer a 'good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.'"

This information indicates that it was translating the Savior's instructions concerning baptism found in 3 Nephi 11 that led to this important event in Church history. The importance of receiving authorized and properly administered baptism was specifically pronounced in the account of the Savior's ministry found in 3 Nephi 11:23–26. As in Joseph Smith's day, the proper mode of baptism had been disputed anciently among the Nephites. This led the Savior to explicitly describe and clarify the process of baptism to the Nephites and counseled them: "And according as I have commanded you thus shall ye baptize. And there shall be no disputations among you, as there have hitherto been" (3 Nephi 11:28). The heavy reliance on the Book of Mormon in determining the correct procedures for priesthood ordination and baptism by one having authority is illustrated here:

Doctrine and Covenants 20:72–74

The person who is called of God ...
shall go down into the water
 with the person who has presented himself or herself for baptism, and
shall say, calling him or her by name: Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Then shall he immerse him or her in the water, and come forth again out of the water.

3 Nephi 11:23–26

Behold, ye
shall go down and stand in the water,
 and in my name shall ye baptize them. And now behold, these are the words which ye
shall say, calling them by name, saying: Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water.

Further Reading

Oliver Cowdery, *“Letter 1,” Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 1 (1834):15.

Book of Mormon Central, *“Why Did Joseph and Oliver Seek Authority to Baptize? (3 Nephi 11:24–25),” KnoWhy* 279 (February 24, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, *“Why did the Lord Quote the Book of Mormon When Reestablishing the Church? (3 Nephi 11:24),” KnoWhy* 282 (March 3, 2017).

3 Nephi 11:27-37 — Jesus Explains the Unity and Roles of the Members of the Godhead

The doctrine of the Godhead is developed in several Book of Mormon passages. Some of these scriptures simply confirm what is taught about the Godhead in the Bible and other modern revelations. Other passages, however, offer unique and unparalleled insights concerning this foundational doctrine. None is more important and authoritative than what Jesus Himself says here in 3 Nephi 11:27–37.

The Book of Mormon consistently affirms the unity and oneness of the Godhead. In 3 Nephi 11:27, Jesus said, “[V]erily I say unto you, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one.” Jesus goes on here to emphasize that, while unified in purpose, each member of the Godhead is distinctly separate and unique, each bearing record of the other two (11:32, 36). Just as they testify of each other without disputation, their followers shall have “no disputations among [them]” (11:28).

The prophet Joseph Smith taught, “It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God.” He also testified that readers of the Book of Mormon

would “get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (Book of Mormon Introduction).

The Book of Mormon account in 3 Nephi is a beautiful depiction of Christ’s love and universal outreach to all. He invited the people to “come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may *know* that I am the God of Israel” (3 Nephi 11:14). In the Book of Mormon, Jesus Christ invites all of God’s children, one by one, to be intimately familiar with Him. He wants them all to personally witness and comprehend the effects of His infinite Atonement in their own lives. By coming unto Christ, by repenting and being baptized, and accepting the eternal benefits of His atoning powers, all can come to intimately be visited by God the Father, can build upon the rock of Christ, and live under the sanctifying power and guiding influence of the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 11:35, 39).

Further Reading

Joseph Smith, Jr., [“The King Follet Sermon,”](#) *Ensign*, April 1971, online at churchofjesuschrist.org

Book of Mormon Central, [“How Are the Book of Mormon’s Teachings About the Godhead Unique? \(3 Nephi 11:27\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 266 (January 25, 2017).

3 NEPHI 12–16



3 Nephi 12–14

3 Nephi 12–14 — Study Questions

These three chapters contain some of the most sublime statements ever to be found in scripture or anywhere else. The words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount have been studied extensively by Christians everywhere. They are sacred. Please approach them reverently and prayerfully. As you study these chapters, here are some intriguing general questions to beneficially ponder. I hope they will help you receive and love these exquisite words of Jesus with all your heart, mind, and strength.

Escalation

- What are the main themes in Jesus’s Sermon at the Temple in Bountiful and His Sermon on the Mount in the Old World?
- How often and in what ways do themes escalate over the course of this masterful Sermon?
- How is that escalation compatible with the character of this sermon as a ritual ascent text leading people into the presence of God? (see “enter” in 3 Nephi 14: 13, 21–23).
- How do the following themes escalate or intensify as this Sermon progresses from initial to higher levels of duty and spirituality: (a) giving to others, (b) praying and asking of God, (c) justice, elements regarding punishments and rewards, and (d) consequences of failed discipleship from simple circumstances to eternal concerns?
- Would you agree that the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount become more serious and more advanced as they progress from beginning to end?

Vocabulary

- How many words and phrases in these chapters do you think would have been familiar to the Nephites, or, how many of them were they hearing for the first time?
- How many of those familiar words and phrases would have been “at home” in the Psalms or in connection with activities or themes already strongly related to practices or ordinances in their temple? See John W. Welch, “The Common Israelite Background,” in *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple & the Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 151–177. In other words, was Jesus beginning with familiar ideas and building upon them, or were these teachings totally new to these listeners?
- As a general characteristic, do General Conference talks and the wordings of our Temple ordinances likewise start simple and become more challenging at the end?

Audiences

- What differences are there between the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7 and the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 12–14?
- Why are those differences significant in terms of the audiences Jesus was addressing?
- Which of the differences are due to the following:
 - the post-resurrection setting in 3 Nephi,
 - the Nephite setting and culture,
 - the fact that the Nephites were more dependent upon written law,
 - the explicit covenant-making setting emphasizing the heart,
 - the more immediate relation to God in their presence,
 - the unseemly penalties that had been dropped,
 - a more established church organizational setting that was in place,
 - a greater universality of spiritual blessings now that Jesus had expanded his mission beyond just the House of Israel,
 - or the anti-Pharisaical, possible anti-Gentile, and alleged anti-Pauline elements were absent and irrelevant here?

You may find other differences as well. See John W. Welch, “The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: The Differences,” in *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple & the Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 125–150.

Languages

- What do the textual similarities and differences between 3 Nephi 12–14 and Matthew 5–7, as well as the earliest Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of Matthew, tell us about the nature of the translation given to us by Joseph Smith? See Welch, “Joseph Smith and the Translation of the Sermon at the Temple,” in *Illuminating*

the Sermon, 179–198; Welch, “The Sermon at the Temple and the Greek New Testament Manuscripts,” in *Illuminating the Sermon*, 199–210.

A Pre-Matthean Origin

- Does the Book of Mormon sustain the important idea that the Sermon on the Mount was actually given by Jesus and not created or compiled later by Matthew or some other writer? Consider (a) the characteristic words of Jesus, (b) the pre-Matthean elements in the text, (c) the temple settings and private audiences for parallels from the Sermon on the Mount in Mark and Luke, (d) the selection of texts used in the public setting in the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6, and (e) Jesus’ overall attitude toward the Temple. See Welch, “Jesus and the Composition of the Sermon on the Mount,” in *Illuminating the Sermon*, 211–237.

A Ritual Text

- Might the Sermon on the Mount have been used as a ritual text in preparing proselytes for baptism and to renew their covenantal commitments as Christians?
- How does the Sermon on the Mount compare with other rituals or ceremonies of conversion, initiation, or admission into such groups as (a) Apostolic Christianity, (b) the Qumran community, (c) Talmudic Judaism, or (d) the Greek mystery religions or utopian groups? See Welch, “The Sermon in Light of Ritual Studies,” in *Illuminating the Sermon*, 239–250.

Face to Face

- As you imagine Jesus speaking the words of the Sermon at the Temple, how do you imagine the expressions on his face?
- How many “faces” of Jesus do you see here? Consider its faces or expressions of direct verbal instruction, of moral and ethical persuasion, of enlightenment with allegorical illustrations, of authority with promises and consequences, and of loving invitation.

Reality and Practicality

- In this text, a faithful reader will see the face of sincerity, wisdom, and truth. The answer to the urgent question, “Master, what shall I *do* to obtain eternal life?” (Luke 10:25) is found here in abundance, clarity, and sensitivity, every step of the way.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999).

3 Nephi Chapters 12–14 — Seeing the Sermon at the Temple as a Temple Text

Embedded in the Book of Mormon, at the climactic moment of the first day of Jesus' ministry among the Nephites at the temple in Bountiful (3 Nephi 11–18), are three chapters that are substantially the same as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. Because "the mountain" is a symbol of the Temple in Jerusalem (see Psalms 24:3; Isaiah 2:2), I have collectively called these accounts the "Sermon at the Temple." Over the ages, people have tended to break the statements in the Sermon on the Mount up into many little expressions rather than to understand them as a cohesive whole. The text is worth a great deal even when viewed just as a series of short aphorisms or ethical proverbs. But Jesus delivered His message all in one piece, and its parts are interconnected. Its thoughts flow from one to the next, and the linkages are significant.

While the Sermon at the Temple in Bountiful adds to our understanding of the Sermon on the Mount in several ways, its most important contribution for me is how it unlocks this age-old mystery of the unity of the Sermon. The main reason that the Sermon on the Mount has remained a sealed text for most readers is the problem of discerning what holds it all together. Does the Sermon on the Mount have a single theme or logic, or is it a haphazard collection of disjointed sayings?

The answer offered by 3 Nephi is most remarkable. Simply stated, the Sermon at the Temple is a temple text. By "temple text" I mean one that relates to the temple, one that contains allusions to the most sacred ordinances and teachings of the plan of salvation. Temple texts are found in several places in the Bible and Book of Mormon. Often, they are presented in or near a temple (see, for example, King Benjamin's speech). They ordain or otherwise convey divine powers through symbolic or ceremonial means, presented together with commandments that are or will be received by sacred oaths that allow the recipient to stand ceremonially in the presence of God. This Sermon in 3 Nephi is clearly a covenant-making text. It gives people commandments and instructions that they must accept by way of covenant at the end of the day (in 3 Nephi 18). That important detail is something that the New Testament does not tell us explicitly, although the Sermon on the Mount follows shortly after the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3, which may link the Sermon to covenant-making preparation. In 3 Nephi 11, the people are clearly at the temple in Bountiful. The surrounding world and the whole environment have been cleansed, and the purified saints who were present are worthy and ready to meet the resurrected Savior.

Several such texts may be found in the scriptures, notably including Jacob's speeches at the temple in the city of Nephi (2 Nephi 6–10; Jacob 2–3), as well as King Benjamin's speech at the temple of Zarahemla (Mosiah 1–6). The temple setting is an essential element in understanding the fabric of these speeches. As we read these teachings of Jesus, if we comprehend the context, the place where He was speaking and the audience He was

talking to, we can understand much better why He said what He did, especially when certain key statements have clear temple significance. This approach does not diminish the ethical and didactic functions of the Sermon. On the contrary, the moral force of the Sermon is only enhanced by the solemnity of a sacred setting, which encourages listeners to receive its values with deepened commitment.

The Sermon is a very carefully structured text. It starts at an entrance point with the Beatitudes, and then builds, culminating at the end when Jesus talks about who shall enter into the presence of God, namely “He that doeth the will of my Father who is in Heaven” (3 Nephi 14:21). This textual structure is known as an ascent text that takes us up and up, towards the Father, step-by-step. As we think in that broader context, we can see how each one of the elements in the Sermon on the Mount builds and depends on what came before. We can make best use of the Sermon if we can appreciate it as a whole and as we examine and contemplate each of its steps.

Some Biblical scholars view Jesus as merely a great teacher or a philosopher who dispensed wisdom randomly to people, but there are a lot of things in these Sermons that cannot be viewed as just wisdom. For example, penalties are given. Jesus pronounced privileges, like their getting to be the salt of the earth, but if they did not live up to that responsibility, they would be thrown out (Greek, *ek ballō*). Jesus said they would be cast out of the community. Here is an important difference between private spirituality and covenantal community-building. If they did not live up to the community standards, they would be expelled and then trodden underfoot. If your right hand offends you, cut it off. If your eye offends you, pluck it out. Jesus did not really expect people to do that, but was explaining what would happen spiritually if the promises that they were making were not kept. Understanding the whole—all the parts—and looking at each word is very important.

Matthew 5 begins with an easily overlooked statement indicating that Jesus and his disciples needed a peaceful location where they could have spiritual time together. Thus, “He went up into a mountain” (Matthew 5:1). Sometimes we get the impression that Jesus just went up onto a hillside. But the text is clear, Jesus went up into the *mountain*, which is exactly what Moses did in Mount Sinai, and it is exactly the phrase that occurs in Psalm 24:3, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?” The Hebrew reads *mountain*, but the King James translators said *hill*. Ascending into the hill or mountain of the Lord was referring to the temple.

The Sermon on the Mount Seen in Twenty-Five Stages of Ascent

Jesus and his disciples go "into the Mountain" (5:1; compare Exodus 19:20; 24:13)

- 1: A promise of ultimate heavenly blessings is given (the Beatitudes, 5:3-12)
- 2: A charge is given, with a warning, to become the salt of the earth (5:13)
- 3: A calling is given to be a light unto the world to the glory of God (5:14-16)
- 4: Obligation imposed to obey and teach the fullness of the law and prophets (5:17-20)
- 5: Anger, ill-speaking, and ridicule of brothers are prohibited (5:21-22)
- 6: All animosities are reconciled before gifts are given at the altar (5:23-26)
- 7: Sexual fidelity is required before, during, and after marriage (5:27-32)
- 8: Oaths are sworn along this path only by saying "yes, yes" or "no, no" (5:33-37)
- 9: Disciples agree to do good and to pray for all people, including enemies (5:38-47)
- 10: Gifts of sun and rain upon all are promised as blessings from heaven (5:45)
- 11: Passing from that first level into a higher order of perfection (5:48)
- 12: Donations are given voluntarily and inconspicuously to the poor (6:1-4)
- 13: Prayers are offered without fanfare, both in private and as a group (6:5-13)
- 14: Forgiveness is given and is commensurately received (6:14-15)
- 15: Fasting, washing, and anointing are done in a secret setting (6:16-18)
- 16: Treasures are consecrated with singleness of heart in loving service to God (6:19-24)
- 17: Assurances of sufficient food, drink and glorious clothing are received (6:25-34)
- 18: In preparing for the final judgment, people judge themselves, not others (7:1-5)
- 19: A curse is placed on those who inappropriately disclose that which is holy (7:6)
- 20: A threefold petition is made: asking, seeking, and knocking (7:7-8)
- 21: Good gifts are received from the Father, and gifts are given as he gives (7:9-12)
- 22: The righteous enter through a narrow opening that leads into life (7:13-14)
- 23: They enjoy and bear the fruits of the tree of life, not of corruptness (7:15-20)
- 24: Doing God's will, they are allowed to enter into his presence and kingdom (7:21-23)
- 25: They then build upon this rock by hearing and doing these things (7:24-27)

Based on John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (London: Ashgate, 2009).

The following is a list of temple elements that can be found in the Savior's visit in 3 Nephi. The first one, the presence of God (the appearance of Jesus and his words in the first person), was the first clue that pointed me towards understanding this sermon in this new light. These features, which are characteristic of the Holy of Holies or sacred functions in the temple of Jerusalem, appear in 3 Nephi:

- The presence of God (the appearance of Jesus and his words in the first person)
- The words of the Lord (3 Nephi 11–27)
- The fullness of joy (3 Nephi 16, 17, 27, 28)
- The Ten Commandments (3 Nephi 12)
- The law of the covenant (3 Nephi 20, 29)

- The Ark (evidences of God’s presence: manna, Aaron’s rod, tablets of the law)
- The mercy seat (mercy, 3 Nephi 17, 22, 26)
- The heavenly throne (3 Nephi 12:34)
- The shewbread (the bread of the sacrament and the body Jesus had shown)
- The seraphim, angels, priests (3 Nephi 17, 18, 27)
- Shining white robes (3 Nephi 11, 19)
- Day one, creation, order (expound all things from the beginning, 3 Nephi 26:3)
- Silence (3 Nephi 11)
- Three dimensions, a perfect cube (perfect, 3 Nephi 12:48)
- Ascending into heaven (3 Nephi 18)
- Entering, a narrow passageway (3 Nephi 14)
- Connecting heaven and earth (3 Nephi 13)
- The mystery of life (3 Nephi 27)
- Secret things (3 Nephi 14, 26)
- Unity (3 Nephi 28)
- Raising to a higher state (3 Nephi 28)
- Sonship, divine acknowledgment (3 Nephi 11)
- Translated beings (3 Nephi 28)
- Sending forth (3 Nephi 11, 19)
- Healing (3 Nephi 17, 26)
- Covenant making (3 Nephi 18)
- Verbatim ritual repetition (3 Nephi 19)
- The face of the Lord shining upon the people (3 Nephi 19)

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “Overview” in *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 4. “The unique insights afforded by 3 Nephi in the Book of Mormon bring the greatness of the New Testament Sermon on the Mount most dramatically into focus.”

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Did Jesus Deliver a Version of the Sermon on the Mount at the Temple in Bountiful? (3 Nephi 12:6),” *KnoWhy* 203 (October 6, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, “What Makes 3 Nephi the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon? (3 Nephi 14:13–14),” *KnoWhy* 206, (October 11, 2016). “At the pinnacle of the history recorded in the Book of Mormon readers find in 3 Nephi the story of the resurrected Jesus Christ who descended from heaven to teach the people at the temple in Bountiful. The magnitude and sacred content of 3 Nephi 11–26 has brought BYU Professor John W. Welch to call it the ‘holy of holies’ of the Book of Mormon. A careful analysis of the text reveals that it can be seen as a literary counterpart to the physical holy of holies

of the ancient temple. The book depicts a temple setting where Jesus Christ descended from heaven to the temple in the Nephite city of Bountiful (see 3 Nephi 11). With the people gathered around, Christ taught them from that sacred edifice. His words were replete with temple-related terms and imagery, although these are not often noticed. Jesus both opened and closed His initial sermon speaking about building upon the rock, ‘evoking images of the temple and its eternal stability.’”

John W. Welch, “Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 1 (2010): 36–55; also published in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012), 1–33.

3 Nephi Chapters 12–14 — Reading the Sermon at the Temple on Several Levels

The Sermon at the Temple can—and *should*—be understood at several different levels:

- The first level I would call a private, spiritual level. This is a level where we read to determine where we can individually be a better people by trying to develop and inculcate these kinds of spiritual attributes.
- Then there is a second way of reading it, which encourages us to be good members of society and to be on good terms with our fellow men and families. This is an ethical reading where these wisdom rules will make life more pleasant socially and culturally.
- The third way of reading is what I would call a covenantal mode, where step-by-step requirements and expectations are given for entering a covenant community.
- The fourth way of reading is as a temple text, to learn how we can come into the presence of God and become like Him.

How do we explain the close parallel between the *Sermon on the Mount* in the New Testament and the *Sermon at the Temple* in 3 Nephi? This question is often asked, especially as biblical scholars have more and more come to the conclusion that Matthew simply put the *Sermon on the Mount* together long after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ministry. They consider that it could have been compiled as long as 20–40 years after Jesus had died. People, they think, had been collecting its saying in what we might call scrapbooks. That view of the *Sermon on the Mount* is certainly incompatible with the fact that Jesus, shortly after his resurrection, appeared in Bountiful and gave essentially the same text. In actuality, He may have given this speech many times, altered to suit the needs of each particular audience (see, for example, the Sermon on the Plain, in Luke 6). In an important way, the “sermon” in 3 Nephi begins in 3 Nephi 11 and goes to the end of chapter 18, where Jesus gives everyone the sacrament, and places them under covenant to keep the

commandments which he has just given them. Seeing it in that context helps unfold the covenant-making nature of this text.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chapters 4 and 5.

3 Nephi 12

3 Nephi 12 — How Gentle God’s Commands

As I awoke in Cambridge, England, on the day when I was to address the Society for Christian Ethics there on the subject of Ethical Formation in the Sermon on the Mount, the hymn that filled my soul was “How Gentle God’s Commands.” I sang it to myself and felt with reassurance its application to the topic of my upcoming presentation.

After delivering the words in 3 Nephi 12–14, Jesus said, “Behold, I have given unto you the commandments” (3 Nephi 15:10). These were new (or renewed) commandments: “Old things are done away, and all things have become new” (3 Nephi 12:47). As you re-read 3 Nephi 12, count how many “commandments” you find. I recommend that you count each “beatitude,” each “charge,” each “wish of the Lord” and each “imperative” among the commandments.

- In applying these teachings of Jesus, think of each of them in your life in two contexts: (a) in an ordinary daily ethical setting, and (b) in a sacred temple context. For example, what does it mean in ordinary life to be “poor in spirit” or to “mourn” or to “hunger and thirst”? What do such things mean in a temple context?
- What is a “temple theme”? In chapter 12 alone, what does “obtaining mercy,” “seeing God,” or “being called the children of God” have to do with the temple? How are the following further elements especially at home in the temple: salt (used in sacrifices), light, candlestick (the menorah), commandments, unity (no ridicule), properly approaching the altar, chastity (see Leviticus 18 and 20), swearing oaths and vows, God’s throne, returning evil with good, praying for enemies, the rising sun, the opening of the windows of heaven, and “perfection”?
- Does 3 Nephi 12:16 justify “showing off,” or must we let our light shine before others in a very certain way and for a particular purpose?
- Is there ever such a thing as “righteous anger” (compare Matthew 5:22 with 3 Nephi 12:2, where the excuse of having a “cause” is correctly not found)?
- Who has the obligation to initiate reconciliation with a brother or sister? (12:23)

- Should a follower of Christ ever go to court against a fellow saint either as a plaintiff or as a defendant? (12:25)
- Might using pornography already be akin to committing adultery physically? (12:28)
- What did Jesus think and teach about divorce? (12:31–32; compare Deuteronomy 24:1–4). Did He have all cases of civil divorce in mind, or does He have in mind here covenant marriages that involve God as a third partner unifying the husband and wife?
- What does it mean to “swear not at all”? (12:34). Is it ever proper to swear oaths by something external, which God doesn’t need? Or do we make our commitments to God by saying “Yes,” or “No,” and thereby give Him our pledge?
- How can we be like our Father in Heaven who makes “his sun to rise on the evil and on the good”? (12:45)
- Matthew 5:48 says, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” 3 Nephi 12:48 says, “I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” What do the differences here mean to you?
- How would you summarize, describe, or classify the contents of 3 Nephi 12? What adjectives, categories, or text-types come most satisfactorily to mind? Would you answer this question differently with respect to Matthew 5?
- How do the teachings in this chapter instruct and challenge all readers to live the gospel in its fullest sense? How can they teach us that we are not better than other people? How do they build fellowship among the Saints, loyalty in marriage, and going the second mile?

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “Temple Themes and Ethical Formation in the Sermon on the Mount,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 2 (2009): 148–60.

3 Nephi 12:1–12 — What Kind of Statements Are the Beatitudes?

The Sermon began with a promise of ultimate blessings. The first few verses are commonly known as the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are the starting point, and a foundation, directing us toward the end and purpose of the Sermon.

The Beatitudes are declarations of future blessings. In the Greek it just says, *macharioi oi katharoi*, or “Blessed the poor in spirit.” There is no verb expressed in these statements. We are expected to understand from the context what the tense of that connecting verb of being is. Usually the tense of the first phrase matches the tense of the second. So, it reads: “Blessed *will be* these people for they *shall see*.” This future tense implies that it is a postponed promise at the outset of this covenant-making and commandment-giving text. Indeed, the Greek word “*macharios*” does not mean “happy” or “fortunate” in a generic

sense. It most often refers to the ultimate blessed state of the souls of those who go on into the next life with eternal joy and well-being.

These ultimate promises also act in a way as a set of entrance requirements. Psalm 24, for example, asks, “who shall ascend into the hill [the temple] of the Lord?” Having clean hands and a pure heart are then stated as entrance requirements. Thus, the Beatitudes given by Jesus also provide a kind of entrance requirement. Using language from Psalm 24, one of them requires and promises, “Blessed are [shall be] the *pure in heart*, for they shall see God.”

3 Nephi 12:1–12 — Language of the Psalms in the Sermon on the Mount

Beginning here in the Beatitudes and continuing throughout the Sermon, we encounter many key words and distinctive phrases—at least 100 of them—that are particularly predominant in the Psalms, which are the words to the temple and pilgrimage hymns of the Hebrew Bible. Here are few examples:

Blessed

The Greek word translated as “blessed” is *macharioi*, and it is the very first word in the book of Psalms, appearing in Psalm 1:1, which reads, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night (Psalm 1:1–2). In other words, *blessed* are the people who keep the law of the Lord. That very same word is used 25 more times in the Greek version of Psalms, which was the main translation of the Hebrew Psalms used by the early Christians. *Beatification* (blessedness) in this temple context refers to ultimate blessings in the Celestial world, being eternally blessed in the presence of righteous and divine beings. Happiness is not guaranteed in every minute of this life, but it says you will be *exalted*. That is what it means to be blessed.

The Sons of God

Another Beatitude states: “Blessed are [will be] the peacemakers for they shall be called the *sons of God*.” The concept of being sons of God is echoed Psalms 2:7, “The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” Psalm 82 says explicitly, “All of you are children of the most High.”

The Pure in Heart

As mentioned above, behind the promise, “Blessed are the *pure in heart*, for they shall see God,” stands Psalm 24:4. “Who shall stand in his holy place, He that hath clean hands and a *pure heart*.” The word for pure here, “*katharsoi*,” refers to something that is thoroughly cleansed. The English word catharsis comes straight from this Greek word, which is very

meaningful in a temple context. How are we purified? Where is our *catharsis*? It is through repentance and the washing and purification ordinances in the temple.

Many other examples of Psalmic language can be found in the Sermon on the Mount. Biblical scholars typically see the Sermon on the Mount as belonging to what they call wisdom literature. And, indeed, it does contain proverbial material such as, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” and so they have looked outside of religious texts for the literary background of the voice of the Sermon on the Mount. However, there is a stronger, more foundational, voice here—namely the sacred and sublime.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (London: Ashgate, 2009), esp. 183–190, 241–242.

John W. Welch, “[The Temple, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Gospel of Matthew](#),” in *Mormonism and the Temple: Examining an Ancient Religious Tradition* (Logan, UT: BYU Studies and the Academy for Temple Studies, 2013), 66–71, esp. Table 1.

3 Nephi 12:1–11 — Blessed Are *All* They...

Notice also that the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew do not include the word “all” as this Sermon at the Temple does. Jesus emphatically and repeatedly declares, “blessed are *all* they” In five places the word “all” shows up in the Book of Mormon version—all those who mourn, all those who hunger, all the pure in heart, all the peacemakers, and all they who are persecuted for my name’s sake. The text ensures that this blessedness will encompass everyone who truly possesses these virtues for Christ’s sake. Jesus will not exclude anyone who is deliberately willing to come to Him through the straight path and narrow gate that He has prescribed.

3 Nephi 12:1–2 — Blessed Are They Who Listen to the Apostles

The Book of Mormon text begins with two new Beatitudes, and they are likely temple related. The first one: “Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you.” That instruction, which is also emphasized in Latter-day Saint temples, is also right here in the Sermon at the Temple. When Joseph Smith translated this in May of 1829, he had not yet received, let alone imagined, the temple ordinances. And yet, temple elements occur over and over again in the words and deeds of Jesus in Bountiful.

In the second verse here, there is another Beatitude—a double one—that is unique to the Book of Mormon version. “More blessed are they who shall believe in your words *because that ye shall testify* that ye have seen me, and that ye know that I am.” That is followed by “Blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and *come down into the depths of humility*

and be baptized.” This is a commission to the Twelve, to testify and to baptize. When Jesus will then say in 12:14, “I give unto you to be the light of the world and to be the salt of the earth,” He has already explained what that meant. They and all others in turn knew the content of the obligation that they had been given as followers of Christ.

3 Nephi 12:3 — Blessed Will Be the Poor in Spirit Who Come unto Me

In 3 Nephi 12:3, “Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit *who come unto me.*” The phrase “who come unto me” can be interpreted as “come follow me.” That required aspect of being “poor in spirit” is not in the biblical version.

3 Nephi 12:10 — Blessed Will Be Those Who Are Persecuted for Jesus’ Sake

Implicit in what is said here—“persecuted for my name’s sake”—is that persecution is not for someone’s own sake or something we have brought on ourselves. Exalting persecution comes from bearing the name of Jesus. This persecution is not sought for by a true Christian. We do not want Jesus to be persecuted and reviled. But if we become the target of reviling because of Him, He said that He would absorb that difficulty, that disadvantage, that pain, because we are doing it for Him. He knows that there will be such trials and persecutions.

3 Nephi 12:13 — I Give unto You to Be the Salt of the Earth

The Savior called people before He started to teach them. In both this statement and in the “light of the world” statement, the 3 Nephi version adds the phrase “I give unto you to be,” replacing the Matthew 5 present indicative words “ye are.” “I give unto you” is equivalent to “this is your calling” or “This is your assignment.” In other words, “I give unto you this responsibility to be this kind of people.” Then He proceeded to enable them by instructing them on how they will have the abilities, the powers, and the gifts to accomplish what He is asking them to do.

“I give unto you to be the salt of the earth,” is a charge, given with a warning. This charge redefined who the participant is to become because of this covenant. Interestingly, every sacrificial covenant in ancient Israel had to have salt added as a part of it. In the covenant that God has with the world, we will become the covenant figures of the world to provide the necessary salt to make the covenant efficacious.

The Book of Mormon says the salt “loses *its* savor.” The early Book of Mormon manuscripts support the reading, “*its* savor.” We usually do not think of salt being masculine and, in fact, the Greek word for salt is neuter. In Matthew chapter 5, the King James version says that it has lost *his* savor. For some reason the King James translators unnecessarily thought that salt should be masculine. The Book of Mormon text is gender neutral.

In the Greek text, there is no noun equivalent to “savor.” The phrase is *ean de to halas mōranthē*. Deterioration is implicit in the meaning of the verb *mrainō*, here in the form *mōranthē*. That verb is derived from the adjective *mōros* (dull, stupid, the origin of “moron”), and meant “to become foolish,” but with salt and other flavorings, it was used to mean “to become insipid,” or “flavorless.” The adjective (*mōros*) is used in the parable of the wise man and the foolish man, who is there called *moron*. Maybe it really should be translated, “if the salt become foolish....” We will learn at the end of the Sermon on the Mount how we can become foolish. Remaining pure and apart is important here. He has appointed us to be apart and pure, and not to be foolish or contaminated by the impurities of the world around us.

3 Nephi 12:14–16 — *I Give unto You to Be the Light of This People*

The people from Jerusalem would have readily related that statement to the Temple in Jerusalem, for the fire of the temple was burning twenty-four hours a day. It was a beacon that could be seen from miles away, in all directions. The Temple was the ultimate light on the hill, and the people in the temple made it much more than just a building: the priests were there keeping fires burning, and they had to have righteous people there performing the ordinances and sacrifices. However, in the 3 Nephi version, Jesus explicitly said to all of the multitude—men, women, and children—“I give unto you....” In other words, He challenged all of them to “be the light of this people.” He was saying that, as a temple community, they will be a light on a hill as was and is the temple.

In verse 15, Jesus asked, “Do men light a candle,” that is in Greek a lamp (*luchnos*), which refers to a little clay lamp. Does a person light their lamp and put it under a bushel (a *modius*)? No. When you light a lamp, you put it on—not a *candlestick* because they did not have candles—but on a *luchnia*. In Exodus (in the Greek Septuagint), the word *luchnia* exclusively means the *menorah* of the temple. Thus, Jesus instructs each of us to bring our *lamp* and add it to the light of the *menorah*, which was the light within the temple. Your light, then, would add to the light upon the hill of the temple. It would shine so that everyone in the House of Israel would see.

What is a *modius*? A “bushel” is a very rough approximation for what the Greek indicated. In the traditional Greek dictionary (LS), it is defined “as a dry measure of about two gallons.” That word, of Latin origin, was used almost exclusively with regard to the Egyptian god Serapis. Serapis was a male god in Egypt that was the companion of Isis. He was an agricultural god; they sacrificed to Serapis and he would make their crops grow. He always wore a *modius*, a measuring container on his head, as his cap or crown. Jesus may have been teaching that you should not put your light under one of those pagan gods that the Gentiles worship, because they were to understand instead that He was the light they should be holding up.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Makes 3 Nephi the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon? \(3 Nephi 14:13–14\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 206, (October 11, 2016).

3 Nephi 12:18–20 — Jesus Exhorts Us to Keep the Commandments

Jesus applied the covenant to obey and to teach the fullness of “the law and commandments of the Father” (3 Nephi 12:19), including repentance. He pointed out that we must keep every “jot and tittle” of the law, since it was not destroyed, but fulfilled (v. 18). He asked us to offer a “broken heart and contrite spirit” as a sacrifice (see already 3 Nephi 9:20), and to come to Him and be saved. He presented here both a law of sacrifice and a law of obedience. Jesus would then continue further by giving the higher aspects of the law once these first two foundational laws were understood and accepted.

Here we learn that Jesus gave many important commandments, and we in the Church should also be clear on that. These commandments range from keeping the Sabbath Day holy to loving your neighbor as yourself. They incorporate many things that we should encourage each other to do. The laws and doctrines of the Kingdom of God constitute an interwoven fabric. As Neal A. Maxwell has said at the end of his book *Whom the Lord Loveth*, “The doctrines of the Church need each other as much as the people of the Church need each other. We dare not break the doctrines apart or specialize within them, because we need them all,” and because they all need each other as one great whole.

3 Nephi 12:21–22 — Jesus Commands Us Not to Be Angry with Our Brother

The Ten Commandments include the law, “Thou shalt not kill.” Taking this to a deeper level, Jesus gives a new version of this commandment: “Thou shall not be angry with thy brother.” Why taming our tempers and emotions is important in all of our human relations, what Jesus says here is specifically relevant within a religious covenant community. It is unbecoming for members of the covenant community to be angry with each other. We may not call him or her a fool, *moros*. As with insipid salt, fools are cast out, excommunicated. That kind of demeaning speech used against a member of the community is inappropriate; it is a powerful form of evil-speaking, and there is a strict prohibition against speaking evil of anyone who is among the members of the holy church.

Matthew 5:22 reads, “Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause...” but 3 Nephi 12:22 does not have the phrase “without a cause.” The Book of Mormon has the stronger statement here. If you are angry with your brother, period, you are in trouble, and you will be in danger of the council and in danger of the judgment of God. In the Greek, the one small word *eikē* has been translated as “without a cause,” but it can also mean “rashly” or “unseemly.” Perhaps someone inserted that little word later into Jesus’s warning here, thinking that surely Jesus did not mean that we could not *ever* be angry. However, in the

Book of Mormon, Jesus strongly declared that He did not want anger at all among his covenant makers. Some of the earliest manuscripts of Matthew do not have that little word *eikē*, so the better manuscripts and translations assume that Jesus originally said what the Book of Mormon has him say.

3 Nephi 12:23–24 — To Which Brother Was Jesus Referring?

We may well ask, “Who is our brother?” It is anyone in the covenant community. If we are angry with a fellow covenant member, we are alienating ourselves from the community. In Matthew it next says, “If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and *there* rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee...,” then we must reconcile with the brother, and then we can come back to the altar and offer our gift. In 3 Nephi 12, it is a little different. “If ye shall come unto me, or shall *desire to come* unto me, and rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee...” Whether we already find ourselves at the altar or are just wishing to come to the altar of Christ, we must be reconciled to our community.

To which brother was Jesus referring? To any brother, or sister. Both in the Bible and here in 3 Nephi, where Jesus taught in an explicit temple context, if you ever realize that somebody especially within the Church has a problem with you, you need to seek that person out and reconcile before going forward with your service or worship in the name of Christ.

3 Nephi 12:25–26 — Who Is Your “Adversary?”

Next Jesus says, “Agree with thine adversary quickly.” There are two ways to answer the question of who this adversary may be. First, when we are with a group of people preparing for any holy sacrificial activity, and we realize that some dispute exists that may lead to litigation, the “adversary” would be the person who is accusing us in court. We are to leave and settle the issue as best we can before we proceed, so that our spiritual activities are not impaired.

A second way to understand who the “adversary” is may come from the Hebrew term for an adversary, or a prosecutor, or a plaintiff. In Jewish law the term is a *satan*. The devil, or Lucifer, is called Satan because at the final judgment, he will be our accuser. He will be the plaintiff. He will be there making accusations and trying to win the day. Against him, we will have Jesus as our advocate, if we have retained Him through our repentance and acceptance. I do not know that there is an allusion here in this text to Satan, but it is interesting that the terminology is such that it may already have in mind the final judgment. Jesus may be saying here that we need to put Satan quickly aside and to get out of Satan’s way. We do not “settle” with Satan by agreeing with him, and we are not going to win any fights against him without the help of the Savior. But we take refuge in the temple, getting quickly into a safe place where we can make our offerings amidst a group of faithful people, we are stronger together against the forces of evil.

3 Nephi 12:27–32 — A Higher Order of Marriage, Chastity, and Divorce

Next, Jesus taught the law of chastity and a related law of divorce pertaining to covenant marriages. On divorce, He comments that it was written in the Law of Moses that if a man were going to put his wife away, he needed only to give her a written bill of divorcement. This is found in Deuteronomy 24:1. But instead, Jesus now said that divorce is only permissible in the case of fornication. He did not allow the same kind of latitude as was available under Deuteronomy. There were many Jewish interpretations of Deuteronomy 24, such as those that said that, if a man found any uncleanness, or anything that was undesirable about his wife, he could give her a bill of divorcement. For those people, marriage had become a simple contract between a man and a woman, and that contract could be broken unilaterally, usually by the man.

But Jesus taught that covenant marriage (see Malachi 2:14) was not that kind of bilateral relationship. Spouses bound by covenant with God, however, were only to enter into divorce under very certain conditions, probably only if they could prove that there had been a real violation of the marriage covenant. Especially in Matthew 19, Jesus explains (in answer to the question about why he disagrees with Deuteronomy 24) that what *God has put together*, man shall not put asunder. Jesus teaches here that covenant marriages, which involve God in the relationship, are not easy to live (Matthew 19:11). Such marriages are not unilaterally created, and thus they are not to be unilaterally terminated. There may or may not have been a way in early Christianity for some kind of an ecclesiastical determination that such a marriage could legitimately end, but such was not something that either the husband or wife should decide on their own accord without thinking about God and His will. For Jesus, the covenant relationship of marriage was sacred. In my view, what Jesus said about divorce (both in Matthew and at the temple in Bountiful) assumes a covenant relationship between the husband and wife that had been ratified, blessed, or sealed by God, and thus could not be lightly abandoned. Jesus taught that, in this new temple context, the responsibilities of marriage, divorce, and chastity will be taken much more seriously, and that the heavenly blessings, accordingly, are much higher.

3 Nephi 12:33–37 — A More Solemn Way of Swearing and Promising

The old law of “forswearing yourself” is referring to swearing an oath invoking the name of God, usually in connection with testimony in court. It also referred to making vows when consecrating certain property to the temple, as in Leviticus 27. Jesus offered three prohibitions: do not swear, even by heaven, by the earth, or by thine head. Thou shalt not *forswear thyself* is translated *thou shalt not bear false witness* in Matthew. In the Ten Commandments, it reads, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,” which is defined in the Bible notes as “uttering an oath or makes a promise using the Lord’s name without valid purpose.”

Jesus' injunction to not "swear by thy head" may sound strange, but a priest under the Law of Moses had to retire when they grew white hairs (3 Nephi 12:36). The mandatory retirement age under the Law of Moses for priests was fifty years old. It was a lot of work to do all the heavy lifting involved with the sacrifices, so they had to be young enough that their hair was still black. If one single white hair appeared, they lost their job as a priest. Perhaps people would swear "by my black hair," meaning they were perfectly able, as a priest, to invoke the name of God. However, Jesus prohibited that. That is not how we make our oaths and covenants, for "you cannot make one hair black or white."

Jesus said that our communication should be simply "Yea, yea and nay, nay." That means if they were going to enter into the covenant being made there, they should just bow their heads and say "yes," or "no."

3 Nephi 12:39–45 — Give Aid to Even Your Enemies

We must help the poor and the needy. Both Matthew 5 and 3 Nephi 12 mention that if someone asks you to give them your coat, you should give them your cloak too; if they ask you to go a mile, go two. People who were on the road may have asked for this kind of help, especially refugees. There were a lot of refugees in the ancient world, where people were constantly being cast out of their communities, and famine would lead them to go seeking food. The children of Israel ended up in Egypt because there was a famine in their land. They went to Egypt to buy wheat from the stores that Joseph had wisely preserved.

Today there are plenty of displaced people. We have refugees right in our own community. They are not hard to find. We need to reach out, we need to look more. The Church does a lot, but it is also up to individuals to do so also.

Some people may ask, why should we bring refugees in when they are our enemies? The Sermon on the Mount passages that I am thinking of in response to that question is "Love your enemies," and not only that, but "Do good to them that despitefully use you." "Turn the other cheek." After all, "God maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good," and we should strive to be like God and his Son.

3 Nephi 12:48 — Jesus Invites Us to Strive for Perfection

It is very significant that Jesus taught the people at the temple in Bountiful to be perfect even as he or his Father which is in Heaven is perfect. What Jesus actually said was, "*I would that ye should be perfect.*" Verbally, this was not so much a commandment, it was not an order, as it was a wish or an open invitation. That we could become as He and His Father are was the greatest, deepest desire of his heart, that we would go on to become fully perfected, fully completed, fully initiated and brought into a complete understanding of who we are and who He is, which can eventually be our great blessing.

At this point, the people had now gotten through the first stage of this instruction; they had gone through what we might call the Aaronic Priesthood part, what was said and written under the old law by those of former times. When we move to the next chapter, in 3 Nephi 13, Jesus gives the road map on the next stage in becoming perfect and finished.

Indeed, the Greek word in the New Testament for perfect is *teleois*, which means “complete, finished, or fully developed.” Nowadays, we think of the concept of *perfect* scientifically or mathematically. For us, something is perfect if it is one hundred percent. But this was a foreign concept in antiquity. In the ancient world, they could not even express a fraction with a numerator greater than one. They had terms for one half, one third, one fourth, one fifth, but if they wanted to say “three-fourths,” they had to say “one-half-plus-one-fourth.” How much less could they imagine the mathematical idea of ninety-five one-hundredths. The ancients did not have the zero either, so, they did not have either of these ideas, of *perfection* and *nothingness*, on a mathematical scale as we do.

Interestingly and instead, there are Greek texts from the mystery religions, such as the Orphics and the Pythagoreans, that all had initiation rituals. When people had been through the initiation, they were called *teliotos*, roughly equivalent to our word “completed.” We can finish a project and say that it is *finished*, but we are not saying that it is *perfect*.

Our modern impression of perfection is more related to a basic philosophical idea of Platonism. Plato posed questions such as, “Do you know what a chair is? How do you know what a chair is? Have you ever seen a perfect chair? Which chair in this room is the perfect chair?” He then could show that there was no such thing as the absolute chair in the material world. So, for them the concept of a chair only existed somewhere out there in the realm of pure forms and ideals. The essential or perfect idea of things thus became idealized and conceptualized. Christianity eventually adopted this idea of Platonism, and with it developed our modern perception of “perfection.” In Hebrew, however, the word that gets translated into “perfect” is *shalom*, which doesn’t mean perfect but means to be *at peace* and *satisfied*. And not just at peace with ourselves, but at peace with God. *Shalom* also describes the relationship that we have with God when we have been through the process of atonement, and we are reconciled and at peace with God.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Does It Mean to Be Perfect?](#) (3 Nephi 12:48),” *KnoWhy* 335 (July 5, 2017). “Instead of expecting people to be ‘without mistake,’ Jesus may have been commanding them to be made whole through making covenants with Him.”

Thomas S. Monson, “[Choices.](#)” *Ensign*, May 2016: “The gift of repentance, provided by our Savior, enables us to correct our course settings, that we might return to

the path which will lead us to that celestial glory we seek. ... As we contemplate the decisions we make in our lives each day—whether to make this choice or that choice—if we choose Christ, we will have made the correct choice.”

3 Nephi 12:48 — Temple Connections to Being Perfect

There are a lot of wonderful, rich nuances to this word “perfect,” and many, many of them have temple connections. There is a subtle undertone of another word for perfect, *teliosis*. This word is found eleven times at the end of Exodus and the beginning of Leviticus to describe an offering that is *consecrated* to God and given in the temple. Giving it to God is your final act, the *teliosis*. Now, bear in mind that the law of consecration is one of the last of the principles in the endowment.

Similarly, if you were to say a phrase like “the presence of God” to one of Jesus’ listeners, they most likely would immediately associate it with the holy of holies in their temple; that was where the presence of God was found. When Jesus said, “Repent of your sins, and come unto me,” they may have thought that has something to do with instruction on how to stand worthily before the face of God. The holy of holies was a perfect cube, 10 cubits by 10 cubits by 10 cubits, and the number ten is not accidental. It was the perfect number to the third power because it represented the state of completeness, or perfection— God’s perfection. Thus, with this word, Jesus was essentially teaching how to be able to enter into the holy of holies. Under the Law of Moses, only the high priest could go into the holy of holies. But upon Jesus’ death, the veil into the holy of holies was rent, and now everyone who is worthy, has the proper priesthood and instruction, and has a covenant relationship is able to enter into the presence of God, as the people gathered in Bountiful fully enjoyed.

3 Nephi 13

As you read this chapter, consider such questions as:

- How long does it take to reach this chapter out loud? (not very long)
- How many “commandments” are found in this chapter? (quite a few statements here are imperatives)
- What is the “ordinary life” meaning of each passage, and what is the “temple significance” of each? (many of these points have two levels)
- In what ways are we presented with a “higher order” of spirituality and righteousness in 3 Nephi 13 than was given in 3 Nephi 12?
- What benefits come from giving to the poor in secret?

- What is the order of prayer taught by the Savior in this chapter? And according to this pattern, what should a person be sure to include in his or her prayers? (do we pray enough for help in overcoming temptations, do we ask enough for forgiveness, and do we praise God enough for his wonderful goodness?)
- Is it fair that we should be forgiven only to the extent that we forgive others?
- How can we teach one another and our children to appreciate fasting, washing, and anointing?
- How does a person “lay up treasures in heaven”? What should be one’s motivation in doing this?
- In what ways is it true that a person cannot serve two masters?
- Since the Book of Mormon directs this statement specifically to the Twelve disciples, what should an ordinary member of the Church make of the passage about the lilies of the field and the Lord giving us food and clothing? What relevance does this part of the Sermon at the Temple have in today’s world and economy?

3 Nephi 13:1–4 — Give Gifts to Honor God

Jesus said that we should give our gifts in secret, not to be seen of men. For this reason, of course, none of us have ever seen a plaque on the wall in the back of our chapels that lists the top ten tithing donors of the ward. It would be outrageous to do that. In some social settings, those who give most command more respect. We understand why that happens, but Jesus taught that the Father, who seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly. Thus, our donations are given completely confidentially.

Even if a bishop wanted to look at the tithing receipts handed out at the end of the year for tax purposes, they may not be a complete record of a person’s tithing, because we can donate directly to the tithing office. The Bishop never gets a report from the tithing office, and tithing settlement is on the honor system. We go to great lengths in the Church to see that such gifts and contributions are given in secret. Those funds are treated as consecrated gifts. They are used by revelation as directed by the Prophet.

3 Nephi 13:5–8 — Jesus Teaches about Prayer

Jesus recommended personal, individual prayer in these Sermons. He suggested that we go into our closets to pray alone. The Greek uses the second person singular “you” (“thou”) in “when you pray.” He adds that we should not use vain repetitions or pray just to be heard.

In Luke 18:9–14, we read of Jesus telling a parable to “certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others,” about a Pharisee and a publican [tax collector], both of whom went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee, stood and uttered words such as, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust,

adulterers, or even as this publican,” and proceeded to list his qualities. The publican, meanwhile, smote upon his breast, saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Jesus was teaching us in Luke, as here in 3 Nephi 13:7, to be humble in our prayers, approaching God sincerely. We shall not be heard for “our much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him.”

Joachim Jeremias, a German theologian (1900–1979) drew attention to the following prayer that is recorded in the Talmud, a prayer that was much like what Jesus is suggesting in the Sermon that we should avoid. It was recorded as Rabbi Nehunia’s prayer of thanks that followed his rather effusive first prayer of praise. The example Jesus gave, then, was taken from a real prayer, or as Jeremias put it, “The prayer was taken from life” (Joachim Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, New York, NY, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972, 143):

I give thanks to Thee, O Lord my God, that Thou hast set my portion with those who sit in the *Beth ha-Midrash* (house of learning) and Thou hast not set my portion with those who sit in [street] corners, for I rise early and they rise early, but I rise early for words of Torah and they rise early for frivolous talk; I labour and they labour, but I labour and receive a reward and they labour and do not receive a reward; I run and they run, but I run to the life of the future world and they run to the pit of destruction (*Berakoth 28b*, in *Babylonian Talmud*).

3 Nephi 13:9–13 — Jesus Taught the Lord’s Prayer

Beyond private prayer, Jesus gave the Lord’s Prayer. It demonstrates how we should pray as a group. Jesus begins: “when *ye* [plural] pray.” Several early Christian texts document the use of sacred group prayers, with the participants standing in a circle around Jesus at the center. The Lord’s Prayer was undoubtedly intended as a pattern or model for group prayers. Jesus probably taught something like it on several occasions and fluidly modified it somewhat each time, as reflected in the fact that no two texts of the prayer are quite the same (see Matthew 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4; and 3 Nephi 13:9–13; Didache 8 offers yet a fourth independent version). The early church father Origen understood the Lord’s Prayer to be only a model or outline, and the rabbis similarly expressed strong prohibitions against reciting a fixed prayer, recommending that in saying a set personal prayer one should vary it a little each time.

It is possible, in the early church, that the person leading the prayer may have said, “Our Father which art in Heaven,” and then the group may have responded antiphonally, “Hallowed be thy name.” The pattern for that prayer was thought to be one of the holy things that should not be cast before the dogs.

In the Sermon at the Temple, the words “give us this day our daily bread” are not found in the Book of Mormon version, but they are in the Joseph Smith Translation. Why might that

be not here in the situation in Bountiful? The word “daily” is an untranslatable word in the Greek. The word is *epiousion*, and a literal translation might be, “Give us this day our bread that is beyond being.” The roots of *epiousion* are *ousion*, a form of *eimi*, which is “to be.” The *epi* means “above” and “upon.” How did it become “daily bread”? Well, the Jerome translation into Latin rendered this as “daily.” And indeed, we eat bread daily, and should give thanks daily. However, the Greek may have been saying something more like “Give us this day our heavenly bread,” or that which is “above” nature or “super” natural. Jesus is that bread, or the new heavenly manna, as he said, “I am that bread of life” (John 6:48).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Is the Lord’s Prayer Different in 3 Nephi?](#) (3 Nephi 13:9) *KnoWhy* 204 (October 7, 2016).

John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 79–82, 206–208.

John W. Welch, “[The Lord’s Prayers](#),” *Ensign*, January, 1976.

3 Nephi 13:28–30 — God Will Clothe Us When We Rely on Him

After speaking about washing, anointing (13:16–18), laying up treasures in heaven (13:19–21), and serving only one master (13:22–24), Jesus concluded this section of the Sermon by speaking in an aside to the twelve disciples, about God clothing them in garments more glorious than Solomon’s. He was making sure that they knew that He would take care of them. However, like most of Christ’s sayings in this Sermon, there are several levels of meaning here. The word for “raiment”, and [what ye shall] “put on,” here in the Greek is *enduo*, and we get the word “endow” from that Greek word. When you are *endowed* you are literally being robed or dressed. One meaning of the verb form of the word is to “invest with clothing,” literally or figuratively. It means to put on clothing, but also means to put on virtues and powers. Here Jesus says, “I will robe you; I will clothe you in garments more glorious than Solomon’s.” This is yet another temple element. Solomon was the great temple builder and king in Jerusalem following the death of his father King David, and as great as Solomon was, he still died. The garment of which Jesus speaks will have eternal value, and if we seek “first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (13:33), all things shall be added unto us.

Shortly after that, in the Sermon (see 3 Nephi 14:12), Jesus said, “This is the law and the prophets.” So, we may conclude that what we are given in 3 Nephi 13 constitutes the higher “prophets” and Melchizedekian material, just as 3 Nephi 12 had taught the “law” or the Aaronic segments.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "New Testament Word Studies—Endow," *Ensign*, April 1993.

3 Nephi 14

Chapter 14 — Preparing to Pass Successfully through the Final Judgment

In these concluding statements, Jesus prepares all of his followers to pass victoriously through God's final judgment.

- He tells us the standard by which we will be judged, namely the manner in which we ourselves have judged others.
- He tells us that we must seek, and ask, and even knock, in order to receive the gifts our Father has prepared for us, for God will not force any person into his presence against their own will.
- He makes it clear that there are only two ways, and two kinds of fruit trees, and that we will be judged by the fruits or our works, and that only those who do the will of the Father and are "known" to Him shall be allowed to enter.
- He admonishes all to build their lives upon "the rock," upon him and his holy mount.

3 Nephi 14:1–2 — Judge Righteous Judgment

Jesus warned people not to judge unrighteously. Of course, in daily life we must make decisions, value judgments, and personal assessments. But we must do this carefully, realizing that if we judge unrighteously, God will ultimately hold us to our own unrighteous standards. Elder Oaks taught:

I have been puzzled that some scriptures command us not to judge and others instruct us that we should judge and even tell us how to do it. I am convinced that these seemingly contradictory directions are consistent when we view them with the perspective of eternity. The key is to understand that there are two kinds of judging: final judgments, which we are forbidden to make; and intermediate judgments, which we are directed to make, but upon righteous principles. ... There is a doctrine underlying the subject of gospel judging. It was taught when a lawyer asked the Savior, "Which is the great commandment in the law?" (Matthew 22:36). Jesus answered: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets [vv. 37–40]."

Thus, Jesus mentions “the law and the prophets” in 3 Nephi 14:12. Judging, in the sense of *deciding*, is not the problem, but the problem is judging incorrectly, in an ungodly fashion, or selfishly, in an unneighborly fashion.

Thus, President Brigham Young wisely taught:

I am very thankful that it is not our province ... to judge the world; if it were, we would ruin everything. We have not sufficient wisdom; our minds are not filled with the knowledge and power of God. ... And we must also acquire the discretion that God exercises in being able to look into futurity, and to ascertain and know the results of our acts away in the future, even in eternity, before we will be capable of judging. (*Journal of Discourses* 19:7–8)

The risk here is that we may want to play it safe and not judge at all, attempting to avoid judging unrighteously, but we are commanded to “judge righteously” (Alma 41:14), so we may not be keeping the whole commandment if we try to play it too safe. We are commanded to help our brother by casting the fleck of sawdust, the “mote,” out of a brother’s eye (13:5), but in order to do so, we must first get the huge wooden ceiling beam out of our own eye or field of vision.

Obviously, we have to be careful. We need to consider how we will be judged and what the final judgment will look like. Notice that the judging principle is similar to the forgiveness concept. If we forgive a lot, we will be forgiven a lot. How we judge is how we will be judged. In the end, combining these principles, Jesus teaches that mercy triumphs over judgment.

Further Reading

Dallin H. Oaks, “[Judge Not and Judging](#),” *BYU Devotional*, March 1, 1998.

3 Nephi 14:6 – Keep Sacred Things Sacred

At this point, Jesus said, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine.” What did He mean by “that which is holy?” What was it that He was comparing to pearls? What pearls and holy things should we be safeguarding? How can we apply this in our day?

The “holy” things in this verse may be referring to a sacred ritual of some kind that is not to be shared indiscriminately with people. Speaking literally, dogs were unclean creatures by the law. The cost of a dog was not be brought into the temple of the Lord for a vow (Deuteronomy 23:18). Things that were unclean, such as flesh torn by beasts, were to be fed to dogs: “neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs” (Exodus 22:31), which made them all the more unclean. But nothing that was holy was to be given to them.

3 Nephi 14:13–23 — Not All Who Say “Lord, Lord” Will Enter the Kingdom of Heaven

Finally, Jesus told us the way back to His Father. There are only two ways. He gave us the strait and narrow path to follow. If we will follow that path, recognize false teachers in sheep’s clothing, come to the gate and knock at His door, and ask for admission, He will open it. The Father will be there to greet us, and we will be allowed to enter in through a narrow entry into His presence. But others who do not follow this path will be told, unfortunately, “I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (13:23).

As King Benjamin taught, the only way we can really know the Lord is by entering into a covenant, taking upon ourselves His name and then serving Him (Mosiah 5:5–13) with all our heart—single-mindedly with full consecration to Him and an eye single to His purposes. Those who “know” the Lord in this relational way will then be allowed to enter into His presence.

Many of these teachings must have had a familiar ring to Jesus’s audiences. The line, “Depart from me ye workers of iniquity,” comes right out of Psalm 6:8, a song that the audience probably sang as temple worshippers. I do not want the Lord to say to me, “Depart ye worker of iniquity,” but instead, “Enter into my presence.”

3 Nephi 14:24–27 — We Must Build on the Only Sure Foundation

Finally, Jesus makes it clear that he expected the Nephites to metaphorically build their houses upon a rock. Would any old rock work as such a great foundation? What rock do you think a Jewish listener may have thought of when Jesus made this statement? They may have thought of Moses striking the rock and water gushing forth (Numbers 20:8–11). They may have thought of the temple mount, the rock of sacrifice and safety (Judges 13:19; Psalms 27:5).

The King James version of this says that the wise man built his house on *a* rock, but the Greek says, *the* rock, not just *a* rock. It says *epi tēn petran*—upon *the* rock. Sometimes we talk about the wise man building his house upon a rock as though any old rock would do. What rock should we be building upon? Helaman 5:12 says, “Remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation.” The Savior and his temple are one. We can build upon the mountain of the Lord, where he is to be found.

3 Nephi 15–16 Overview

In the chapters 15–18, the ministry of Jesus among the people at Bountiful continues throughout the rest of that first day. Here are a few questions regarding the words of Jesus in chapters 15–16:

- How have old things become new without being destroyed?
- How do the words of Jesus in these verses shape the Latter-day Saint view of divine law, of the law of Moses, and the mission of Jesus Christ?
- How is this information important for the world in general and to you in particular?
- Why and what does Jesus speak to the Nephite disciples about God remembering His sheep?
- What can one learn about the relationships between God and Jesus, between God and all His people who are of the House of Israel, and between God and the Gentiles in these verses?
- How does that knowledge strengthen your relationship with the Father and His Son?

While Jesus re-uses several phrases from chapters 11–14 in 3 Nephi 15 and 16, there is more going on in this summation and application than a mere recapitulation. The essence of the Sermon was well understood and clearly applied. The Sermon on the Mount has not been just dropped into the Book of Mormon in a clumsy kind of way. But it belongs here in brilliant ways that Jesus will now review, explicate, and apply. Notice that Jesus reused His own words. Having initially taught them, He now enlightened them, going through in the reverse order, as follows:

In chapter 12, Jesus had introduced four things in this order:

If the salt shall lose its savor (12:13),

Be the light of this people (12:14),

Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets (12:17), and

In me it hath all been fulfilled (12:18).

In chapters 15 and 16, Jesus emphasizes and elaborates these specific points in the opposite order, as follows:

The law in me is fulfilled (15:4),

I do not destroy the prophets (15:6–7),

Ye are a light unto this people, who are a remnant of the house of Joseph (15:12), and

Those who will not turn to Christ will be as salt that has lost its savor (16:15).

Obviously, Jesus knew how to use the structural and rhetorical power of introducing ideas in one order and then going back through those in the opposite order to finish where he started. It was a powerful and an organized way of presenting ideas. It is a recognizable chiasmic structure with which these people were well familiar. The structure may indicate that these passages were most likely not just being casually repeated, but were being embedded deliberately in a holy two-way covenant-making context.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "Worthy of Another Look: Reusages of the Words of Christ," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 1 (2013): 62–72.

3 Nephi 15:1 — Jesus Had Now Taught Everything He Had Taught in the Old World

Jesus said in 3 Nephi 15:1 that he had taught the people in Bountiful "the things" that he taught his disciples in Jerusalem before he ascended into heaven. As previously discussed in the set of notes addressing 3 Nephi 10:18, that ascension was most likely at the end of Jesus's 40-day ministry among his disciples and the many others to whom he appeared. He ascended, waited until the time was right—not very long—and then he appeared in the New World shortly thereafter.

3 Nephi 15:1 — We Should Remember and Do His Sayings

"Therefore, whoso *remembereth* these sayings of mine and *doeth* them" This is building on 3 Nephi 14:24, "Therefore, whoso *heareth* these sayings of mine and *doeth* them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who builds his house upon a rock." But it is not enough just to hear them; now they must be remembered. There is a difference between hearing and remembering. Jesus emphasized, especially in the sacrament prayers, the importance of *remembering* what he taught. Here he says, "If you remember and do them, I will raise you up at the last day." This is a covenantal promise on his part. It was no longer just "if you hear and do them," and build your house, you are building on a rock. The floods will descend and your house will stand. Here Jesus says more than that. If you build your house on this rock—which is the temple or all the temple-related teachings and the covenants that are involved there—then I will raise you up at the last day. You will have the blessings of the holy resurrection and be able to come forth into the presence of God.

3 Nephi 15:9–10 — Those Who Endure to the End Shall Be Saved

This is the resurrected Christ speaking to them, so when He spoke of enduring to the end, He was speaking from His own serious experience and perspective. When He said, “I am the law and light,” it is important to remember here that Jesus Christ had already overcome death and had been resurrected. So He was speaking from a different perspective now in giving these commandments and promises. The people in Bountiful had put their fingers in the tokens of His sacrifice, and so they knew what He was saying. When he said, “I am the law, I have done this,” it seems like a very different perspective from before. Jesus had spoken as one who would be going to do these things. He is now speaking as one truly having even greater power and authority.

3 Nephi 15:21–22 — Other Sheep I Have Which Are Not of This Fold

When Jesus appeared to the Nephites, he told them that they were among the “other sheep” that must be brought into the fold (3 Nephi 15:21). 1 Nephi 5:14 states that Lehi was a descendant of Joseph, and in Alma 10:3, Amulek tells the people of Ammonihah that Lehi was a descendant of Manasseh. The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, sons of Joseph, were among the northern tribes that became “lost.” The Nephites, then, were actually part of the “lost” tribes, and the “other sheep” referred to them, among others. However, the people of ancient Judea understood him “not, for they supposed it had been the Gentiles; for they understood not that the Gentiles should be converted through their preaching” (3 Nephi 15:22). And, just as Jesus Christ remembered these “other sheep,” he will remember all of God’s children, today and forever.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Jesus Say That There Were “Other Sheep” Who Would Hear His Voice?”](#) (3 Nephi 15:21), *KnowWhy* 207 (October 12, 2016).

3 Nephi 16

The careful integration of the Sermon at the Temple throughout the remainder of 3 Nephi provides a means of understanding seemingly obscure parts of the Sermon on the Mount, as has been noted above. But it does something else as well. By quoting His own words so often, Jesus taught His people the central importance of this primary Sermon, which He said (19:8) was to be remembered and used with precision, “nothing varying.” So should it be for us as well.

In this chapter, Jesus next explains that He will go to “other sheep” (16:1) in addition to these people at Bountiful, so that they may all be “one fold and one shepherd” (16:3). He commands the Nephites to write what Jesus has taught them so that it can come forth and

all “may be brought to a knowledge of [Christ], their Redeemer” (16:4). The believing Gentiles will be blessed, but the “fullness” of the gospel will be taken from “the unbelieving Gentiles” who commit all kinds of sins. But if they will repent, they shall yet “be numbered among my people” (16:13). Otherwise, they will be “trodden under foot” (16:15), as the salt that has lost its savor (12:13). Jesus then ended this concluding peroration by saying that, in all of this, the words of Isaiah (in Isaiah 52:8–10) “shall be fulfilled,” and he then quoted Isaiah 52:8–10 (see 16:17–20), and was about to leave.

I suspect that Jesus was thinking at that time that He would discuss Isaiah 52:8–10 further on the next day, as He was already planning to come again to these people on the next day (17:3). And indeed, when Jesus will return, He will pick up (in 3 Nephi 20:32–39) exactly where He leaves off here with Isaiah 52:8–10. That text was very important to the Nephites, having been cited by Abinadi back in Mosiah 15:29–31.

But as Jesus was turning to leave thinking He had already overwhelmed them (quoting Isaiah tends to do that to people), Jesus saw that the people were in tears. Moved with deepest compassion, He magnificently stayed on, as we will learn next in 3 Nephi 17–18.

Further Reading

Dana M. Pike, “‘How Beautiful upon the Mountains’: The Imagery of Isaiah 52:7–10 and Its Occurrences in the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald Parry and John Welch (Provo: FARMS, 1998), esp. 266–272.

Book of Mormon Central, “Why is the Sermon at the Temple Echoed throughout the Rest of 3 Nephi? (3 Nephi 16:6), *KnoWhy* 208 (October 13, 2016).”

John W. Welch, “Echoes from the Sermon on the Mount,” in *The Sermon on the Mount in Latter-day Scripture*, ed. Gaye Strathearn, Thomas A. Wayment, and Daniel L. Belnap (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University and Deseret Book, 2010), 314–315; reprinted as “Reusages of the Words of Christ,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies and Other Restoration Scripture*, 22 no. 1 (2013): 63–71.

3 NEPHI 17–19

John W. Welch Notes



3 Nephi 17 — Study Questions

In this chapter, we may ask ourselves the following questions:

- Why did Jesus teach people things that he says they would not be able to understand?
- What can a person do to understand such things better?
- What does it mean to “ponder upon the things” that one hears in Church settings?
- What do you find especially tender and impressive about the hour of healings here?
- Above all, what would you want the Lord to ask for, if he were to pray for you?
- What gives the Lord his greatest joy?
- What can we learn from the example of love that Jesus has for each child?

3 Nephi 17:6–10 — Jesus, Filled with Compassion, Healed the Nephites

3 Nephi cannot be read or understood outside of a family context. The Nephites came to the temple early in the morning. Men, women, and children were there, and may have come fasting; there would not have been much time for breakfast. For what reason were they there? It may have been some type of sacred gathering called, perhaps by Nephi himself, to determine what was going to happen next. They may have been there to give thanks to the Lord that they had survived. Regardless, they were all there. Everything which the Savior says in 3 Nephi is to men, to women, to grandparents, and to children. It is a message that applies to the entire human family.

When Jesus was about to leave at the end of that first day and cast his eyes about to the people, he saw that their eyes were steadfast on him, and that their eyes were filled with tears and his bowels, his soft inner being, was filled, not just with mercy but with

compassion, or as the German would say, with *Mitleid*, “with suffering together.” Jesus’s words in this tender moment are elegant, personal, and inviting:

3 Nephi 17:6–7

- A Behold, **my bowels are filled**
- B with **compassion towards you**.
- C Have ye any **sick** among you?
- D **Bring them hither**.
- E Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or withered, or deaf, or afflicted in any manner?
- D’ **Bring them hither**
- C’ and I will **heal** them,
- B’ for I have **compassion upon you**;
- A’ **my bowels are filled** with mercy.

Jesus then drew himself close to the people through a series of intimate “I/you” statements. Here we find five such interpersonal elements, the symbolic number of mercy and compassion. These lines emotively and intimately affirm God’s personal relationship to mankind:

3 Nephi 17:8

I perceive that **ye** desire
 that I should show unto **you**
 what I have done unto **your** brethren at Jerusalem,
 for I see that **your** faith is sufficient
 that I should heal **you**.

The Savior was filled with compassion, so he blessed them—those who had been injured or were ill or were blind, lame, or deaf. As they had come before to touch the Lord “one by one” (3 Nephi 11:15), they now came again one by one. The word “one” at the beginning of verse 9 is echoed again in the throng coming forward with “one accord,” and at the end it is found in the individual acts of love as Jesus healed them, “every one”:

3 Nephi 17:9

All the multitude, with **one** accord, did go **forth**

with their sick, and their **afflicted**, and their lame, and

with their blind, their dumb, and their **afflicted** in any manner;

and he did heal them every **one** as they were brought **forth**.

After they had been healed, those people came—the eyes, here again, are an important factor—and bathed his feet with their tears. I can only imagine that this was everyone—men, women and children—wanting and trying to reciprocate the love that he had shown to them.

If we are going to follow the example of Jesus, we too need to minister one by one. It is not enough to have an impersonal food bank say, “Go and get it.” There is more to it than that. We need to care for the individual needs of others, look at what their circumstances are, and love and serve them.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [*“Why Did Jesus Minister to the People One by One? \(3 Nephi 17:21\), KnoWhy 209*](#) (October 14, 2016).

For a discussion of the linguistic and literary elements in the translation of this text, see John W. Welch, [*Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount*](#) (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 179–198.

3 Nephi 17:11–15, 19–20 — Jesus Blessed the Parents

Jesus then wanted to give the people a great blessing. He placed himself in the middle of the crowd, with the children roundabout him, and the parents roundabout them. Before turning to the children, Jesus blessed their parents. He prayed for them, and the text says, “the things which he prayed cannot be written, and the multitude did bear record who heard him” (17:15). The record of the incident says, “No one can imagine the joy that filled our hearts when we heard him pray for us unto the Father” (17:17). Jesus appreciated the sacrifices and devotion of parents. He may have been praying that they would be good parents, to have the strength and wisdom to be able to do what these little children needed to have done for them. He may also have been opening to their view the promises and blessings of the eternal nature of family relationships. As Jesus looked around after blessing them, he said to those parents, “Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full” (17:20).

3 Nephi 17:17–18 — There Is Joy Especially in Temple Work

Psalm 16—which has been called “a prayer for admission to the temple”—declares that “in [God’s] presence is fullness of joy” (Psalm 16:11; cf. 21:6). The “presence” of the Lord was experienced in his holy temple (Psalm 11:4; 2 Chronicles 20:9), and the psalmist equated that presence with a feeling of joy. King David spoke of the joy that he felt at merely witnessing his people’s willingness to help build God’s temple (1 Chronicles 29:17; cf. Ezra 6:16) and the psalmist exclaimed, “a day in thy courts is better than a thousand [anywhere else]. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psalm 84:10). In other words, any type of service in the temple, no matter how lowly the position, will bring a joy that is preferable to being out in the world, amongst the wicked.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why is Joy Associated with Temple Work in the Scriptures? \(3 Nephi 17:17–18\), *KnowWhy* 372 \(October 12, 2017\).](#)

John W. Welch, [“Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon,”](#) *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 1 (2010): 36–55;

Michael D. Coogan, Marc Z. Brettler, Carol Newsom, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, College Edition (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 786–787.

3 Nephi 17:21–23 — The Savior Then Blessed the Children

The Holy of Holies was said by the ancients to be a place of supreme joy. It was characterized by the joy of the Lord, and in this case, here was Jesus and all of these people celebrating with eternal joy. He turned to the children and blessed them one by one, and after that, he turned to the parents and he said, “Behold your little ones.” I do not think he was saying, “Look at your kids. Aren’t they cute?” He was saying in effect, “Behold, *your* little ones; they are now yours in a way that they were not before.” This blessing was confirmed in the presence of God, of Jesus himself, of witnesses, and of angels who then came down and ministered unto the children. It is an amazing thing to imagine the Lord Himself administering such a blessing to the parents and these children whom he loved so completely.

If we look at this afternoon of healing “every one” and at the blessing of the parents and their children “one by one” (17:9, 21) through a temple lens, one can appreciate even deeper why everyone can and must go through the temple one by one and personally do, step by step, the whole sequence of ordinances. And likewise, why we do proxy work for the dead, each of them one by one.

Such ordinances and blessings are individual matters, and covenants are made individually and personally with the Lord. Richard Holzapfel has explained, “According to the Book of Mormon model, ministering often occurs ‘one by one’ as disciples come in contact with the Savior and with one another. In many cases a personal ‘touch’ is a symbolic means of transmitting God’s love and power to an individual.” Elder Holzapfel also said,

Third Nephi, sometimes referred to as the fifth Gospel in Latter-day Saint circles, describes Christ's post-Resurrection ministry to the Nephites in terms similar to those used in the four New Testament Gospels. It emphasizes the individual experiences of the Nephite people with the resurrected Messiah, noting their direct physical contact with as well as His laying on of hands as the symbolic act of transmitting authority and power (Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, “One by One: The Fifth Gospel's Model of Service,” in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Gospel Insights from General Authorities and Religious Educators* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2003), 378–388).

Elder Ronald A. Rasband likewise recalled in a Conference talk, ““Certainly, there is a very profound and tender personal message here. Jesus Christ ministers to, and loves us all, one by one” (Ronald A. Rasband, “One by One,” *Ensign*, November 2000).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Jesus Minister to the People One by One? \(3 Nephi 17:21\), KnoWhy 209](#) (October 14, 2016).

3 Nephi 17:24–25 — Angels Appeared and Ministered to the Children

3 Nephi affirms the reality that angels are in the presence of God and that they serve as messengers who can minister to us. We certainly need and could use that ministering assistance in our world today. Modern theology tends to abstract God, to make him rather impersonal but also to make him lonely. The biblical view of God is not a lonely, impersonal being. God is always surrounded by the hosts of heaven. God works with the archangels, Michael and others. Jesus himself is sometimes even called *the angel of the Lord*. Being an angel carries connotations of purity, of power, of righteousness, and of doing the will of the Lord. In 3 Nephi, the angels must have been rejoicing on this occasion just as they did when they sang at the birth of the Savior, “Glory to God in the Highest.”

In the ancient Israelite temple, in the view of the High Priest, the seraphim surrounded the cubicle of the Holy of Holies. The seraphim were burning, bright beings. We do not know what they were except that they were clothed in white robes and their brightness exceeded all description.

Angels come as messengers. The angel Moroni came with an important message, as did the angel Gabriel. The Lord needs other people, just as we need one another. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a testimony that heaven is made up of people working in unity and harmony. In Jesus' own intercessory prayers in John 17 and later here in 3 Nephi 19, he prays that we can be one with each other, one with him, and one with the Father, as he is. The purpose of that is to tell us the reality and the eternal nature of relationships one with another.

Angels come in the Book of Mormon to serve many purposes. In 3 Nephi, they were not so much to deliver the word of the Lord, because he—the Word of God—was there himself to do that, but angels were there to assist, minister, and to witness. These blessings were given in the presence of God, angels, and all these witnesses.

3 Nephi 18

Here are some study questions for you to consider as you turn now to the next chapter:

- How can a person better appreciate the administration of the sacrament today by noticing the details involved in administering the sacrament in 3 Nephi 18?
- How closely does our administration of the sacrament today compare with the administration of the sacrament here in 3 Nephi 18? See Moroni 4–5.
- What do you learn about prayer from verses 17–25 in this chapter? What do these verses teach people about when and how to pray?
- What should a person do if he or she feels unworthy to partake of the sacrament?
- When and how did these twelve disciples receive what we and they would probably call the Melchizedek priesthood?
- Where does Mormon show us “hereafter that this record is true” (18:37)?
- What did Jesus say to the disciples at this time? See Moroni 2:1–3.
- At the end of his first day with the people in Bountiful in 3 Nephi 18, Jesus instituted the sacrament and gave other instructions to the people. What connections can you find between his words of instruction in that chapter and the teachings in 3 Nephi 12–14?

3 Nephi 18–19 Introduction

3 Nephi has been referred to as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon, and in important ways chapters 18 and 19 are the heart of 3 Nephi, for in these two chapters, the Nephites entered into a new covenantal relationship personally with the Lord. In a way, chapters 18 and 19 can be thought of as the Ark of the Covenant at the very center of the Holy of Holies. There the people enter into a covenant with the Father. And then they

pray to the Father, and they see Jesus Christ as the Great High Priest offering prayers of intercession and blessing.

In ancient Israel, the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem only on the most sacred of days, bringing about purity and eternal blessings for all who would obey and be faithful. That was the peak of Hebrew worship, and a similar, more literal experience stands here at the zenith of the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi, as a spiritual gem and model of purifying preparation, “contains those matters that the Savior himself felt were and are most important to the functioning of his church and absolutely essential for sons and daughters of God to internalize if they want to be exalted.” As I see it, “The book of 3 Nephi lays forth a holy template for how one may dwell forever in the house of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the great and eternal High Priest of all mankind.”

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Has 3 Nephi Been Called the Crown Jewel of the Book of Mormon? \(3 Nephi 17:17\), *KnoWhy* 210 \(October 17, 2016\).](#)

John W. Welch, [“Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon,”](#) *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 1 (2010): 36–55.

Andrew C. Skinner, *Third Nephi: The Fifth Gospel* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2012).

3 Nephi 18:1–9 — Jesus Instituted the Sacrament

As Jesus next administered the sacrament of the bread and the wine to these people, I think some of them would have noted that, previously in their old temples, twelve loaves of what were called shew-bread were placed daily on a table in the “Holy Place,” the room called the *Hekal*. Only the High Priest could eat of that holy bread.

Here, instead of twelve loaves, we have twelve disciples who carry the bread to all 2,500 people who are allowed to enter into this special holy relationship, as they enter into a covenant with the Lord. The bread now represents not just the broken body as it did at the Last Supper and does in the New Testament, but as Jesus says, “Partake of this in remembrance of my body *which I have shown unto you*” (3 Nephi 18:7). For 3 Nephi, the bread of the sacrament represented the substance of the body of Christ—the tangible, physical, resurrected body—that these people only a few hours earlier that day had touched, felt, and worshipped. They had testified that they had witnessed the resurrected Lord, with the signs of his suffering in his hands and feet. The tangible, physical nature of that bread reminded them, and reminds us, of the reality of the Resurrection that will be all of ours through the power of the victorious subduing of death and hell by Jesus Christ.

When I partake of the sacrament and contemplate not only the death and suffering of the Lord, but especially his consequential resurrection, I am transported spiritually into the book of 3 Nephi. That text gives me and all of us the opportunity to go to the Temple in Bountiful, where we, too, can touch the bread of eternal life.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, ["Why Did the Savior Emphasize His Risen Body in the Nephite Sacrament? \(3 Nephi 18:7\), KnoWhy 211 \(October 18, 2016\).](#)

3 Nephi 18:2 – Jesus Invited the People “to Sit”

In 3 Nephi 18:2, Jesus commanded the people that they “should sit.” Why did the Book of Mormon scribes bother to record and tell us that these people were all asked to sit? Is every word in the Book of Mormon there for a purpose? Presumptively, yes, and perhaps even for multiple purposes.

First, Jesus was concerned for their comfort. The multitude had probably been standing for a long time. In chapter 17, the children had been blessed, and the multitude had stood, then knelt, then stood again. The nature of the Savior is such that when people had been kneeling for a prayer for some time, he asked them to rise; when they were tired, he asked them to sit; and when they were hungry, he and his ministering angels provided spiritual and physical food. He was very aware of the needs of the people.

Second, Jesus asked them to sit to put themselves in a position to truly receive the sacrament. Latter-day Saints sit as the sacrament is blessed and passed to the congregation. Some churches have the congregation stand to take the sacrament, and some kneel, often at an altar. One may ask what difference any of that makes. Is there symbolism in being asked to “sit”? When people stand in a group, they are either waiting to be told what to do or watching something happening. People are invited to sit when they are about to be taught, and indeed partaking of the sacrament is a time to be taught. The Nephite multitude needed to be in a situation not only to be taught what they needed to know, but also to learn by the spirit of what they needed to repent.

Third, it was polite for them to wait upon the Lord. In many cultures and literatures, one must be invited to sit. Until then, humble servants stand ready and at attention. Isaiah saw that in the messianic day, Jerusalem would be invited to arise, come forth, and “sit down” (Isaiah 52:2; 2 Nephi 8:25). Alma promised the righteous that they would “sit down in the kingdom of God” (Alma 5:24; 29:17; see also Alma 34:36; 28:15; 3 Nephi 28:10). But kings were seated, and the exalted will “sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Alma 7:25; Helaman 3:30). Seats were designated for chief judges and priests (Alma 50:40;

Mosiah 11:11). Jesus Christ himself “sitteth on the right hand” of God the Father in his power (Moroni 9:26). Sitting, especially in the presence of God, is not something casual.

Fourth, in this connection, the sacrament is also connected to the Passover meal, as it was for the Last Supper in Jerusalem. Not only are certain honors involved in being seated, but also having passed successfully through a certain degree of vulnerability. The Israelites had been through a series of terrible events in Egypt. Being seated at the Passover, protected by the blood of the Lamb, was an indication of now being safe and connected as a family and people. It signified that life was now more stable. Being seated for the Nephites may have been reminiscent of being seated at their Passover Seder and now with the Savior Himself.

3 Nephi 18:3–7— Jesus’ Original Words in Blessing the Sacrament Prayers

On this occasion, Jesus gave the sacramental instructions and injunctions himself. Naturally, he spoke personally and in the first person. So, he told people they did this “in remembrance of *my* body,” and told them to “always remember *me*.” Of course, when we read in Moroni 4, the prayer on the blessing of the bread has been recast into the third person. It says, “remember *him*.” These words of blessing and sanctifying have been switched from the first and second person in 3 Nephi 18 to the third person in Moroni 4–5.

I presume that this change probably happened very early after Jesus’s visit. Jesus administered the sacrament immediately a second time on the next day (3 Nephi 20:3–5), and again on the third day (3 Nephi 26:13). Having seen this done regularly, the disciples soon would have standardized this formality as the elders and priests continued to administer “the flesh and blood of Christ unto the church, ... according to the commandments of Christ,” and wherefore, they said, “we know the manner to be true” (Moroni 4:1). As they then did this, they would have retained the main words and expressions that Jesus himself had used. It would make sense that Nephi, as the chief disciple, decided which of Jesus’ words they were going to use, and how they were going to repeat what Jesus had done in administering the sacrament.

Indeed, most of the important words in our sacrament prayers are already to be found in the words of Jesus recorded in 3 Nephi 18:5–11. We can see how those sacred words have been adjusted grammatically to make clear sense when spoken, as an ordinance, by a representative of Christ in a congregational setting. After these prayers were formalized, they were then faithfully preserved, handed down, and included by Moroni among the treasured priesthood documents and along with three personal letters from his father that Moroni included at the end of the record, in Moroni 2–9, before sealing the plates and burying the record.

As you read the following words in 3 Nephi 18, take note of the bolded words in particular. They are the direct antecedents of our precious sacrament prayers:

⁵Behold there shall one be ordained among you, and to him will I give power that he shall break **bread** and **ble^ss** it and give it unto the people of my church, **unto all those who shall** believe and be baptized in my name. ⁶And this shall ye always observe to do, even as I have done, even as I have broken bread and blessed it and given it unto you. ⁷And this shall ye **do in remembrance of my body**, *which I have shown unto you*. And it shall be a **testimony [witness] unto the Father that ye do always remember me**. And if ye do always remember me **ye shall have my Spirit to be with you**.

⁸And it came to pass that when he said these words, he commanded his disciples that they should take of the wine of the cup and **drink of it**, and that they should also give unto the multitude that they might **drink of it**. ... ¹⁰And when the disciples had done this, Jesus said unto them: Blessed are ye for this thing which ye have done, for this is fulfilling my **commandments**, and this doth **witness unto the Father that ye are willing to do that which I have commanded you**. ¹¹And this shall ye always do to those who repent and are baptized **in my name**; and ye shall do it **in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you**, that ye may **witness unto the Father that ye do always remember me**. And if ye do always remember me **ye shall have my Spirit to be with you**.

Here is a chart that helps trace the words in the sacrament prayers precisely back into the words of Jesus at the ending of his first day among the people of Bountiful:

Moroni 4	3 Nephi 18
O God, <i>the</i> Eternal <i>Father</i> , we <i>ask thee in the name</i> of <i>thy</i> Son, Jesus Christ,	<i>ask the Father in my name</i> (3 Nephi 18:20)
to <i>ble^ss</i> and sanctify <i>this bread</i>	he took of <i>the bread</i> and break and <i>bless^ed</i> it (3 Nephi 18:3)
<i>to</i> the souls of <i>all those who</i> partake of it; that	unto all those who shall believe (3 Nephi 18:5)
<i>they</i> may eat <i>in remembrance of the body</i> of <i>thy</i> Son	this shall ye do <i>in remembrance of my body</i> which I have shown unto you (3 Nephi 18:7)

and <i>witness unto</i> thee, O God, <i>the</i> Eternal <i>Father</i>	it shall be a <i>testimony unto the Father</i> (3 Nephi 18:7)
<i>that they are willing to</i> take upon them	<i>that ye are willing to</i> do (3 Nephi 18:10)
the name of thy Son, and <i>always remember him</i> ,	that ye do <i>always remember me</i> (3 Nephi 18:7)
and keep <i>his commandments which he hath given them</i> ,	that <i>which I have commanded</i> you (3 Nephi 18:10)
that <i>they may</i> always <i>have</i> his <i>Spirit to be with</i> them, Amen.	<i>ye shall have</i> my <i>Spirit to be with</i> you (3 Nephi 18:7)

Moroni 5

3 Nephi 18

O God, <i>the</i> Eternal <i>Father</i> , we <i>ask</i> thee <i>in the name</i> of thy Son, Jesus Christ,	<i>ask the Father in my name</i> (3 Nephi 18:20)
to bless and sanc-tify <i>this wine</i> to the souls of	take of <i>the wine</i> (3 Nephi 18:8)
<i>all those who</i>	<i>all those who</i> (3 Nephi 18:5)
<i>drink</i> of it, that they	they did <i>drink</i> (3 Nephi 18:9)
may <i>do it in remembrance of</i> the <i>blood of thy Son</i> ,	<i>do it in remembrance of my blood</i> (3 Nephi 18:11)
<i>which</i> was <i>shed for them</i> ;	<i>which</i> I have <i>shed for</i> you (3 Nephi 18:11)
that <i>they may witness unto</i> thee, O God, <i>the</i> Eternal <i>Father</i> ,	that <i>ye may witness unto the Father</i> (3 Nephi 18:11)
<i>that they do always remember him</i> ,	<i>that ye do always remember me</i> (3 Nephi 18:11)
<i>that they do always remember him</i> ,	<i>that ye do always remember me</i> (3 Nephi 18:11)
that <i>they may have</i> his <i>Spirit to be with</i> them. Amen	<i>ye shall have</i> my <i>Spirit to be with</i> you (3 Nephi 18:11).

The next time you attend a sacrament service, I hope you will hear Jesus's words in these prayers. As one holding the designated priesthood office pronounces these holy words in Jesus's behalf, we get extraordinarily close to hearing, not only the ritual encasement of the traditionally received sayings of Jesus, but also what one might call the *vox ipsa*, the very voice and the very words as they originated with Jesus.

Further Reading

Welch, John W., "Our Nephite Sacrament Prayers," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1992), 286–289.

For a fascinating and more detailed study of the words which Jesus used in 3 Nephi 18 in blessing the emblems of the sacrament, comparing them with the words we use today in blessing the sacrament, which were revealed first in this dispensation with the translation of Moroni 4–5, see John W. Welch, "From Presence to Practice: Jesus, the Sacrament Prayers, the Priesthood, and Church Discipline in 3 Nephi 18 and Moroni 2-6," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 119–139.

3 Nephi 18:1–11 — Passing the Sacrament in the Church Today

The manner and order in which the Savior administered the sacrament among these people sets the pattern for how we prepare, bless, and pass the sacrament. In all respects, we strive to honor and follow him in detail. We show this by remembering and reverencing his will in this holy observance, if for no other reason than that this was how he did it.

First, he "commanded" his twelve disciples "that they should bring forth some bread and wine" (18:1). While they no doubt turned to their wives to see if they might have any bread at home that would do, this assignment was given as a priesthood function, to see that the proper two items were brought which themselves would become the emblems of his holy presence and atoning power.

After the congregation was seated, Jesus "took of the bread and brake and blessed it" (18:3). Jesus did this himself on that occasion. At the end of his instructions, Jesus would ordain "one" and give him "power" that "he shall break bread and bless it and give it unto the people ... who shall believe and be baptized in my name" (18:5). Under this instruction, one man in the congregation was given priesthood authority to see that this ordinance is properly carried out. In Latter-day Saint wards today, this may be why the bishop is responsible for this ministration. In that role, he symbolizes the One Lord Jesus.

The resurrected Savior then gave the bread "unto the [twelve] disciples" and commanded them to eat first (18:3). When they had eaten, he "commanded that they should give unto

the multitude” (18:5). In Latter-day Saint sacrament services today, as a mark of respect and for other reasons, the presiding officer partakes of the bread and water first, before the rest of the congregation. This is done in that way, basically, because the Lord did it that way. The Savior himself offered the sacrament to Nephi and the other disciples and they took it to the general congregation.

When a congregation sees the Bishop or other presiding leader take the sacrament, they can be assured that their leader is worthy to partake. How would a group of Saints react if the leader did not take the Sacrament? One may ask if that should matter, but it surely would. When a bishop has properly prepared himself and is seen partaking of the sacrament, his flock can have greater confidence to follow his guidance and counsel.

When the presiding person partakes of the sacrament, members are also reassured that proper procedures have been followed and the sacrament emblems have been blessed and dedicated properly. In most services today, a priest holding the Aaronic priesthood, looks to the bishop after saying a sacrament prayer to be sure that the prayer was correctly delivered.

Sometimes, the deacons who pass the sacrament emblems to the congregation wonder to whom should they take it after the bishop has received the sacrament. In fact, once the bishop has received the bread or the water, it does not matter who receives it next. Jesus gave one emblem to the disciples, and then they passed it to the multitude in no specific order. It then goes forward to all equally: to children, women, and men.

The Church normally has a policy that does not allow families to have the sacrament on vacations away from an organized unit. However, during the recent pandemic in which gathering in groups was officially forbidden, Church members are given authorization, under direction from their bishop, for a worthy priesthood holder within the home to administer the sacrament to the family.

As the details in this chapter are reviewed, it becomes clear that the providing of the sacrament to the Nephites was far more than just a nice story. It generated the order of the Church for carrying out the sacrament in the Restored Gospel. As we partake of the sacrament, we reenact not only what the first Apostles experienced with Jesus in Jerusalem at the Last Supper, but also what the Nephites were blessed to experience with the Savior during his visit in Bountiful.

3 Nephi 18:3–16 — When Did These People Accept the Covenant?

There was clearly a covenantal relationship between the Savior and the Nephites, but we might ask where the people themselves accepted to do His will by way of covenant? It is not the same as King Benjamin’s speech in which, when he got to the end, all the people at his temple cried with one voice, saying,

Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which 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).

These covenants happen at baptism and at the temple, but where in the text of 3 Nephi do we see covenant-making occur? It is during the sacrament. And here they covenant to remember Jesus and the body which he has shown them.

I love to point out that in Bountiful they were not told to partake of the sacrament in remembrance of the *broken body* alone—they knew that the bread, and the body, had been broken, and they knew what had happened—but more than that, in 18:7 it says, “This shall ye do in remembrance of my body, *which I have shown unto you.*” The resurrected Lord was offering the sacrament right then, in person. That sacrament was a token of the resurrected reality of the tangible body of Jesus with which he had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven.

When we pick up the bread to partake of the sacrament, we often think of how painful it must have been for his body to have been broken, but the substance of the bread also is tangible material that symbolizes the physical nature of the resurrected body. As people partake of the bread, they are symbolically touching the Lord’s body, just as the people at Bountiful did as they came forward one by one to ascertain the truthfulness of the resurrection and to know the literalness of Jesus’ being there with a body containing the marks of his death. They could testify with certainty that He had overcome suffering and death.

It is indeed a blessing to have access to both the sacrament of the Last Supper, which was the sacrament of the suffering and death of the Lord, and the sacrament in 3 Nephi, which is the sacrament of the Lord’s resurrected body. Just as the Bible and Book of Mormon go hand in hand, the Latter-day sacrament symbolizes both the broken body of the Last Supper and the risen body that the Savior revealed to the Nephites.

3 Nephi 18:4, 5, 9 — What Does “They Were Filled” Mean?

A frequently-asked question about 3 Nephi 18:4–5, 9 is, “What does ‘they were filled’ mean when the disciples and the multitude had partaken of the emblems of the sacrament? Does it mean literally, physically satisfied, spiritually fulfilled, or something else?” Although the exact meaning of the word “filled” is not given here, in 3 Nephi 20:9, during the second day of the visit and the second administration of the sacrament, the record makes this clearer:

Now, when the multitude had all eaten and drunk, behold, they were filled *with the Spirit*; and they did cry out with one voice, and gave glory to Jesus, whom they both saw and heard.

The Nephites were filled with the spirit and with testimony through partaking of the emblems of the sacrament. The participants cried out with one voice and gave glory to Jesus. The Savior had predicted that very effect, in 20:8:

And he said unto them: He that eateth this bread eateth of my body to his soul; and he that drinketh of this wine drinketh of my blood to his soul; and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled.

The intended meaning is that they were spiritually fed. However, when a person is filled with the spirit, they may also be satisfied physically and their emotional yearnings and material concerns can be reduced. For example, during a fast, pangs of hunger may not weigh one down because there is a sense of different fullness and greater satisfaction. In John 6:35, Jesus taught that he is “the bread of life”: “And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” Although the text refers to the spiritual nutrition, then, it can be understood and applied in reference to being fully satisfied in other ways too.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Alma Bless and Thank God After Eating?](#) (Alma 8:22),” *KnoWhy* 115 (June 16, 2016).

3 Nephi 18:15–21 — Instructions on Prayer

In these verses, the Savior taught the disciples and the multitude when and how to pray. He makes several important points.

In 3 Nephi 18:15, Jesus began by teaching the twelve disciples to *pray always* to avoid temptation. Under the old Jewish law, the faithful prayed three times a day. As long as they recited the morning, mid-day, and night prayer, that was enough. That they should pray always was a new rule, in which prayer became a continual course, not just a three-times-a-day event. Then in 3 Nephi 18:18, he turned to the multitude and reiterated that same guidance, “Ye must watch and pray always lest ye enter into temptation.”

Both statements, to the disciples (verse 15) and to the multitude (verse 18), begin with the words “Verily, verily I say unto you.” This introductory expression indicates the importance of the succeeding words, drawing attention and alerting the audience to the meaning. Here, the words “verily, verily” are repeated, and the emphasis, to “pray always lest ye enter into temptation,” is thereby doubled.

The admonition recalls the section in the Lord's Prayer in 3 Nephi 13, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Specifically asking to avoid temptation probably should be a part of every prayer. Whereas it is important to thank the Father and ask for blessings, Jesus advised his followers to pray constantly in order to defeat Satan, which is only possible with the Lord's help.

In 3 Nephi 18:18, Jesus next taught that they should always pray *to the Father in his name*. Approaching the Father in prayer throughout the day would keep them aligned, so to speak, with the North Star. Jesus was offering here to unite them with the Father through His name. That would have been something new for them. Had they been praying in the name of Jesus that way before? I do not think so. We do not have much indication of the way they prayed, but when you see Alma or Nephi praying, they are mostly praying to God and to the Lord, but not mentioning the name of Jesus.

In 3 Nephi 18:20, we are also taught that in prayer, the asker must believe that he will receive, and what is asked must be right. "Ask and ye shall receive," is frequently quoted in its simplest form, but "whatsoever ye shall ask ... if it be right, believing that ye shall receive it" is somewhat more precise. One example of this is found in 3 Nephi 19:9, in which the people prayed for what they most desired, and their righteous desire, the gift of the Holy Ghost, was given after they were baptized. Also, in 3 Nephi 19:24, the Nephites prayed "without ceasing, and they were filled with desire." As they continued to pray to receive guidance, their hearts were transformed and they desired only what was right.

The more intently one prays "without ceasing," the more one's will becomes conformed to the will of God. When one desires what the Father desires, prayers will be answered. However, this will not happen without continuous heartfelt prayer.

In 3 Nephi 18:21, the people were next instructed to pray in their families. They should not just pray at church, and of course not on a Rameumptom. Jesus commanded them—and us—to pray *in our families*; we must pray at home, and Jesus added, "unto the Father, always in my name"—again that direction. To this, Jesus added, "that your wives and children may be blessed."

Should asking, "Heavenly Father, please bless my wife and my children" be a part of prayer, or does it mean, "Have family prayer so that they will all be blessed"? Probably both. Our Heavenly Father is waiting to give blessings that are conditional upon our asking, and Jesus taught that blessings await the families who pray together.

There is nowhere in the Bible that talks about praying in the family. Nor is family prayer taught anywhere in the Doctrine and Covenants. So why do we have family prayer? Precisely because Jesus tells us to pray at home, to pray in our families. This is an

important instruction. Latter-day Saints strive to follow this scripture and have family prayer at least once daily. This text is so easy to glide over, but this is an essential part of the foundational order of the Church. The family is the basic and most fundamental unit of mortal life and of celestial glory.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [*“Why Does Jesus Say that ‘Ye Must Watch and Pray Always’? \(3 Nephi 18:15, 20-21\),” KnoWhy 344*](#) (July 26, 2017).

3 Nephi 18:28–33 — Not Allowing People to Unworthily Partake of the Sacrament

The Twelve are next told that they need to watch for people who are partaking of the sacrament unworthily. The Savior is talking to those who have keys to make that determination. For the ordinary members of the church, that is not our business to worry about this concern. That is for the leaders of the church or of the ward to take care of.

In verse 30, we are told not to cast such people out. Why is it that we do not cast them out? What are we hoping for? We want them to repent and continue to build faith, so, the next thing we do is continue to minister to that person. If they persist, there is instructions for that too. In verse 31, Jesus said, “If he repent not, he shall not be numbered among my people, that he may not destroy my people ...” But we are, even then, to hold out the opportunity for repentance as long as someone is willing to cooperate and try to come through with the process.

Previously in verse 22, Jesus had said, “Ye shall not forbid any man from coming unto you,” except under these guidelines. He pointed out also, in verse 25, “Ye see that I have commanded that none of you should go away, but rather have commanded that ye should come unto me, that ye might feel and see; even so shall ye do unto the world.” Jesus went out of his way to have 2,500 people do that, so he could make a point that, if at all possible, he does not want to lose or exclude anyone.

Brigham Young was once asked how long the Saints would do vicarious ordinances for the dead. His answer was, “The work will go on until every soul that can be saved has been saved.” It is not over when you die. It is not over until it is over, and that may be a long, long time. We will always continue to minister. I think that is the message here.

3 Nephi 18:37 — Authority to Give the Gift of the Holy Ghost

Later, in Moroni 2, Moroni recorded onto the permanent record the actual words which Jesus spoke on that occasion to his Twelve Disciples. There in a very holy moment, they were given the power to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost. The sequence and timing in which the twelve disciples received these two powers offers an amazing insight. At the beginning of the first day, Jesus ordained them and gave them the power to baptize, the

power to cleanse with water. At the end of that day he gave them a second power—the power to cleanse by fire and with the Holy Ghost.

The words of Christ, which he spake unto his disciples, the twelve whom he had chosen, as he laid his hands upon them— And he called them by name, saying: Ye shall call on the Father in my name, in mighty prayer; and after ye have done this ye shall have power that to him upon whom ye shall lay your hands, ye shall give the Holy Ghost; and in my name shall ye give it, for thus do mine apostles. Now Christ spake these words unto them at the time of his first appearing; and the multitude heard it not, but the disciples heard it; and on as many as they laid their hands, fell the Holy Ghost (Moroni 2:1–3).

This was not just ordination to the priesthood in general; this was being given the power to give the gift of the Holy Ghost. These men had already been given the power and authority to baptize. That happened back in 3 Nephi 11. We learn something there too, if you are given the priesthood, it does not mean that you have authority to perform all of the ordinances of the priesthood. How do we know that? The example in the Book of Mormon answers that question.

I once explained to a Catholic priest in Germany that we have the Aaronic Priesthood or the Levitical, which is one order, and we have a second order called the Melchizedek Priesthood. To which he said, “Oh that is interesting. How do you get that idea?” I said, “In Hebrews chapter 7, it talks about the two priesthoods, but it does not make it clear that those two priesthoods are still important today, and that they are separate, and so you do not get them both all at once.” He thought that sounded reasonable. But more than that, I mentioned that we have authority for that teaching in the Book of Mormon. He did not find that binding on him, but he nodded with understanding how we utilized both the Bible and the Book of Mormon in reaching that significant doctrine.

While reading and translating 3 Nephi, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery became aware that they did not have priesthood power. Right after they had translated 3 Nephi 11, they went to the banks of the Susquehanna River and there received the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood under the hands of John the Baptist. I am sure that they were thinking much the same thing when they came to the end of chapter 18. There too they would have realized that they had not yet received that additional, higher authority and that there was thus more yet to come. In fulfillment of the words that John the Baptist himself had given them, Peter, James and John soon would restore through Joseph and Oliver that power—the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Jesus's first day in Bountiful ended with this one last event. It was a private event for just the Twelve. The multitude did not even hear the words that Jesus spoke in verse 37. In verse 36, he touched all of the Twelve. I think this means that he put his hands upon them. Then the cloud came over them, and he ascended into heaven. Later, in Moroni 2, we learn what he said as he gave them on that occasion the power to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost.

3 Nephi 18:38–39 — Jesus Ascended into Heaven

In this holy envelopment, the twelve disciples were able to see and testify that Jesus ascended back into heaven. They had seen him come down, and they testified that he had returned to that holy place. It would have been very assuring to know that he had not just vanished, but that he had gone deliberately. He had not abandoned his people, but promised that he would come again. The following day, the disciples were able to bring those people and many more back together at the temple to begin carrying out the instructions that Jesus had given them—to baptize them and to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost. They then had the blessing of seeing his presence again and more fully as he appeared on the second day.

3 Nephi 19

These study questions pertaining to this chapter are in reference to the second day of Jesus's extended visit. Select two or three of these that resonate with you. How would you answer them:

- Why do you think we are told that they all returned to their homes?
- How did the Nephites know that Jesus would come back the next day?
- How did they know where he would appear to them?
- Do you notice any interesting things about the names of these twelve men?
- What is significant about the people dividing into twelve bodies? (19:5)
- Why is it important that they prayed (as we pray) “in the name of Jesus”? (19:6–7)
- How could all the twelve speak the same words that Jesus had spoken? (19:8)
- What did the twelve want most of all? (19:9) and how did they receive it? (19:10–14)
- What did the multitude see when the twelve were filled with the Holy Ghost?
- Who was commanded to kneel down on the earth? (19:16)
- What recognitions are embedded in calling Jesus “Lord” and “God”? (19:20)
- Why did Jesus “need” to pray to the Father? (19:19)
- What can one learn in 3 Nephi 19 about the Godhead? (19:19–23)
- For what was Jesus thankful in this prayer?
- What did Jesus ask for in this first prayer?

- How do the words “and they were filled with desire” strike you? (19:24)
- How does 19:25 compare with the Priestly Blessing in Numbers 6:24–26?
- What do the words “white” and “whiteness” say to you? (19:25)
- What did Jesus pray for in this second prayer?
- How many times does the word “purified” and “faith” appear in this prayer?
- Who heard this prayer of Jesus? (19:33)
- What might Jesus have prayed for in this third prayer?
- How often did ancient people pray? How often should we pray?
- Why were such great things seen and heard by the Nephites?

3 Nephi 19:1–3 — The People Spread the Word of Christ’s Ministry

After that first tremendous day was over, I imagine that the Twelve went home, attended to their families, and then met together again. They may have conferred together all that night and recorded the words which Jesus had spoken, so that they could deliver them again the next day. They would have learned the difficulty of being a servant, that it takes work through the lonely midnight hours to be able to render that kind of service to the people which the Lord wanted them to do.

What is unmistakable in 3 Nephi is that the Savior calls on everyone. It does not matter who they are, he wants them to “repent and come unto me” and to be one with him. The disciples are told to go out and bring as many as they can the next day. I imagine there were plenty who said, “I cannot come, I am not worthy,” or maybe “I am too skeptical.” But the crowd that assembled the second day was even larger than that on the first day, and those were people who responded to the call. They came when someone invited them and said, “Please come; you will not be disappointed.”

The Twelve were directing this; probably sending people out in various directions, “You go here, you go there.” We can suppose that anybody who was close by the temple could not have missed what was going on, so when it says “abroad,” it was probably referring people out in the outlying areas, maybe in the farmlands, who would not have been aware of what was going on. They wanted to bring in as many as possible.

3 Nephi 19: 4–35 — Who Was the Recordkeeper on This Great Occasion?

Who was the recordkeeper in 3 Nephi? Probably Nephi, the high priest, I would say. When his father left, he handed over to Nephi all the sacred records. He had been trained as a recordkeeper. On a later visit, Jesus asked Nephi to bring the record that had been made of Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecy. Can you imagine the Savior proof-reading your work and saying, “You know, you are pretty good at this, but you missed something”? Of course, Nephi fixed it right away. He was the recordkeeper. While we do not know whether the words of Jesus were recorded in real time, they were kept diligently and promptly.

Even if his words were not written as they were spoken, the disciples no doubt remembered it soon enough that night. The ancient people had very good memories because their minds were not as cluttered as our minds are today. They were in the habit of memorizing, and it was not uncommon in ancient pedagogy for a teacher to simply talk and then the students would recite what the teacher had said. Today, we have recording devices, and because of that, we are lazy. Without that technology, people actually listened and remembered, *but* they would write it down as soon as possible so that it would be available accurately. That is probably why we have exactly the words that Jesus spoke here in 3 Nephi.

3 Nephi 19:9 — The Disciples Desired and Prayed for the Holy Ghost

In discussing the section for 3 Nephi 18:15–21, we mentioned this verse as an example of when the people prayed for what they most desired, and their righteous desire, the Holy Ghost, was given after they were baptized. How does that strike you?

We pray often for many things, but why do we not pray for this gift a little more often? Why would we not count that as the thing which we desire most of all in our prayers? Are we complacent because we have been given the gift of the Holy Ghost? Do we sometimes just take it for granted, or do we need to consciously seek it?

What caused them to pray for this very thing so quickly? Since they could pray for whatever they wanted, they could have prayed that the Savior would return to them. They could have prayed for peace with the Lamanites, or any number of things. However, they prayed for that which they desired the most, the Holy Ghost. It is the key to knowledge, goodness, and joy.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [*“Why Is 3 Nephi Important for Understanding the Godhead? \(3 Nephi 19:23\), KnoWhy 213 \(October 20, 2016\).*](#)

3 Nephi 19:11–14 — The Twelve Disciples Were Baptized in the New Dispensation

When they took upon them the name of Christ, they became like the high priests in the old temple, for the high priest wore on his forehead, literally, the name of Jehovah, and there was a promise in Numbers 6:27 that the Lord’s countenance would smile upon his people and that he would put his name upon them. This was an important step in the progress of these disciples, as they took the name of God upon themselves and enter into a covenant to keep these promises.

This meant that they had entered into a covenant to serve only one God, and especially not Mammon. This promise caused them, at the end of 3 Nephi, to put all their property together, and to have all their things in common. They did this because they had made a

covenant that they would consecrate whatever the Lord had given to them. They had made a promise that their eyes would be single to his glory. They had covenanted that they would lay up treasures in heaven.

At the end of 3 Nephi, Jesus asked what the disciples would like: “What is it that ye desire of me, after that I am gone to the Father?” Three of them said that they would like to stay on this earth and teach more people. They were willing to offer all that they had to have a fullness of joy with Heavenly Father. The other nine wanted to stay with the Lord, and we understand that. However, the three who stayed behind, postponing their own spiritual progress in that way in order to be servants, were also keeping the covenant that they made to serve, to minister, and to continue to enjoy the blessings of seeing people helped as they come unto Christ.

3 Nephi 19:19–23, 27–29 — Jesus Offered an Intercessory Prayer

David Paulson has written beautifully and compellingly on the topic of Jesus’ special prayer which was given as Jesus interceded in our behalf by pleading with the Father. We learn much about the nature of the Godhead by watching Jesus interact with his Father and how he prays to God and what he prays for. It gives us the earliest Latter-day Saint document pertinent to the Godhead. To us it is not so mysterious.

Here you have a fully represented concept about God and Jesus, in a beautiful text that we are perfectly comfortable with. We understand this; it seems so obvious. But there are many historians who think that Joseph Smith did not understand the nature of the Godhead until much later, and that it was not even really until Nauvoo that he began to really articulate things which we understand as being essential to the doctrine of the Godhead. People who wonder about that have perhaps not read 3 Nephi carefully enough. David Paulson argues that there are several features of the relationship between the Father and the Son that are represented here as separate but united beings. This text presents a very powerful statement of the understanding of the Godhead as three separate beings perfectly united in purpose.

Theologians David L. Paulsen and Ari D. Bruening, in fact, have identified five different ways 3 Nephi depicts the Father and the Son as separate, individual beings.

Ways Father and Son are Differentiated in 3 Nephi

Godhead Differences	3 Nephi
1. Christ Speaking of God as “My Father”	3 Nephi 14:21 ; 27:16 ; 28:10
2. Christ Praying to the Father	3 Nephi 17:14 ; 18:19 ; 19:19–20
3. Christ Obeying the Father	3 Nephi 15:14 ; 16:16
4. Christ’s Ascension to the Father	3 Nephi 15:1 ; 17:4 ; 18:27 ; 26:15
5. Other Ways Father and Son are Distinguished	3 Nephi 11:35 ; 15:24 ; 16:6 ; 20:26

While several passages in 3 Nephi speak of the oneness of the Father and the Son ([3 Nephi 11:27, 36](#); [20:35](#); [28:10](#)), Jesus clarified that the nature of this oneness especially when he prayed with His disciples, where He prayed that His disciples may be one with Him in the same ways “as” He and the Father are one ([3 Nephi 19:23, 29](#)). Paulsen and Bruening thus conclude that “3 Nephi contains extensive and persuasive evidence that Jesus Christ and his Father are distinct persons” with an exalted “oneness” that functions most vividly in terms of their uncompromising state “of purification, alignment, and divine in dwelling within a community.”

Taking this another step in this direction, Robert L. Millett once asked this provoking question: If God and Jesus are existentially one being, “why did Jesus need to pray?” His answers are helpful, as we stretch to conceive the matchless harmony that exists between the members of the Godhead:

To begin with, during his mortal ministry he set aside much of the power and glory he had enjoyed before he came into the world (John 17:5). Paul wrote that Jesus “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:7–8). Other translations render the above passage as “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (New American Bible; see also New Revised Standard Version; emphasis added). By choice Jesus did not turn the stones to

bread, although he certainly possessed the power to do so (Luke 4:3–4). By choice Jesus did not cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple and anticipate divine deliverance, although he had the power to do so (Luke 4:9–12). By choice our Lord did not call down legions of angels to deliver him and his in the Garden of Gethsemane, although he indeed possessed the power to do so (Matthew 26:51–54). And by choice the Master of ocean and earth and skies did not come down from the cross and bring an end to the pain and suffering, the ignominy and irony of his crucifixion and death, although the power to do just that was within his grasp (Matthew 27:39–40; Luke 23:39).

By setting aside power and glory, he was able to know mortality in its fulness, to know by experience what it felt like to be hungry, thirsty, tired, snubbed, ridiculed, excluded; in short, he chose to endure the throes and toils of this estate so that he might then be in a position to succor his people (Alma 7:11–13; D&C 62:1). Thus when he felt the need for reassurance, he prayed to his Father in Heaven. When he needed answers or perspective, he prayed. When he needed the sacred sustaining influence of the Father in his darkest hours, he prayed, prayed earnestly. Because of the Spirit, which conveys the mind of God (1 Corinthians 2:16),¹⁶ he was in the Father, as the Father was in him. They were one...

Jesus prayed to the Father because he loved the Father. Jesus prayed to the Father because it was a reverential way of speaking to his Father, who is forever worthy of the reverence of his children. Jesus prayed to the Father because they enjoyed communion. That word communion is an especially meaningful word, one that is worth much reflection. President David O. McKay observed that spirituality is “the consciousness of victory over self, and of communion with the Infinite.” Jesus possessed perfect spirituality because he had overcome the world (John 16:33; D&C 101:36) and because he enjoyed perfect communion with the Father. This pattern is a call to you and me, is it not, to live our lives in such a manner that we cultivate the cleansing and revelatory benefits of the Spirit more and more; that we yield our hearts unto God (Helaman 3:35) and have an eye single to his glory (D&C 88:67); that we allow our consciences to be strengthened, our judgment to be refined, and our desires to be educated.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Is 3 Nephi Important for Understanding the Godhead? \(3 Nephi 19:23\), *KnoWhy* 213 \(October 20, 2016\).](#)

David L. Paulsen and Ari D. Bruening, “The Social Model of the Trinity in 3 Nephi,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book, 2012), 191–233, see pages 193, 204, 214.

Ari B. Bruening and David L. Paulsen, “The Development of the Mormon Understanding of God: Early Mormon Modalism and Early Myths,” *FARMS Review of Books* 13, no. 2 (2001): 109–169.

Robert L Millet, “The Praying Savior: Insights from the Gospel of 3 Nephi,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book, 2012), 142–144.

3 Nephi 19:25 — The Disciples Appeared as Holy as the Savior

Here in 3 Nephi 19, the twelve disciples who are ordained by Jesus have their garments shining even as brightly as angels. That is not a trivial point. That shining glory is a foreshadowing, a guarantee, a down-payment of the great eternal glory that they and we all can eventually have in the Celestial Kingdom. These angels become not just messengers in word, but physical messengers, embodiments of the promise of glory that all the righteous who come unto Christ and obey his words and keep his commandments and enter eternally into his presence by doing His will can have.

3 Nephi 19:25 – The Priestly Blessing

What does 3 Nephi 19:25 have to do with the priestly blessing in Numbers 6:24–27? Not too long ago, a little silver scroll was found in Jerusalem in a tomb that was excavated. A road crew was digging a highway and excavating a road and uncovered a burial chamber. In the excavation, a small silver scroll was discovered, which had been worn as an amulet around the neck of a young woman who had been buried. The date of the tomb and the script on this scroll was from the 7th Century BC, and on it, written in tiny letters, were the words of the Aaronic Priesthood blessing in Numbers 6:24–27.

This discovery becomes the earliest biblical text that we have. It is verbatim; it is exactly the same as this Hebrew text that has come down to us. This would have been the same text that was on the Brass Plates. And this makes people now rethink much about the dating of that priestly text in particular, but other texts like it as well.

This text, this blessing, was spoken twice every day in the temple in Jerusalem at the time of the daily offering. Morning and night after the offering was given, the high priest would bless all the people. This is a good reason to think that this second-day gathering is again happening at the temple. We do not know what the Savior said. The text does not give us the words, but in 3 Nephi 19:24–25, it says “and it came to pass that Jesus blessed them.” What kind of words would he have used? Here is the traditional high priestly blessing:

Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them. (Numbers 6:23–27)

There are important echoes in the text of 3 Nephi 19 with these words. The Nephite record says: “His countenance did smile upon them and the light of his countenance did shine upon them.” The face of God is emphasized three times in this text. The face, the countenance, is what the ancient blessing was all about: That you may see his face, that he will smile upon you with his face of approval, that you will know that he loves you, that he accepts you. That is the effect of the blessings of the priesthood and of these ordinances, that when they are effective in your life, you will know that the Lord smiles upon you, that he loves you, and that he can and will be gracious and good to you. What greater blessing could there be?

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Jesus Allude to the Priestly Blessing in Numbers 6? \(3 Nephi 19:25\), *KnoWhy* 212 \(October 19, 2016\).](#)

3 Nephi 19:31–34 — Jesus Prays in Language That Can’t Be Written or Spoken

Are you glad that there are things left out of this record? A little later it will even get to the point where the record says that there are things that cannot even be uttered. When we go to the temple, holy things are usually things that we cannot fully communicate to other people, even if we wanted to and were allowed to. Partly, it just that it is impossible to communicate them, but also because they are so sacred that we are under an obligation not to communicate them further.

I am glad that everything is not spilled out here in the open. When it comes to sacred things, there are things that you should only learn through sacred instruction and by personal revelation in an interwoven context that circumscribes and interrelates all truths into a harmonious whole. As we get a glimpse of what is here in 3 Nephi 19, this is what is available to us in the temple, being taught there by sacred experiences, by the Holy Ghost, and through revelation. Then you can truly appreciate the eternal doctrines and everlasting principles of the Father. If these were simply told to us, we would not appreciate them. We must know in an abundance of ways the source from which they spring.

3 NEPHI 20–26

John W. Welch Notes



3 Nephi 20:1–9 — The Multitude Is Miraculously Fed

In 3 Nephi 20:1–9, Jesus miraculously administered bread and wine to the multitude. Consider the following questions:

- How long had they been kneeling down? Perhaps continuously beginning at 19:17?
- How was this bread and wine different from the bread and wine used in 18:1? See 19:6–7.
- Does this event suggest that the feeding of the thousands in Galilee was also sacramental?
- How did this ordinance affect the people? See 20:9. How can the sacrament have the same effect on people today?

After all the spiritual manifestations, repeatedly kneeling in steadfast prayer, being baptized and “encircled about as if it were by fire” (19:4), hearing and seeing Jesus pray unto the Father in their behalf and smile upon them (19:30), and being filled with the Spirit of the gift of the Holy Ghost which they had been given (20:9), and after “they had all given glory unto Jesus” (20:10), the people were prepared to receive his teachings of the second day.

3 Nephi 20:10–22:17 — The Father’s Covenant with All Israel

Jesus then said unto all the people gathered that morning, “Now I finish the commandment which the Father hath commanded me concerning this people, who are a remnant of the house of Israel” (20:10). Jesus had been commanded to tell this people that they were part of God’s covenant people, that God had not forgotten them, that he would never forget them, that they would be gathered and blessed with all the blessings he had promised.

In some ways this is a simple message, and it runs throughout chapters 20–26. In the Lord’s due time, righteous remnants of covenant keepers will be organized to spiritually build a new temple Jerusalem (20:22). It will be beautiful and safe beyond words (22:8–

17). Its purpose will be to prepare parents, children, ancestors, and posterity to welcome the final coming and reigning of the Lord (24:1; 25:2, 6). “A sign” will be given by which people in the future will know that this “work of the Father hath already commenced” in fulfilling all his promises to the covenant house of Israel (21:1, 2, 7). That sign is the beginning of “a great and a marvelous work” (20:9), promised by Isaiah and foreseen by Micah, of the coming forth of the Nephite record (20:2–7).

While simple in essence, human life is also complex. And, most certainly, this complicated block of scripture is extremely difficult to follow. It is certainly one of the most challenging sections in the Book of Mormon. Jesus even said to the people that he knew they would have a hard time understanding these things (17:2), and thus he first prepared their leaders (3 Nephi 15–16), healed and blessed them with his loving kindness (3 Nephi 17), obtained their promise that they would remember him always and keep his commandments (3 Nephi 18), and saw that they had truly received the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 19), and then the stage was set on which he could expound these things, which had long been prophesied, and could put them all into eternal perspective.

This text has been called by Victor Ludlow “The Father’s Covenant People Sermon.” Others call it the “Covenant Sermon” for short. It is clearly all about God’s everlasting “covenant.” That word (either covenant or covenanted) appears 17 times here, distributed throughout the text. Interestingly, the word *covenant* never appears in the plural here. This Sermon focuses only on one covenant, the Father’s covenant with his people through the “seed” of Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (20:25, 27), promising eternal posterity and a place of everlasting inheritance, through the preaching of “the fulness of [Christ’s] gospel,” which “shall be preached unto them, and they shall be believe” that Jesus Christ is “the Son of God” (20:30–31).

In a way, this sermon on Day 2 balances the Sermon at the Temple given by Jesus on Day 1 (in 3 Nephi 12:1–16:20). It picks up on Day 2 (see 20:11) with a quote from Isaiah 52:8, which is where Jesus had left off the day before (quoted in 16:18). But the discourse on Day 1 was largely focused on personal righteousness. Here on Day 2 the subject of attention shifts to the collective well-being of the entire covenant people, in all of its scattered branches.

Notice also that on Day 1, as Jesus spoke the words found in 3 Nephi 15:11–16:20, he addressed his remarks only to the twelve disciples whom he had chosen, beginning to explain to them things about the great covenant that he had entered into with his people Israel (see 15:11). But he held off. Here, in 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5, he resumes speaking about that same subject, but now he explains this subject to the entire multitude. As you look at the similarities and differences between these two presentations, see if the difference in

audience helps you better understand what Jesus says here and what the meaning and the remaining future fulfillment of this covenant might be.

And here, on Day 2, the text becomes very intimate in another way. Now Jesus, as Jehovah, speaks even more directly than before on behalf of the Father.

In multiple instances, the resounding use of first-person pronouns here in 3 Nephi 20–21 personalize this powerful text: “I will establish,” “I made,” “I will be,” “I will return,” “I will remember,” “I would give,” “I shall declare,” “I will cut off,” “I will pluck,” “I also will be in their midst,” “I will go before them,” etc. This use of first-person divine declarations rivals Leviticus 26, the other great example in scripture of the personal delivery by God of his words of promises and assurances given directly to his covenant people.

Throughout this extended discourse, it is clear what Jesus’s main theme is. It is all about the *covenant* of his *Father* with his *people*. In 3 Nephi 20–21, the word “Father” saliently appears 39 times, the word “people” appears 35 times, and “covenant” is there 20 times.

Amidst the explanations given in this covenant sermon, Jesus uses several key words and memorable expressions. Watch for these interlocking pieces, especially as they are sometimes used more than once. For example, what can be understood here about the meaning of:

- “a New Jerusalem” (20:22; 21:23)
- “A prophet ... like unto [Moses]” (20:23)
- The command to not touch “that which is unclean” (20:41)
- a “marred” servant (20:44; 21:10)
- The “sign” (21:1, 2, 7)
- a “great and marvelous work” (21:9)
- “my church” (21:22) and “my people” (21:23, 24, 26, 27)
- “the God of the whole earth” (22:5)

In general, as you read these chapters, ask yourself on each page, “What do I learn here about Jesus Christ? About the Father and the Godhead? About the meaning of otherwise opaque prophetic words of Isaiah and Micah? About what the Father would have you do in your life and in this world today?”

A Slight Word of Caution: Chapter Breaks Can Be Confusing

One thing to be aware of in working through these difficult chapters is that both the original and the current chapter breaks are confusing. The printers must have struggled as they divided this text into chapters. Our modern chapter divisions are very different from the chapter breaks supplied in 1830 and used in the 1837 and 1840 editions as well.

That earlier division scheme is very hard to make sense of. For example, Chapter IX in the early printings began where our chapter 19 begins and goes all the way to 3 Nephi 21:21. Chapter X ends at our 23:13. Chapter XI begins with 23:14 and that one chapter contains all of the quotations from Malachi 3–4, ending with 3 Nephi 25:6. And the modern chapters breaks also break up the flow of this lengthy text, which makes it hard to keep in mind the overall flow of what Jesus is saying. So, if you are puzzled about how this text from 3 Nephi 20 to 3 Nephi 26 should be outlined and subdivided, join the crowd!

Moreover, Jesus quoted extensively from Isaiah, Micah, and Malachi in this block of text. Half of the verses in this speech actually come directly from the words that Jehovah (Jesus) had previously spoken to and through these prophets. But the meanings of these words, perhaps intentionally, are in some ways opaque. I have found it at least a little bit helpful to mark these quotations in colored markers and with quote marks, to keep track of which words are coming from Micah, Isaiah, or Malachi. The following chart can help you keep track of these textual dependencies:

Isaiah

Micah

Isaiah/Micah

3 Nephi 20

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39

40 41 42 43 44 45 46

2 Nephi 21

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29

Identifying these relationships helps make the structure of this Covenant Sermon easier to follow and to see how covenants tie into the principles that the Lord Jesus Christ was teaching here. Above all, don't get frustrated. As explained next, this Covenant Sermon actually has an underlying structural order that I think you will find helpful.

The Chiastic Structure of 3 Nephi 20:10–22:17 Helps Readers Follow This Text

The following chiastic structure of 3 Nephi 20–22, which is still open to minor adjustments, has been detected by Professor Victor Ludlow. It helps us to focus on the step-by-step development of this discourse and especially on its main point, the focal center of this passage.

In this structure, notice especially that, in line F, words from Micah 4–5 are used to show that the Gentiles will repent and obtain blessings. Farther down, in the counterpoint line labeled F', some of the same words from Micah are quoted again, dealing with what will happen to the unrepentant Gentiles. In parts H and I, Isaiah 52:11–15 is quoted; and then in parts H' and I', Isaiah is quoted again but this time Isaiah 52:15 is quoted first (in 3 Nephi 21:8), followed then (in 3 Nephi 21:10) by a quote from Isaiah 52:14, that is, in reverse order.

This extended ring-composition is like a large picture frame which, if understood, helps readers to see the order and organization of this text and thereby follow and better understand what Jesus is saying.

A The Father and Son work together ([3 Nephi 20:10](#))

B Isaiah's words are written, therefore search them ([v. 11](#))

C Isaiah's words and the Father's covenant with Israel will be fulfilled ([v. 12](#))

D Scattered Israel to be gathered ([v. 13](#))

E The promised land is an inheritance for the Nephites/Lamanites ([v. 14](#))

F Micah quoted: Gentiles to repent & receive blessings ([v. 15–20](#); [Micah 5:8–9](#); [4:12–13](#))

G The Lord's covenant with Moses, the Gentiles, and Israel concerning the New Jerusalem. ([v. 21–29](#))

H Isaiah quoted ([Isa 52:1–14](#)): Gospel preached, Zion established, servant marred ([v. 30–44](#))

I Isaiah quoted: Kings shall shut their mouths, speechless ([v. 45](#); [Isaiah 52:15](#))

J Covenant fulfillment and the work of the Father ([v. 46](#))

K A key "sign" given, when these things are "about to take place" ([3 Nephi 21:1](#))

L This is "the sign:" Gentiles will learn of "scattered" Israel ([v. 2](#))

M "These things" in the Book of Mormon to come forth "from them [the Gentiles] unto you (to the Lamanites/Nephites) ([v. 3](#))

N In the "wisdom in the Father" and the "power of the Father," "the covenant of the Father" will make it possible for these things

to come forth “unto a remnant of your seed,” O house of Israel ([v. 4](#))

M' “These works” in the Book of Mormon will come “forth from the Gentiles to your seed” (to the Lamanites/Nephites) ([v.5](#))

L' Some Gentiles to “be numbered among” the house of Israel ([v. 6](#))

K' And “it shall be a sign” as Lamanites begin to know that “these things come to pass” ([v.7](#))

J' Work and covenant of the Father have already commenced ([v.7](#))

I' Isaiah quoted: Kings shall shut their mouths, speechless ([v. 8](#); [Isaiah 52:15](#))

H' Isaiah quoted: A great and marvelous work; the marred servant ([v. 9–10](#); [Isaiah 52:14](#))

G' Moses, the Gentiles, and covenant Israel ([v. 11](#))

F' Micah quoted: Unrepentant Gentiles will be cut down ([v. 12–21](#); [Micah 5:8–15](#))

E' The promised land is an inheritance for the righteous ([v. 22–23](#))

D' Gentiles to help in the gathering of Israel and a New Jerusalem ([v. 24–25](#))

C' Father’s work with his people ([v. 26–27](#))

A* The Father and Son work together ([v. 28–29](#))

B* Isaiah’s portrayal of Zion ([Isaiah 54](#), [3 Nephi 22](#)); search his words. ([3 Nephi 23:1–3](#))

*Note: The A-B, A'-B' order of the first two and last two element in this structure may be allowable as a minor deviation within this overall pattern, or alternatively these opening and closing elements may be seen as AB, A'B' compounds. In either case, this impressive chiastic organizing structure is quite helpful in tracking the meaning of Jesus’s words here.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Jesus Mix Together Micah and Isaiah? \(3 Nephi 20:25\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 214 (October 21, 2016).

Victor L. Ludlow, “The Father’s Covenant People Sermon: 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012), 147–174. As Professor Ludlow modestly notes, “In spite of many, many hours involved in studying and analyzing this profound sermon, the outline is still a work in progress” (page 167).

Victor L. Ludlow, “Jesus’ Covenant Teachings in Third Nephi,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 177–185.

Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1997), 284–299.

3 Nephi 20–25 — The “Prophetic Worldview” of the Nephites

To understand what Jesus is communicating in these dense chapters, it is also helpful for readers to remember the broader context of the Nephite prophetic worldview which would have been familiar to Jesus’s audience here in Bountiful. In the book *Isaiah and the Book of Mormon*, an opening chapter entitled “Getting through Isaiah with the Help of the Nephite Prophetic View” focuses on the prophetic foreknowledge that is found in earlier sections of the Book of Mormon. That “prophetic worldview,” as understood and articulated by the prophets Nephi, Jacob, Zenos, and Abinadi, foreshadowed the unfolding of the covenant over the course of world history after the time of Lehi. That worldview anticipated four main stages:

1. The scattering of Israel,
2. The coming of the Messiah and his rejection by those in Jerusalem,
3. The day of the Gentiles, and
4. The final victory of God over evil through the reestablishment of Israel and the judgment of the world.

In sum, in stage 1, there would be an apostasy in Israel, and the Israelites would be scattered. However, in stage 2, the Lord would be merciful; at least some of the Jews would be brought back. The Messiah would come to earth only to be rejected by his people. In stage 3, the “day of the Gentile” would rise, and the Book of Mormon would be brought forth through the Gentiles to the posterity of Lehi. But wickedness would still prevail. Some of the Gentiles would forget the Jews, and there would be transgressions and serious problems. Eventually there would be a division into only two churches, the church of the Lord or the good people, on the one hand, and the great and abominable composed of all others, on the other hand. Finally, stage 4 would bring forth the victory of God as Israel is gathered. In this overall view, there would be converts, righteousness would begin to be established again, a fullness of the truth and the Lord would prevail over all who fight against him and lift up their hand against him.

Notice that in 3 Nephi 15–16, on Day 1, Jesus added details, confirmations, and fulfillments to this same overall prophetic expectation that these righteous people in Bountiful already knew quite a bit about. By the time of 3 Nephi, the first two of these

four stages had already been fulfilled. So, in 3 Nephi 15–16, as Jesus spoke to His disciples, He began by focusing on elements that pertain to stage 3, when he discussed what can be called the “day of the Gentiles.” Once the Gentiles had become ripe in iniquity, however, they would eventually reject the fullness of the gospel, and there would arise “all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations” (3 Nephi 16:10). All the elements belonging to stage 3 of the Nephite prophetic worldview can be found in chapters 15 and 16.

And then, in 3 Nephi 20–25, on Day 2, speaking to a more spiritually prepared people, Jesus emphasized stage 4. Twice he quoted Isaiah 52:7–8, about the “watchmen” who shall lift up their voices in a day of fullness and how Jesus will be the primary messenger who will announce deliverance to the Israelites, and they will know how beautiful his feet are (see below). He also quoted all of Isaiah 54 about the end of times when the barren or childless woman (symbolizing the church during the Great Apostasy) will be comforted, will become fruitful, and will enlarge and richly adorn her tent (or tabernacle) with seed (children) who will eternally inherit. Other themes of glory and the building of Zion are introduced that pertain especially to the converted Nephites (see further below). And he concluded by quoting Malachi 3–4 about the earth not being wasted at his final coming.

It is clear here that Jesus taught those who needed to know only after they were spiritually prepared to understand these sublime materials. He taught them within the traditional framework of the four stages of the Nephite prophetic worldview. He drew on scriptures that they had and then added Malachi 3–4 to them. He stressed the value of keeping their records so that they could fulfill a crucial role in the complete fulfillment of the Father’s covenant with his people throughout the world.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Vision Guides Nephi's Choice of Isaiah Chapters? \(2 Nephi 11:2\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 38 (February 22, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[Getting through Isaiah with the Help of the Nephite Prophetic View](#),” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 19–45.

3 Nephi 20–21

3 Nephi 20:16–25 — The Lord’s People Make, Keep, and Renew Covenants with Him

3 Nephi 20:16–19 quotes from Micah 5:8–9 and 4:12–13, especially to show that all “gain” would be consecrated unto the Lord (20:19). What Micah (and Isaiah) meant by “the remnant of Jacob” (Micah 5:8; 3 Nephi 20:16 see also Isaiah 10:21–22) remains obscure, but Jesus quotes Micah here after saying that there will be many “remnants” scattered abroad (20:13–14). One remnant of Israel (or Jacob) in particular “will return” unto the Lord and it will be a great sign when “these things” will come forth “unto them” (21:4).

Then, in 3 Nephi 20:22–25, Jesus went on to teach about the covenant that had been made with Jacob regarding the land (20:22) and also the covenant made with Abraham (20:25, 27) regarding the blessing of all the kindreds of the earth through his seed. It is interesting that he lists these two patriarchs in the reverse order from our normal expectations. We often talk about the covenant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but here it is first the covenant of Jacob, and then Abraham. In Leviticus 26:42, the Holy of Holies of the book of Leviticus, the Lord likewise promises, in reserve order, “Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember.” I think we have here in the Book of Mormon a credible and appropriate reference here back to the holiest spot of the book of Leviticus, which is the holiest of all places in the Old Testament.

Both there and here, God promises many things, but above all he promises that he will fulfill all his promises and will never forget his people, so long as they will “confess their iniquity” and “accept of the punishment of their iniquity” so that “I might be their God,” and I will never forget them (Leviticus 26:40–42, 45) and that “the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel” (3 Nephi 21:1).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Makes 3 Nephi the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon? \(3 Nephi 14:13–14\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 206 (October 11, 2016).

3 Nephi 20:29–30 — The Lord Will Gather Israel

In this covenant speech, Jesus began by explaining in these verses how all of Israel will be scattered and lost, but that there would be a day of the Gentiles when they would be the nursing fathers to help bring the gospel back to the people who had been scattered. The key point is that the coming forth of the Book of Mormon will be the sign (21:5, 7) that will let everyone know that the word of God is coming forth again to the scattered Israelites, and that the Gentiles, if they will believe, can then become members of the House of Israel.

The people there in Bountiful had a crucial role to fulfill in the covenant of God with the children of Abraham, providing a visible sign that God had set His hand again to fulfill that covenant.

Jesus explained how this will happen, how people will rejoice, how people will be gathered in, how a New Jerusalem will be formed, and how the victory of God over the forces of evil and separation will eventually be complete. This promise would have been especially meaningful to these people who had recently witnessed such massive destruction and tragedy.

Nephi, as recorder, and Mormon, as compiler, structurally retained this culminating climax of Jesus' covenant speech. Mormon sacrificed his life to preserve these records, especially because he knew that Jesus had taught that the coming forth of this record would be a sign that God's covenant is being fulfilled. This covenant speech is a Nephite document emphasizing the Nephites' role in the Father's plan of salvation and of the fulfillment of God's covenant.

This is also part of our role today among God's people, to take the Book of Mormon to the world in order to bring to pass the fulfillment of the great covenants and promises of God. We as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are the inheritors of this record, and thanks to publishing and technology, we are able to take it to all the world as an ensign (a banner) to the nations. The Lord has promised that people from all the nations of the earth will flow unto the House of the Lord and unto the covenant of the Lord, so that they may be blessed eternally. As we become members of this covenant, we become children of God in receiving the blessings of all that the Father has and all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through all the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Nephi 20:35–36 — What Is the Meaning of the Word “Holy” in Jesus' Sermons?

It is revealing to look where the word “holy” appears in this text and what it means. The word “holiness” in both Greek and Hebrew has no particular synonym, and so it is hard to define. If you want to understand holiness, you have to look at how this word is used contextually.

In 3 Nephi, you have references to holy ones (people within the church; 5:14), to God's holy arm (20:35), a holy city (the New Jerusalem; 20:36), holy prophets (1:13, 26; 29:2), and holy angels (27:30), along with the “Holy Ghost” (mentioned 30x in 3 Nephi). Alma 13 had also spoken dominantly, 18x, about “holy” things: holy works, God's holy order, a holy calling, a holy ordinance, the holy order of the high priesthood, holy men, God's holy name, holy scriptures, holy angels, holy commandments, and holy fathers. In these texts, we can identify many of these things that one would have found associated with the Holy of Holies of the biblical times. In 3 Nephi we now encounter even the holy presence of

God and the very words of the Lord, as previously only the High Priest was allowed to do in the ancient Holy of Holies.

The Holy of Holies is described in Jewish literature as a place of the fullness of joy. Above all, holiness is a state of joy and rejoicing. “Joy” is mentioned, being another dominant term, 16x in 3 Nephi, especially in 3 Nephi chapters 16, 17, 27, 28. This was certainly a time of immense joy and happiness for those people. The tablets of the Ten Commandments were stored inside the Ark of the Covenant, but now Jesus preached openly new commandments in his Sermon at the Temple. The rod of Aaron, also inside the Ark of the Covenant, represented his holy Aaronic priesthood authority, and Jesus now gave the higher priesthood authority to his disciples at the end of 3 Nephi 18. The shewbread of the Temple, which could only be eaten by the one High Priest, anticipated Jesus’ miraculous administration of the sacrament, now given to all the covenant people.

Being “holy” refers to and defines all that we are striving to be as Latter-day Saints. The word “saint” (from *sanctos* in Latin) means “sanctified.” It means one who has been made holy. We are striving to be true and faithful Latter-day Saints, or holy ones. Holiness should define our relationships with God, our relationships within our families, our conduct within church circles, and our dealings with all other people. Everyone who has been to the temple is an anointed one and are all anointed beings, to become holy people, made holy by the Anointed One, in every way possible.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Makes 3 Nephi the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon? \(3 Nephi 14:13–14\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 206 (October 11, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 1 (2010): 36–55; also published in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012), 1–33.

3 Nephi 22

As mentioned above, in this concluding chapter, the Lord quotes what is now known as Isaiah 54. Here, and in 3 Nephi 23–25, watch for temple themes and temple elements. Imagine yourself hearing these words at the temple and in an immediate temple context. How does that help you understand why the Savior concluded his second day of teaching with these particular passages? As I suggest further below, the presence of the children

amidst this assembly provides a meaningful context for why Jesus quoted Isaiah 54, which focuses to a large extent on childbearing and the importance to the Lord of bringing children into this glorious world and earthly existence.

Read 3 Nephi 22 (Isaiah 54) with special sensitivity, as if you were hearing it recited by the Savior. This is a beautiful and powerful scripture. Pause to think about such words as:

- “Sing barren” (22:1)
- “cords” and “stakes,” “enlarge thy tent” (22:2)
- “break forth,” which can mean “give birth” (22:3)
- “inherit the Gentiles” (22:3)
- “fear not” (22:4)
- “forget the shame of thy youth” and the “reproach of thy widowhood” (22:4)
- God as a “husband” (22:5)
- “called to grief ... as a woman forsaken” (22:6)
- “for a small moment” (22:7, remembering D&C 122:4)
- “waters of Noah” (22:9, even the flood did not last forever)
- “everlasting kindness,” “my kindness shall not depart” (22:8, 10)
- “foundations of sapphires” (22:11), as part of beautiful temples
- “great shall be the peace of thy children” (22:13), the heritage of the Lord
- “no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper” (22:17)

What do the words and assurances in this chapter mean to you personally? How do you see yourself in latter-day circumstances described in these chapters? What are your roles in God’s covenant plan? As these prophecies are fulfilled in our day, how do we move ourselves from being spectators to being witnesses and agents of their fulfillment? On all of these words and phrases, I highly recommend the research from Cynthia Hallen, a retired professor from the BYU Department of Linguistics. She has written beautifully about the meanings of many of these exquisite words and phrases.

3 Nephi 22:7–12 — The Lord’s Kindness Shall Not Depart from His Children

Concerning the word “kindness” in English and even in other languages, Professor Cynthia Hallen offers a key to understanding the Lord’s relation to his covenant people. As she explains, “the earliest etymological meaning of kindness is the reconstructed Indo-European root *gen-*, meaning to give birth, beget; with derivatives referring to ... procreation and to familial and tribal groups.” Several other terms in this chapter of Isaiah come from that same semantic root of kindness. They are deeply related to the gospel in the Book of Mormon and to the writings of Isaiah, including words such as gentiles, genteel, gentile, gentle, generation, genealogy, genesis, progenitor, nation, nativity, kindred, even the word king. All these words are linguistically related to the word

“kindness,” and all those things have to do with the Lord’s covenant “kind,” “kinship,” and “kingly” relationships with His people. His “everlasting kindness” (22:8) is a truly merciful, binding, and eternally sealing.

Further Reading

Cynthia L. Hallen, “The Lord’s Covenant of Kindness: Isaiah 54 and 3 Nephi 22,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, eds. (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 313–349.

3 Nephi 22:13 – The Covenant Is a Family Covenant

The covenant of God with Abraham and Sarah has application to families and posterity. Towards the end of the first day of the Savior’s visit to the Nephites, the little children were given a special blessing. In 3 Nephi 17:23, he said, “Behold your little ones,” and the multitude saw their children in a sacred environment: “And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them.” Before Jesus left on Day 1, He drew attention to the family again, speaking of family prayer: “Pray in your families unto the Father, always in my name, that your wives and your children may be blessed” (3 Nephi 18:21).

When Jesus returned for Day 2 and on Day 3, the people apparently brought their children with them. After all, who would have been taking care of them? And think what would their parents have been worrying about? We know that Jesus continued to minister to them, for the children spoke “unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than [Jesus] had revealed unto the people” (26:14), and the people “both saw and heard these children; yea, even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things” (26:16).

Thus, when Jesus quotes passages that mention “children,” we should realize that they too were actually there in attendance. For example, in quoting Isaiah 54, Jesus emphasizes the importance of childbearing and childrearing. Isaiah prophesies that in the days of glory, “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children” (3 Nephi 22:13), and 22:17 ends with “and this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord,” echoing Psalm 127:3 which refers to children as the heritage of the Lord. And the quotation from Malachi 3–4 ends with turning “the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers” (25:6). Just as Jesus had ended Day 1 by focusing on the family, he ends Day 2 and Day 3 similarly (26:14–16).

The covenant is not just a national promise; the covenant is a family promise too. It is all about gathering. Israel will be gathered from north, south, east, and west; and people also

will gather in families. That final gathering is what family reunions represent. In those reunions, families recognize their children as their greatest blessings. The Lord, as he sees his children being gathered, likewise recognizes them as his greatest inheritance.

3 Nephi 23:6–25:6

Up to this point, Jesus has quoted and expounded scriptures that were known in writing among the Nephites. For example, the priests of Noah had quoted Alma 52 when they challenged Abinadi, and he quoted Isaiah 53 in his reply to them. And since they had Isaiah 53, they probably already had Isaiah 54 too; and Micah was a very early Israelite prophet whose writings also could have been known to the Nephites as well, although we don't know for sure about that.

But 3 Nephi 23:6 says that after Jesus “had expounded all the scriptures unto them *which they had [previously] received,*” he discussed “other scriptures ... *that ye have not.*” Accordingly, in these chapters, Jesus added one missing point to the Nephite record of the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite, and then he quoted to them Malachi 3–4, in 3 Nephi 24–25, which they apparently did not already have.

3 Nephi 23:7–14 — Jesus Corrects the Nephite Record

As a first matter of business, the Lord asks Nephi to “bring forth the record which ye have kept,” and Nephi presented to the Lord the records that his people had kept. The Lord “cast his eyes upon them” and accepted them (23:8), with one needed correction: Samuel's prophecy had been omitted, about “many saints who should arise from the dead, and should appear unto many” at the time that “the father should glorify his name” in Jesus (23:9). That point was then added and now appears as inserted into Helaman 14:25. Jesus then ratified all the rest by expounding these records “all in one” and commanding the people to use those records in teaching the things “which he had expounded unto them” (23:14).

What personal lessons can we learn from this brief exchange? Why do you suppose that the Nephites had failed to record this detail? Have you had some experiences in which recordkeeping proved especially crucial? Why would Nephi and then Mormon have included this little event in the record? Either of them could have felt embarrassed by it. As recordkeepers, they were doing their best, but they knew they were not perfect. Moroni, too, worried about any possible imperfections in the record (Ether 12:23–24). But they did not hide their failings.

Remember that writing records in the ancient world was no simple task. You couldn't just go down to the bookstore and buy paper or fig bark sheets or tumbaga plates. You had to

make the materials on which you would write. You had to record by hand the characters or letters of the words very carefully. It was difficult. It was also one of the most sacred responsibilities of ancient priests to keep the holy books of any temple, and it is out of the books that people will be judged. These written words need to be preserved and handed down from one generation to another.

In this text we find a wonderful depiction of the earnestness of this Nephi—the High Priest presenting his records to the Lord—how devoted he must have been to have created those records in the first place. I imagine Nephi would have been crestfallen when the Lord pointed out that something important had been left out of the record. Perhaps he even wondered, “Am I worthy to continue to serve having made such an obvious mistake?” He and his people also would have known the kindness of Jesus in his response. His interest was not in chastising but in emphasizing the importance of record-keeping. And think how many other things Nephi had gotten right!

Earlier that day, Jesus had gone off by himself to pray for the people, asking for the Lord’s infinite blessings to come upon them. Nephi would have had the confidence to know that even though he had made a mistake in recordkeeping, the record was being given with earnestness and fullness. It was the best he could do, and the Lord would take what he had done and perfect it.

This also, of course, gives us yet another meaningful lesson about how important it is when we deal with the scriptures: every word is important. Sometimes, we read the scriptures too quickly. I think the slower we read them, the more we will look at each particular word and wonder: Why did the Lord or his prophets want these particular words in this text? The answers will speak to our hearts and souls, speaking volumes of meaning far beyond what just the ink on the printed pages might represent.

Sometimes when we talk about the auditing of the Nephite records, we think of what Samuel prophesied. However, Jesus specifically asked not just what Samuel had said but if Samuel’s prophecies were *fulfilled*. He was concerned that the Nephites noted the *fulfillment* of Samuel’s prophecies. Think of all the times in the New Testament Gospels, when the author says, “because it was written,” “as it was written,” or “to fulfill that which was written.” It is important to the Lord that we take note of when prophecy is fulfilled. He sees that every word shall be fulfilled.

3 Nephi 24

2 Nephi 24–25 — Jesus Quotes Malachi 3–4

Jesus then quotes the last two chapters of Malachi. Why didn't he give them chapters 1–2 as well? At least for purposes of discussion, I assume that they had those chapters already. But even if they didn't, we cannot fully understand chapters 3 and 4 without also reading Malachi 1–2.

We should also note that when Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith on September 21, 1823, he quoted a version of Malachi 4:5–6 (see D&C 2:1–3). So, it is interesting that Moroni begins the opening of the Restoration exactly where Jesus left off at the end of his Covenant Sermon and scripture additions on Day 2, about the final stage in the sacred history of the world.

What reasons might Jesus have had for quoting these two chapters in particular? Remember that he met again with these people, on Day 2, near their temple and with their children. So, as you read these two chapters from the book of Malachi, see how many correspondences you can spot between the words in the book of Malachi and the words or themes of the temple. Here is a list of possible temple elements in the chapters and verses of Malachi:

Possible Temple Elements Reflected in Malachi 1–2

Scripture	Temple Reference
1:6	the law of obedience
1:6–7	evil speaking of, despising with contempt, desecrating the Lord's name
1:7	not polluting the bread on the altar or table of the Lord
1:8, 10, 14	making an acceptable sacrifice and sacred vows to God
1:8, 9	praying for God's graciousness and asking him to give regard
1:11	the Lord's name, that it will be great in all nations
1:11	incense and pure offerings, with prayers, shall go up in all places
2:1–3	priesthood authority, curses for not glorifying God's name

2:4–5	keeping the covenant of life and peace
2:6	the law of truth
2:10–11	not dealing treacherously with a brother; not profaning the holy
2:12	cutting off any man who profanes the covenant
2:14–16	keeping the law of chastity; fidelity to spouse and God
2:16	hating divorce; covering violence with a garment
2:17	preparing for the coming judgment of God

Possible Temple Elements Reflected in Malachi 3–4 (3 Nephi 24–25)

Scripture	Temple Reference
3:1 (24:1)	the coming of a messenger of the covenant “suddenly to his temple”
3:3–10	making pure consecration of tithes and offerings
3:11	rebuking Satan, the devourer
3:12	being called “blessed” in a delightful land
3:14	abiding the day of his coming judgment
3:16	those who fear the Lord speaking often one to another
3:16	keeping a book of remembrance of the names of the righteous
3:17	treasuring people as jewels, as a man spareth his own son
3:18	being able to discern between the good and the evil
4:2 (25:2)	The Sun (Son) of Righteousness shall heal the sick
4:4	remembering the Ten Commandments given at Mount Sinai

4:5	sending the prophet Elijah
4:5–6	bringing parents and children, ancestors and posterity, together
2:16	hating divorce; covering violence with a garment
2:17	preparing for the coming judgment of God

I am happy to thank the late Marshall Goodrich of Portland, Oregon, one of my missionary companions and scripture class members, for expanding and sharing this list of temple elements and covenantal connections in the book of Malachi. All of them, and several others as well, are well worth pondering, not only in the context of the temple in Bountiful but also, especially, in relation to our own experiences, with and for our own posterity and progenitors, in the Lord's holy temples that now dot the earth.

3 Nephi 24:2 – The Lord Will Refine Us and Cleanse Us

My friend Rita grew up in the textile industry in England. She related to our scripture study class how, in order to soften and whiten wool from sheep, they have to soak it in fuller's earth for a period of time. The fuller, the man who cleaned the wool and then presented it, smelled horrible, and so did the whole neighborhood of the mill. Nothing smells worse than wet sheep's wool with lanolin in it. The fuller had to become dirty to clean the wool. She rightly sees this as a great metaphor for the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In order to have our garments cleansed and purified, they must be made white by the fuller. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Mark described how the Lord's "raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so, as no fuller on earth can white them" (Mark 9:3). The cleansing power of the Atonement transcends all, and Malachi in 3 Nephi 24:2 was certainly aware of this.

3 Nephi 26

3 Nephi 26:1–16 – Jesus Expounds Things “Both Great and Small” Preparing to Ascend Again

What is significant about expounding things “both great and small”? (3 Nephi 26:1). God is in the microscopic details. God is also in the macrospheres of cosmic and spiritual order.

How does seeing “all things even from the beginning until the time [Jesus] should come in his glory” help people to live righteously and happily? (3 Nephi 26:3). It is faith-

promoting to know that God knows the end from the beginning. He has a plan. He rules and reigns with justice, mercy and equity, for time and for all eternity.

Why does Mormon not write any more about what Jesus taught to the Nephites? (3 Nephi 26:9). Are we patient enough in receiving small things before hoping to have greater things made manifest to us?

3 Nephi 26:13–21 — The Tongues of Children are Loosed

There are several things that are very reassuring about Jesus' final departure from these people and the end of this astonishingly magnificent day. Can we really fathom what has happened here? What significance do you find in the fact that Jesus ended his second appearance to the Nephites, first, with the renewal of covenants again with the sacrament, ministering again unto the children, healing again all the sick, letting the children speak, baptizing those who came forth, seeing that they shared all things in common and that they did all things as they had been commanded (3 Nephi 26:13–20).

We don't know when he finally left these people, but we know that he didn't leave until he had walked and talked many days with his disciples, and didn't go until he was sure that they were fully trained and able to carry on with the building of Zion in their community. He did not leave until he knew that those little children who had been blessed were being properly taught and the order of the Church had been properly instituted.

Just as the children are of supreme importance to Jesus's ministry here on Day 2, I believe those little children who were present on this occasion will become the key to understanding 4 Nephi. There were four generations of wonderful righteousness, peace, and happiness following the appearance of Jesus among these people, partly because those little children would have lived long enough to testify of their experiences to the future generations. In an era of peace and prosperity, life expectancy increases. So, their grandchildren would likely have known them, which means four generations of people would have been taught by those little children who grew up, married, had children and grandchildren. Many years later, those people could say, my grandmother told me what it was like "when I was there with the Savior." This kind of testimony no doubt fueled the amazing Zion community that 4 Nephi reports. I do not think Jesus would have departed until he was sure that that all this was securely in place.

Brothers and sisters, I realize that this block of text (3 Nephi 19–26) is as deep as it is dense. I plead with you to take extra time and make a sincere effort as you ponder these precious words, praying that the Holy Ghost will open your eyes of understanding. In these words, Jesus gives to us, as well as to those Nephites who were in attendance, the very essence of the Father's prophetic covenant with his people. The events of Day 1 moved us as the

Savior received each individual, compassionately healed their sick, and ministered unto the children. On this Day 2, the teachings are deeper, intentionally veiled, and more abstract, and yet, even more importantly, Jesus here gives us the heart of the Father's promised covenant to all of mankind. Working through these supernal words this time, line upon line, was more spiritually moving and more revealing to me than ever before. I am grateful—as I am sure you will be too—for the guidance of the Holy Ghost in bringing all this together in one great whole.

Further Reading

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

3 Nephi 26:15 — The Elusiveness of Time during Jesus' Visit

I think it is very telling that we do not have an exact date for the departure of Jesus at the end of 3 Nephi. It is almost as if there is no temporal end to his presence. He is still with these people in spirit and maybe even in close proximity physically. The book of 3 Nephi begins with a day, month, and year. We know exactly when the sign of his birth was given, but we do not know of any of the other such precise dates after the coming of Christ. It is almost as if time becomes irrelevant as 3 Nephi unfolds.

This is very uncharacteristic of most historical books, and also of the rest of the Book of Mormon. But something happens in the Holy of Holies. Anciently, it was seen as a timeless place and as a place of eternal perfection. The Holy of Holies was 10 cubits by 10 cubits by 10 cubits, a perfect cube, in which all things stood still, symbolizing the unity, the oneness, the eternal harmony of being in the presence of God. There, time becomes immaterial. From there emanates constantly the beginning and the renewal of creation. When the sacred order moves out into the next room in the temple, we find the days of the creation being represented. But in the Holy of Holies, in the presence of God, we are brought into a timeless context. Perhaps that is why we are not given the time or the day of the departure of Jesus. For indeed, he is still with us.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Is So Little Said about the Timing of Christ's Temple Ministry?](#) (3 Nephi 10:18)," *KnoWhy* 481 (November 1, 2018).

3 NEPHI 27–4 NEPHI

John W. Welch Notes



Introduction and Questions

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

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

3 Nephi 27

3 Nephi 27 — Study Questions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 Nephi 28 — The Three Nephites

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

3 Nephi 30

3 Nephi 30 Study Questions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Concluding Thoughts on Holiness

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

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

4 Nephi

4 Nephi Study Questions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 Nephi 1:2 — No Contentions and Disputations

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 Nephi 1:7 — Making Community Improvements

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 Nephi 1:16 — They Become a Happy People

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lineage of Alma₁



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

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

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

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

MORMON 1–6

John W. Welch Notes



Who Was Mormon?

Up until this point in the Book of Mormon, Mormon has been largely in the shadows, but now it is time for him to tell his own story. The more we can know about Mormon's life and times, his callings and motivations, the more we can appreciate why he included the things he did in this work of scripture and history.

In Mormon 2:2, we learn that he was sixteen years old in AD 326, putting his birth at AD 311. From that we can deduce that he lived to be 74 years old, since the final battle, from which he died, was in AD 385.

In 4 Nephi, the setting had deteriorated from one of faith and light into a century of slow decline that began around AD 200. Enormous cultural change occurred over the course of only a few generations. This inexorable decline continued downhill, one rung at a time. In Mormon's mind, those changes appeared linked, as things had worsened step by step over that period. Approximately 30 downward-spiraling steps can be extracted from the relatively few verses in 4 Nephi.

Mormon knew this history, and it influenced his choices as he selected which records to transcribe or to abridge onto his plates. For example, he personally knew of, and made special mention in Mormon 1:19 of the fulfillment of, "all the words of Abinadi, and also Samuel the Lamanite." This explains why Mormon included six chapters in the middle of the book of Mosiah about Abinadi's prophecies and his fate, and also four chapters at the end of the book of Helaman about Samuel's prophetic warnings and their aftermaths. It also explains why he covered in so many places throughout the Book of Mormon of the

fulfillment of inspired forecasts about the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, Redeemer, and Son of God.

Mormon remained stalwart in the midst of unthinkable hardships and tragic disappointments, one after another. He introduced himself, first and foremost, as “a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (3 Nephi 5:13), and, accordingly, throughout his composition of his abridgment, Mormon features Jesus Christ as the focus of Nephite doctrine, worship, religion, and civic and social order. Personally, Mormon wrote the ten chapters found in Mormon 1–7 and Moroni 7–9. In those chapters Mormon included the name of “Jesus” 19 times (at least once in every chapter except Mormon 4) and the title “Christ” a total of 52 times (with the highest density appearing 38 times Moroni 7 alone). Obviously, Mormon was much more than just a nominal Christian.

Having an overall chronology of Mormon’s life is helpful in guiding readers through these ten chapters that move quickly through his 75 years of life from AD 311 to AD 385. In the chronology below, **the bold dates and ages are actually stated in Mormon’s text**; the other dates and ages are derived or estimated and thus are only suggested and are not to be taken as absolutes.

Chronology of Mormon’s Life

Year	Event
311	Mormon is born
321	Ammaron commissions Mormon to retrieve sacred records when 24 years old (1:2–4)
322	Mormon, at age 11 , goes with his father to the land southward and Zarahemla (1:6)
322	War breaks out between Nephites and Lamanites (1:8)
323–326	Four years of peace (1:12)
326	Mormon, age 15 , is visited by the Lord and knows the goodness of Jesus (1:15)
327	Mormon, age 16 , is appointed to lead the army (2:2)
328	Lamanites attack (2:3)
330	Mormon defeats Aaron (2:9)

331?	Mormon marries at age 20?
331	Outbreak of hostilities
333?	Moroni is born?
335	Mormon remembers Ammaron telling him to go to Antum at age 24 (1:3)
335	Mormon goes and obtains the records
344	People curse God and wish to die; day of grace was passed (2:14–15)
345	Nephites flee to Jashon, where the records were (2:16–17)
345	Mormon finishes the large plates of Nephi by adding information up to his time (2:18)
345	Nephites fortify city of Shem (2:21)
346	Lamanites attack Shem (2:22)
348–349	Mormon describes the feelings and conditions of this time (2:19–27)
349	Mormon, age 38, has not yet made a complete record on the Plates of Mormon (2:18)
350	Nephites and Lamanites enter into ten-year peace treaty (2:28)
350–360	Ten years of peace; Mormon and Moroni work on the Plates of Mormon (2:28)
359?	Mormon preaches repentance and baptism (3:2); was Moroni 7 spoken about then?
360	The king of the Lamanites sends a letter that they will attack (3:4)
360	Nephites move to Desolation, by “the narrow pass into land southward” (3:5, 8)
361	Lamanites attack and are defeated (3:7)
362	Lamanites attack again and are defeated, dead thrown into the sea, Nephite boasting (3:8)
362	Mormon, age 51, refuses to lead the Nephite army any longer (3:11, 16)

362?	Moroni, age 29, called to the ministry (Moroni 8:1), given copy of Moroni 7?
362	Conditions are described in Mormon 3:11–15
362?	Mormon writes to Moroni (Moroni 8?); this letter's conditions match Mormon 3:3–15
363	Nephites go on the offensive (4:1)
364	Lamanites attack Teancum and are driven back (4:7–8)
366	Blood on both sides, Teancum taken, idols, women and children sacrifice (4:10–13)
367	Nephites attack back in great anger, drive Lamanites out (4:15)
367?	Mormon writes Moroni 9 to Moroni; its words and conditions match Mormon 4
368–374	Hiatus in warfare, little information given, Mormon may have worked further on the records
375	Lamanites attack, great slaughter, women and children sacrificed (4:17–22)
378?	Mormon (age 67) repents of his oath and was given again command of the army (5:1)
379	Lamanites attack the city of Jordan and other strongholds and were driven back; Nephites who would not gather in were destroyed (5:3, 5)
380	Lamanites attack again in great numbers, and the Nephites are defeated; only the swift could outrun the Lamanites (5:6, 7)
384	Mormon writes to the Lamanite king to set a final battle at Cumorah (6:2)
385	Mormon, age 74, dies (killed in last battle)

Further Reading

For two other largely compatible chronological overviews of Mormon's life, see Alan C. Miner, "A Chronological Setting for the Epistles of Mormon to Moroni," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no 2. (1994): 94–113; Joseph M. Spencer, "On the Dating of Moroni 8–9," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 22 (2016): 131–148.

Mormon 1 — Mormon as a Teenager: Some Questions to Keep in Mind

- How did the events and concerns of Mormon’s formative youth and during his mid-life challenges influence his composition of the entire Book of Mormon?
- Mormon tells us that he grew up in a very difficult time. The cultural environment was already bad when he was born. Yet he grew up to be extraordinarily faithful, righteous, and dutiful. How might that have happened? Are there lessons that we as his readers can apply to strengthen the current rising generation (Mormon 1:1–14)? What happened to Mormon when he was 15 and 16 years old, and then as a very young adult?
- Is it implausible to think of a person so young being put in charge of thousands of soldiers at a very critical moment (Mormon 1:15–2:7)?

Main events covered in this chapter:

Year	Event
311	Mormon is born
321	Ammaron commissions Mormon to retrieve sacred records when 24 years old (1:2–4)
322	Mormon, at age 11, goes with his father to the land southward and Zarahemla (1:6)
322	War breaks out between Nephites and Lamanites (1:8)
323–326	Four years of peace (1:12)
326	Mormon, age 15, is visited by the Lord and knows the goodness of Jesus (1:15)

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“What Do We Know About Mormon’s Upbringing?”](#) *KnoWhy* 226 (November 8, 2016).

Mormon 1:2–3 — Mormon’s Character

What Did Ammaron Mean by “Sober?”

Mormon was trusted by Ammaron. There is no information on the age of Ammaron or on his immediate kinship relations to the young Mormon, though they both descended from Nephi. However, this older man knew that this 10-year-old boy was very precocious, and he trusted him. Being trusted with some major assignment can be very influential in the development of confidence in the formation of the character of a young person, and

indeed Mormon remembered that description. Being told that he was trustworthy likely made Mormon even more so. He was, even at that age, a very responsible person.

In Mormon 1:2, Ammaron said plainly to Mormon that he was a “sober” child. Likewise, Alma, when speaking to his sons Helaman and Shiblon, had ended his blessings and instructions by encouraging them to “be sober” (Alma 37:47; 38:15), and Nephi, Jacob, Benjamin, and Alma spoke words with “soberness” (1 Nephi 18:10; Jacob 2:2; 6:5) or with “truth and soberness” (Mosiah 4:15; Alma 42:31; 53:21). So, this word, in Nephite vocabulary, carried high praise and honor.

Today the word “sober” is used almost always to mean not influenced by drugs or alcohol, but according to Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, the word “sober” described much more, including the following:

A person who is sober is calm, not under the influence of passion, without intemperate passion. He is cool, calm, moderate, freedom from inordinate passions, freedom from the heat of passion, calmness, coolness, habitual freedom from enthusiasm, inordinate passion or over-heated imagination. Gravity without sadness or melancholy.

The word “sober” comes from the Latin “sobrius” which also meant much more than simply “not intoxicated.” It also meant being “moderate, frugal, continent, reasonable, and sensible.” Mormon was by nature all of these things. His disposition was calm and level-headed in the worst of situations. See Mormon 3:16–22 in which he calmly steps down and becomes an “idle witness.” As readers, we can see these qualities coming through in Mormon’s statements and descriptions throughout the Book of Mormon, which are characteristically thoughtful, restrained, sensible, and wise. It reinforces my confidence in Mormon as an accurate and appropriate transmitter of the records of his people to know that his character, from a young age, disposed him toward leaving us with an accurate, perceptive, and carefully stated documentary.

Mormon Was Quick to Observe

Ammaron also referred to Mormon as being “quick to observe” (1:2), implying perhaps that he was good at accurately perceiving his surroundings, and maybe also quick to learn and obey. In Mormon 1:3, Ammaron counseled him to remember the things that “ye have observed concerning this people” in order to prepare to “take [particularly] the plates of Nephi unto yourself,” at the age of 24 (1:3–4).

The Nephites were not living their religion very well at this time, and they were making poor choices. An observant person sees his surroundings, considers them, and decides to

do something better. Mormon continued in this vein, even stepping down as the commander when the behavior of the Nephites fell below his standard.

Mormon Demonstrated Patience and Obedience

Mormon was also patient and obedient, and remembered his duty, all of which he attributed to his being a descendant of Nephi. At the age of ten years, he was asked to take stewardship of the records when he reached the age of twenty-four, in AD 334. More patient than many young people, he waited until the appropriate time to obtain the records. In recent years, research has shown that a knowledge of family history and origins have a beneficial effect on the choices that young people make.

Mormon Was Learned and Trained

Speaking about himself, Mormon commented that at the age of ten, he was “learned somewhat after the manner of the learning of my people,” using a phrase that is similar to the words Nephi used to describe himself (1 Nephi 1:1–2). One may suppose that Mormon was a diligent young student, considering the high quality of his later writing and editing. However, there had to be a time of preparation.

In Mormon 1:6, Mormon recorded that when he was eleven years old, his father took him south to Zarahemla. In AD 322, a war began by the borders of Zarahemla about the time that Mormon’s father took him to Zarahemla. They traveled southward, so they probably came from near Bountiful or the narrow neck of land where Mormon ended up at the end of his life. He found that the land was very over-populated: “The whole face of the land had become covered with buildings, and the people were as numerous almost, as it were the sand of the sea” (Mormon 1:7). As a young boy likely from a smaller, rural area, he seems to have been astounded by the big city.

Mormon’s father was probably involved in some way as a military leader, and the young Mormon went along to be exposed to military operations. This seems apparent because Mormon began at that time observing military details. He described the composition of the two sides, the numbers of soldiers, and the fact that there were several battles before the Lamanites capitulated and peace reigned for about four years.

Mormon’s calling as a prophet and religious leader occurred when he was fifteen years old, in AD 325–326. In Mormon 1:15, he described, “And I, being fifteen years of age and being somewhat of a sober mind, therefore I was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus.” The similarity here to Joseph Smith’s life is obvious and worth noting. Joseph was visited by the Father and the Son around that same time in his life.

Mormon then went through a period of growth and preparation for the fulfillment of his calling. Having been visited by Jesus Christ, he immediately desired to begin teaching

what he had learned, but was forbidden for a time because of the unrighteousness of the people. And, instead, the next year, at the age of sixteen, Mormon was acclaimed the military leader of the Nephite forces.

Mormon marked that date by stating both his age and the date in Mormon 2:2, which reads, “*in my sixteenth year I did go forth at the head of an army of the Nephites, against the Lamanites; therefore three hundred and twenty and six years had passed away.*” This one link allows us to say that Mormon was 15 years old (in his 16th year), and that 326 years from the birth of Christ then ended. This means that he was born either in 310 or 311, depending on the month in which he was born. For convenience, we can say he was born in 311.

Based on Mormon’s evident precociousness, spirituality, lineage, and physical stature, Ammaron was thus certainly inspired five years earlier as he confidently selected Mormon at such a young age as the next record-keeper. Ammaron himself was no doubt quite old. He received the plates from his brother Amos, and they were both sons and grandsons of another Amos, who was a son or a grandson of leaders named Nephi in 4 Nephi. Although the chronological record is not explicit here, one can well imagine that Ammaron had searched and waited long, during the deteriorating years between AD 250–321 when Ammaron spoke to Mormon when he was “about ten years of age” (Mormon 1:2). Ammaron needed someone reliable and able to make and edit records. It is likely that his positive statements about Mormon’s strengths encouraged Mormon to develop those strengths further. An adult’s trust often proves to be invaluable to the development of young people. It is worthwhile to consider how and when we may want to provide positive reinforcement to young people.

Further Reading

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, “Mormon, the Man and the Message,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi Through Moroni, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1995), 117–131.

Book of Mormon Central, “What Do We Know about Mormon’s Upbringing? (Mormon 1:2),” *KnoWhy* 226 (November 8, 2016).

Mormon 2

Mormon 2:1–2 — At Age 16, Mormon Leads the Nephites in Battle

When Mormon was selected to lead the military system at the age of sixteen, he had certainly been prepared and positioned by several means to assume this position. Looking

mature and being responsible were good foundations, but he had to be groomed and trained for the role.

As he explained in Mormon 1:5, Mormon was a direct descendant of Nephi, which, according to the book of Jacob, meant that he had the right to be a king or leader. That right belonged to the direct descendants of Nephi. This may explain how he could have been selected at such a young age to fulfill that role.

Likely, his father was a military leader, and he trained Mormon. John Tvedtnes has written a very persuasive argument that Mormon may well have come from a military caste or line of Nephites, and that he learned certain things naturally from his father. In that day, people typically took over the trade of their fathers. Mormon's father may very well have been in that line of work, with great responsibility and political influence. For purposes of comparison, other great military leaders in history assumed leadership roles at young ages:

Alexander the Great (356–323 BC)

Alexander the Great, officially known as Alexander III, was the son of Philip II, King of Macedonia. He had been tutored by Aristotle, and had opportunity for the finest education. Aristotle gave Alexander, who was very interested in history, a copy of Homer's *Iliad*, the great story of the Trojan War. As any good, young Greek would, he probably knew that whole text by memory, so he knew the great military history of the Greek people. Mormon, too, had an interest in history, especially as he was destined to edit the old records of his people. He was learning of the history of the Nephite armies and their wars.

Alexander the Great fought alongside his father for several years, and successfully led the military and defended the nation while his father was away on forays. Then he defeated the Persian Empire, a huge empire, when he was only 23 years old. He had been considered very precocious at the age of ten, when he tamed his own huge, white Macedonian horse. In his day, people assumed that only someone with divine blood could possibly have done that.

Julius Caesar (100–44 BC) and Augustus Caesar (63 BC–AD 14)

Julius Caesar was born into an influential family, well educated, and entered military service at age 19. By age 26 his extraordinary career as a general and politician had begun. When Julius Caesar was assassinated, Augustus Caesar became his heir at the age of 19, inheriting two-thirds of the very large estate that Julius Caesar had amassed. Augustus led the battle at the age of 32, when he defeated Marc Anthony to become the sole ruler of the Mediterranean world and Roman Empire. He developed the state into an empire, in

which, despite appearances, he was the sole ruler, and he extended and defended the outer borders with great success.

Louis XIV (1638–1715)

The young Louis became nominal king at the age of five. However, he did not rule personally until he was sixteen, at which time, he took over complete, singlehanded rule. He reformed much of the French political and military system with a strong and highly organized hand.

Thus, it is perfectly feasible for a precocious and serious-minded young man like Mormon, particularly one who had been both trained by his father and called of God, to become an important leader at a young age. There are several examples throughout history. In contrast to these historic rulers however, young leaders such as Mormon, David the shepherd boy/king, and Joseph Smith were not only very talented and precocious, but more than that they were called by God and led through the Holy Ghost.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Do We Know about Mormon’s Upbringing?](#) (Mormon 1:2),” *KnowWhy* 226 (November 8, 2016).

Mormon 2:2–18 — Life Events of Mormon during the War

Main events covered in this section:

Year	Event
327	Mormon, age 16, is appointed to lead the army (2:2)
328	Lamanites attack (2:3)
330	Mormon defeats Aaron (2:9)
331?	Mormon marries at age 20?
331	Outbreak of hostilities
333?	Moroni is born?
335	Mormon remembers Ammaron telling him to go to Antum at age 24 (1:3)
335	Mormon goes and obtains the records

344	People curse God and wish to die; day of grace was passed (2:14–15)
345	Nephites flee to Jashon, where the records were (2:16–17)
345	Mormon finishes the large plates of Nephi by adding information up to his time (2:18)
345	Nephites fortify city of Shem (2:21)
346	Lamanites attack Shem (2:22)
348–349	Mormon describes the feelings and conditions of this time (2:19–27)
349	Mormon, age 38, has not yet made a complete record on the Plates of Mormon (2:18)
350	Nephites and Lamanites enter into ten-year peace treaty (2:28)
350–360	Ten years of peace; Mormon and Moroni work on the Plates of Mormon (2:28)

AD 326–331

The series of skirmishes between AD 326–331 provided a great victory for Mormon, who did not win many battles during his lifetime. Several features preceded these events: robbers, over-population, intense militarism, and a lot of fear (Mormon 2:3). The Nephites had resorted to sorceries, witchcrafts and magic (Mormon 1:19); they were no longer relying on the Holy Ghost, and they turned to superstition to find a successful strategy. Divination, augury, and things of that nature are surrogates for the lack of the influence of the Holy Ghost. These factors came together to cause the Nephite crisis.

At this point, the Nephites had to retreat. Thus, when Mormon, at age sixteen, began to lead these people, they were already on the run and setting up refugee camps. They had lost their lands, and only had the things they could carry with them. Access to healthcare and food must have been very limited, especially when they were so afraid, as described in Mormon 2:3.

As recorded in Mormon 2:9, however, he regrouped the army and prevailed for a moment of victory against Aaron. Mormon reported, “He came against us with an army of forty and four thousand. And behold, I withstood him with forty and two thousand. And it came to pass that I beat him with my army that he fled before me.” The Nephites were slightly outnumbered, but Mormon wanted us to know that he won at least that once.

When Did Mormon Marry?

By the end of that victory in about AD 331, Mormon was in his twentieth year. In Jewish tradition, if they were still following it or some similar life-expectations, the age of twenty was considered an ideal age to marry. Mormon still had another four years before he could obtain the records at the age of 24, and he would probably have wanted to first marry a woman who already understood his mission. We don't know when Mormon married, but for several reasons, sometime during the early 330s would have made sense. Interestingly, Joseph Smith married Emma at about that age as well in January 1827. Joseph began translating the plates, bringing forth the 116 pages in May and June, 1828, when he was age 22.

Hypothetically, Mormon could have married around AD 331, about twenty years of age, during the break in the wars at that time. Moroni could have been born a couple years after that. Looking ahead, if Moroni was then called to the ministry around 30 years of age, that would have occurred around AD 360, around the end of the 10-year-treaty. Considering the conditions at such times in Mormon's life helps us suggest possible dates for things such as Mormon's preaching in his synagogue as found in Moroni 7, and also his letter to Moroni as recorded in Moroni 8. Moroni noted that that letter was written by his father shortly after Moroni's call to the ministry, whenever that was (Moroni 8:1). The contexts behind those two documents as well as behind his letter found in Moroni 9 will be discussed later in the notes for Moroni 7–9.

AD 331–345

Very little of what Mormon did between AD 331–345 is recorded in Mormon 2:18, but the points that Mormon touches were the most crucial. The Nephites became worse and the day of grace was past; they were sorrowful, but not unto repentance. Rather theirs was the sorrowing of the damned. In particular, they did not come to Jesus with "broken hearts and contrite spirits," but they "did curse God and wish to die" (Mormon 2:14). The phrase "broken heart and contrite spirit" was spoken by Jesus out of the darkness in 3 Nephi 19: "I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings. And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me *a broken heart and a contrite spirit*" (3 Nephi 9:19–20). The phrase was also used in the Sermon at the Temple, when Jesus commanded all to repent and come unto Him (3 Nephi 12:19). Mormon's diagnosis of the serious spiritual decline of his people thus identifies their strong rejection of the basic teachings of Jesus in 3 Nephi. In using words sparingly, Mormon is excellent at remembering and using significant key phrases that he obviously knew from his study of the records and teachings of his people.

In the year AD 344, the Nephites fled again, and Mormon led them up to the land of Jashon, where a deposit of the Nephite records were. In Mormon 2:17 he recorded,

“Behold I had gone, according to the word of Ammaron and taken the plates of Nephi and did make a record according to the words of Ammaron.” By the time he returned in AD 344, Mormon had already obtained access to the plates, at the age of 24.

It is likely that, between AD 334–344, Mormon worked somewhat on the records. He was apparently finishing the record of what he called the Large Plates when, in Mormon 2:18, he wrote: “and upon the plates of Nephi, I did make a full account.” That is, he wrote on what for centuries had been called the Large Plates, recording “all the wickedness and abomination” of his own people. But upon *these* plates (the plates of Mormon), as he also wrote, he “did forbear to make a full account.” We do not know when he actually made the plates of Mormon, but it would seem likely that he at least began working on them during this period.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Mormon Write So Little About His Own Time Period? \(Mormon 2:18\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 227 (November 9, 2016).

Mormon 2:19–29 — The Ten-Year Peace Treaty

Only a few words and phrases are used by Mormon to describe the feelings and spiritual conditions of the Nephites before they entered into the Ten-Year peace treaty (AD 350–360) with the Lamanites and Gadianton robbers (Mormon 2:19–29). According to Mormon 2:28, in the year AD 350, the Nephites (led by Mormon) made a ten-year peace treaty with the Lamanites and even with the Gadianton robbers. They bought those ten years of peace at a very high price, by promising to give up the entire land south of the narrow neck of land.

As numbers often do, this date and these ten years probably mean something. The year 350 was the seventh occurrence of the fifty-year cycle—the seventh Jubilee year—from the birth of Jesus. They negotiated a ten-year treaty in accordance with Hebrew custom in observance of this special sabbatical-jubilee.

In Mormon 3:1 we learn that during that decade Mormon had made sure that his people were employed in preparing for the inevitable resumption of battle. Nevertheless, that decade was the only time in Mormon’s life that he had a peaceful period long enough to work on a major project, such as the Book of Mormon. Mormon was forty years old in AD 350, and he was sixty years old when the ten-year peace expired. It would appear that it was during this Jubilee decade that he had time and the opportunity to work on the abridgment.

At the same time, if he had married in about AD 331, his son Moroni could have been born a year or two later, and he would have been about 18 or 19 years old in AD 350—old enough to have been taught and trained by Mormon in the languages of his people and

in the skills required to abridge records and to make and inscribe plates. When Mormon died in AD 385, Moroni knew exactly how to pick up where Mormon had left off. It makes sense that Moroni would have grown up as his father's research and writing assistant.

Promptly after those ten years, in Mormon 3:4, the king of the Lamanites wrote a letter warning that they would resume hostilities. Apparently, this king was willing to live exactly by this ten-year treaty. It must have been a very solemn and somewhat religiously or symbolically oriented treaty for people on both sides to be willing to take a ten-year break from the war. The Lamanites were no doubt tired and probably needed a little rest too, but that would not have required a full decade in order to regroup. The bigger problem must have been within the Nephite camp. And, indeed, it was not more than two years after this ten-year time-out that Mormon would utterly refuse to lead the Nephites any longer because of their vengefulness and hatred.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Is The 10-Year Peace Treaty Important? \(Mormon 3:1\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 228 (November 10, 2016).

Mormon 3

Mormon 3 — Questions Arising within This Chapter

- Around AD 360, at the age of 49, what did Mormon preach to his people at the close of the ten-year time of treaty (see Mormon 3:2–3)?
- Why did Mormon refuse to lead his people after AD 362 (Mormon 3:10–16)?
- What might it mean to “stand as an idle witness” (Mormon 3:16)?
- How can a person become free from the natural urge to get revenge? Are we free from this problem? In what ways do we get back at people in our society today (Mormon 3:10–16)?
- What is Mormon's purpose in writing his own book and also the entire Book of Mormon (Mormon 3:17–22)? How does this statement of purpose compare with Moroni's statement of purpose in the Title Page of the Book of Mormon? Or with Nephi's statement of purpose in 1 Nephi 1:20?
- How much of the Book of Mormon had Mormon completed by this time? Had he spent much of the time during the ten-years during the treaty of peace working on that project? That may well have been the case. One might think that Mormon could have continued writing and inscribing some things during the next 23 years until his death in AD 385, but with a major population relocation to the land of Desolation and with at least eight more military offensives occurring during those

remaining years, the circumstances under which Mormon could have worked on the sacred record during that time would have been far less than ideal.

Mormon 3:1–4 — Mormon Cries Repentance

In Mormon 3:2, Mormon tells us that he was specifically asked by the Lord to “Cry unto this people—Repent ye and come unto me, and be ye baptized, and build up again my church, and ye shall be spared.” This was the last warning for his people.

Mormon recorded in Mormon 3:4 that he received this command from the Lord and began preaching in AD 360, at 50 years old. He recorded that the event occurred at the end of the ten-year peace treaty made with the Lamanites, maybe as long as ten years after his tabernacle speech recorded by his son in Moroni 7. The treaty came to an abrupt end when the King of the Lamanites wrote a letter of warning that the time for the period of peace was over.

Mormon began, as instructed, to teach about repentance. In his earlier sermon, recorded in Moroni 7, while speaking to a band of believers, he had taught the higher law from the Sermon in the Temple, but now, he focused on the first principle of the Gospel, faith, repentance, and baptism. The ten-year celebration would have been a great time for people to have regrouped and returned to Christ, but apparently, they had not done so. This was a season of repentance, and his teaching was a great deal more than just a nice topic in conference.

The Lord had said, “Repent ye!” The verb “repent” was used purposefully. They had been on the run for a while, followed by a long a season of jubilee and celebration. Now it was time to go back to work to re-establish the church. Mormon used the verb again in the expression of his inner desire, “And I would that I could persuade all ye ends of the earth to *repent* and prepare to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ” (Mormon 3:22, emphasis added).

Mormon commented in Mormon 3:3 that he had done what he had been commanded to do. “I did cry unto the people,” but his efforts were in vain. His people did not recognize that the Lord had spared them and had granted them a time for *repentance*. However, “behold, they did harden their hearts against the Lord” (Mormon 3:3).

Mormon 3:9–16 — Mormon Refuses to Lead the Wicked Nephites

At the end of the ten-year span of peace, the king of the Lamanites had sent a letter warning that the treaty was over, and that fighting would resume. Mormon led his people in two successful battles, one in the 361st year, in the Land of Desolation (Mormon 3:7), and another in the 362nd year (v. 8), in which they “did slay a great number of them.” However, it becomes clear in Mormon 3:9 that the Nephites became proud and boastful

because of their success. Not only were they interested in revenge, but they even swore before the heavens that they would avenge themselves of the blood of their brethren.

The war, to the Nephites, became an offensive action. It is quite possible that their choices were based partly on a desire to step into a position of advantage, and win, but their motivation and trust in themselves precluded the help of the Lord.

Primarily, they wrongly became avengers of blood. Avengers of blood were part of the Law of Moses. If one had a brother or first-level relative murdered, there was an obligation under the Law of Moses to act as what was called the redeemer of blood, or *go-el hadam*, and to even the score. They may have been using this old law to say that God would justify their thirst for revenge. Though this was 330 years after Christ appeared, there were lingering questions about which parts of the Law of Moses were supposed to have been discontinued and which were still applicable. Possibly, they were falling back into old customs. For example, in Moroni 8, which was an “epistle of my father Mormon, written to me, Moroni; and it was written unto me soon after my calling to the ministry,” it was noted that the law of circumcision was done away in Christ. This sort of confusion also happened in Jerusalem among a number of early Christian converts.

It was not always clear which parts of the Law of Moses were to be done away with and which were not. For example, the law of the Sabbath is still followed, but other parts of the Law of Moses are not. Prophetic instruction was required to differentiate between those parts to be retained and those parts to be discontinued. Thus, although one may understand where they might have acquired their idea, they were still incorrect.

They were warned that exacting revenge was sinful, but they ignored the prophet, Mormon. One may ask whether seeking revenge is a common part of life today. In what ways do even Latter-day Saints “get back” at people in our society? It happens at a national level; it happens in the lives of individuals. Road rage is a modern example of vengeful behavior. Holding grudges or considering getting even with someone are common failings.

Mormon retired at the age of 53 because he could no longer stand at the head of the vengeful and bitter Nephites who would neither hear his cry for repentance nor cease being avengers. In Mormon 3:11–16, he announced that he would stand down. For what it may or may not have been worth in Mormon’s day, the mandatory retirement age of priests under the Law of Moses was 50 (see Numbers 8:25). Mormon was called back into service and accepted the role of leader again at the very end of his life, 20 years later.

Mormon 3:16 — Mormon Stands as an “Idle Witness”

Mormon withdrew from the battle and stood on the sidelines. His words were resolute. “I utterly refused to go up against mine enemies; and I did even as the Lord had commanded me; and I did stand as an idle witness to manifest unto the world the things which I saw and heard” (Mormon 3:16).

What might it mean for a person stands as an idle witness? It is someone who chronicles events, but does not become involved. Mormon was not going to be a partisan. He was not going to try to persuade people. He was simply going to record the effects of their choices without being able to alter their course.

Some scholars have written about an interesting psychological phenomenon called the survivor witness. This phenomenon was most pronounced in the holocaust in Germany where people realized the hopelessness of their situation. There was no getting out of those camps, and for the most part, there was no one to whom they could talk. There was no one who would know what had happened to them. They were being eradicated without a voice.

When investigators went into the concentration camps after the war was over, they found that the victims had written notes and buried them under sidewalks where it had washed away, or in cracks of the wood. They had an urge to record what happened to them, and their notes told their story. They had no idea to whom they were speaking, but still desired to leave a record of the fact that they had been there and of what had happened to them. In most cases, they tried not to condemn what was happening, but gave a factual report. It is uncanny how many such statements seemed very dispassionate about the circumstances. They were hoping that someone, someday, would know what had occurred. That whole collection of letters has been studied by psychologists, and they have coined the phrase “survivor witnesses” for these people.

Mormon’s statements and the way in which he dispassionately told the story, matches the model that scholars developed of what these survivor-witnesses wrote. His testimony is the kind that would be expected from a person who had actually watched the horrors that he had to watch, knowing the hopelessness and his lack of power to be able to change the inevitable, inexorable consequences.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can the Book of Mormon Survivors Give Us Hope?](#) (Mormon 8:3),” *KnoWhy* 393 (December 26, 2017).

Gordon C. Thomasson, "The Survivor and the Will to Bear Witness," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 266–268.

Lisa Bolin Hawkins and Gordon Thomasson, "I Only Am Escaped Alone to Tell Thee: Survivor Witnesses in the Book of Mormon" *FARMS Preliminary Reports* (1984): 1–13.

Mormon 3:17–22 — Mormon Addresses His Purpose for Writing

How does Mormon now state his purpose in writing his own book and also the entire Book of Mormon? How does this statement of purpose compare with Moroni's statement of purpose in the Title Page of the Book of Mormon? Or with Nephi's statement of purpose in 1 Nephi 1:20?

Mormon's role as an idle- or survivor-witness affects his statement of purpose. He had tried to get his people to repent, but now they had uprooted and moved, had been attacked and won, but then were attacked again and lost, and became proud and unruly. In Mormon 3:17–22, after washing his hands of further responsibility and pronouncing himself an idle witness, he spoke like a survivor-witness as he stated the only remaining purposes that he hoped to accomplish as this witness. What were Mormon's purposes now in writing especially this last part of his personal book?

In Mormon 3:17, he first hoped to reach a distant, future audience:

- *"Therefore, I write unto you gentiles."* These are people long removed from his immediate audience, but he wants them to know exactly what happened.
- *"... and also unto you, House of Israel, when the work shall commence, that ye shall be about to prepare to return to the land of your inheritance."* That statement relates back to 3 Nephi 21, where this was to be the sign of the beginning of the fulfillment of those prophecies.
- *"And I write unto all the ends of the earth and you twelve tribes of Israel,"* and so on.
- *"... and I write unto the remnant of this people who shall be judged by the Twelve whom Jesus chose in this land."*

In addition, the fact that Mormon truly loved his people, as he said in Mormon 3:12, is evident in this statement of purpose. In Mormon 3:20–21, he secondarily—and perhaps less hopefully—listed three immediate purposes for his account as a witness:

- *"And for this cause I write unto you that ye may know that ye must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, yea, every soul who belongs to the whole human family of Adam and ye must stand to be judged of your works, whether they be good or evil"*

- “And also that ye may believe the gospel of Jesus Christ which you shall have among you”
- “And also that the Jews, the covenant people of the Lord shall have other witness besides him whom they saw and heard, that Jesus whom they slew was the very Christ and the very God.”

This statement of purpose is rather different from what Moroni expresses in the Title Page, the one that people usually refer to. Why may Mormon have wanted his main purpose to be to ensure that people know that they would stand to be judged? Was he discharging his obligation to let people know that this will happen? Was it because he cared about the people and his stewardship?

In Mormon 3:22, he forewarned all to repent and prepare for the time of judgment. Repentance is what the Lord had commanded him to preach (Mormon 3:2). It is apparent that Mormon had this message of the urgency to repent in his mind the whole time he was editing, abridging, and producing the Book of Mormon.

The fact that all will stand to be judged is really the only thing Mormon had left to say to his own people at this time. Because they had been wicked and had not listened, he turned them over to the accountability of God. The status of being an idle witness left nothing more to do than to bear testimony and remind people that they are accountable. This purpose is not identical to, but is consistent with, the purpose that Moroni expressed in the Title Page. It is a reflection of Mormon’s despair after hearing, as he wrote in verse 15, that this was their last warning. He knew that they had received their last chance.

Mormon had been described as a *sober* young man. Here he did not get angry, but he calmly and coolly stepped to the sidelines and stood as an idle witness. That is a sober person. These attributes are also characteristic of the way Mormon handled the accounts of the destructions in 3 Nephi 8, and other conflicts in the record with the Gadianton robbers. He presents a very factual, purposeful, sober history. He was decidedly suited for the task of abridging the history of his people into our Book of Mormon.

Mormon 4–6 — The Last Nephite War

When the Book of Mormon was first published, readers of Mormon’s accounts of the final battles in Mormon 4–6, and Moroni 9 were very skeptical: “This is too fantastic,” they said, “This could never have really happened.” War had not been conducted in that manner in Europe. Soldiers in that era went out on to a field outside of town to fight. Even when the Civil War began, the women and children took picnic baskets and watched the battle. In

ancient warfare, however, the whole population was affected more than modern experience would indicate.

In World War II, Hugh Nibley was in Army Intelligence, and was one of the first to arrive at the beach on D-Day. His job was to go ahead of the soldiers, get inland as far as he could, and let people know where the strengths and weaknesses of the German lines were. Nibley had served a mission in Germany, had German ancestry, and had a German appearance. He spoke with a flawless accent, so he interrogated many captives. When he was in the D-Day invasion he had a large coat, and every pocket was very strictly regulated on what had to be kept and what could not be kept in each pocket, so that if he was killed, his fellow intelligence officers could get quickly to his body and get what they needed to take. He was not allowed to have anything else other than the items that were prescribed, but he violated the rules. He smuggled a copy of the Book of Mormon into one pocket, and was reading as he went across the English Channel on the morning of the invasion, 6 June 1944.

He said, "It never really dawned on me how historically real the Book of Mormon was until D-Day." In interviews included in the film *The Faith of an Observer*, Nibley recalls that he got his testimony of the Book of Mormon riding across the bumpy waves reading about the destruction of the Jaredites and Mormon's account of the destruction of the Nephites. It was there that he saw the great catastrophe, the pain, the suffering, and the chaos of war. We see both the allied soldiers' accounts and Mormon's account of people running this way and that way, fleeing and going from one city to the next, and being driven from one place to another. It is chaos. Mormon regrouped and then they were driven again. It was impossible for him to be in control of his soldiers; they did not even have walkie-talkies as they did in World War II. Once they were scattered, regrouping was very difficult. The chaos, tension, and horror of the similar military scene at the landing were overwhelming to Brother Nibley.

In the newspapers, it seemed that D-Day went according to plan, but Brother Nibley reported, "Nothing went according to plan." The ships were blown the wrong way, the weather did not cooperate, and we were not where we were supposed to be. Moreover, the Germans had intercepted all the messages, and thought the invasion was going to be where the troops expected it to be. It was a piece of good fortune that they were off course, otherwise the exercise would have come out a whole lot differently. The chaos was evident.

People used to read the Book of Mormon account and say, "This just sounds too fantastic to be true," but it is true. We know today that such things happen. Many war participants have verified similar experiences, and with embedded television participation, the public can now observe at a safe distance some of the realities of war.

Further Reading

Hugh Nibley and Alex Nibley, *Sergeant Nibley PhD: Memories of an Unlikely Screaming Eagle* (Salt Lake City, UT: Shadow Mountain, 2006).

Mormon 4

Mormon 4 — Study Questions for This Chapter

- Mormon 4:2, 5, 10, 11–18: What points here suggest that Mormon’s letter to Moroni in Moroni 9 was written as a reaction to the events described here in Mormon 4, perhaps at the end of the hiatus between AD 367–375, before the invasion in AD 375?
- Mormon 4:5: Do you find some great quotes, some pearls, in the midst of all this horrendous slaughter, suffering, and depravity? Consider, among others, the words of wisdom in Mormon 4:5; Moroni 9:5; 9:6; and 9:20.
- Mormon 4:11: What can we learn from Mormon’s great reluctance to report these awful experiences? Read and ponder Mormon 4:11, 5:8–11, and Moroni 9:19.

Mormon 4:11 — Mormon Was Reluctant to Share Details of the War

It is interesting that Mormon was reluctant to tell us everything about the horrible experiences during these last battles. They were, to him, unspeakably sad, awful events. In Mormon 4:11 we read, “It is impossible for the tongue to describe, or for man to write a perfect description of the horrible scene of the blood and carnage which was among the people, both of the Nephites and the Lamanites.”

There are a few other places in which Mormon made a similar plea for his readers to understand how bad it was, though he said it was impossible for him to describe. He did not go into detail. Is that something that modern readers could learn? If they were to produce this installment of the Nephite history in a feature-length film, the battle scene would likely go on for fifteen or twenty minutes. Mormon would not have been happy with that. His reluctance was in keeping with his lifestyle. He was surrounded by wickedness and slaughter all his life, and yet he was visited by the Savior and he was an apostle, a very sensitive person, the leader of the church, and a prophet, so his reluctance to describe the evils was in keeping with his role and life.

When one considers the great man that produced this whole book, one can appreciate what he had and had not told us about many other events. When he reported the great battles in the Book of Alma, he did not really dwell on the carnage. He said, in modern terms, “There were a lot of them and they threw them in the river.” That is about as much

as he wanted to say about that. He had sensitivity about not wanting to give more time and attention to such terrible things than he absolutely had to.

The most graphic description of the atrocities is not in Mormon's public writings in Mormon 4. It is in his letter, in Moroni 9:8–9. After Mormon had lived with the experience for some time, and it was a little in the past, he wanted people to know how bad it really had become. He wanted them to know that God was no longer justified in standing by these people; then he was willing to put this into the record so that it was available. However, when Mormon wrote these words, he did not intend them for public consumption. He was writing a letter to Moroni who was one of his Generals and his son. This record, which speaks of such atrocities as eating the flesh of others, can be compared to classified information. But it became declassified, in Moroni 9:8–9.

It happened in Mormon's time, and it happened when Jerusalem was attacked by the Romans and they would not let anybody in or out of the city of Jerusalem. Josephus recorded that they had nothing at all to eat, so they started eating their children. It has happened in South Sudan more recently. According to CNN, "Forced cannibalism, gang rapes, and death by burning are among the atrocities marking the brutal civil war taking place in South Sudan, according to an African Union (AU) report." The report describes heart-wrenching events too ugly to detail, and assures the reader that the details of Mormon's experiences are not fantasy and were thankfully under-reported.

Further Reading

Susannah Cullinane, "[Cannibalism, gang rapes -- the brutal toll of the South Sudan conflict](#)," *CNN* (October 29, 2015).

Mormon 4:11 — Did the Nephites Use a Macuahuitl?

The "horrible scene of the blood and carnage" described by Mormon in his record (Mormon 4:11, 21, and 5:8) and his letter to his son (Moroni 9) and the account of many thousands of people having been slaughtered, bring to mind the weapon known as a macuahuitl. This weapon, a particularly effective and brutal one, was used by the Aztec, Maya, and several other Central and South American native peoples. The weapon was constructed of a strong wooden baton, with sharp obsidian blades inserted along two edges. A sword that was even a foot shorter than these long "slashers" would not have been able to stand up against such a weapon. The obsidian blades were said by the Spanish who invaded the Americas to be neither breakable nor extractable. Obsidian is the sharpest, natural edge that is found. Before there were lasers, obsidian flakes were used to perform surgery.

In addition, when Spanish soldiers arrived in Mexico to conquer, they were met by a number of Aztec soldiers, who, they reported, could decapitate a horse with their swords. People assumed the conquistadors had exaggerated in order to make themselves look better when they reported what a great victory they had won. Later evidence supports that they were not exaggerating. Weapons and records found in archaeological work have supported their statements.

Although no one is certain that such weapons were used in Mormon’s battles, they would certainly have added to the appearance of a great deal of “blood and carnage” when compared with the traditional weapons that were known in Europe and the Americas in the 1800’s.

Further Reading

Matthew Roper, “[To Inflict the Wounds of Death](#),” FairMormon Presentation 2016, online at fairmormon.org.

Matthew Roper, “[Swords and ‘Cimeters’ in the Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1 (1999): 35–43.

Mormon 4 and Moroni 9 Compared

In reading Mormon 4–5 and Moroni 9, look for unique points mentioned in both texts help us see that Moroni 9 was written in response to actual atrocities, which Moroni had not yet heard of, and at a time when Moroni was not close by Mormon’s side. As Alan Miner has also concluded, I am of the opinion that Moroni 9 was likely written sometime around AD 375–376 (Mormon 4:15–16; 5:3).

Mormon	Moroni	Shared Content
4:2, 14	9:7–9	taking prisoners is particularly mentioned, only in these two places in the book of Mormon
4:10	9:3–5	anger is mentioned only in these verses in the book of Mormon; anger is in opposition to Jesus’s first mandate in 3 Nephi 12:22
4:11–21	9:8, 16	unspeakable suffering; human sacrifice unto idols; feed women the flesh of their husbands; no water; widows left to wander with no food; these things appear here and nowhere else in the whole Book of Mormon
4:13	9:2	a battle in which Nephites did not conquer; first time this happens in Mormon’s lifetime

4:12, 15	9:9–10	extraordinary Nephite excesses, revenge and wickedness
4:18	9:24	swept off as dew before the sun, on the run, many desertions
4:23	9:24	Mormon takes up all of Ammaron's records; Mormon has records to give Moroni
5:1	9:6	Mormon repented of his oath not to lead any longer; Mormon explains why he retracted his vow and is now not quitting, "if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation"
4:11; 5:8–11	9:19	reluctance to even mention some atrocities

The last few of these points in this list make it likely that Mormon first wrote about these events in Mormon 4 and then drafted the personal letter to Moroni in Moroni 9 based on that record.

Further Reading

Joseph M. Spencer, "[On the Dating of Moroni 8–9](#)," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 22 (2016): 131–148.

Alan C. Miner, "[A Chronological Setting for the Epistles of Mormon to Moroni](#)," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no 2. (1994): 94–113.

Mormon 5

Events occurring in this chapter:

Year	Event
379	Lamanites attack the city of Jordan and other strongholds and were driven back; Nephites who would not gather in were destroyed (5:3, 5)
380	Lamanites attack again in great numbers, and the Nephites are defeated; only the swift could outrun the Lamanites (5:6, 7)

Mormon 5:8–24

How does Mormon now state his purpose and intent for writing the Book of Mormon? Compare these verses with his previous statement of purpose in Mormon 3:17–22.

Mormon now explains why he only writes a few things—because the sorrow would be too great (5:9). But he knows that people who care for the house of Israel will sorrow for the calamity of these distant kinsmen who would not repent and be “clasped in the arm of Jesus” (5:11). Mormon had been commanded to write to the “unbelieving of the Jews” that they might be persuaded “that Jesus is the Christ,” the anointed messiah, through whom God will keep his promises “unto the fulfilling of his covenant” (5:14).

Mormon then speaks to “the seed” of this defeated people and their fate, being led about by Satan (5:15, 18). Nevertheless, the Lord has “reserved their blessings” and the Lord will “remember the covenant” and “the prayers of the righteous,” even though the seed will be “driven and scattered by the Gentiles” (5:19–21).

Mormon concludes by admonishing the Gentiles to repent, humble themselves, turn from their evil ways, unless “a remnant” will tear them to pieces (5:22–24). Mormon’s words here echo the woes and warnings at the end of 3 Nephi 29–30, but here in Mormon 5 he relates those more general curses and commandments to the Gentiles’ specific mistreatment of the Nephite remnant and seed that will scatter and survive the institutional collapse of the Nephite nation as a people.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Was Mormon’s Purpose in Writing the Book of Mormon? \(Mormon 5:14\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 230 (November 14, 2016).

Mormon 6

Mormon 6 – Questions to Ponder

- Mormon 6:2–3. Mormon now writes to the king of the Lamanites to set a place and time for a final confrontation. How odd is it that the King of the Lamanites would let the Nephites gather their armies together for a final battle? Or, was honor in battle understood differently then than it is now?
- Mormon 6:4–15. Where was the hill and the land of Cumorah where this final battle was staged? How many Nephites died there? How devastating was it in the minds of ancient people for their dead to be denied burial?
- Mormon 6:10. Why do you think Mormon was killed, and not even taken captive or held as a trophy of war? Might it have been obvious that he was already

mortally wounded? Might the Lamanite king have been showing some aristocratic respect for his personal counterpart, or maybe Mormon was regarded as a holy man. Or maybe they just overlooked him in the carnage.

- Mormon 6:16–22. Do these words not rank among the most poignant and eloquent lamentations of all time? What helps human beings the most in dealing with the sorrows, pains, and uncertainties of death?

Mormon 6:10–15 — How Many Soldiers Died in the Final Battle?

The public in the early 19th century had probably not heard of whole populations being obliterated. But even when the so-called civilized Greeks took over the island of an enemy, they exterminated the male population, and either killed the women and children or reserved them as slaves. Modern reporting increases awareness of the realities of war. When one to three million Cambodians, much of the whole population, were obliterated by the Khmer Rouge from 1970 to 1975, the entire world could observe the results.

A so-called ethnic cleansing, later classified as a genocide, took place in areas controlled by the Bosnian Serbs, who were mostly Orthodox Christians in 1995. Both Muslim Bosnians and Roman Catholic Bosnian Croats were targets for extermination. According to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the ethnic cleansing campaign included exterminations, unlawful confinement, murder, rape, sexual assault, torture, beating, robbery, and inhumane treatment of civilians. It also included targeting political leaders, intellectuals, and professionals; the unlawful deportation and transfer of civilians; the unlawful shelling of civilians; the unlawful appropriation and plunder of real and personal property; the destruction of homes and businesses; and the destruction of places of worship.

In the case of Mormon's final battle, the numbers were also staggering—as many as 230,000 in one battle, assuming each unit was full to begin with. Except for 24 survivors, twenty-three leaders, each together with their ten thousand, were all “hewn down.” These kinds of things do happen, probably more in the ancient world than today, but no era in history is immune from such slaughter.

Regarding uncertainties about the location of this final battle, much has been said. But in the end, one might wonder why it is that we simply do not know the place of that battle. One might also ask what significance its GPS location might have, if any.

In comparison, it might help to point out that we do not know the location of Mt. Sinai, where Moses saw God and received the Ten Commandments. Likewise, we do not know the location of the Mount of Transfiguration, where Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus, Peter, James and John. Nor do we know the mountain on which Jesus gave the Sermon on

the Mount. In none of these cases is the specific location crucial, but rather knowing what happened there is.

Also, there is no compelling reason why Moroni should have buried the plates of Mormon at the same location where this final battle had taken place 36 years earlier. All those years, Moroni had wandered to avoid contact with his enemies, who would have killed him if they had found him.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Where is the Location of the Hill Cumorah?](#) (Mormon 6:6)," *KnoWhy* 489 (November 29, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Could So Many People Have Died at the Battle of Cumorah? \(Mormon 6:14\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 231 (November 15, 2016).

Mormon 6:16–22 — Mormon’s Anguished Lament over the Fallen Nephites

The words of sorrow and mourning in Mormon 6:16–22, which can easily bring tears to the eyes, can be seen literarily as a powerful formal lamentation. The text could well have been sung or chanted as a dirge. It deserves and rewards a more careful analysis than it has previously been given.

As background, in ancient Syrian literature, going back to the Assyrian Empire and beyond into the Sumerian literature, we find tablets lamenting over the destruction of a city or the destruction of a temple. This became a genre, a type of writing. In early cultures, mourning and lamentation was serious and very public. Usually women, but sometimes men, would mourn for days and would cry aloud, putting expression to their deep sorrow. Under Jewish law, the men were required to mourn in a slightly different way; they tore their clothes, both the outer and inner garments. Jewish law even went so far as to say how long the tear had to be in order for it to qualify as a properly rent garment. In all these cases, mourning was a formalized experience.

In general, ancient funeral lamentations had developed patterns and styles. In the *Iliad*, for example, there are about a dozen passages in which Homer’s epic poetry follows a standard pattern as the women mourn and lament over the death of Hector and other heroes. Both Homer and Mormon understood the lamentable side of intransigent warfare. Mormon’s lament seems spontaneous, but he has had plenty of previous opportunities to mourn the deaths of large numbers of his people. No doubt, due to the uniqueness of this final demise of his entire nation, Mormon’s lamentation is somewhat unique, but Mormon probably had cried out in bereavement on many other occasions as well. This final dirge manifests the confident cadences and heart-rending expressions of an aged and lyrically experienced prophetic leader.

Mormon's Lament

(Mormon 6:16–11)

And my soul was rent with anguish, because of the slain of my people, and I cried:

[Tripartite]

[A. Direct Address]

O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord!

O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you!

Behold if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen.

But behold, ye are fallen,

and I mourn your loss.

O ye fair

sons and daughters,

ye fathers and mothers,

ye husbands and wives,

[O] ye fair ones

How is it that ye could have fallen!

But ye are gone

And my sorrows cannot bring your return.

[B. Central Parallelistic Narrative Comment]

And the day soon cometh that your mortal must put on immortality

And these bodies which are now moldering in corruption must soon become incorruptible bodies.

And then ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ

To be judged according to your works

And if it so be that ye are righteous,

then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you.

[C. Renewed address to the dead]

O that ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you.

But behold, ye are gone,

and the Father, yea, the Eternal Father of heaven, knoweth your state;

and he doeth with you according to his justice and mercy.

Patterns and recurring themes, are discernable in these typical formulaic military lamentations in the *Iliad*, and some of the themes that appear there are also identifiable in Mormon's speech.

Like the dirges in the *Iliad*, Mormon's speech, begins with a common verb of speaking: to cry out. Then there are words that specifically mark the speech as a personal lament. Mormon, for example, makes it clear that he personally is mourning by saying explicitly, "I mourn your loss." He also says, "My soul was rent with anguish." He is tearing his soul, perhaps when he rends or tears his coat, which would have been a customary outward manifestation of the inward spiritual tearing of his soul.

Mormon's lament has a tripartite structure, which was a common feature of the way ancient people mourned. For example, in Syrian literature—and this goes back into the Assyrian Empire and beyond that into Sumerian literature—we find clay tablets that are written lamenting over the destruction of a city or the destruction of a temple, and because of their standard styles and formats, scholars refer to them as a *genre*, a particular type of writing.

Those laments often have a tripartite structure in which they begin with a personal address, the mourner then speaks to the dead person in the direct vocative case, often characterized by the word "O." Likewise, Mormon begins, "O, ye fair ones..."

Then at the end, there is usually praise for the dead, lavishly offered and frequently enhanced by repetition. Likewise, Mormon says, "Oh, ye fair ones, ye fair ones," and four times, he refers to how good they could have been. Additionally, these ancient laments often contain an element of reproach, and Mormon likewise cries out, "How could ye have departed ...?" and "How could ye have rejected ...?" In other words, how could this have happened?

Typically, in these laments there is a comparison between the living people and the deceased, extending sometimes to a comparison of the living and the dead in general. Often, the mourner expresses an unfulfilled wish. There is a contrast between the present and the future, and concerns about the future. In particular, the women express concern about what will happen to them now that their man is gone. Will they be taken captive? What will happen next?

The Greek dirges often contain an element of bravado in which the mourners say, "We will get back at you!" "We will take vengeance; we will see that your debt is reconciled." That element does not exist in Mormon's mourning. True to his spirit, Mormon does not allow himself to feel that kind of revenge. Just as he had required his people to leave vengeance in the hands of God, Mormon ends his lament by also recognizing that God holds the ultimate power to judge what is to be done.

With a background of those elements, one can feel the power of and sense the deep emotion eloquently expressed in this terse but complete expression of lamentation. In Mormon 6:16–20, Mormon first addresses the dead:

O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you! Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But behold, ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss. O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen! But behold, ye are gone, and my sorrows cannot bring your return.

Then, as in the traditional tripartite structure, after addressing the dead, Mormon's lamentation turns to what is called a central narrative or comment, and then at the end, the third part will return to direct speech directed at the deceased. In Mormon's speech, we have exactly those parts too. The central narrative is in Mormon 6:21:

And the day soon cometh that your mortal must put on immortality, and these bodies which are now moldering in corruption must soon become incorruptible bodies; and then ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to be judged according to your works; and if it so be that ye are righteous, then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you.

Then follows a return to a final direct address in 6:22:

O that ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you. But behold, ye are gone, and the Father, yea, the Eternal Father of heaven, knoweth your state; and he doeth with you according to his justice and mercy.

An Outline of Mormon's Formal Elegy as Compared with Ancient Elegiac Structures

Ancient Elegiac Structures	Mormon's Formal Elegy
Formulaic speech introduction	My soul rent with anguish (cf. tearing of the garment)
Common verb of speaking	I cried
Words that specifically mark the speech as a personal lament	I mourn your loss

Poetical, chant-able, refrains, antitheticals, parallelisms	
Direct address to the dead	O ye fair ones
Praise for the dead, lavish, repeated	Fair ones, 4x (but Mormon cannot recommend them to God)
Reproach for the mourned	How could ye have rejected How could ye have fallen
Comparison to other characters living or dead	Blessed are ye with your fathers who have gone before you
Common fate of the mourner and the deceased	Mormon knows he too will die and his death is anticipated by the audience
Unfulfilled wish by the mourner	If you had not done this, ye would not have fallen My sorrows cannot bring you back, i.e., as much as I might wish
Contrast between past and present	How could ye have departed, in the past you were righteous
Contrast between present and future	Corruption to incorruption, immortal to mortal
Concern about the future	God knows your state and he will deal with you
Concern about captivity or death of women	Explicit mention of daughters, mothers, wives
Masculine alternative is retributive or compensatory action	To be judged according to your works, talionic justice, justice or mercy Mormon leaves the vengeance to God, as he has told his soldiers they should do

The repetition and structure here are striking. When one is in the deepest moments of sorrow and grief, not much can be said. However, Mormon has embraced beautifully

what can be said in this instance, as he looks back on not only the thousands who have died right before him, but on the lost potential of this great nation now ending. This is a sublime elegy.

It may be enlightening to read a few such lamentations found in the book of Lamentations in the Old Testament, which was written by Jeremiah lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem. That book is four chapters long and shares some of the same characteristics described here. However, Mormon had neither resources nor time to make his parting words as long as the book of Lamentations, so his is considerably more concise.

The other big difference is that Jeremiah ended his mournful lamentation with an optimistic prophecy, because he knew that the Jews would be brought back to Jerusalem. Jeremiah had even purchased some of the family property from his nephew in anticipation of the return. Mormon, however, knew that his people were not coming back, and he closed the record with his final and solemn farewell to his people.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Did Mormon React to Seeing His People Slain?](#) (Mormon 6:17)," *KnoWhy* 232 (November 16, 2016).

MORMON 7–9

John W. Welch Notes



Mormon 7

How did Mormon deal personally with this military and human cataclysm? It must have been awful. As you read this final chapter, mourn with him as you relive his anguished lament in Mormon 7. He had spent his whole life working and striving to prevent this from happening. Notice that as he lamented, Mormon still clung faithfully to his goal and mission. If he was angry, he doesn't let that show. Perhaps he was beyond the point of anger, and knew that he now simply had to turn everything over to the Lord. He had labored long and hard to leave a written legacy for any survivors and for whatever use the Lord might make of the record that he so meticulously assembled and composed. He could only trust that God would, someday, have it see the light of day again. Looking back over the entire Book of Mormon, readers today can see his determination, dedication, and deepest desires coming through his selection of source materials and also in his personal comments and asides that he pauses to interject knowingly into this powerfully orchestrated sacred record.

Each person today can learn many lessons from Mormon's life and personality. One might wish to emulate Mormon's devotion to duty. One might strive to remain positive and faithful in facing difficulties and disappointments. One might mourn and lament as he has here, openly recognizing sorrows and tragedy. One might likewise think what one can do today to help descendants and future generations to learn lessons of truthfulness and testimony, looking forward to the ultimate victory in the eternal battle in which we are led by Jesus Christ in obedience and charity.

Mormon 7:1 — Mormon’s Final Plea to the Descendants of His People

After his formal lament in Mormon 6, Mormon offered his final words of farewell. Remember that there was originally no chapter break or italicized section following his lament. The words in Mormon 6–7 were a single connected chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. Mormon’s primary audience here was his own people, and he pleaded with “the remnant of this people who are spared, if it so be that God may give unto them my words, that they may know of the things of their fathers.” He was giving all that he had left to the posterity of his people, and he was most likely trying to strengthen his only son Moroni as well in these last words of his final book within the Book of Mormon.

It is not known how many people were killed on the occasion of that final battle. Not all were killed, of course. Some would have fled. Their enemies continued to hunt them down and kill them, but only if they refused to “deny the Christ” (Moroni 1:2).

Mormon listed among the dead twenty-three of his generals, each with their ten thousand. That would seem to be a total of 230,000 men, but we do not know how the Nephites actually configured the units in their armies. In the Roman military, as a comparison, a unit of a hundred soldiers was called a *century*. A centurion was one of those hundred and would lead that unit. However, a *century* was still a *century* even if it had only fifty-two or seventy-five soldiers in it. We use a similar system for priesthood quorums. A quorum of deacons has 12, teachers 24, and priests 48, and an elder’s quorum has 96. There can be less, but not more in a quorum. The Nephite *Ten Thousand* may have been like these examples. Therefore, there may not have been a full company of 230,000 men who died at the final battle, to say nothing of the auxiliaries and civilians who would have been moving with this army. But the result, stated one way or the other, was still the complete elimination of all the soldiers that Mormon had led.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Could So Many People Have Died at the Battle of Cumorah?](#) (Mormon 6:14),” *KnoWhy* 231 (November 15, 2016).

A. Brent Merrill, “Nephite Captains and Armies,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 285–286.

Mormon 7:2–5 — What Mormon Wanted the Remnants of His People to Know

Mormon had four specific statements of what he wanted his remote audience to know, and he expressed those points tersely and clearly, each preceded by the phrase “Know ye that”:

1. Know ye that ye are of the house of Israel.

2. Know ye that ye must come unto repentance, or ye cannot be saved.
3. Know ye that ye must lay down your weapons of war, and delight no more in the shedding of blood, and take them not again, save it be that God shall command you.
4. Know ye that ye must come to the knowledge of your fathers, and repent of all your sins and iniquities.

Mormon 7: 5–8 — Mormon’s Testimony of the Mission of Jesus Christ

Mormon expanded upon his fourth desire from verses 2–5, which was itself, a lucid summary of the mission of Jesus:

- Believe in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God, and
- Believe that he was slain by certain of the Jews, and
- Believe that by the power of the Father he hath risen again, and
- Believe that not just Jesus is risen but that from the Father he hath gained the victory over the grave, and that in him is the sting of death swallowed up.

Mormon echoes here the words of Abinadi (which he would have been aware of), quoting Isaiah, regarding “the sting of death” being swallowed up in Christ (Mosiah 16:8; Alma 22:14). His listing of these elements of belief also track in style and content King Benjamin’s words (Mosiah 4:9–10), as well as the consistently repeated elements in the [standard Nephite declarations of faith](#) (compare especially 2 Nephi 9:4–15; Alma 33:22).

Mormon’s summary statement here and its expansion illustrates his sincere love for his people and his powerful testimony of the details of Christ’s Atonement. He wanted his people to know:

- that Jesus will bring to pass the resurrection of all the dead,
- that all mankind will be resurrected to stand before the divine judgment seat,
- that Jesus will provide redemption for all who will repent and accept his atonement, and
- that those who accept it and are thus found guiltless will dwell in the presence of God.

In verse 7, his description of dwelling in the presence of God is vivid and beautifully touching. It is added eloquently here to the terse statements that have preceded it:

“to dwell in the presence of God in his kingdom, to sing ceaseless praises with the choirs above, unto the Father, and unto the Son, and unto the Holy Ghost, which are one God, in a state of happiness which hath no end.”

Then in verse 8, Mormon added literally the “therefore.” Because he knew, and (presumably by the nature of his description) had seen what lay ahead, he returned to his very forthright listing of what the people needed to do to attain this beautiful goal. They

needed to “repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus, and lay hold upon [and cling to] the gospel of Christ, which shall be set before you” (7:8).

Further Reading

John W. Welch and Greg Welch, “Consistent Elements in Nephite Declarations of Faith,” in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 43.

Mormon 7:8–9 — The Record That Shall Come Forth from the Jews Unto the Gentiles

In referring to the gospel of Jesus Christ, Mormon then prophesied of the coming of the Bible through the Jews to the Gentiles, and thence to the descendants of the Nephites and Lamanites. He stated that if his audience believed his records, they “will believe that [namely, the Bible].” He knew that this would be one of the great missions of the Book of Mormon—to help establish the truth of the Bible. Doctrine and Covenants 20:11 similarly says that one of the main missions of the Book of Mormon is “proving to the world that the holy scriptures [including the Bible] are true.”

Latter-day Saints, however, often reverse this logic, using the Bible to prove that Joseph Smith was a prophet and to bolster other parts of the restored gospel, which it indeed does. But, if the Book of Mormon is intended, according to Mormon, to prove that the Bible is true, the logic should run primarily in that direction. By knowing that the Book of Mormon is good and true, one can then know even better and more surely that the Bible is true. And in a day such as ours, when many people have lost faith in the credibility of the Bible, the strength of the Book of Mormon should only be welcomed as an enhancing ally. Increasingly today, the Book of Mormon may be the first introduction that many people coming from a non-Judeo-Christian background will have to the Bible in general and the Gospel of Jesus Christ in particular.

Reciprocally, as Mormon also expects, belief in the Bible can also enhance belief in the Book of Mormon. How can we help fulfill this two-way interactivity? It takes conscious attention and effort to realize and show how extensively and how meaningfully these two “sticks” of scripture do and should, indeed, become one in our hands, as Ezekiel 37 prophesies that they are intended to become.

Mormon 7:9–10 — The Intent for Which the Book of Mormon Was Written

Lastly, Mormon gives yet another statement of “the intent” for which the Book of Mormon was written. Through these plates, the remnant of his people will eventually “know concerning their fathers, and also the marvelous works which were wrought by the power of God.”

Recall the other two earlier statements of intent mentioned by Mormon in this book of Mormon: First, when Mormon was getting started with the records project, during the

ten-year time of peace, he said the reason he was writing the Book of Mormon was so that people would know that they will stand in the *future* before the judgment bar of God (Mormon 3:17–22).

Second, he said that his purpose was to persuade them now, in the *present*, to believe in Christ more fully, and believe now that the covenant will be restored (Mormon 5:14–15).

Then here in his final statement in Mormon 7:9–10, he states his “purpose” in writing the Book of Mormon so that the Nephites will remember their *past* and their heritage, that they might

- Know concerning their fathers, and the marvelous works which were wrought by the power of God among them, and
- Know that they are a remnant of the seed of Jacob, numbered among the people of the first Covenant.

Indeed, knowing all three—the past, present, and future—was important to Mormon and Moroni. In the Title Page of the Book of Mormon, Moroni includes again this triad: that the remnant may know “what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers [past]; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord [now], that they are not cast off forever [future].”

Remembering who we are and what the Lord has done for us is indeed of crucial importance. In most reconversion efforts in the Book of Mormon, the missionaries often began by reminding the prospective learner to remember “the marvelous works which were wrought by the power of God.” People were exhorted to remember such things as the rescue of the Hebrews from Egypt, and the ultimately safe journey of Lehi and his family. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught that the most important word in our religious dictionary is *remember*. “Because we have made covenants with God,” he said, “our greatest need is to remember” them.

Further Reading

Spencer W. Kimball, “Circles of Exaltation” (address to Church Educational System religious educators, June 28, 1968), 5.

Mormon 8

Mormon 8–9

In these two chapters, as Moroni finishes the record of his slain father, his emotions are intense and palpable. You may want to read these as if you were Moroni writing his final words of prophecy, declaration, questioning, judging, challenging, commanding,

attesting, and petitioning in this, his “first farewell.” He will bid farewell and sign off again at the end of the book of Ether, and finally at the end of his book of Moroni.

In finishing the record of his father, Moroni did not stay around the location of the final battle. If he had, he would have been killed, so he left. The final battle took place in AD 385, and Moroni finally buried these records in AD 421, thirty-six years later. He apparently spent those thirty-six years in exile, probably, for the most part, alone. Think of being alone for that long. Loneliness is terrible, especially when you are being pursued, but look at what he left for us in spite of his solitary circumstances. Moroni’s integrity and personality shine through in these words he has written. They are not just casual words. They are words that were deeply important to Moroni, and I am very grateful to him for writing and preserving them.

Moroni, a Master Scribe

As a master scribe, Moroni paid attention to his audiences. Four times, he declares specifically to whom he is speaking: “I speak unto you as if you were present” (8:35); “I speak concerning those who do not believe in Christ” (9:1); “I speak unto you who deny the revelations of God” (9:7); and “I speak unto you as thou I spake from the dead” (9:30).

He adapted to these audiences. For example, in chapter 8, he was speaking to those who believed in Christ. To them he spoke in certain modes, for example, a questioning mode. In chapter 9, he switched to another one of his audiences—the non-believers. He spoke to them in other modes, such as by challenging them. The Gentiles are part of his audiences, but they are not his only audience. He also spoke, as did his father Mormon, to the Lamanites, and to his own people, who were already all dead.

Clearly, he had several audiences and many things to say to them. But it seems that he was hard-pressed to find more sources of metal, as he mentions running out of plates. If only he had found more, we may have been blessed with much more that he could have said.

Moroni’s Many Rhetorical Techniques

Moroni would never have had an opportunity to speak face-to-face to the people to whom he so yearned to deliver this message, but he used exceptionally effective rhetorical techniques to make his message clear to a broad audience that was widely spread in distance and over time. The several modes of writing, or *rhetorical registers*, that Moroni used in Moroni 8 and 9 are very impressive. They are noticeable to us because they involve several sequences of repetitive form. Moroni was a prophet trying to communicate across a span of 2,000 years. He enumerated and gave specificity to details to provide relevance. Not many authors would need to say, “I am writing to you,” but Moroni’s audience was

not immediate. He felt an urgency to reach them, and he reiterated his phrases, wondering if we are hearing him.

When we read these chapters, we must pull out the different rhetorical modes and series which Moroni uses. They sometimes overlap, but they are usually distinct. I find ten modes in Mormon 8–9. At first, Moroni will use (1) a blessing and cursing mode, then (2) a warning mode, (3) a forecasting mode, (4) a declaring mode, (5) a questioning mode, (6) a judging mode, (7) a challenging mode, (8) a commanding mode (9) an attesting mode, and finally (10) a petitioning mode. The reader must focus to notice these patterns, and one may have to read this chapter many times before observing how these rhetorical modes work in individual blocks of text as well as together and as a whole.

As will be seen below, Moroni uses these forms masterfully. Books have been written describing the techniques used by the greatest rhetoricians, artists, and musicians, helping us appreciate what made them so masterful. A great master is able to use forms so perfectly that the form does not draw attention to itself. When you listen to a Beethoven symphony, you are not conscious of how it is organized thematically, progressively, even mathematically. When you listen to a Bach fugue, it is structured with repetitions and patterns, yet overall, it simply sounds clear, interesting, perfect and beautiful because everything flows through the form and meshes so well. That is what Moroni has done as he deliberately employs these various rhetorical registers through engraving his words onto plates.

Moroni's Three Endings

Moroni produced three conclusions to the Book of Mormon. One is here in Mormon 8–9, another is found in the Ether 12, and his final farewell can be found at the conclusion of his writings in Moroni 10. These three conclusions were written at different times, and they are very different from each other. There are many lessons to be learned from each of them, not the least of which is that it is hard to know how to conclude a major work like the Book of Mormon.

I think what Moroni was doing here in chapters 8 and 9 can be best described as “dutiful.” He was doing his duty. He was warning us. He was commanding us. He was closing the record as his father had charged him to do. He issued challenges and asked questions. This was his duty, and he was doing things dutifully for his father who had told him to do so.

Then, when Moroni was abridging the book of Ether, he inserted his second farewell as an extended commentary on the fact that the people of Ether would “not believe” the great and marvelous things which he prophesied “because they saw them not” (Ether 12:5). He

then discourses, teaches, worries about the Gentiles mocking, prays that the Gentiles will have charity, and bids farewell for the next thirty-six verses (12:6–41), and in the end he lets Ether have the last word in the book of Ether (15:34).

But when he wrote in Moroni 10, he was not doing it because he had been told to do it, and he was not worried about what his readers might think of his work. In the end, Moroni simply pours out his heart to us. That is where we will eventually find his series of seven pleading exhortations to us, as we will later see.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Moroni Write So Many Farewells? \(Mormon 8:1\), KnoWhy 233](#) (November 17, 2016). “When readers recognize that Moroni’s three farewells were written at different stages of his life and in the context of different record-keeping projects, they can better understand the purpose and meaning of each one. In the first, he spoke with the voice of justice. In the second, he found himself moved by sympathy. . . . In the third, Moroni turned the matter over to the will and grace of God.”

Mormon 8:1–3 — Moroni’s Colophon

In ancient writing, many manuscripts contained what scholars call a *colophon*. They did not have a copyright or a title page on their scrolls, but formal scribes would typically leave a declaration either at the beginning or the end of what they had written. A colophon required the scribe to leave a date of when the document was written, and state the identity of the author, their titles, and their genealogy. Moroni began by saying who his father was, and giving us the genealogy and the sad, though glorious and honorable, way in which Mormon died.

Further Reading

Thomas W. Mackay, [“Mormon as Editor: A Study of Colophons, Headers, and Source Indicators,”](#) *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2 (1993): 90–109.

John A. Tvedtnes, [“Colophons in the Book of Mormon,”](#) in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 13–16.

Mormon 8:6 — Moroni Provides the Time of His Authorship

Ancient authors were often expected to provide a period or date for their writing. Moroni gave a date in Moroni 8:6, “Behold, four hundred years have passed away since the coming of our Lord and Savior.” There were twenty-one more years before he finally buried the plates, and it had been fifteen years since the final battle before Moroni was able to put this first conclusion on the record.

Four hundred is twenty squared, that is twenty times twenty. The Mesoamerican calendar system was based on the number twenty. One cycle of twenty years was called a *tun* and so it had been a *tun* of *tuns*. Moroni probably saw this as significant; otherwise, why would he have made particular mention of it? A good recordkeeper demarcates when and where the record was produced.

Further Reading

Mark Alan Wright, “Nephite Daykeepers: Ritual Specialists in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon,” in *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of the Expound Symposium, 14 May 2011*, ed. Matthew B. Brown, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Stephen D. Ricks, and John S. Thompson (Salt Lake City and Orem, UT: Eborn Books and Interpreter Foundation, 2014), 252–253.

Evidence Central, “[Book of Mormon Evidence: Calendrical Pattern](#),” September 19, 2020, online at evidencecentral.org.

Mormon 8:14–22 — Moroni Offers Blessings, Warnings, and Curses

Moroni wisely begins in Mormon 8:14 with blessings and accompanying curses, part of a typical colophon. A good scribe would typically place curses upon anyone who would tamper with or misuse the record. In verses 14 to 22, he warned people not to condemn the record because of potential mistakes or faults of men in it (8:17). A good scribe would realize that they were unlikely to produce a perfect record, and there is a very candid admission that there may be errors. Moroni, as a competent scribe, editor, and author followed appropriate conventions by providing a colophon and its required information according to ancient convention.

He also warned people that that no one shall have these records to get gain (8:14), and he blesses those who will do this with an eye single to God’s glory (8:15; invoking 3 Nephi 13:22). He warns people not to try to destroy the work of the Lord or to claim that God has forgotten his covenant (8:21), for the eternal purposes of the Lord shall roll on (8:22), and the words and prayers of the righteous dead shall cry from the dust (8:23–25).

In Mormon 9:31, Moroni likewise ends his first farewell by pointing out again how fortunate the readers are that, through this record, God has made manifest their—Moroni’s contemporaries’—imperfections, “That ye may learn to be more wise than we have been.” He may have been concerned that people would condemn the book as unrighteous because the people who produced it had been destroyed, and reject it as the work of a sinful people. Moroni asked readers not to condemn the record because of who the people were, because of their weakness in writing, or their weakness in many ways. It is a modest statement, and the curse is not the usual type of self-promoting, harsh curse.

One curse has particular meaning to modern authors or publishers. The records were written on precious metal, and if someone were to find them and could not read the writing, they would be likely to melt them down. Therefore, he provided a warning that no one shall have the plates to get gain. This warning, however, refers not only to the metal content, but also to the book itself. The publication of the Book of Mormon should not be something to be sold at a great profit. The Lord would not be very happy for people to be profiting from it. The record is of great worth, but it was not designed to be of financial worth. Moroni wanted to be sure that whoever obtained this record dealt with it appropriately. In verse 15, he wrote, "God wills that it shall be done with an eye single to his glory, or the welfare of the ancient, long-dispersed covenant people of the Lord." They shall be brought to light only for these purposes.

He also wrote a blessing to the person who brought forth the book, "Blessed be he that shall bring this thing to light" (8:16). So, Joseph Smith was given a blessing, and that will come up again in Moroni 10:24–25: "Wo be unto the children of men because of unbelief" which will exist at the time when the Book of Mormon comes forth, for "there shall be none that doeth good among you, no, not one," which words will be fulfilled as the Savior spoke to Joseph Smith in the First Vision. Then Moroni continued and clarified, "For if there be one among you that doeth good, he shall work by the power and gifts of God" (10:25) which is another reference to Joseph Smith and the only way in which the Book of Mormon could possibly come forth.

Mormon 8:26–32 — Forecasting

In chapter 8, verses 26 to 32, Moroni began to talk about the time when the Book of Mormon would come forth. Six times, he wrote, "*It shall come in a day when...*" He forecasts clearly:

- *it shall come in a day when* it shall be said that miracles are done away ...
- *and it shall come in a day when* the blood of the saints shall cry unto the Lord ...
- *Yea, it shall come in a day when* the power of God shall be denied ...
- *Yea, it shall come in a day when* there shall be heard of fires, and tempests ...
- *Yea, it shall come in a day when* there shall be great pollutions ...
- *Yea, it shall come in a day when* there shall be churches built up ... for your money...

The number six is often thought of as a number of incompleteness or defectiveness (being one short of the number 7, which symbolically bespeaks completeness). Here, Moroni gives us no good news about the many things that would be in place when the Book of Mormon would come forth. After all, he has just experienced the destruction of his own people. These six things had been problems for centuries within the Nephite world, with people like Nehor and Korihor, with the blood of martyrs like Abinadi and the women and children in Ammonihah, with the destructions at the time of the Crucifixion, and with

priestcrafts. Moroni recognized these problems and hoped that the Book of Mormon would help to prevent those problems from repeating themselves at some future time.

Mormon 8:33, 38–40 — Questioning

A section of questioning begins in verse 33. Seven times he asked, *O why? Why? Why? Why* have you done this? Why are you this way? Why do you continue to do this?

- *Why have ye* built up churches unto yourselves to get gain ...? (v. 33)
- *Why have ye* transfigured the holy word of God ...? (v. 33)
- *Why have ye* polluted the holy church of God ...? (v. 38)
- *Why are ye* ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ ...? (v. 38)
- *Why do ye* not think that greater is the value of endless happiness ...? (v. 38)
- *Why do ye* adorn yourselves with that which hath no life ...? (v. 39)
- *Why do ye* build up secret combinations to get gain ...? (v. 40)

Moroni certainly knows how to ask the “why” questions! Elder M. Russell Ballard has assured us all that asking the “why questions” is the best way to open the windows and doors of revelation. Asking why is still today a great step in the direction of learning why and knowing why.

Further Reading

M. Russell Ballard, “[The Opportunities and Responsibilities of CES Teachers in the 21st Century](#),” Address to CES Religious Educators, February 26, 2016, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

Mormon 8:33–37 — Beholding

In verse 35, Moroni wrote, “Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me.” He has seen our day, our problems, our wickedness, and our weakness. That is why he repeats himself in trying to drive his point across to us. That statement about Jesus is in a sequence of the *beholding* section. There are five beholds starting in Moroni 8:33:

- Behold, look ye unto the revelations of God; for behold, the time cometh ... (v. 33)
- Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things ... (v. 34)
- Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. (v. 35)
- But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing. (v. 35)
- For behold, ye do love money ... more than ye love the poor and the needy... (v. 37)

So, behold! Moroni wanted to get our attention, and wanted us to look at this seriously.

Mormon 8:35 — Declaring

Four times, Moroni used a declarative mode preceded by “*I speak*.”

- *I speak* unto you as if you were present. (Mormon 8:35)
- *I speak* concerning those who do not believe in Christ. (Mormon 9:1)
- *I speak* unto you who deny the revelations of God. (Mormon 9:7)
- *I speak* unto you as though I spoke from the dead. (Mormon 9:30)

What is the effect on readers when they hear Moroni repeating phrases such as these? We will see this style of repetition throughout this writing.

Mormon 9

Mormon 9:2–19 — Challenging

Continuing directly into chapter 9, Moroni switches into a challenging mode for the non-believers. He now provides different questions for a different audience, challenging people who do not believe in Christ. He asks sixteen such questions of those who do not believe.

- Will ye say? (9:2–3)
- Will ye longer deny?
- Do ye suppose?
- Do ye suppose?
- Have these things passed? (9:15–19)
- Has the end come?
- Are not the things marvelous?
- Who can comprehend?
- Who shall say?
- Who shall say?
- Why has God ceased?
- Who can stand? (9:26)
- Who can deny?
- Who will rise up against the almighty?
- Who will despise the works of the Lord?
- Who will despise the children of Christ?

Mormon 9:21 — Exhorting

Why would Moroni have been particularly interested in our need to be believing? In Moroni 10, it says that if you do not believe, you cannot have faith, hope, or charity. Unbelief is the enemy of all those good things. He wanted us to know that we have to believe and “deny not the gifts.” He will emphasize this again in Moroni 10, because he knew that the Book of Mormon would have to come forward by the gift and power of

God. How else could it happen? He knew that his language would be lost. Someone would find these plates, but how would they be able to read them? He knew that it would be only through the channel of faith that this record had a chance of surviving.

Mormon 9:27–31 — Commanding

How many commands does Moroni give to his readers in Mormon 9:27–31? I count 22 of them. Since there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, this number might not be accidental.

What are these commands, and how are we doing these days in keeping them? These statements are all in the imperative mood. Like the Ten Commandments, some are prohibiting commands (in the apodictic style); others are affirmative injunctions or instructions. All are commands or directions, not just suggestions of one kind or another. Each is worth pondering. Each should (or should not) be done:

1. Despise not.
2. Wonder not.
3. Hearken unto the words of the Lord.
4. Ask the Father in the name of Jesus Christ for whatever ye shall stand in need.
5. Doubt not.
6. Be believing.
7. Begin as in times of old.
8. Come unto the Lord with all your heart.
9. Work out salvation your own salvation with fear and trembling before God.
10. Be wise in the days of your probation.
11. Strip yourselves of all uncleanness.
12. Ask not to consume uncleanness on your lusts.
13. Ask with a firmness unshaken that ye will yield to no temptation.
14. Serve the true and living God.
15. See that not baptized unworthily.
16. See that partake not of the sacrament of Christ unworthily.
17. See that ye do all things in worthiness.
18. Do all things in the name of Jesus Christ, the son of the living God.
19. Endure to the end.
20. Condemn me not because of mine imperfections.
21. Condemn not my father or those who have written before him.
22. Give thanks that God has made manifest our imperfections, that ye may be wiser than we have been.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Moroni Conclude His Father’s Record with 22 Commands? \(Mormon 9:27\), KnoWhy 234](#) (November 18, 2016).

Mormon 9:32–33 – Why Did the Nephites Write in Reformed Egyptian?

At the beginning of the Book of Mormon, in 1 Nephi 1:2, Nephi explains that the language he was using on his plates was “the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians.” In Mosiah 1, King Benjamin required his sons, to learn Egyptian and Hebrew, “all the language of his fathers” (verse 2), so they could read both the prophecies on the plates from Jerusalem (verse 2), and the writings on the plates of Nephi.

Here, Moroni explained that the language used was “reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech.” He also explained that they would have needed larger plates if they had been writing in Hebrew, which also had been altered somewhat.

We do not know for sure, but some researchers believe that Mormon and Moroni probably wrote in the Hebrew language, except they wrote the sounds using Egyptian characters or modified Reformed Egyptian characters which may have been some kind of shorthand at this time.

People might wonder if one alphabetic-based script has ever been used to write the sounds of another language. The answer is yes. In modern times, a person can find on the web the Hebrew or Greek words of the Bible transliterated into English letters, not as translations but so that the reader can pronounce out loud the sounds of those ancient words.

Did this kind of thing ever happen in the ancient world? Yes, it did. The text of a Hebrew psalm was found years ago in Egypt, written out phonetically using Egyptian characters. Another example comes from Gubbio in central Italy. The people who lived in what is now called Gubbio were Umbrians, and they spoke a dialect of the Umbrian language. They apparently had no written language, as far as we know, but wanted to record their laws, especially their religious laws on conducting public festivals in worshiping their gods. This was probably in the third Century BC. So they went to the Etruscans, who were master metallurgists, knowing how to make metal artifacts and plates of all kinds. The Umbrians apparently stood there and spoke in their language what they wanted this legal posting to say; however, the Etruscan platemaker knew only how to write in Etruscan script. So these Umbrian public city ordinances and texts were recorded, on plates of brass, in Umbrian but using Etruscan letters.



Figure 1 Umbrian Iguvine brass plate (c. 200 B.C.), Gubbio City Museum, Italy. Photograph by John W. Welch.

When these Umbrian plates were discovered in the seventeenth century, no one was able to read them. The people who understood Etruscan studied them and gave up, pronouncing them as nonsense. Eventually, however, someone who knew Umbrian was there while another was reading the lines aloud in an attempt to make sense of the sounds. He recognized it as Umbrian, and that solved the puzzle. Similarly, Ugaritic texts in a Northwest Semitic language are written using cuneiform symbols. There were many languages, but not that many writing systems, so this kind of thing happened more often than people might think.



Figure 2 Gubbio City Hall and Museum. Photograph by John W. Welch.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Mormon and Moroni Write in Reformed Egyptian? \(Mormon 9:32\), KnoWhy 513 \(May 2, 2019\).](#)

John Gee, [“Two Notes on Egyptian Script,”](#) *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 162–176.

Stephen D. Ricks, [“Semitic Texts Written in Egyptian Characters,”](#) in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, edited by John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 237–243.

On the history and contents of the seven Iguvine tablets, see generally https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iguvine_Tablets

Mormon 9:32, 35–36 — Attesting

Understanding how difficult this writing process would have been, Moroni’s attestations that he has done the best he could makes perfect sense. “We have *written* ... according to our knowledge” (9:32); with larger plates “we should have *written* in Hebrew” (9:33); and if we “could have *written* in Hebrew” there would have been fewer chances for misunderstanding (9:33); but “the Lord knoweth the things which we have *written*” (9:34), and “these things are *written* that we may rid our garments of the blood of our brethren” (9:35). In the best scribal form, Moroni validates his efforts. He closes his writing with a five-fold attestation that he and his father have written the best they possibly could.

Mormon 9:37 — Petitioning

True to his rhetorical form, Moroni ends his first farewell with a three-fold petition. Three times he prays: “*May* the Lord Jesus Christ grant that their prayers may be answered according to their faith.” “*May* God the Father remember the covenant that he hath made with the house of Israel.” “*May* he bless them forever, through faith on the name of Jesus Christ.” His fervent petitions are given for our benefit, and they are given for any and all readers to claim. *May* it be so. “Amen.”

ETHER 1–5

John W. Welch Notes



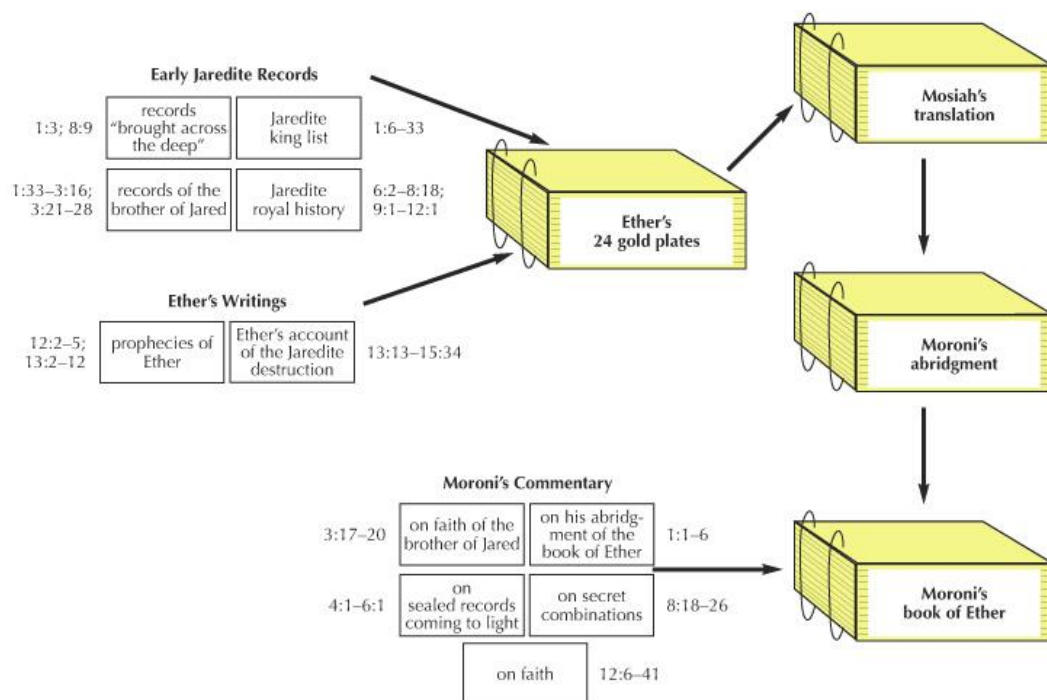
Study Questions for the Book of Ether

As you study the book of Ether, you may wish to observe its overall organization and its most salient points of emphasis, paying particular attention to the historical, personal, doctrinal, and religious importance of the experiences of the Brother of Jared and of the Jaredite people. Since it is proverbially said that a good question is half the answer, bear in mind the following constructive questions:

- Many instructive things can be (and have been) said about this book appended to the main line of the Book of Mormon. What do you find most amazing, impressive, and inspiring about the complex book of Ether given to us by Moroni?
- If you were writing a history of a fallen civilization, what sorts of details might you include or not find important?
- What was going on in Moroni's very lonely life and traumatized situation when he was finally able to fulfill his father Mormon's editorial promise that "this account shall be written hereafter; for it is expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account" (Mosiah 28:19)? Note that about 15 years had passed since the final Nephite battle and Mormon's death (Mormon 8:6).
- In addition to fulfilling his father's plan to include something of the record of Ether, why else did Moroni craft this book the way he did? Was it to solidify his testimony of Jesus as the Lord God from the beginning of history (Ether 2–3) until the end of time with "a New Jerusalem" (Ether 13:4)? Was it to overcome his fears with faith? Was it to assuage his own disappointment over the total destruction of his own people? Or was it to show that he, as a lone voice, could hope to make a difference for future people, just as the lone survivor Ether had left a helpful record that told of the demise of the Jaredite civilization?

- Who was Ether? When and why was his account written? (See Ether 12:2–5; 13:2–12).
- What records did Ether rely on as he wrote his original multilayered account of the destruction of his people, the Jaredites, on his 24 gold plates? Those records included at least certain records “brought across the deep” (Ether 1:3; 8:9), a Jaredite king list (1:6–33), records of the brother of Jared (1:33–3:16; 3:21–28); and a Jaredite royal history (6:2–8:18; 9:1–12:1). Ether’s account was translated by King Mosiah, the son of Benjamin about 92 BC (Mosiah 28). See *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 15:

Sources behind the Book of Ether



- What then motivated Moroni as he chose what to include in his abridgement of Ether’s account, which Moroni describes as an “account of those ancient inhabitants who were destroyed by the hand of the Lord upon the face of this north country” (Ether 1:1)?
- What personal editorial comments and instructional impressions did Moroni interject? See Ether 1:1–6; 3:17–20 (on the faith of the brother of Jared); in 4:1–6:1 (on sealed records coming to light); in 8:18–26 (on the damage caused by secret combinations); in 12:6–37 (on the nature of faith, as well as of hope and charity); and in 12:38–41 (to bid farewell to the Gentiles, testifying that he had talked with Jesus “face to face”).

- What do you think Moroni wanted his readers to learn from the devastating Jaredite experiences, and also from the regrettable Nephite experiences?
- What are your three or four favorite verses in the book of Ether? You may wish to memorize them.

Seeing the Underlying Record of Ether as an Epic

It appears that the Jaredite story was originally told and written in the manner of an epic. Epics, such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, were a very early style of poetic literature, singing “of gods and of men.” Richard D. Rust, in his book, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon*, discusses the many types and styles of writing in the Book of Mormon, and categorizes the Jaredite story as a classic epic.

In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M. H. Abrams explains that most epics are in poetry; however, durable and persuasive epics may also be written in prose. He defines characteristics of literary epics as follows (the examples from Jaredite literature are added):

- The hero is a figure of great national or even cosmic importance. In *The Iliad*, he is the Greek warrior Achilles, the son of the sea nymph Thetis. Sometimes there are two brothers who stand in contrast with each other. In the story of the Jaredite origins, there were two brothers, Jared and his brother, rather like Romulus and Remus, or other such pairs.
- The setting is ample and even huge in scale, possibly even cosmic. With help from the gods, Odysseus sails or wanders over the Mediterranean basin, the whole of the known world. The Jaredites, with divine assistance, cross a huge ocean to an unknown land.
- The action involves superhuman deeds either in battle, as in *The Iliad*, or long arduous journeys, as in *The Odyssey*. The Jaredite journey was certainly arduous, dangerous, and long.
- In these great actions, the gods or other supernatural beings take an interest or an active part. The Olympian Gods are involved in Homer’s epics. Jehovah, the Son of God who will come to Earth, provides guidance for the Jaredite journey.
- An epic is a ceremonial performance narrated in a ceremonial style, not given in normal speech. The text of the brother of Jared, who goes up into a high mountain where he sees not only the finger but also the face of God, is extraordinary, and it beckons to its readers to also strive to find an opening through the heavenly veil.

This last point does not mean that epics are, of necessity, only fictional literature and not historical. For many years people believed all components of *The Iliad*, including the siege of Troy, were mythological. The Homeric epics were validated when in 1868, Heinrich Schliemann discovered the city of Troy, now well excavated at the archaeological site of

Hisarlik. The excavation demonstrated the existence of many levels of occupation, city gates, and city walls, many of the things that Homer described are there. Indeed, history and human experience fundamentally precede poetry and theology.

The purpose of an epic was not simply entertainment. Epics were crucial in the reflection of essential needs and in the formation of the particular culture. There are no extant Olmec epics, but there are Maya creation epics such as the *Popol Vuh*. Those stories tell of the origin of their civilization, as seven ships sail across the sea and arrive in Central America. In addition, the great Israelite epic is the exodus from Egypt. The liberation, the plagues, the wandering in the wilderness, crossing the Red Sea, and acquiring their land contribute to their becoming a people.

And coming right from Mesopotamia in the third millennium BC, about the same time as the Jaredite departure, were the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Epic of Nergal and Erishkegal*, the *Enuma Elish* and other sagas, reflecting a twilight world of kings, mighty warriors, dispersions, migrations, boats, feasts, rebellions, underground oppositions, jails, chaos, violence and savage reprisals, with the involvement of gods and battles to the death of all involved, as Hugh Nibley thoroughly introduced to LDS readers back in the 1950s and as John Thompson developed further in the 1990s.

Seen against this background, the book of Ether adheres in style and content to the typical configuration of an ancient epic. Its conclusion had a tragic, but didactically valuable, ending. Rather than showing only the foundation of a great culture, or the success of one political group over another, the record of Ether demonstrates the crumbling of one, initially strong civilization, and provides sober warnings for future cultures to avoid the same fate.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Is the Book of Ether an Epic? \(Ether 7:9\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 241 (November 29, 2016).

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Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; the World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, CWHN 5, ed. John W. Welch, with Darrell L. Matthews and Stephen R. Callister (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988, esp. 172–263, 285–307, 350–379). This material is conveniently summarized in Hugh Nibley’s, “Some Test Cases from the Book of Ether,” in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1988).

John S. Thompson, “The Jaredite Exodus: A Literary Perspective of a Historical Narrative,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 3, no. 1 (1994): 104–112.

Ether 1

Ether 1:1–2—Moroni as Abridger, Editor, Commentator, or Author

Moroni took that epic and abridged it and added his own comments to the record left by Ether. Moroni would have most likely relied on King Mosiah’s translation of Ether’s twenty-four plates. And as Moroni’s intent was for the record to teach future generations “from the dust,” he did not hold back in inserting his own editorial comments. Because this text is “layered,” it is interesting to notice, at the outset, that in any given verse, the following “voices” may be speaking to us or influencing the text’s wording and meaning. Those possible voices would include (1) Jared or the brother of Jared, (2) other ancient Jaredite recordkeepers or story-tellers, (3) the final Jaredite prophet Ether, (4) King Mosiah as translator, (5) Moroni as abridger or editor, (6) Moroni as commentator or as author adding his own thoughts and impressions, and finally (7) Joseph Smith as translator bringing it forth in English. Facing this complexity would normally be unsettling, but realizing that all of this was possible—at every important turn—because of the gift and power of God gives us as readers confidence going forward.

Considering these layers further: As is recorded in Mosiah 28, the messengers of Limhi had found Ether’s plates during their unsuccessful journey in search of Zarahemla, and then Mosiah translated them using the Urim and Thummim because his people were anxious to know about the former civilization. Mormon commented in Mosiah 28:19 that the contents would be written later because it was “expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account.” Possibly, as Mormon lay dying, he reminded Moroni to be sure to let people know about the history of the Jaredites.

Mormon and Moroni may have been even more interested in ensuring that the history was available for later generations of readers after they knew that their own generation had suffered the same kind of fate as the Jaredites. The whole book of Ether becomes,

then, a prophetic, allegorical warning to the Nephites and to us, of how these things happened. The historical content of the Jaredite history is not allegorical, but Moroni used it allegorically, making it into a series of valuable lessons.

Moroni's abridgement most likely relied on King Mosiah's translation. Although he says in Ether 1:2 that he is taking his account from the twenty-four gold plates, it is not likely that Moroni retranslated Ether's plates; he would probably have said so if he had. It is not clear that he even had those plates with him, though he would have known of them. It is unlikely that Moroni would have kept many records with him during his wandering and travels, although he certainly had some, in addition to the plates of Mormon, which he was finishing.

Ether 5 contains an important disclosure by Moroni: "And now I, Moroni, have written the words which were commanded me *according to my memory*" (Ether 5:1). Apparently, he knew these Jaredite origin stories by heart, as was common in ancient cultures. Parts of Moroni's book of Ether may be a retelling of the Jaredite history based on things that he learned from his father Mormon, who would have had particular access to these records. As they were engrossed in wars, both Mormon and Moroni would have studied the final chapters of the Jaredite history particularly to learn military strategies from them.

Moroni's purpose was to demonstrate that what had become of the Jaredites had happened to his generation of Nephites and would happen to later generations of Gentiles. In Ether 2:11 Moroni added, "And this cometh unto you, oh, ye Gentiles." Moroni wrote this about fifteen years after he had written his first farewell in Mormon 8 and 9, in which he had spoken directly to the Gentiles. In Ether 2 he continued that conversation about what they needed to know, "that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent." The call to repentance is a persistent theme throughout Moroni's writings.

Interestingly, Moroni was honest enough to tell readers when he was chiming in, when he was abridging, and even when he was quoting. For example, in Ether 2:13, Moroni did not say, "And now I proceed with Ether's record," but rather, "Now I proceed with *my* record of the Jaredites" (emphasis added). Moroni's abridgment produced what one may thus call "Moroni's Book of Ether." In addition to his abridgement of existing material, Moroni took occasion to interject his own commentary, asides, and sometimes prophecies. Here are the main ones: Ether 1:1–6; 4:1–6:1; 12:6–41; and 15:33.

As mentioned above, the book of Ether has a very complex textual history, but one of the most interesting things about Moroni's book of Ether in particular, and about the Book of Mormon in general, is the candor and the honesty of this text. Mormon and Moroni usually state clearly when they are interjecting their own commentary. Thus, there is not

the same confusion here as in the Old Testament, where dissecting its layers of redaction and editing is often ambiguous and uncertain.

Another intriguing feature is the source text's underlying continuity. If one were to mark everything spoken by Moroni in one color, and mark everything that is archaic Jaredite in a contrasting color, one can take the Moroni material out, and the underlying Jaredite text flows seamlessly together. This careful splicing of the text is incredibly difficult to do successfully without a word-processor. The result is, from a text-critical point of view, a powerful testimony of the antiquity and the editorial process by which this came.

On the original Jaredite record, presumably also in Mosiah's translation, there was an account of the creation. This is one more feature that marks this record as a work of ancient prophecy. In Ether 1:3, Moroni stated that he was going to spare us the rehearsal of the creation account because he expected that it would be available from other sources, as it had been for him on the Plates of Brass.

Ether 1:3–5 — What Was Contained in the Jaredite Scriptures?

The book of Ether originates in a very different time of human history than did Lehi and Nephi. One must shift gears to understand the world in which they lived. They seem to have left the Middle East shortly after the fall of the tower and the confusion of the languages at Babel, before Abraham and King Hammurabi, and long before Moses. Perhaps about 2300 BC, an arbitrary date that seems to work out based on the underlying royal genealogy. Beginning that long ago, the Jaredites did not know about the Abrahamic Covenant, the Law of Moses or circumcision, nor did they have brass plates to take as Lehi did. There was no national religion; everything was local. They may have known of the prophets Noah and Enoch. They must have had some knowledge of the ancient dealings of God in the history of mankind, because Moroni records that they had an account of the creation (see Ether 1: 4–5).

As far as their other literary sources, we know they kept their king list and probably some kind of oral history, if not a written one, up to the fall of the tower. The twenty-four plates were made after the migration to the promised land. We cannot measure the Jaredite culture against the Nephite culture, because we do not even know for sure that they were Semitic, though some of the names and the root of their creation story may indicate that they were. It is a blessing that they made a record at all.

Were any laws recorded on those plates of Ether? Hammurabi (ca. 1810–1750 BC) was the sixth king of the First Babylonian dynasty of the Amorite tribe, reigning from c. 1792 BC to c. 1750 BC, is best known for having issued the Code of Hammurabi, which he claimed to have received from Shamash, the Babylonian god of justice. Hammurabi was

eventually able to establish a unified Kingdom in the area from which Jared and his brother had earlier originated, when he united Southern and Northern Mesopotamia—the Sumerian culture in the south, and the Akkadian culture in the north. He established a law code, though he was not the first one to do that. Starting a couple hundred years earlier, people began writing laws down and following them. But, before then, as far as we know, there was not much in the way of law. Lehi and his family took with them in 600 BC a whole set of laws, the Law of Moses on the brass plates and a whole culture with them; but which the Jaredites much earlier did not have.

Since they knew of the Creation, they probably knew of Noah. In terms of law, God had made a covenant with Noah that related especially to protecting life and avoiding murder—if a person killed another man, the perpetrator’s blood had to be shed (Genesis 9:6). These rules issued by Noah are thought to apply to all of Noah’s posterity as the minimal rules of basic civilization. These very fundamental things are what we ever see by way of legal regulation in the Book of Ether. We see other atrocious things that apparently were considered “legal” within their civilization.

Ether 1:6–32 — Ether’s Genealogy Is Listed Back to Jared

In an early analysis of the source of material for the Book of Ether, we get the sense that this book is the product of a long history, including several stages of composition, beginning with Jared, after whom the Jaredites were named.

First, there would have existed among the Jaredites general oral traditions and some specific archaic writings. Anciently, the basic historical information found in the book of Ether was probably handed down in the form of a king list kept among the descendants of Jared, who were the Jaredite rulers for over one thousand years.

This king list could have been either written or oral. King lists similar to the one in Ether 1 appear among the earliest written records in ancient Mesopotamia, and many Mesoamerican monuments have now been shown to contain historical information about royal lines. Most of the short accounts of each king’s reign in Ether 6–11 are not dissimilar in scale. Yet some early peoples also orally transmitted memorized king lists and stories about their origins. While it is not clear whether Ether worked in this respect from a written royal record, an oral tradition, or a combination of both, the integrity of the Jaredite king list as a separate source is underscored by its apparent insertion as a unit in the midst of Moroni’s introductory materials (Ether 1:3–5, 33). The words in these verses follow very closely the words of Mosiah² in Mosiah 28:17. The king list appears in the middle of this material, from Ether 1:5, which mentions that the account begins “from the tower,” to verse 33, which picks back up with the same language: “from the great tower.”

The genealogy in the book of Ether (Ether 1:6–33) is a prime example of these ancient king lists. The list, which served as an identification and reference for the author, is listed from the author down to his earliest ancestor. Ether is named first, Aaron is tenth, Shiz is twentieth, and Jared is thirtieth. Whether or not the number thirty is important is not clear, but the Maori people can recite their lineage, and it was important to them to be able to recite their lineage back thirty generations.

Likewise, the Jaredite king list given to us by Ether contains thirty generations. Here is that list as it was given in Ether 1:6–32, from the perspective of Ether, the narrator and the final Jaredite prophet.

Notice that the names are first listed from Ether back to Jared, in genealogical order:

Order	Passage	Name
1	1:6	Ether, the son of
2	1:6	Coriantor, son of
3	1:7	Moron, the son of
4	1:8	Ethem
5	1:9	Ahah
6	1:10	Seth
7	1:11	Shiblom
8	1:12	Com
9	1:13	Coriantum
10	1:14	Amnigaddah
11	1:15	Aaron
12	1:16	Heth
13	1:16	Hearthom
14	1:17	Lib
15	1:18	Kish
16	1:19	Corom
17	1:20	Levi
18	1:21	Kim

19	1:22	Morianton
20	1:23	Riplakish
21	1:24	Shez
22	1:25	Heth
23	1:26	Com
24	1:27	Coriantum
25	1:28	Emer
26	1:29	Omer
27	1:30	Shule
28	1:31	Kib
29	1:32	Orihah, the son of
30	1:32	Jared

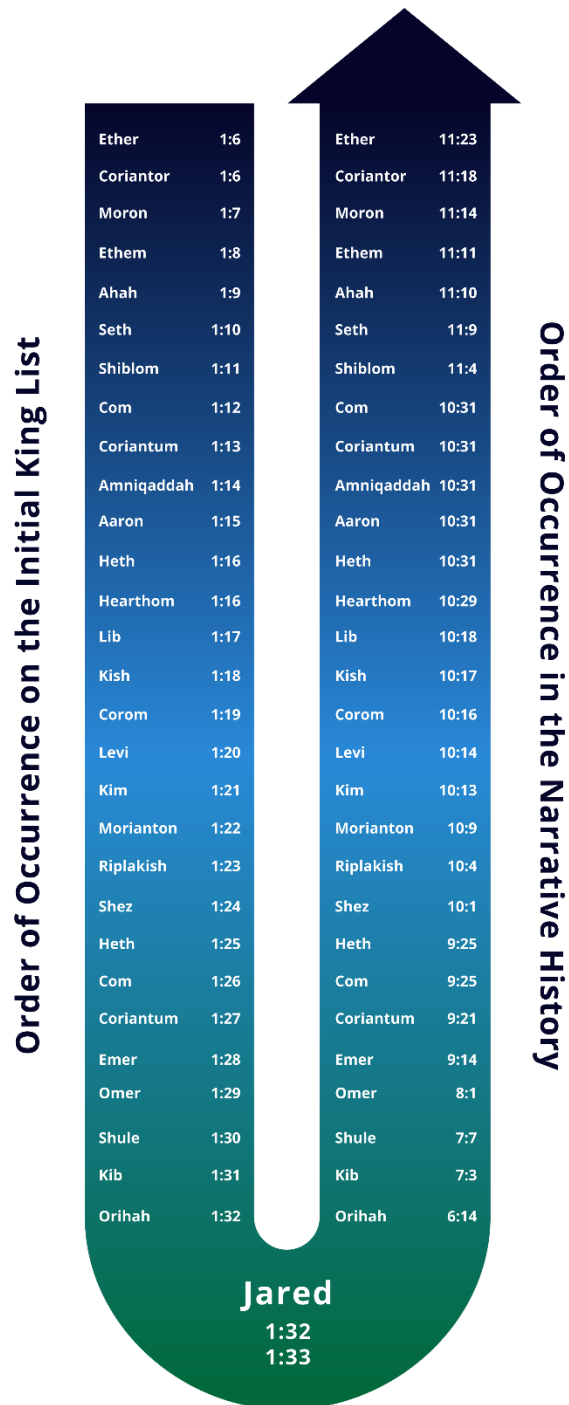
Then, as the story of the Jaredites unfolds, the same names are given in exactly the opposite order, in their historical order from Jared down to Ether. Here are all of those same names in the order of their first mention in the scriptural narrative, with their chapter and verse numbers given:

Order	Passage	Name
1	1:33	Jared, begat
2	6:14	Orihah, begat
3	7:3	Kib, begat
4	7:7	Shule
5	8:1	Omer
6	9:14	Emer
7	9:21	Coriantum
8	9:25	Com
9	9:25	Heth
10	10:1	Shez
11	10:4	Riplakish

12	10:9	Morianton
13	10:13	Kim
14	10:14	Levi
15	10:16	Corom
16	10:17	Kish
17	10:18	Lib
18	10:29	Hearthom
19	10:31	Heth
20	10:31	Aaron
21	10:31	Amnigaddah
22	10:31	Coriantum
23	10:31	Com
24	11:4	Shiblom
25	11:9	Seth
26	11:10	Ahah
27	11:11	Ethem
28	11:14	Moron
29	11:18	Coriantor
30	11:23	Ether

The following graphic combines these two sequences visually into a single graphic:

The Genealogy from Jared to Ether



Two of the more uplifting features of the book of Ether are the accounts of the tremendous faith of Jared and, even more so, of the Brother of Jared, who were the first characters in what may be considered Ether's family history. Note that Ether did not descend from the brother of Jared. Rather, he descended from Jared, and so the brother of Jared is not mentioned in the genealogical king list in Ether 1, though he was crucially important.

Culturally, king lists were especially important in ancient Mesopotamia, the place where the story of the Jaredites begins. In Mesopotamia, the number system was based, not on the number 10, but on the number 60. Throughout the ancient Near East, for commercial and legal purposes, there were 60 shekels in a mina, and 60 minas equaled 1 talent. The number 60 was conveniently divisible by 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 15, 20, and 30. And thus, the number 30, being the number of names in this king list may well have had some cultural meaning or symbolic significance.

The written history that is then given in the book of Ether follows this list chronologically, but now in the opposite order, beginning with Ether's oldest ancestor whose name shows up last on the list and working down to the time of Ether, whose name is first on the list. Other names appear in the history that are not listed in this royal lineage (the brother of Jared, for example), and sometimes the names of these kings appear in the narrative history more than once, but none of the names in the king list appear *their first time in the narrative* out of this order. Thus, the thirty names first given from Ether back to Jared are then introduced into the narrative from Jared down to Ether in exactly the opposite order, and not a single one of them is left out.

Needless to say, the precision of the reverse repetition of the Jaredite king list in the book of Ether is absolutely amazing. If you haven't seen this before, join the crowd. I first saw this feature in the book of Ether in 2009.

Also, in this context, think of Joseph Smith dictating the translation of Ether 1–12 to Oliver Cowdery, presumptively over the four days from May 25–28, 1829. Imagine anyone telling a story, beginning with a list of 30 names, and then over the next four days elaborating the histories of those 30 leaders in exactly the opposite order, interspersing various side stories, interactions between parties, conflicts, and editorial asides, and yet never leaving out a single name in the original list or confusing their order. There is no evidence or reason to believe that Joseph had any notes or even access to Oliver's manuscript page for Ether 1 as he revealed the text of Ether 6–12. In fact, reported interviews from Emma Smith and David Whitmer indicate that there were no such outlines or notes.

Thus, in addition to Moroni's divinely guided work in remembering, abridging, and writing the book of Ether, we benefit from the inspiration of Joseph Smith, who translated this record accurately and precisely "by the gift and power of God."

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Does the Book of Ether Begin with Such a Long Genealogy? (Ether 1:18)," *KnoWhy* 235 (November 21, 2016). "It may be easy to think of the authors of the Book of Mormon as distant from readers today. They're people from the remote past, who may seem difficult to relate to in modern times. Yet, on occasion, the curtain gets pulled back and the modern reader can almost sit with the authors and compilers and observe their manners and methods as they work. The book of Ether is one of those occasions. One can almost see Ether referring to the king list as he crafted his 24-gold-plate record of the Jaredites. One can also observe Moroni as he interspersed his own editorial commentaries (Ether 1:1–6; 3:17–20; 4:1–6:1; 8:18–26; 12:6–41) into the Jaredite story as it unfolded." See also, John W. Welch, "Preliminary Comments on the Sources behind the Book of Ether," *Preliminary Reports* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1986). On the timing of the translation, see John W. Welch, "Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon: 'Days [and Hours] Never to Be Forgotten'," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2018): 10–50.

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Lyle Campbell and Terrence Kaufman, "Mayan Linguistics: Where are We Now?" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 14 (1985): 193.

M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies, with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 101, 115.

Ether 1:33 — Who Was the Brother of Jared?

Even though the brother of Jared plays a crucial role in this narrative, the focus is on Jared's lineage because Ether was a direct descendant of Jared. There is no mention of the brother of Jared's name in the Book of Mormon text. Joseph Smith later revealed that it was Mahonri Moriancumer.

Ether knew, as a prophet himself, how important the faith of the brother of Jared was. Without that faith, the Jaredites would never have arrived at their new land or known of the promises of the Lord.

One may ask why Jared, who clearly had faith too, did not seek the guidance himself. Jared sent his brother repeatedly to consult with the Lord on behalf of himself and their families. It appears that there may have been a priesthood function involved. In the ancient world, families would dedicate some of their children to serve in the temple. We also know that temple building and seeking heaven was a big part of this culture, though the people of Babel went about it in the wrong way.

Temple priests served an important role in Mesopotamian society. In the ancient Mesopotamian world, they even sold temple franchises. The temples were an economy that had to be managed. Priests would have stewardships over crops, land, and animal. They had to be able to hold the proper festivals. They needed to support themselves so that they could attend to the functions of the temple and the religion. It was a great honor for a family to dedicate a child or two to this service. The priests probably did not make a lot of money, but they certainly garnered great prestige.

Perhaps Jared and his family had a connection of that nature through the brother of Jared. He may have been involved in the religious worship and he had faith necessary to be able to get the answers and blessing from the Lord that he needed.

The brother of Jared received some truly great revelations about the wonderful mysteries of things from the beginning to the end, and they were clearly new to him. Without his brother's faith and *savoir-faire*, Jared would not have had the critical information needed to conduct the expedition.

Ether 1:33 — Josephus's Account of the Tower of Babel

At the time of Jesus' life in Jerusalem, Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian, wrote the *Antiquities of the Jews*. In it he wrote of the effects of the fall of the tower of Babel:

After this they were dispersed abroad, on account of their languages, and went out by colonies everywhere; and each colony took possession of that land which they light upon, and unto which God led them; so that the whole continent was filled with them, both the inland and the maritime countries. *There were some also who passed over the sea in ships, and inhabited the islands.* And some of those nations do still retain the denominations which were given them by their first founders: but some have lost them also. ([Book 1, Chapter 5](#)).

At least this point made in antiquity is consistent with the story of the Jaredite journey.

Ether 1:41–43 — The Lord Led Jared and His Brother to a Promised Land

The central river valley of Mesopotamia has few natural boundaries such as mountains to separate peoples and polities. The geographical problems of the Middle East today are endemic. Alexander the Great could not hold the area together for long. The Romans conquered northern Mesopotamia for a short time and could only hold it for 30 or 40 years. And the Ottomans tried too, but they also had to struggle for success. It was, and still is, an area of migration and movement, and so, to the people of Jared, the idea of migrating to a new land would likely not have been a foreign concept.

Ether 2

Ether 2 — Study Questions and Items of Interest

- On Ether 2:3 — After what did Brigham Young name the territory of Deseret? Hugh Nibley wrote, “The founders of the Second Civilization of Egypt [ca. 1550–1070 BC] had the bee as the symbol of their land, their king, and their empire, to all of which they applied the designation *deseret*, or something [dsrt] very close to it.” How could the Egyptians and the people of Jared have had the same word? Maybe ancient peoples got around a lot more than modern people have typically thought they could have or would have. Does the honeybee symbol provide inspiration to you? It has been a symbol of industry and unity in many cultures around the world.
- On Ether 2:7–12 — How did the Lord describe the land of promise? He provided conditions for prospering in the new Western Hemisphere land. What were they? How would the inhabitants be able to avoid bondage and captivity? Why did Moroni record the reasons for the downfall of the Jaredite civilization?
- Ether 2:14 — When the people of Jared got to the shore, they were busy for four years, and the brother of Jared had neglected to “call upon the Lord” in all that time. How serious was that sin? How did the Lord respond? Would it be better for you to go on forgetting, or for the Lord to chastise you for three hours?
- Ether 2:23, 25 — When the brother of Jared prayed for help in the preparation of the barges, the Lord encouraged him to propose a solution to the lighting problem. Why did the Lord do that? Does he still do that sometimes with us? Why did Moroni incorporate this in his text? What can we learn from these experiences?

Ether 2:1 — The Valley Northward

The “valley which was northward,” that the people of Jared went “down” to was named the valley of Nimrod (See Genesis 10:8–10). In another interesting statement, Josephus, in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, said,

Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah: a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it was through his means that they were happy; but to believe that it was their own courage which procured that happiness. He also gradually changed the government into tyranny; seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence on his own power. He also said, “He would be revenged on God, if he should have a mind to drown the world again: for that he would build a Tower too high for the waters to be able to reach; and that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their fore-fathers.”

[About An. 2520] Now the multitude were very ready to follow the determination of Nimrod, and to esteem it a piece of cowardice to submit to God: and they built a Tower; neither sparing any pains, nor being in any degree negligent about the work. And, by reason of the multitude of hands employed in it, it grew very high, sooner than anyone could expect. But the thickness of it was so great, and it was so strongly built, that thereby its great height seemed, upon the view, to be less than it really was. It was built of burnt brick, cemented together with mortar, made of *bitumen*; that it might not be liable to admit water. When God saw that they acted so madly, he did not resolve to destroy them utterly; since they were not grown wiser by the destruction of the former sinners: but he caused a tumult among them, by producing in them diverse languages; and causing, that through the multitude of those languages, they should not be able to understand one another. The place wherein they built the Tower is now called *Babylon*: because of the confusion of that language which they readily understood before: for the Hebrews mean by the word *Babel*, *Confusion* ([Book 1, chapter 4](#)).

According to this account, what was Nimrod’s motive for building the Tower? How did the righteous Jaredites fare during the catastrophe? Why and how did God make good from the retribution? What can we do as individuals to try to avoid reaping similar retribution from God?

Ether 2:1–3 — Possible Geographical Influences

Mesopotamia at this time was composed of many small, competitive, and vulnerable cities. Mesopotamia’s lack of natural boundaries made it difficult to defend. Egypt, on the

other hand, was easily defensible because its territory surrounded one large river (the Nile), with limited access from other places. Its geographic advantages also made Egypt more unified. There was only one language and one pharaoh who ruled the whole Nile River by controlling the boats and the commerce.

However, in the Mesopotamian area, there are two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. There is an upper and lower area, with different altitudes, climates, cultures, and languages. There were nomadic people, who could travel in and out of the desert. There were people that came down from the hills from what is now Iran. There were waves of immigrants, tired of being hunters up in the mountains, coming down into the lush, fertile land. Thus, there were many competing cultures.

When the ancestors of Ether left and moved to the Valley of Nimrod, they were temporarily reversing the usual process. They reverted from an agricultural culture to one of hunter-gatherers. They even named the valley after Nimrod, the great hunter.

Ether 2:4–5, 14 — The Lord Spoke Through a Cloud (or Veil)

At one point, the brother of Jared had neglected to consult with the Lord for four years. The text explains in Ether 2:14 that the Lord came to him, and “stood in a cloud and talked with him.” The Lord spoke to and chastened the brother for three hours.

For the Israelites going through the desert, the Lord was in a cloud at the tabernacle, protected from their vision. They could only speak with the Lord through the appropriate authority of the high priest, in this case Moses. Their cloud appeared as a pillar of fire at night, leading them both physically and spiritually. This calls to mind the burning bush from which the Lord addressed Moses. How do you see the veil and the cloud described in the book of Ether as being in harmony with similar events in Hebrew history and related Latter-day doctrine?

ETHER 3

Ether 3 — Questions to Ponder and Principles to Apply

- In Ether 3:1–5 — To solve the lighting problem, the brother of Jared melted clear rocks out of the mountain and then bravely asked the Lord for a miracle to make them glow. How do you think he came up promptly with that idea? What can we learn about self-help and help from the Lord? What can we begin with when we need light in our own lives? How can we apply this metaphorically to ourselves?

- In Ether 3:6–16 — What caused the veil to be “taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared?” Why did he fall to the ground? What does the nature of his fear tell you about the character of the man? What did the Lord ask of him before he could be admitted into the presence of the Lord? Why would the Lord ask that? Did he not know the heart of the brother of Jared? How much does the principle of expressed commitment matter to the Lord?
- In Ether 3:21–28 — What is the nature of the visions that this prophet had? What did he see? Who else saw this information? Where are the contents of the vision recorded, and how shall they be seen?

Ether 3:6–28 — The Brother of Jared Is Admitted to the Divine Council

In Ether 3:6, when the veil was taken from the eyes of the Brother of Jared and he saw the finger of the Lord, he fell to the ground in fear. In Ether 3:6–8, the record says, “I feared lest he should smite me.” He had asked the Lord to touch the stones in verse 4 but had apparently not expected to see the finger perform the action.

Subsequently, the Lord showed himself fully to the brother of Jared in person, presented in what biblical scholars call a “prophetic call” narrative: “He showed unto the brother of Jared all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be; and he withheld them not from his sight, even unto the ends of the earth.” David Paulsen published an interesting article in the *Harvard Theological Review* about the logic of divine embodiment. Latter-day Christology has always held that the Lord Jesus Christ had a spiritual body before he had an earthly one, and that he was the one who communicated with the ancients.

Further Reading

David L. Paulsen, “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 83, no. 2 (1990): 105–116.

Ether 3:6–13, 19–20 — The Brother of Jared Is Admitted into the Presence of the Lord

In Latter-day doctrine, we speak of a symbolic veil that has two applications. In one case, the veil is a mechanism that shades the memory as we transition to Earth from our pre-Earth life. In a second, but related, application, the veil provides a protective barrier to protect us from unauthorized interaction with the Lord in the present. In each instance, the veil is penetrable under circumstances such as the brother of Jared’s great faith that allowed him to see beyond it.

In Ether 3:6, Moroni commented that the veil was taken from the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord. In Ether 3:19 he says, “Because of the knowledge of this man, he could not be kept from within the veil....” Clearly, the veil is a symbol for

the sacred cloud, a holy protection that shields people on the Earth from interacting with the Lord inappropriately.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central [“Why Did Moroni Use Temple Imagery While Telling the Brother of Jared Story?”](#) (Ether 3:20),” *KnoWhy* 237 (November 23, 2016).

Ether 3:14–18 — The Premortal Jesus Ministered to the Brother of Jared

The Lord told the brother of Jared that he was witnessing the “body of my spirit, as I will appear unto my people in the flesh.” He did not touch the Lord’s body; it was a body of spirit, a pre-Earth body. This man spoke for three hours with the Lord the first time. The Lord then explained his role in the Plan of Redemption to the brother of Jared. In verse 14, it is recorded that the Lord said, “I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters.” This is the earliest instance on record when Jesus introduced himself in this way, giving his name and setting forth the basic elements of Christology and salvation history.

Ether 3:15 — Was the Savior’s Appearance to the Brother of Jared Unique?

In Ether 3:15, the statement by the Lord, “Never have I showed myself unto man that I created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast,” raises a question as to what the Lord meant by this. He had shown himself to certain of the patriarchs such as Adam and Eve. Enoch and Noah had preceded the brother of Jared and spoken with God.

A *BYU Studies* article by Kent Jackson presented several different views for how this may be understood. Bruce R. McConkie interpreted the verse as, “Never have I showed myself in the manner and form now involved . . . Never before has the veil been lifted completely so that a mortal man has been able to see my spirit body *in the full and complete sense of the word.*”

As another interpretation, Sidney Sperry thought that the word “man” might mean “an unbelieving man,” but “to the faithful, he had indeed shown Himself.”

Daniel Ludlow included Ether 3:19–20 in pointing out that the brother of Jared had gained a perfect “*knowledge*” so great that he “could not be kept from beholding from within the veil,” and thus, as verse 26 says, that the Lord could not withhold anything from him. Perhaps that was what distinguished the brother of Jared from others to whom the Lord (such as Adam) to whom the Lord had appeared.

Kent Jackson, rightly agreeing that these three views are not mutually exclusive, summarized by adding that this was the first recorded manifestation of Jehovah in which he *particularly identified himself specifically in his roles as creator and redeemer*. As the Savior said, in verse 14, “I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people.”

Further Reading

Kent P. Jackson, “‘Never Have I Showed Myself Unto Man’: A Suggestion for Understanding Ether 3:15a,” *BYU Studies* 30, no. 3 (1990): 71–76.

Ether 4

Ether 4 — Questions about the Sealed Record

- Ether 4:1 — Who translated the record from the Jaredite language into the Nephite language? See Mosiah 28:11–17.
- Ether 4:1 — Why did King Mosiah not publish the record of the vision of the brother of Jared?
- Ether 4:4–5 — Why did Moroni record the contents of the vision? What was he told to do with that record? Do we know, then, at least part of what the sealed portion of the plates of Mormon will contain? See also 2 Nephi 27:7–10 and Ether 3:25–26.
- Ether 4:5–6 — Why might the Lord not yet have given us the full the record of this vision?
- Ether 4:7, 15 — When will we receive this information? How can we be preparing for them to come forth?
- Ether 4:16–17 — What does the coming forth of the Book of Mormon have to do with the revelations of John? How do we know that the revelations of John are indeed revelations from God? See 1 Nephi 14:18–27. What “work of the Lord” has “commenced upon all the face of the land”? What does all this have to do with the fulfilling of the Covenant?

Ether 4:7 — When Will The Sealed Record be Revealed?

The record and the revelations shown to the brother of Jared were sealed up and obscured until the Lord sees fit to share the information with mankind in general, “even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations, saith Jesus Christ.” When will that be? Ether 4:7 indicates that it will be “In that day that they shall exercise faith in me ... even as the brother of Jared did, that they may become sanctified in me, then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations.”

Ether 4:19 — Why Do So Many of Mormon’s Teachings Appear in Ether 4 and 5?

The following chart (see KnoWhy 239) illustrates several of the many interesting intertextual similarities between Moroni’s writings in Ether 4–5 and also Moroni 10 of distinctive words and doctrinal themes that had been previously written by Mormon in Moroni 7. Obviously, Moroni read, knew, and treasured the record he had of his father’s great sermon. Although, at the time that Moroni wrote Ether 4 and 5, he had not yet decided to include that record in his final book of Moroni, it is evident that Moroni draws on his father’s rhetoric and vocabulary here in Ether 4 and 5, as he will again in Moroni 10. It is clear that Moroni had taken seriously the training and instruction that he had received from his father, Mormon. And he hopes that we will as well.

Parallel Element	Moroni 7 (Mormon)	Ether 4–5 (Moroni)	Moroni 10 (Moroni)
Addressed to specific audience	To the church, the peaceable followers of Christ (7:3)	Addressed to specific audience	To the church, the peaceable followers of Christ (7:3)
Must have faith, hope, and/or charity to be part of church/kingdom	... that have obtained a sufficient <i>hope</i> by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord ... until ye shall rest with him in <i>heaven</i> ” (7:3) “for if ye have not <i>faith</i> in him then ye are not fit to be numbered among the people of his <i>church</i> (7:39)	... blessed is he that is found <i>faithful</i> unto my name at the last day, for he shall be lifted up to dwell in the <i>kingdom</i> (4:19)	And except ye have <i>charity</i> ye can in nowise be saved in the <i>kingdom</i> of God; neither can ye be saved in the <i>kingdom</i> of God if ye have not <i>faith</i> ; neither can ye if ye have no <i>hope</i> (10:21)
Discerning good from evil; all that is good (every good gift) comes from God; anything that is good invites to come to Christ and not deny Him; good people work by the “power and	Wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a <i>good gift</i> . Wherefore, all things which are <i>good cometh of God</i> ; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he	For because of my Spirit he shall know that these things are true; for it <i>persuadeth men to do good</i> . And whatsoever thing <i>persuadeth men to do good</i> is of me; for <i>good cometh of none save it be of me</i> . I am the same that <i>leadeth men to all good</i> (4:11–12)	And whatsoever thing is good is just and true; wherefore, <i>nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is</i> . And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that <i>every good gift cometh of Christ</i> .

<p>gift(s)" of Christ/God</p>	<p>may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which <i>inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ</i>, is sent forth by the <i>power and gift</i> of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.</p> <p>But whatsoever thing <i>persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him</i>, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil ... Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; (7:5–19)</p>	<p>And wo be unto the children of men if this be the case; for there shall be none that doeth good among you, no not one. For if there be one among you that doeth good, he shall work by the <i>power and gifts of God</i>. (10:6, 18, 25)</p>	
<p>Pray unto Father with "heart"</p>	<p>... <i>pray unto the Father</i> with all the energy of <i>heart</i> (7:48)</p>	<p>... yea, when ye shall <i>call upon the Father</i> in my name, with a broken <i>heart</i> and a contrite spirit (4:15)</p>	<p>... <i>ask God, the Eternal Father</i>, in the name of Christ ... ye shall ask with a sincere <i>heart</i>, with real intent ... (10:4)</p>
<p>By the Spirit, one can know the truth</p>	<p>... the way to judge is as plain, that ye may <i>know</i> with a perfect knowledge ... For behold, the <i>Spirit of Christ</i> is given to every man, that he</p>	<p>For because of my <i>Spirit</i> he shall <i>know</i> that these things are <i>true</i> ... (4:11)</p>	<p>... he will manifest the <i>truth</i> of it unto you, by the power of the <i>Holy Ghost</i>. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may <i>know</i> the <i>truth</i> of all things (10:4–5)</p>

	may <i>know</i> good from evil (7:15–16)		
God will provide witnesses	Wherefore, by the <i>ministering of angels</i> , and by <i>every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God</i> , men began to exercise faith in Christ; For behold, [the angels] are subject unto [Christ], to minister according to the word of his command, <i>showing themselves</i> unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness. And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance ... to prepare the way among the children of men, by <i>declaring the word of Christ</i> unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they <i>may bear testimony of him</i> . (7:25, 29–31)	And unto three shall [the plates] be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true. And in <i>the mouth of three witnesses</i> shall these things be established; and the <i>testimony of three, and this work</i> , in the which shall be shown forth the power of God and also his word, of which <i>the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost bear record</i> —and all this shall stand as a <i>testimony</i> against the world at the last day. (5:3–4)	And I exhort you to remember these things; for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the <i>Lord God will say unto you</i> : Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written <i>by this man</i> , like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust? And <i>God shall show unto you</i> , that that which I have written is true. (10:28–29)
The problem of unbelief	But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and <i>believe not</i> in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil (7:17)	And now, after that, they have all dwindled in <i>unbelief</i> ... the knowledge which is hid up because of <i>unbelief</i> and it hath not come unto you, because of <i>unbelief</i> . Behold, when ye shall rend that veil of <i>unbelief</i> which doth	... all these gifts of which I have spoken, which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the <i>unbelief</i> of the children of men. if the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be done away

cause you to remain in your awful state of wickedness, and hardness of heart, and blindness of mind ... (4:3, 13–15)

among you, it shall be because of *unbelief*. (10:19, 24)

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Do So Many of Mormon’s Teachings Appear in Ether 4 and 5?](#) (Ether 4:19),” *KnoWhy* 239 (November 25, 2016).

Ether 5

Ether 5 — Questions about Witnesses

- Whose voice do we hear throughout this chapter? Why is Moroni so adamant about his instruction to whoever translates the Nephite record? How do we know that we can equate the record to a “holy thing?”
- Ether 5:2–4 — Compare these verses with 2 Nephi 27:12–13. How many witnesses were to see Mormon’s original record? Why so? See Deuteronomy 19:15 pertaining to the Hebrew law of witnesses. Why would the Lord retain the ancient law of witnesses for a sacred record? Who were the three people who saw the plates? Who were the three sacred Heavenly witnesses of the work?
- Ether 5:6 — Moroni testifies that he will stand as a witness of his record at the Judgment bar. How many reasons can you think of for why Moroni repeated this very testimony in Moroni 10:27, 34?

Ether 5:1–4 — The Plates Will Be Shown to Three Witnesses

In 2 Nephi 27:12–13, Nephi foresaw that the plates of the Book of Mormon would be “hid from the eyes of the world” and that “the eyes of none shall behold it save it be that three witnesses shall behold it, by the power of God” and “none other ... shall view it, save it be a few according to the will of God.” Here in Ether 5:2–3, Moroni reaffirmed that the plates will be shown by the power of God to three of the people who had assisted in bringing forth the plates to verify the truth of the work. In Ether 5:4, Moroni is quoting, either of himself or through the Lord, the ancient Hebrew law of witnesses, in which two or three witnesses were required in establishing the truth of important testimonies in court. Deuteronomy 19:15 says: “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the

mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." Moroni said, "In the mouth of three witnesses shall these things be established" (Ether 5:4).

This is followed by a statement that "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." Moroni knows that he has no one else that he can call on to validate the truthfulness of the record he is giving here in the book of Ether. So, he calls these three Heavenly witnesses to corroborate that his record is true. Likewise, in Doctrine and Covenants 6:28, the Lord affirmed the validity of this law of witnesses, declaring in April, 1829, that "in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." Witnesses, together with physical and written evidences, still play crucial roles in religious life, as well as in legal systems throughout the modern world, in coming to recognize and know the truth.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Were Three Key Witnesses Chosen to Testify of the Book of Mormon? \(Ether 5:4\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 267 (January 27, 2017).

Ether 5:5–6 — Ye Shall See Me, and We Shall Stand Before God at the Last Day.

Ether 5 consists entirely of one of Moroni's commentaries, in which he testified of the truthfulness of his record, and explained the need for witnesses, not only in this life, but also in the world to come. He reiterated his main point that "If it so be that they [we] repent and come unto the Father in the name of Jesus, they [we] shall be received into the kingdom of God." Many people are looking forward to greeting him, "when ye shall see me, and we shall stand before God at the last day" (Ether 5:6). Here Moroni puts himself on the line as a witness on the day of God's judgment. To quote 2 Nephi 33:15, "For what I seal on earth, shall be brought against you at the judgment bar." Moroni later will likewise say, "Ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God" (Moroni 10:27).

ETHER 6–11

John W. Welch Notes



Ether 6

In these chapters, we find the historical chapters that cover the history of the Jaredites. I hope that these notes from times I have taught these chapters will be of interest to you. Obviously, these chapters contain no doctrinal discourses. But they do contain solemn admonitions about wickedness, immorality, idolatry, political strife, power struggles, secret oaths, violence, failing to heed prophetic warnings, and refusing to repent. By no means are these chapters irrelevant today.

Ether 6 — Questions to Ponder about the Jaredite Migration

- How many similarities or differences can you detect between the account of the Jaredite journey and the journey of Lehi's family? Why might those comparisons be helpful to understand?
- The vessels are said to have been tight "like unto the ark of Noah." How many other features of these vessels may have been like the ark? How much divine instruction and guidance did Noah or the Jaredites have to prepare their vessels? How much divine help did Nephi have to prepare his ship? How much divine help is available to us as we journey towards our "promised land?"
- It is clear that the Lord cared about the people having light during this long journey. Does this help us believe that he cares about bringing light to us when we sit in spiritual or existential darkness? How does this account help us identify what steps we can take to obtain that light?

- How long did the ocean part of the Jaredite journey last? What source of power drove the vessels? How did the people pass much of the time? How do those kinds of activities help us during times of trial?
- What can we derive from this statement by President Brigham Young?

We are on the old ship Zion. ... [God] is at the helm and will stay there. ... All is right, sing Hallelujah, for the Lord is here. He dictates, guides and directs. If the people will have implicit confidence in their God, never forsake their covenants nor their God, He will guide us right (Brigham Young, "Remarks," *Deseret News*, Nov. 18, 1857, 291).

- Were the Jaredites justified in singing praises and songs of gratitude to the Lord? (See Elder Russell Ballard's Talk, "[Stay on the Boat and Hold On!](#)" *Ensign*, October 2014.)

Ether 6:2–3 — The Lord Provides Light for the Jaredite Barges

The brother of Jared went to the Lord with his concern about the lack of light in the barges. The Lord did not provide an immediate solution to the problem, but asked, "What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels?" (Ether 2:23). In response, the brother of Jared "did molten out of rock sixteen small stones; and they were white and clear, even as transparent glass" (Ether 6:3). He then went back to the Lord and asked the Lord to touch each stone, which caused them to "shine in darkness, to give light unto men, women, and children, that they might not cross the great waters in darkness" (Ether 6:3).

Referencing this account, Hugh Nibley asked, "[W]ho gave the brother of Jared the idea about stones in the first place? It was not the Lord, who left him entirely on his own; and yet the man went right to work as if he knew exactly what he was doing. Who put him on to it?"

Nibley acknowledged that the brother of Jared's shining stones narrative "has been the subject of much mockery and fun among the critics of the Book of Mormon." However, both Nibley and John A. Tvedtnes have found that there is a substantial body of ancient literature that contain legends and histories of stones that provided light. Tvedtnes noted, "The account of the stones used to provide light in the Jaredite barges fits rather well into a larger corpus of ancient and medieval literature." These texts from antiquity were unknown in the world during Joseph Smith's time or were unavailable to Smith.

One ancient account was of Alexander the Great, who was said to have a stone—a jewel that would glow. He carried it under his belt until he lost it in the Euphrates. Even Aristotle (Alexander's tutor) mentioned Alexander's stone.

Of greater relevance to the Jaredite record, are the accounts linking shining stones to Noah's ark. The story of Noah and the flood would have been relatively recent history for the Jaredites, who had departed from the "great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people" (Ether 1:33). An ancient glowing stone known as the "Pyrophilus" and other examples of luminous stones appear in various ancient texts, such as in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Nibley noted, "The *Pyrophilus* legend, wherever it is found, has accordingly been traced back ultimately in every case to the story of Noah."

Lucian of Samosata related the story of a temple in Syria where throngs of pilgrims were shown a hole in the ground where they believed the waters of the flood receded. This Syrian temple had a stone, known as the "lynchnis," that shone brightly at night, but not in the day. The lynchnis illuminated the whole sanctuary to simulate how Noah could tell how many days had passed during his voyage.

In the Babylonian Talmud, a Jewish commentator reported that the Lord instructed Noah to "set therein precious stones and jewels, so that they may give thee light, bright as the noon." Another ancient Jewish rabbi explained, "During the whole twelve months that Noah was in the Ark he did not require the light of the sun by day or light of the moon by night, but he had a polished gem which he hung up." Shaul Yosef Leiter, in a weekly Torah message, explained that the Torah description of the ark construction in Genesis 6:16 used the Hebrew word "tzohar," meaning "something that shines." In the Jerusalem Talmud, there are extensive debates about whether this "tzohar" was a window or a shining stone.

These various Jewish accounts of a shining stone being used in Noah's ark are of particular interest, considering that Ether 6:7 made a direct comparison between the Jaredite vessels and Noah's ark: "[T]here was no water that could hurt them, their vessels being tight like unto a dish, and also they were tight like unto the ark of Noah."

Hugh Nibley gave the following summary:

Now whether the ark of Noah was actually lit by shining stones or not is beside the point, which is that the idea of stones shining in the darkness of the ark was not invented by Joseph Smith or anybody else in the nineteenth century, but [1] was known to the ancient rabbis in an obscure and garbled version, [2] was clearly indicated in the properties of a very ancient shrine dedicated to the Syrian Noah, and [3] was mixed in among the legends of the very ancient Alexander cycle by means of which scholars quickly and easily ran it down to its oldest visible source, namely the old Sumerian Epic of the Babylonian Noah. However ridiculous the story of the shining stones may sound to modern ears, there is no doubt that it is

[genuinely ancient], going back to the proper sources as far as Ether is concerned. (Numbering added for clarity.)

Far from being an amusing creation of Joseph Smith, the shining stones are features of ancient texts that were not known in Smith's place and time.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Where did the Brother of Jared Get the Idea of Shining Stones? (Ether 6:3)," *KnoWhy* 240 (November 28, 2016).

Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 1st edition (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1957), chapter 25, pp. 288–298. Nibley, Hugh W., "There Were Jaredites - The Shining Stones – Continued." *Improvement Era* 59, no. 9 (1956): 630–632, 672–675.

Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 6 (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 285, 337–358.

John A. Tvedtnes, "Glowing Stones in Ancient and Medieval Lore," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 99–123.

Ether 6:4–11 — Comparing Lehi's Journey with the Jaredite Journey

The record of the Jaredites and the record of Lehi's family were written centuries apart and yet, the two narratives are very similar. Perhaps Moroni was very deliberate in drawing the similarities so that contrasts between the two accounts would be more apparent. Below are a few of the many similarities found in both the Jaredite and Nephite narratives:

- There was a declaration by the people that they would be faithful before the journey. The Lord promised to go before them and lead them into a choice land—their Promised Land.
- They had a journey through the wilderness before they got to the shore.
- They dwelt in tents by the shore for a period of time.
- The Lord commanded them to build sea vessels according to his specifications.
- They faced a problem with the construction of the sea vessels, requiring them to exert their own thought and effort before going to the Lord to ask for help.
- There was ongoing revelation from the Lord, as well as preparation of food and the other provisions that they needed to take.
- They were promised a specific choice land that would be free from captivity if the people living in the land would serve the Lord. There is parallel language used in both accounts regarding this promise.

- The Lord provided light for both journeys. (The Lord provided light in the Jaredite vessels as they were swallowed up in the depths of the sea. In the Nephite account, the Lord was their light in the wilderness.)

Some verses in each account are also quite similar. The Jared record states, “[A]nd it came to pass that when they had done all these things they got aboard of their vessels or barges, and set forth into the sea, commending themselves unto the Lord their God. And it came to pass that the Lord God caused that there should be *a furious wind blow upon the face of the waters, towards the promised land*; and thus, they were tossed upon the waves of the sea before the wind” (Ether 6:4–5).

The Nephite version reads: “And it came to pass after we had all gone down into the ship, and had taken with us our provisions and things which had been commanded us, we did put forth into the sea and were *driven forth before the wind towards the promised land*.” (1 Nephi 18:8). There are five sections in that verse that are identical to the Jaredite record. The Nephite record later talks about winds never ceasing to blow towards the Promised Land.

Even though both narratives are similar, there is much that can be learned from differences between the two accounts. The Jaredite record states that *the Lord God* caused furious winds, and that the people were “tossed upon the waves of the sea” as their vessels were pushed forward to the promised land. In other words, it was not an easy voyage—they had their trials along the journey, but they did ultimately make it to their desired destination. Knowing that it was the Lord who provided the tempest that pushed the Jaredites forward towards the Promised Land, we can apply this situation to ourselves metaphorically. When we face personal trials, tribulations, or trauma, it may be for a greater purpose. We may undergo these difficult experiences to get us to our desired destination—helping us to become more like the Son and the Father so that we can live in their presence someday.

On the other hand, it was the disobedience of Laman and Lemuel which caused the worst recorded storm on the voyage of Lehi’s family to the Promised Land. When out of anger, Laman and Lemuel tied their brother on the boat, Nephi had to pray to get his brothers under control so the Lord would stop the terrible storm. In both narratives, the people were traveling to their Promised Land and they had the same general purpose for getting there. However, in one scenario the people were allowed to learn and grow through necessary trials and tribulations—not of their making—along the journey. In the other scenario, the disobedient choices of a few caused unnecessary delay and difficulty for all on the ship. These two narratives had similar conditions that served two completely separate purposes.

Ether 6:4–11 — Prevailing Currents in the Pacific Ocean

Scholars have been unable to identify the specific land route the Jaredites took to arrive at the ocean shore. As they made their way toward the ocean, they had barges that were used to cross smaller bodies of water—perhaps rivers, inland lakes, or seas (like the Caspian Sea). They eventually ended up somewhere on the coast of China or Korea, where they entered barges that took them across a very large body of water. The journey on the water was a long one—344 days—until they arrived at a landing place in their Promised Land. The ocean voyage was probably a longer trip than the inland route that they might have taken.

John L. Sorenson, a renowned Mesoamerican scholar, has pointed out that if you throw a tennis shoe in the water off the coast of Korea or Japan and then let the Pacific current take its course, the shoe will wash ashore somewhere around El Salvador in about 340 days. Such are the currents of the ocean. This exact scenario was recently proven. Not too long ago, there was a container-load of Nike shoes on a ship that went down in a storm right off the coast of Japan. The container went to the bottom of the ocean and broke open. The shoes all popped up on top of the water and floated with the ocean currents. This story was in the news because there were hundreds of shoes that washed ashore in Central America. As a result, people were running along the shoreline picking up brand-new, brand-name shoes.

Ether 6:25–30 — All but One Son Refuse to be King

In ancient Mesopotamia there were two models of government. The first was monarchical—with one person, like Hammurabi, ruling over the people as king. The second form of government was democracy—run by councils.

Many years after landing in the Promised Land, as Jared and his brother approached death, they numbered the Jaredite people. The Jaredite group had grown to include fifty or more people. Jared and his brother asked the people for their preference of government and the people requested that one of the sons of Jared or his brother be anointed king. We often see the glamorous side of kingship, but in the Book of Ether we see it was a curse for this civilization.

Jared and his brother did not see eye to eye on the question of kingship. The more righteous brother of Jared was upset about the people desiring a king and predicted “surely this thing leadeth into captivity” (6:23; compare 1 Samuel 8:10–18, and Mosiah 29:16–23). What do these expressed concerns about having a king have in common? How accurate was the prophecy of the brother of Jared concerning what would happen if they had a king?

Ironically, the people then chose the firstborn of the brother of Jared, but he refused (6:25). Might that imply that the people hoped to unify the group by selecting the son of the brother who did not want kingship? They may not have been surprised when he followed the wise counsel of his father and refused to become king. But they may have been more surprised when all the other sons of the brother of Jared, and of Pagag, and even of Jared also refused, except for Jared's son, Orihah. Orihah was a good king and served the people well: "Orihah did walk humbly before the Lord, and did remember how great things the Lord had done for his father, and also taught his people how great things the Lord had done for their fathers" (6:30). But that happy situation would not last long.

Ether 7

Ether 7 — Questions Regarding Kingship

This chapter raises several interesting questions about kingship.

- Why was the youngest son selected to be king in each of these cases?
- How many generations was it before a king was deposed and kept in captivity?
- What was the motive behind Shule's rising up against his brother? Was it selfish and power-seeking, or did he have a less selfish motive? What reward did he get?
- Notice that Corihor repented, but one of his sons took back the throne and put Shule in captivity. How was Shule rescued? By whom?
- How did it come about that the kingdom was divided?
- How did king Shule protect the prophets?
- How far do the benefits of one good man reach? Think of Abinadi.

Ether 7:3 — Kib, the Youngest, Rules in Orihah's Stead

It was important for stability in ancient societies to have as few transitions of authority as possible under monarchical government. Every time a king's throne was vacated, the social structure of the whole community was upset. Generally, the kingship became vacant upon the monarch's death. It was highly unusual, almost unthinkable, for a king to give up his office voluntarily or for a king to be replaced by popular vote. Regardless, when a king died or left office, all government officials serving under that king were automatically released and replaced by the new king. The new king had the right to replace or keep any government official. It was analogous to what happens in the Church today when a bishop is released. The counselors in the bishopric are generally released with the outgoing bishop. Similarly, when the Relief Society President is released, her counselors are usually released with her. In the ancient world, it was not unusual for a new king to simply reinstall the previous bureaucrats, officers in the military, and other

government officials. However, change to monarchical authority was often difficult and took a period of time before stability was resumed in the community. This may provide some explanation as to why leadership was often passed on to a younger son of the king.

There may be another reason why the younger son of a king would assume office—the older sons were often needed as workers. In an agrarian world, the older sons were needed to till the fields and take care of the herds. They typically worked in agriculture or learned to be businessmen or craftsmen. Usually the younger sons—the favored sons—stayed home, studied, learned languages, and became educated and trained. They had a closer relationship with their father. I think we see that with Nephi. Nephi recorded, “Having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father ...” Nephi was the record keeper. He became the successor to Lehi.

When you look at how succession in the early part of the Book of Mormon went from Jacob to Enos to Jarom and to Omni, only a few generations covered a lot of years. In order for that to make sense, Enos was likely born very late in Jacob’s life; Jarom was likely born very late in Enos’ life. As the king or patriarch of a family aged, he could leave much of the day-to-day dealings to his older sons. The father would have more time to train and school a younger son as successor and give him all of the necessary expertise in politics, linguistics, and economics. A powerful king or patriarch would not have wanted to train his sons too soon, lest they upstage the father. Ancient kings and patriarchs often selected their younger sons as successors.

Ether 7:23 — Idolatry Begins to be Practiced Widely

In the Book of Ether, idolatry kept recurring. It was appealing to the ancients to have an idol—especially a very large, prominent, beautifully-carved stone image of something. This made belief and worship easy—the image could be seen and the idol could be touched. Not only could they see and touch an idol, but there was a pleasant smell associated with idol worship since incense was often burned as part of the ceremonies. The visual, tangible, olfactory sensory experience of idols was what was appealing. All of this gave a feeling of permanence. Idols seemed to have a bigger-than-life presence and, in fact, many of them were larger than life. Large stone idols were intimidating and put the worshipper in a secondary or lowly state. That appealed to the kings and rulers, who generally wanted the ordinary people to feel lowly. The humbler the people were, the easier it was to maintain control in the land.

During his ministry on the earth in the Meridian of Time, Jesus Christ could be seen, touched, and heard. He has appeared and spoken to prophets in every dispensation of the gospel. The reality of these events is recorded in scripture for the benefit of all of us. However, most of us live by faith in Jesus Christ. Both Moroni and the Apostle Paul

emphasized that we must have faith in Jesus Christ, even though we do not see. Paul stated that “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). Hebrews 11:1 explains that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things *not seen*.” Moroni stated that “faith is things which are hoped for and *not seen*; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6). These scriptures help us to avoid the lure of idolatry.

Ether 7:25 — Protection Given to the Prophets

As the people continued in their wickedness and idol worship, they began persecuting the prophets who were sent to teach repentance. In response, a law was enacted under the direction of King Shule that provided protection for the prophets, allowing them freedom of travel and freedom of speech. Apparently, the people were allowed some freedom of religion to the extent that they could choose to listen to the prophets and then choose whether or not to repent of their wickedness and idolatry.

Even though prophets in ancient America often spoke unflattering things about the kings, there was strong respect and reliance on prophecy among the Maya people. John Sorenson has written a paper on this topic. Maya kings rarely made important decisions without first consulting the prophets.

Further Reading

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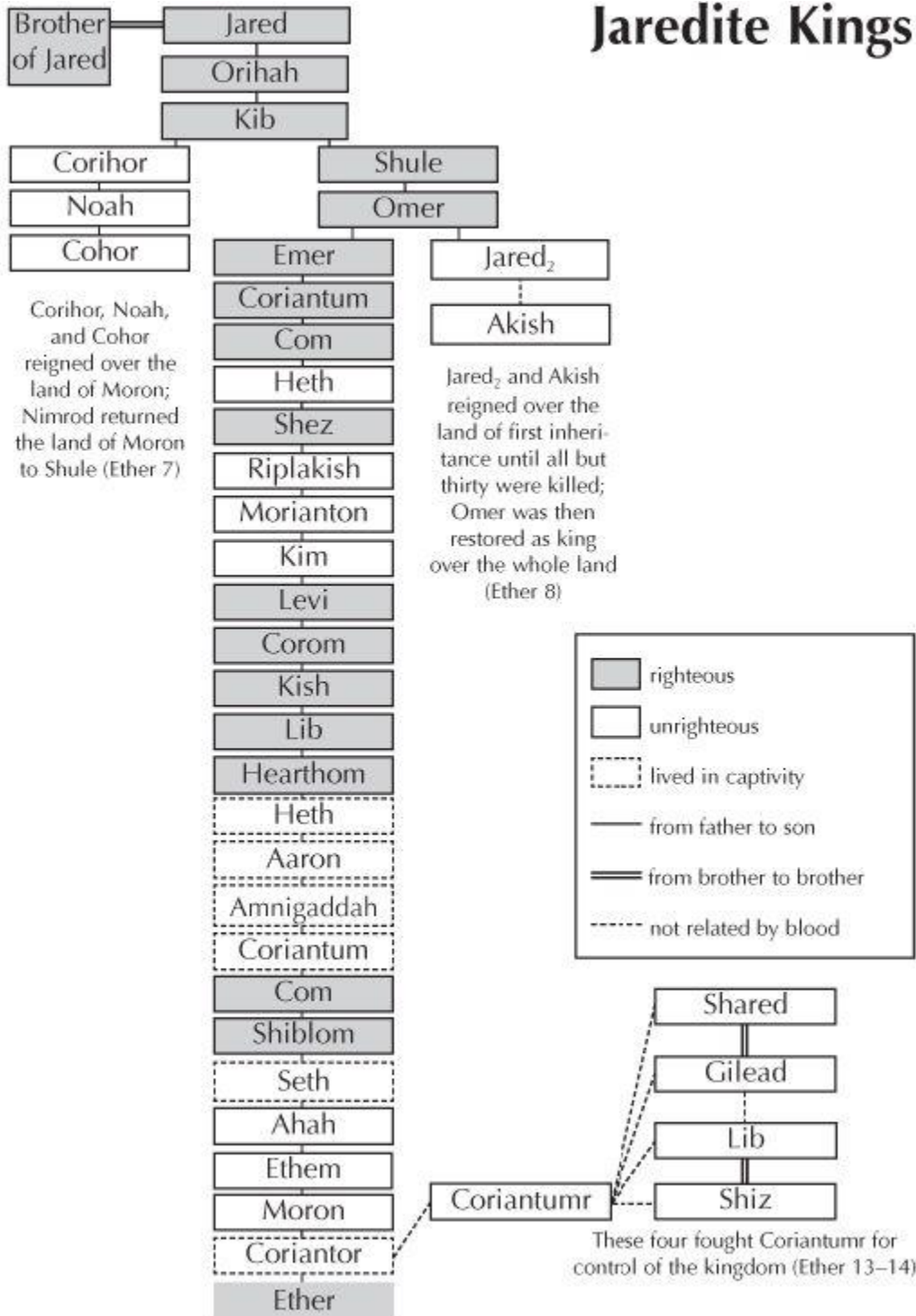
Ether 8

Ether 8:4 — How Does a King Spend His Life in Captivity?

Ether is full of accounts of kings living in captivity—often for the remainder of their lives. This was very characteristic at this time. A king was believed to connect the human and divine realms and was considered to hold the unique position of appeasing the idolatrous gods for the benefit of all the people. In this way, royal monarchs were viewed as being sacred or even quasi-divine. The enemies of a king could not put him to death without

fearing retribution in society or fearing that they would be the cause of punishment on all the people by idolatrous gods.

Jaredite Kings



What kind of captivity was Omer in where he could beget “sons and daughters?” How long was he in captivity? How old must his sons have been to deliver him? “Captivity” did not mean being put behind bars or in a penitentiary. There were no jails or prisons in antiquity and there was no sentence of “life-in-prison.” Incarcerating people was very expensive. If someone needed to be restrained temporarily, he would be thrown and contained in a cistern for a short period of time.

This ancient society had class distinctions and was highly class structured, as was all of the ancient near-eastern world. With class distinction came privileges and legal benefits for those in the upper class—particularly for royalty. Enemies of a king could confine him and other royal members in a restricted area where they were required to stay—in a palace or a specific part of the land. Even though they were restricted in their movement, they lived their lives in comparative ease. They were not put into slavery, nor were they required to work for other people. Therefore, the many kings over several generations who were required to live “in captivity” in the Book of Ether were likely confined to living in restricted areas, but were permitted to live and act with relative freedom.

Below is a chart showing the chronology of the Jaredite kings, indicating those who ruled righteously, those who were a wicked influence over the people, and those who lived in captivity. The main column of this chart shows the founder of the Jaredite nation and follows his progeny down to Ether, who was not a king. His name is on this book in the Book of Mormon because it was Ether who told the history of the Jaredite people. This list also gives the names of others who created conflict with particular kings and asserted power as rulers.

Ether 8:20 — “And Now I, Moroni ...”

In Ether 8, the problem of ancient, secret, and wicked oaths comes in with a vengeance (8:15, 16, 20). Here we have an early arising of the secret oaths and combinations, instigated by a daughter of king Jared. What did she propose? According to Moroni, where did the secret oaths come from? Who maintained and restored the oaths? (8:9–16). Why does Moroni not record the “manner of their oaths?” What does Moroni prophesy about nations that “uphold such secret combinations, to get power and gain?” What does Moroni suggest we should do when we see “these things come among you?” Who is behind the building up of this system? What are some solutions for us in our day? (8:20–26).

In describing the book of Ether, Book of Mormon scholar Grant Hardy observed, “Moroni maintains a more pervasive narrator presence” than his father, Mormon. Moroni interspersed comment on the Jaredite narrative at five points: Ether 1:1–6; 3:17–20; 4:1–6:1; 8:18–26; 12:6–41. In the book of Ether alone, the phrase, “I, Moroni” appears eleven times. In contrast, the phrase “I, Mormon” only appears three times outside Mormon’s own writing about his own

lifetime. Moroni used Mormon's classic phrase "and thus we see" only once. This occurrence in Ether 8:20 is a good place to look at Moroni's editorial philosophy.

There may be several explanations as to why Mormon's and Moroni's approaches were so different. Unlike Mormon, who had time to carefully craft his abridging and commentary, Moroni's life was constantly under threat, making it so he had to work under incredibly difficult circumstances. He had to edit, abridge, and write under the assumption that his life could end suddenly. This accounts for why Moroni wrote multiple endings to his record. For example, in Moroni 1:1 he states: "Now I, Moroni, after having made an end of abridging the account of the people of Jared, I had supposed not to have written more, but I have not as yet perished."

It may be that Moroni left the blocks of Jaredite record more or less intact and edited the original text less than his father Mormon did. When Moroni's five comments are removed from Ether, the remaining text flows flawlessly. For example, when the text of Ether 12:5 and 13:2 is read back to back, they read like they belong together: "Ether did prophesy great and marvelous things unto the people, which they did not believe, because they saw them not ... For behold, they rejected all the words of Ether; for he truly told them of all things, from the beginning of man." Even though there is almost an entire chapter of commentary from Moroni separating these verses, they flow together perfectly.

Further Reading

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George A. Horton Jr., "And Thus We See," in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003), 57–59.

Ether 9

Ether 9 — Study Questions

- Was the use of conspiracies and secret combinations by the daughter of Jared and Akish successful in attaining their goals?
- Why are evil plans often successful in attaining their goals? What does that say about the goals? Did the success last? To what did it lead?
- What influence saved the life of Omer?

- What happens if we ignore the promptings we receive?
- Think through your life, and ask yourself what promptings you have received. Did you listen, or did you neglect to follow them? How did it work out?

Ether 9:3 — Warned in a Dream

Throughout the scriptures, we hear of people being warned by the Lord—either in a dream or otherwise, including the still, small voice. Consider the dreams of Joseph, the son of Jacob (Israel), that led him to become the chief administrator in Egypt. A most outstanding example is Joseph, the step-father of Jesus, who obeyed divine guidance and warnings instantly. Matthew 2:13–14 explains:

[T]he angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt.

Indeed, the origin of the entire Book of Mormon with Lehi’s journey to the Promised Land with his family was prompted by a warning of the Lord.

Here, Omer was similarly warned, and he “departed out of the land with his family.” Not all of Omer’s family left with him. Omer’s son, Jared, and the posterity of Jared stayed behind. The narrative in Ether 9:2–3 gives us the bare simple facts, but there was probably very strong emotions involved in these activities.

Ether 9:1–9 — The Evil Plot

The conspiracy and use of evil by Akish and his friends, probably with Jared’s consent, came to fruition when Omer was overthrown as king and Jared was installed as ruler. Jared was grateful, no doubt, to Akish, so he allowed Akish to marry his daughter. However, the success of Jared was short-lived. In this book we see early examples of family treachery. Sons and daughters rise up against fathers, brothers against brothers—all to gain power. As Pope John Paul II has said, “As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live.”

Akish used his secret combinations against his father-in-law in order to become the king himself. Akish recruited his fellow conspirators to behead Jared even while he was sitting on the throne giving audience to his people. One wonders if Jared’s daughter may have even been complicit in the wicked plans against her own father. The spread of the “wicked and secret society” had “corrupted the hearts of all the people” (9:6). Later, Akish, jealous of his own son, starved him to death. Nimrah, the victim’s brother and son of Akish, fled to the land where Omer ruled.

Ether 9:10–12 — The Destruction of Akish’s Kingdom

Akish’s nation was destroyed, but what was the cause of this destruction? Who were the main enemies of Akish’s regime? Were Akish and his sons the only parties to blame for the destruction? What part did the regular citizens play in this downfall? In fairly short order, the kingdom of Akish, which he had used treachery to obtain, was utterly destroyed by that same treachery. His own sons began a war that went on for “many years” and resulted in the obliteration of all but thirty people in the kingdom, and those who had previously fled to dwell with Omer.

Thus, we see the “fruits” of evil engendered by one or two people—Akish and the daughter of Jared. For a short period of time, their plans looked successful, but the evil soon cankered an entire nation. Moroni pointed out that “the people of Akish were desirous for gain,” and were as greedy for financial success as Akish was for power. They were bribed by the sons of Akish. These sons began a civil war that caused the end of the kingly line of Jared and Akish.

Ether 9:13–27 — Peace Restored for a Short Time

Omer came out of self-exile and regained control of the nation. Emer, one of Omer’s younger sons, “did fill the steps of his father.” The land began to prosper and “Emer did execute judgement in righteousness all his days.” Coriantum then reigned, followed by his son Com, both of whom reigned righteously. However, the story repeats, and Com’s son, Heth, “began to embrace the secret plans again of old, to destroy his father.” Heth dethroned his father, slays him with his own sword, and then reigns in his stead.

Ether 9:28–35 — Poisonous Serpents upon the Face of the Land

Prophets warned that a “great famine” would come if the people did not repent. However, Heth himself encouraged the people to reject the prophets, instead persecuting them and casting them out. As predicted, “there began to be a great dearth upon the land ... for there was no rain upon the face of the earth.” In the midst of the great famine, an interesting series of events followed. First, the land was infested by “poisonous serpents,” which “did poison many people.” Next, “flocks began to flee” southward, and the serpents followed the flocks (Ether 9:31). The serpents then stopped pursuing the flocks and “hedge[d] up the way,” preventing people from passing into the land southward (Ether 9:33).

As strange as this series of events may seem, the details are ecologically sound. In times of drought, snakes will often migrate to populated areas in search of water or prey. As the population of snakes increases, and if the snakes are venomous, there is greater likelihood that people will be bitten and poisoned by the snakes. If the drought does not subside, the snakes, as well as other animals, will continue to migrate in search of water. In addition,

animals will migrate to escape the infestation of the snakes and also the drought, with some perishing as they flee (Ether 9:32). This could explain what Ether referred to as the flocks “flee[ing] before the poisonous serpents” (Ether 9:31).

Ether’s record states that when the people had eventually suffered enough to repent and the famine ceased, the serpents were no longer a threat. This is likely the result of two things. First, as rain showered on the land (Ether 9:35), snakes and other animals would return to their natural habitats and populations would be more evenly distributed. Second, eventually the bird populations would recover and begin to regulate snake populations, reducing them to normal levels. Thus, the serpents would no longer pose a barrier to the land southward.

Once again, we see that what may, at first glance, appear to be an unbelievable description of events in the Book of Mormon, actually contains truth when investigated further. This narrative can also be used as a parable, showing that real repentance can end a spiritual famine and tear down the barriers that keep us from returning to the Lord. There is no barrier so great that the Atonement cannot overcome.

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Ether 10

Much of the Jaredite history is contained in this chapter. According to Eldin Ricks, “It is likely that over half of Moroni’s thumbnail sketch of Jaredite history is covered by this chapter.” Eldin Ricks, *Book of Mormon Study Guide* (Orem, UT: Orion Publishing, 1963), 102. Fourteen rulers are covered starting with Shez in Ether 10:1 to the end of the chapter. Many of those generations of the ruling family were in captivity from the days of

Hearthom to the end of the chapter. Evidently this family divisiveness played a strong role in the final decay of the Jaredite kingdom.

Ether 10:5–8 — Riplakish Was Like King Noah

The description of king Riplakish's reign was exactly antithetical to the rule of a righteous king. In Israel, the "Paragraph of the King" in Deuteronomy 17:14–20 imposed a remarkable set of limitations on the lawful power, assuring that the king remained as "one from among thy brethren" (Deuteronomy 17:15). But this Hebrew expectation of kingship was not codified until after the time of Moses. Even so, Riplakish is portrayed in Moroni's abridgment in direct contrast to King Benjamin, who came after the laws were codified, and who gave an accounting of his stewardship in his famous speech at the temple. King Benjamin likely had access to passages about righteous kings in the Brass Plates, and Benjamin closely followed the wording of the Paragraph of the King himself as he reported to his people that he had met the standards of a righteous king in Israel. Deuteronomy 17:17 says of a good king, "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold."

In contrast, we read of Riplakish's behavior as king in Ether 10:5: "[H]e did have many wives and concubines, and did lay that upon men's shoulders which was grievous to be borne; yea, he did tax them with heavy taxes; and with the taxes he did build many spacious buildings." Then in verse 7: "Wherefore he did obtain all his fine work, yea, even his fine gold he did cause to be refined in prison; and all manner of fine workmanship he did cause to be wrought in prison."

An integral part of the Paragraph of the King was the warning to kings not to use their power to gain wealth and satisfy their own lusts. King Benjamin delineated how he obeyed that requirement. Perhaps there was, long before the publication of the Paragraph of the King, a similar expectation for righteous rule and Ether was expressing that, or perhaps Moroni used the Paragraph of the King as a guide in demonstrating that Riplakish was a bad king. King Mosiah must have noted, and perhaps even accentuated, the contrast between his father Benjamin and the behavior of Riplakish.

Further Reading

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Ether 10:6 — Riplakish Constructs a Beautiful Throne

Scholars identify the first advanced Mesoamerican civilization as the Olmec (ca. 1700–400 BC), which closely corresponds with the time period of the Jaredite civilization. This ancient pre-Columbian American “society began constructing thrones of stone between 1350–1000 BC.” Today, these people are known for their huge and elaborate stone thrones and colossal stone heads that have survived the centuries. The thrones were usually made out of a single, large, altar-like stone, ornamentally carved with three-dimensional depictions of the rulers themselves seated in cave-like openings. The massive stones used to make these thrones and heads could weigh up to 40 tons and were transported from as far as 90 km (about 56 miles). The intensive labor required to produce these stone monuments attests to the power of the rulers who commissioned them.

Mesoamerican scholars have noted that construction of massive thrones and colossal stone heads were one of the ways Olmec kings memorialized themselves. The thrones served as seats of power, which symbolically positioned rulers as sitting between the human and divine realms. The thrones were also carved in ways to legitimize their high status by establishing their relationship to founding ancestors.

In order for Riplakish to construct an “exceedingly beautiful throne,” he had to have possessed sufficient power to harness a massive labor force. Riplakish was the second king following a famine which had decimated the Jaredite kingdom (Ether 9:28–35). His father had begun to rebuild the kingdom (Ether 10:1–4), and by the time Riplakish took over the kingdom he wielded considerable power. The record describes a period of oppressive taxation and building projects during Riplakish’s reign and mentions that he burdened the people with burdens “grievous to be borne” and forced them to “labor continually” (Ether 10:5–6).

Many Olmec stone thrones and heads were intentionally smashed, defaced and mutilated to delegitimize a king and his possible successors—particularly at times of rebellion or civil war. Consistent with Olmec history, Riplakish’s throne may have been defaced and mutilated since the Jaredite record states that “the people did rise up in rebellion against” Riplakish, and he “was killed, and his descendants were driven out of the land” (Ether 10:8).

Further Reading

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Ether 10:8, 32 — The Number "Forty-two" in the Book of Ether

The number forty-two is mentioned frequently in the Book of Mormon—some of which are found in the book of Ether (9:24; 10:8, 15, 32). Ether 10:8 states that "[When king Riplakish] had reigned for the space of forty and two years the people did rise up in rebellion." Verse 32 mentions that Com "reigned over the half of the kingdom forty and two years." Many things were recorded as having happened in multiples of forty-two. This may reflect some feature of ancient calendaring patterns and information recorded by ancient astronomers; but as intriguing as this may be, we cannot be sure.

Further Reading

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Ether 11

Many final questions arise in this chapter:

- Why was Com blessed "all the remainder of his days," despite the rejection of the prophets by the people?
- Even in very wicked times, is it possible for a person of courage and conviction to stand for the truth?
- What action caused war to keep coming back?
- What characteristics of the people and royal family appear to be at the root of the descent into tragedy and trials?
- What action by the brother of Shiblom appears to have caused the worst destruction again?
- What behavior prevented them from listening to the Lord and his prophets?

- What happened as soon as the people began to repent?
- Can wickedness among the leaders cause decline in a nation?

Ether 11:1–19 — The Beginning of the Fall of the Jaredite Nation

Generally, even the wicked people in a community publicly follow the path of a righteous king. However, in this society, the wickedness became so strong that the king did not have much influence. Com was a righteous king who protected the prophets who were ostracized by the people. The next king was Com's son, Shiblom, whose brother rebelled and drew the kingdom into "exceedingly great war" and "contentions in all the land" (verses 4 and 7). Worst of all, Shiblom's brother killed all the prophets who were warning of impending destruction. Sure enough, severe destruction did follow, and sadly, just as the people began suffering enough that they began to repent, Shiblom was killed. Seth (presumably the heir of kingship and brother of Shiblom) lived as a captive the rest of his life. Seth's wicked son, Aha, took over the kingship. The next few descendants of the kings ruled in great wickedness, until the prophets withdrew from the people. The record states that a succeeding king "did reign in [the previous king's] stead" (11:14). That does not give much confidence that the many monarchical successions mentioned in the Jaredite record were normal and peaceful. After a period of rebellion, the kingdom was split in two between two unrighteous rulers—one of whom was Moron. Subsequently, Moron was overthrown and put in "captivity all the remainder of his days (verse 18). Moron's son, Coriantor, also "dwelt in captivity all his days" (11:19).

Ether 11:20–21 — Warnings of Destruction and the Solution

At the time Moron and his son Coriantor were in captivity, prophets again came among the people warning that "God would execute judgment against them to their utter destruction," and would bring another people to inherit the land of promise. In the Book of Mormon and subsequent history, we see the fulfillment of that warning. The Jaredite nation was destroyed and the succeeding group of people, the Nephites, were also eventually destroyed as a nation because of their unrighteousness.

By telling the stories of both Nephite and Jaredite societies and their destructions, the Book of Mormon drives home its powerful warning for modern readers. As Steven C. Walker observed, "It is because what happened to the Jaredites happens to the Nephites," that "more presciently, we sense its potential for ourselves." The Book of Mormon is a divinely appointed warning for the modern days, twice illustrating the downfall that awaits societies that succumb to wickedness and corruption.

It is worth noting that even though the great empires and nations of the earth tend to disintegrate, and the Book of Mormon demonstrates the fall of two major civilizations, the book also presents a successful solution. Only when the people hear the word of the Lord,

repent, and adhere to the principles taught by Jesus Christ, as found in 3 Nephi and elsewhere in scripture, can the tide of social decay and destruction be staved off.

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ETHER 12–15

John W. Welch Notes



Introduction — Final Farewells of Two Prophets

Steve Walker, a faculty member in the Brigham Young University English department, has written several articles on literature and belief. He once wrote an essay called “Last Words,” as an introduction to the books of 4 Nephi, Mormon, Ether and Moroni. This came at the end of a series of essays on different parts of the Book of Mormon. He is a master of literary analysis. This is what he said:

Looked at from a literary perspective, for its impact in our personal lives, I find the final section of the Book of Mormon to be particularly engaging. Like any good climax, it tends to be the most intense part of the book. It is arguably the most significant section. This culmination of a thousand-year chronicle puts the whole volume into over-view mode—the summary at the end of the book encapsulates what has mattered most. T. S. Eliot [“Little Gidding,” *The Four Quartets*] observed that, ‘What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.’ Endings re-orient us as when Sam from the Lord of the Rings returns to the shrine with all those world-altering adventures involving the ring. ‘Well, I’m back.’

The small books that wrap up the Book of Mormon—Fourth Nephi, Mormon, Ether, and especially Moroni—give us the conclusion to the whole matter. Their endings are emphatic because they take up the theme of endings in a series of death-bed statements, famous last words. That’s dramatic because of the ‘last, the best of all the game’ effect, because of our expectation that the final things said distills overall implications, as in Sidney Carton’s last words in *A Tale of Two Cities*:

'It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done.' The final Book of Mormon words put me in the mind of the last words of Rabelais, for instance, who said: 'I'm going to seek a great perhaps'; and of Lord Nelson's, 'Thank God I have done my duty'; and Goethe, 'More light'. I especially like Pancho Villa's expression that final statements matter, 'Don't let it end like this. Tell them I said something.'

There is weightiness to the last words in the Book of Mormon as it assumes a death-bed whisper, 'low out of the dust' as 'one that hath a familiar spirit ... out of the ground.' The book's mood here is solemn, and that 'whisper out of the dust' haunts us. It is because we are witnessing the death throes of entire peoples and sense the cosmic proportions in that apocalyptic end of all things. Unlike the apocalypses we're used to, the kind of arcane theoretical symbolizing we get in Ezekiel or Revelation, this apocalypse invades actual experience. Mormon gives his last words, Moroni makes a penultimate statement, then his final absolute words, and we hear not so much the echo of a distantly anticipated millennial ending as the immediate death of specific individuals.

This is a great literary comment on what we are seeing here in the Book of Mormon.

Further Reading

Steve Walker, "Last Words," in *The Reader's Book of Mormon: Last Words: 4 Nephi – Moroni*, eds. Robert A. Rees and Eugene England (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008), vii-xxii.

Ether 12

Ether 12 – Study Questions

- **Ether 12: 3–4** — What process did Ether teach as a means to gain a better world? What provides an anchor for the "souls of men" to help them in their journey?
- **Ether 12:5–6** — To what did Moroni attribute the inability of the people to believe the marvelous things that Ether prophesied? What advice does he give to us about seeking proof of spiritual phenomena before we believe?
- **Ether 12:6–22** — While reading Moroni's discourse on faith, can you detect why the Savior has appeared only to certain witnesses instead of to the whole world? To help answer this question, you may wish to read Acts 10:39–41. Why were the golden plates shown only to a limited number of witnesses? What examples of faith did Moroni offer? Can you list them?

- **Ether 12:23–27** — Why was Moroni so concerned about the gentiles mocking, and especially about “the placement of our words?” Did the Lord say to Moroni, “Oh no, you do not have a weakness in that area!” What did he say?
- **Ether 12:38–41** — What kind of person can you detect that Moroni is after reading this farewell? How does our humility and faith stack up?

Ether 12:6–22, 30–31 — A Witness Comes after the Trial of Your Faith.

Moroni saw the faithlessness of the Jaredites and saw that they did not accept the teachings of Ether. He claimed, “They did not believe, because they saw them not” (Ether 12:5). Then he added a caution to his readers, “Wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6).

In order to demonstrate the truth of this principle, Moroni drew upon a number of episodes in the Book of Mormon. He wrote, for instance, that it was by faith that “Alma and Amulek ... caused the prison to tumble to the earth” (Ether 12:13). It was by faith that “Ammon and his brethren ... wrought so great a miracle among the Lamanites” (v. 15). And it was because of the great faith of the brother of Jared that the Lord “could not withhold anything from his sight” (v. 21, see *KnoWhy* 246). Moroni adds, in verse 19, “And there were many whose faith was so exceedingly strong, even before Christ came, who could not be kept from within the veil, but truly saw with their eyes the things which they had beheld with an eye of faith, and they were glad.” Most of all, it was by faith and charity that these righteous individuals “obtained a promise” of those blessings that they most desired (12:17, 21, 22, 34, 37).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Must a Trial of Faith Precede a Witness of Truth? \(Ether 12:6\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 246 (December 6, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can Trials of Faith Lead to Spiritual Growth? \(Ether 12:6\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 356 (August 23, 2017). “Whatever their form, our mortal trials provide essential opportunities for spiritual growth.”

Ether 12:23–41 — Moroni Fears That Gentiles Will Mock Him

Why was Moroni so concerned about the Gentiles mocking “the placement of our words?” After examining the excellent Hebrew poetry of the earlier writers (such as King Benjamin and Alma), it is no wonder he was concerned about the placement of his words. He had directly quoted such brilliant poetic writing.

C.S. Lewis, referring to Hebrew use of parallelism said,

It is (according to one's point of view) either a wonderful piece of luck or a wise provision of God's, that poetry which was to be turned into all languages should have as its chief formal characteristic one that does not disappear (as mere metre does) in translation.

I think we have plenty of reasons to believe that Moroni had very high personal standards. Maybe he expected a little too much of himself, and maybe he was worried about every little detail, but he had given attention to so many details here. Normally, by the time we get to the Book of Ether, we tend to rush through it. Reading it from the perspective of Moroni, we realize that just before Moroni wrote his last chapters in this book, he had spent a great deal of time saturated in these important records. They come to life a lot better and we notice a lot more when we look at the book of Ether from his perspective.

After making apologies for his writing skills, which were considerable even so, Moroni gave his classic promise that if people will come unto the Lord, he "will show unto them their weakness," which he has given them "that they may be humble; ... then I will make weak things become strong unto them" (12:27).

In the end, Moroni expressed a sincere, powerful testimony of the truthfulness of all his words, and in particular of his knowledge of the Savior. Expecting to meet all of us, his readers, someday "before the judgment-seat of Christ" (12:38), he added, "And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face, and that he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things" (12:39), following that with a request that we also "seek Jesus" (12:41)

Further Reading

C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (San Diego, CA: Harvest Books/Harcourt, Brace and Company: 1958), 4–5.

Ether 13

Ether 13 — Study Questions

- **Ether 13:2–4, 6** — What did Ether say about the flood? Also, Ether "saw the days of Christ." Do we know whether he saw Christ during his life on earth, in Bountiful after his resurrection, or both? Where did Ether say the place of the New Jerusalem would be? For a corroborating view, see Doctrine and Covenants 84:2–3.
- **Ether 13:5–6** — How did Ether explain why the Old Jerusalem could not be called the New Jerusalem? For whom was the Old Jerusalem to be the holy land? For whom was the New Jerusalem to be the holy city?

- **Ether 13:10–11** — At the end of the millennium, when the New and the Old Jerusalem return to the earth, who will inhabit the Old Jerusalem? Who will inhabit the New Jerusalem? Which one do you see yourself dwelling in?
- **Ether 13:13–22** — Where did Ether live during this period? Why? What ancient biblical prophet had to similarly hide out?
- **Ether 13:20–21** — Would Coriantumr have been able to get his kingdom back and put things to rights? Under what conditions? Was Coriantumr’s opportunity to live to see “the fulfilling of the prophecies which had been spoken concerning another people receiving the land for their inheritance” a blessing for him, or a punishment? How do you think he may have felt about Ether’s prophecies when he encountered the new people? What did that say about Ether as a prophet? (see Deuteronomy 13:22).

Ether 13:3–11 — Ether Sees the New Jerusalem and the Last Days

In Ether 13:3–11, what did Moroni want us to see? Here he talks about Ether seeing the future: the days of Christ, the New Jerusalem, the millennial material, a remnant of Lehi’s posterity being preserved. The survival of the remnant was important to Moroni because these were his people. They were his enemies, but they are from the household of Lehi. In Ether 13:11, Moroni wanted us to know that the fulfilling of the covenant with Abraham applied to the Lamanite remnant because they are a part of the House of Israel. The purpose of the Book of Mormon, as indicated in the Title Page, is that we will remember the covenant.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Do the Prophets Speak of Multiple Jerusalems?](#)” (Ether 13:3–6), *KnoWhy* 247 (December 7, 2016).

Ether 13:21 — Ether Saw the Nephites in Vision

Moroni wanted to point out that Ether had prophesied that another group of people would be brought forth and would possess the land if Coriantumr and the Jaredites did not repent. In Ether 11:21, Ether had previously seen in a vision and prophesied that another group would sail across the ocean led by God “after the manner by which he brought their fathers.” This group, of course, was led by Lehi. This would have been important for Moroni to include, as it involved his ancestry and posterity.

Ether 13:25 — The Final War of the Jaredites Raged throughout the Land

As Hugh Nibley was riding the troop transport ships that were crossing the English Channel on the morning of June 6, 1944, he was one of the first to hit Utah Beach as one of the Intelligence officers. He was to get behind German lines so he could let everybody know what was happening. He had smuggled a small copy of the Book of Mormon into

his intelligence pockets. They were told that they could not put anything into these pockets except for classified materials. As he was riding across the choppy waters, he was reading Ether 13–15. Brother Nibley said, “I had read these before, but to me it had always been so fancifully absurd, so far out of the realm of anything that I had ever experienced, I could not see how this could even happen. It was so outlandishly awful.” He said, “It was at that moment as I looked out at what I was experiencing, that was when I got my testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. It was in the darkness, realizing how real it can be, and so in such a way that you could not make it up that way.”

Moroni himself, in fact, had experienced something like this. He had lived through the destruction of his own people. I have wondered why Moroni detailed over three chapters, the day-by-day, blow-by-blow, count of how many men were left among the Jaredites.

During his own people’s final struggle, Moroni was one of the commanders of a full complement of soldiers, which may have been a maximum of 10,000 people. After the battle every day, he would have counted up who was left. Ether had apparently done the same. When Moroni gave us these diminishing numbers, he had lived through that situation. Like Brother Nibley, that darkness of war allowed Moroni to feel the contrast with the wonderful things that he had learned from the Nephite records and the 24 gold plates of Ether.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Could So Many People Have Died at the Battle of Cumorah?](#) (Mormon 6:114),” *KnoWhy* (November 15, 2016).

Alex Nibley and Hugh Nibley, *Sergeant Nibley: Memories of an Unlikely Screaming Eagle* (Salt Lake City, UT: Shadow Mountain, 2006).

Ether 14

Ether 14 — Study Questions

- **Ether 14:1–2** — What do you think Moroni meant by “there began to be a great curse on all the land?” What would likely happen if a man left his tools lying around? Why might that have been so? What did the people do to protect their property and their families? In our day, what measures, defense, or surveillance are taken to defend our property against such a “curse”?
- **Ether 14:8–10** — Ether 14:9–10 sometimes leaves us wondering who killed whom because the pronouns are not clearly defined. Nevertheless, a high priest of either

Shared or Gilead killed his leader. Do you think that corrupt priests were part of the cause of the Jaredite decline?

- **Ether 14:21–23** — These verses present a very realistic sidelight on what war entails. Why do you think Moroni may have added these gruesome details? What do you think he hoped to accomplish? What in Moroni’s background had made him very conscious of such circumstances?
- **Ether 14:24** — Moroni records two purposes for Shiz’s oath to kill Coriantumr. What are they? What does that tell us about the nature of Shiz and the condition of the people of Jared?

Ether 15

Ether 15 — Study Questions

- **Ether 15:1–3** — After recovering from injury, Coriantumr began to remember the words of Ether (Ether 13:20–21). He remembered the words of other prophets too. How many people had died before Coriantumr repented? Were there only soldiers, or were there civilian casualties? What did he do to try to right the situation as far as he could?
- **Ether 15:4–6** — What was so tragic about Shiz offering to spare more people, if Coriantumr would give himself up so that Shiz could kill him? Can you imagine how Coriantumr must have felt? Why would it not have been profitable for him to do that? Why would turning himself over likely not have saved the people (Ether 13:20–21)? Had the people repented along with Coriantumr? Who was continuing the bloodshed?
- **Ether 15:15–28** — What was Moroni’s purpose in giving a blow-by-blow account of the destruction of the Jaredites? See Ether 2:11–12.

Ether 15:11 — Two Final Battles

Moroni, the only known Nephite survivor of the battle at Cumorah, was the narrator of the account in the book of Ether that involves the final Jaredite battle at Ramah. He must have been deeply impressed by the parallels between the two wars of annihilation. In both cases, nations of great promise were wiped away. Because of their wickedness, the Spirit of God “ceased to strive” with both peoples (Mormon 5:16; Ether 15:19). In this chart the dates, places, numbers of soldiers, outcomes, and other statistics of these battles are contrasted. Despite the consequent collapse of these civilizations, a remnant of Lehi’s seed was preserved, fulfilling the promises made by the Lord to Lehi, Nephi, Enos, and other righteous Nephites.

This chart compares the final battles of both the Jaredite and Nephite civilizations, which took place near the same hill (see Ether 15:11).

The Two Final Battles

	Jaredites	Nephites
when	ca. 300 B.C.	385 A.D.
where	hill Ramah	hill Cumorah (hill Ramah)
who	Coriantumr and Shiz	Nephites and Lamanites
how many	2 million or more	around 230,000 Nephites
who gathered	men, wives, children	men, wives, children
outcome	both sides destroyed	Nephites destroyed
Spirit	ceased to strive with	ceased to strive with
prophet	Ether	Mormon
account	Ether 13–15	Mormon 6–7
record	24 gold plates	plates of Mormon
survivor	Coriantumr	Moroni

Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "The Two Final Battles," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 138.

Ether 15:31 — Shiz Struggled after Coriantumr Slew Him

The decapitation of Shiz, right at the very end of the last chapter of the Book of Ether, is often noted and wondered about. Shiz had his head chopped off, and then he raised up and collapsed. People suppose that it must be mythological. They think it must have been embellished through the ages and doesn't represent an accurate account of what had happened. Enlightening readers about the plausibility of this reported physiological phenomenon, Gary Hatfield, a professor of neuropathology, explains,

Shiz's death struggle illustrates the classic reflex posture that occurs in both humans and animals when the upper brain stem (midbrain/mesencephalon) is disconnected from the brain. The extensor muscles of the arms and legs contract,

and this reflect action could cause Shiz to raise up on his hands. In many patients, it is the sparing of vital respiratory and blood pressure in the central (pons) and lower (medulla) brain stem that permits survival.

The brain stem is located inside the base of the skull and is relatively small. It connects the brain proper, or cerebrum, with the spinal cord in the neck. Coriantumr was obviously too exhausted to do a clean job. His stroke evidently strayed a little too high. He must have cut off Shiz's head through the base of the skull, at the level of the midbrain, instead of lower through the cervical spine in the curvature of the neck. ... Significantly, this nervous system phenomenon (decerebrate rigidity) was first reported in 1898, long after the Book of Mormon was published.

Apparently, when the brain stem is cut at a certain point there is still enough of the brain left that it can give these impulses before the victim dies. Modern scientific knowledge thus offers corroboration of this gruesome account in the Book of Mormon.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Could Shiz Move and Breathe After Being Beheaded?](#) (Ether 15:31), *KnoWhy* 248, (December 8, 2016).

M. Gary Hadfield, "[The 'Decapitation' of Shiz](#)," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin Thorne (Provo UT: FARMS, 1999), 266.

Ether 15:32 — Coriantumr, Being Exhausted, Falls to the Earth

The last person left in the Book of Ether is Coriantumr. This relates to Omni 1:21, which speaks of the people of Zarahemla finding a man named Coriantumr:

And they [a large stone with engravings] gave an account of one Coriantumr, and the slain of his people. And Coriantumr was discovered by the people of Zarahemla; and he dwelt with them for the space of nine moons.

Coriantumr apparently did not die after he cut off Shiz's head. It only says he collapsed "*as if* he had no life." He was exhausted but alive, and it seems that this same Coriantumr is the one who is mentioned as having been found in the book of Omni. He knew his king list; he knew his genealogy. It is possible that certain Nephite names (such as Nehor in Ether 7:4), were first Jaredite names and were passed down by Coriantumr.

Ether 15:33–34 — Ether Finishes His Record

When most everyone had died, the Lord finally said to Ether, "go forth." He had been watching and he knew that it was safe for him to come out of the cave. Thinking about

both Ether and Mormon, how do you end a book like this? How do you make a conclusion about what you have witnessed? What other options might they have had? There was no point in calling people to repentance; there was no one to call, nor to listen.

In the face of this catastrophe and tragedy, Ether acknowledged that “it mattereth not, if it so be that I am saved in the kingdom of God.” No matter what happens in your life, or what kinds of difficulties you face, salvation is most important. This was spoken by someone who had really seen trials and devastation, and I think that is really something.

When Ether wrote his book, he was not sure what was going to happen. The brother of Jared had been given promises that these teachings would come forth, but Ether did not even know what was going to happen to him next. He poured out his soul in an existential cry hoping that someone, someday, would care. He was doing what many people would do, and that was bearing solid testimony. His confidence and faith were extremely powerful, and his mind and will were submissive to the will of the Lord. Whatever would happen next, he said, “it mattereth not, if it so be that I am saved in the kingdom of God. Amen” (15:34).

Further Reading

Daniel F. Belnap, ed., *Illuminating the Jaredite Record* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 2020). <https://rsc.byu.edu/book/illuminating-jaredite-records>. This new volume explores the relationship between the Nephite and the Jaredite records culturally, politically, literarily, and theologically. The first approach is a cultural-historical lens, in which elements of Jaredite culture are discussed, including the impact of a Jaredite subculture on Nephite politics during the reign of the judges, and a Mesopotamia perspective as seership and divination, and the brother of Jared’s experience as a spiritual transition. The second grouping looks at the book of Ether through a narratological lens, exploring different aspects of Moroni’s construction of the book of Ether. The third grouping considers the book of Ether’s depiction of women, as it contains one of the most descriptive, yet ambivalent, accounts of females in the Book of Mormon, both historically and contemporarily. The book of Ether is also reviewed pedagogically. For example, in Alma 37, Alma the Younger explained the value of using the Jaredite records in teaching modern audiences.

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can the Book of Mormon Survivors Give Us Hope?](#) (Mormon 8:3),” *KnoWhy* 393 (December 26, 2017).

MORONI 1–6

John W. Welch Notes



Introduction

Moroni's first farewell, recorded in Mormon 8–9, was written "four hundred years" after the "the coming of our Lord and Savior" (Mormon 8:6). Notably, this was approximately fifteen years after the battle at Cumorah (see Mormon 6:5). Moroni's final farewell, contained in the book bearing his own name, was written "more than four hundred and twenty years" after "the sign was given of the coming of Christ" (Moroni 10:1). By this time, nearly thirty-five years had passed since the battle at Cumorah. So Moroni was at least middle-aged by this point and had wandered for many years to escape death at the hands of the Lamanites and also to fulfill the commandments of the Lord (Moroni 1:1–4).

In this book, Moroni opens his treasure box of ecclesiastical, spiritual, and personal records and brings forth some of the greatest written jewels found anywhere in the Book of Mormon. These include instructions for performing priesthood ordinances and conducting the meetings of the Church of Jesus Christ (Moroni 1–6), three personal letters from his father Mormon (Moroni 7–9), and Moroni's final set of powerful exhortations to the surviving descendants of Lehi (Moroni 10).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Moroni Write So Many Farewells?](#) (Mormon 8:1)," *KnoWhy* 233 (November 17, 2016).

Moroni 1–6 — The Book of Mormon as the Foundation of Church Organization

In Moroni 1–6, Moroni presents information about ordinances and statements about the manner in which the Nephites worshipped when they were righteous. These chapters

may be thought of as a priesthood handbook of the righteous Nephites, given under the guidance of the Savior during his visit. Moroni's instructions provide the *how-to* from the first part of 4 Nephi, giving specific instructions for how they were able to create such a wonderful Zion community.

Still today, we can go through the Book of Mormon and find much of the information that we would need to run the Church of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the leaders of the Church wisely use the Book of Mormon as a key source of inspiration and guidance. It is regularly cited in General Conference addresses counselling members of the Church in their personal lives and callings within the Church.

In fact, the value of the Book of Mormon as an authoritative source for Church administration was recognized immediately. A little-known document called *The Articles of the Church of Christ* was written by Oliver Cowdery in June 1829, shortly after the translation of the plates of Mormon was completed. With Moroni 1–6 in hand, Oliver began drafting what was a first effort to determine how he and Joseph should build up the Church, and what its organizational practices should look like. He wrote, "Listen to the voice of Christ and write the words which I shall command you concerning *my Church, my gospel, my rock.*" "My Church," "my gospel," and "my rock" are words used by the resurrected Jesus in 3 Nephi 11 and 3 Nephi 27. According to historian Scott Faulring, "more than half of Cowdery's Articles are either direct quotations or paraphrases with slight deviations from the Book of Mormon." The subsequent revelation now found in Doctrine and Covenants 20 likewise draws heavily on the Book of Mormon, especially details on priesthood offices and the administration of ordinances found in Moroni 2–6.

The original Book of Mormon manuscript is a long, hand-written manuscript. It had no verse numbers, no paragraphs, and, of course, no index. Oliver had written most of the book out by hand, word by word, and that dictation process had gone on from the beginning of April to the end of June—approximately three months. But Oliver Cowdery was able to go to the manuscript pages and locate this scattered information, which he then put together in an amazing condensation of the administrative affairs of the Church.

Oliver's "Articles" began with how to baptize people, and he quoted what we now have as 3 Nephi 11:23–27. Then he discussed ordaining priests and teachers using Moroni 3, and quoted how priests should be ordained. From there, he moved to the sacrament, inviting people to come and partake of the sacrament "often." Moroni 6:6 says, "And they did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus." Moroni is not the only one to say that we should do this oft; Jesus himself blessed and broke the bread, and passed the sacrament to his disciples as they met together often with him. Jesus set the example, saying, "And behold, ye shall meet together oft" (3 Nephi

18:22) and “And if ye shall always do these things blessed are ye, for ye are built upon my rock” (3 Nephi 18:12). The actual words of the Sacrament prayers are then quoted as they are found Moroni 4 and 5. Oliver then went to Moroni 6:7–8, which discussed what was to happen if someone came and was not worthy to partake of the sacrament, as set forth by Jesus toward the end of 3 Nephi 18. Approximately half of Oliver’s administrative document is taken verbatim from the Book of Mormon text.

Oliver’s two-page draft was not adopted for use in the Church in June 1829 because the Church had not yet been organized. When the Church was organized about ten months later, on April 6, 1830, Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants was then revealed by Joseph Smith, expanding and refining Oliver’s document and likewise making good use of administrative directives found in the Book of Mormon.

Even today, in the Church’s Handbook of Instructions and in the general administration of the operations of the Church, it is easy to find many ways in which the Church is organized that specifically follow the directions given by Jesus Christ and the prophetic leaders of his Church found in the Book of Mormon. As Jesus told his twelve disciples, “Ye know the things that ye must do in my church ... for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do. Therefore, if ye do these things blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:21–22). Obviously, the Book of Mormon gives us many things: revelation, doctrine, history, scripture, personal guidance, practical role models, political wisdom, literary inspiration, and much, much more. On top of all of that, it teaches us how to conduct the spiritual and temporal matters of the Church. Here is a list of some such policies and practices followed by the Church today that have scriptural authority behind them coming from the Book of Mormon:

- The name of the Church of Christ (3 Nephi 27:8–9)
- Acting in the name of Christ (3 Nephi 27:7)
- A single prophet-leader (2 Nephi 5; Alma 1; Helaman 7; 3 Nephi 7:25)
- A quorum of twelve (3 Nephi 12:1; 19:12), “give heed unto the words of these twelve” (12:1)
- Three leaders with exceptional powers (3 Nephi 28:2–12)
- Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 27:12; Ether 5:4)
- Presiding (Mosiah 26:37; “to preside and watch over,” Alma 6:1; 3 Nephi 28:18)
- Uniformity, “a regulation throughout the Church” (Alma 6:7; 45:21; 62:44)
- The process of making administrative changes (Mosiah 29; 3 Nephi 15:1)
- Dividing church members into smaller groups or congregations (3 Nephi 19:4; Mosiah 18:18; 25:19–23)
- The pastoral duties of church leaders (Mosiah 18:19–23)

- Consecration of righteous men as priests and teachers (2 Nephi 5:26; Mosiah 23:16–18; 25:19)
- Ordination of priests and elders (Alma 6:1)
- Ordination by the laying on of hands (Alma 6:1; Moroni 2:2)
- Procedures and words used in ordaining priests and teachers (Moroni 3:1–4)
- Priesthood authority to baptize (Mosiah 18:13; 3 Nephi 11:19–22)
- A higher priesthood authority needed to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 18:36–37; Moroni 2)
- Priesthood after the Holy Order of the Son of God, associated with Melchizedek (Alma 13:1–10)
- Faith as the first principle in joining the Church (Alma 32)
- Examples of study, prayer, change of heart in conversion (Alma 17–26)
- Repentance (Mosiah 4:10; 11; 26; Alma 5; 9; 12; 42; Helaman 7; 13; 3 Nephi 30:2)
- Confession (Mosiah 26:9; “did confess their sins and were baptized” Helaman 5:17; 16:1; Moroni 6:7)
- Covenant making, remembering, and keeping (Mosiah 5:1–10; Mosiah 18:13; 3 Nephi 18)
- Taking upon them the name of Christ (Mosiah 5:10–12; 25:23; 3 Nephi 27:25; Moroni 6:3)
- No infant baptism (Moroni 8:20–21)
- The words of the baptismal prayer (3 Nephi 11:26–27)
- Baptism by immersion unto repentance (Mosiah 18:14–17; Alma 6:2; 3 Nephi 11:26)
- Baptizing in the name of Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 18:11; 27:16; 30:2; 4 Nephi 1:1)
- Procedures and words used for giving the Holy Ghost (Moroni 2:2)
- Numbering the covenant members of the Church (Mosiah 6:4; 26:35; Alma 6:3; Moroni 6:4)
- The administration of the Sacrament (3 Nephi 18; Moroni 6:6)
- The priests kneel down with of the Church (Moroni 4:2)
- The words of the sacrament prayers (3 Nephi 18:7, 10–11; Moroni 4–5)
- Healing the sick (Alma 15:5–11; 3 Nephi 7:22; 17:7–9; 4 Nephi 1:5; Mormon 9:24)
- Patriarchal or father’s blessings (2 Nephi 1–4; Alma 36–42)
- Fasting in private (Mosiah 27:22; Helaman 3:35; Moroni 6:5)
- Praying in private (Enos 1:4; Alma 33–34; 3 Nephi 13, 19)
- Praying in the name of Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 18:19, 23, 30)
- Family prayer (Alma 34:21; 3 Nephi 18:21, “pray in your families unto the Father”)
- Marriage (4 Nephi 1:11)
- Blessing children and the fulness of joy as parents (3 Nephi 17:11–24)

- Polygamy allowed but only if the Lord of Hosts commands his people (Jacob 2:27, 30; 3:5)
- Welfare and giving to the poor (Jacob 2:19; Mosiah 4; 18:27; Alma 1:27; 34:26–29; 35:9)
- Tithing (3 Nephi 24:8–10)
- Building Zion, the New Jerusalem, in this land (3 Nephi 21:22–25)
- Moving to new lands, flight into the wilderness (Lehi, Mosiah)
- Purposes and conduct of church meetings and worship (Moroni 6)
- Praying and fasting together (Alma 6:6; 3 Nephi 19; 4 Nephi 1:2; Moroni 6:5)
- Singing (Alma 5:9, 26; Ether 6:9; Moroni 6:9)
- Preaching, exhorting, as led by the Holy Ghost (Moroni 6:9)
- Meeting “one day in every week” (Mosiah 18:25)
- Keep the Sabbath day holy (Mosiah 18:23)
- Holding conferences (Mosiah 2–5; Alma 5, 7)
- Voice of the people, consent (Mosiah 29:25–29; Alma 2:3; 4:16; 27:21–22; Helaman 1:5–8)
- Inviting all to hear the word of God (Alma 6:5; “all are alike unto God,” 2 Nephi 26:33)
- Including the children in the congregation (Mosiah 2:5; 3 Nephi 17:25; Moroni 8)
- Volunteerism (2 Nephi 26:31, “the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion”)
- Unpaid ministers (2 Nephi 26:31, “if they labor for money they shall perish”)
- Temples and temple worship (2 Nephi 5:16; Jacob 2:11; Mosiah 2:1; 3 Nephi 11:1)
- Prohibited iniquities, worthiness list (2 Nephi 26:32; Alma 1:32; 16:18; Helaman 4:12)
- White and pure garments (1 Nephi 12:11; Jacob 1:19; Alma 5:27; 3 Nephi 19:30)
- Obedience (1 Nephi 22:30–31; Jacob 4:5; Mosiah 5:5, 8; 3 Nephi 12:18)
- Sacrifice (3 Nephi 12:19), “pointing to the great and last sacrifice” (Alma 34:14)
- Chastity (Jacob 2:28), no adultery (Mosiah 2:13; Alma 30:10; 3 Nephi 12:27–28)
- Consecration, dedicate wealth to the kingdom of God (Jacob 2:18–19; 3 Nephi 13:20, 24, 33)
- Sealing powers (Enos 1:5; Mosiah 26:20; Helaman 10:7)
- Keeping sacred things confidential (3 Nephi 28:16)
- Not imparting the holy thing to those unworthy or unprepared (3 Nephi 14:7)
- Missionary preparation (Alma 17:2–4)
- Missionary work (Alma 36:24, “labored without ceasing [to] bring souls unto repentance”)
- Patterns of missionary work (Mosiah 11; 18; Alma 4–15; 31–34; Helaman 6; 3 Nephi 27:1)
- Companions, two witnesses (Alma and Amulek)
- Church discipline and excommunication procedures (Mosiah 26:32; 3 Nephi 18; Moroni 6)

- Reactivate those cast out, encourage them to repent (Mosiah 26:29–30; 3 Nephi 18:28–32)
- Teachers and teaching (Jacob 1:19; Mosiah 18:25–26; 23:14)
- Teach no doctrine except what the prophets have spoken (Mosiah 18:19)
- Teaching youth (1 Nephi 1:1; Enos 1:1; Mosiah 1:2; Alma 57:21)
- Keeping historical records and annual reports (3 Nephi 23; Helaman 6:6, 13)
- Scriptures, keeping and guarding them (1 Nephi 6, 9; Mosiah 1–2; Alma 37:1–18)
- Military obligations (Alma 46:20–21) and support those in defensive combat (Alma 27:24)
- Rather simple conduct of funerals (2 Nephi 4:12; Mosiah 6:5; 29:45–46; Alma 62:52, 63:3)
- Simple church building decoration, not idolatrous or opulent (Mosiah 11:7–10; Mormon 8:37)

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did the Lord Quote the Book of Mormon When Reestablishing the Church?](#) (3 Nephi 11:24)," *KnoWhy* 282 (March 3, 2017).

Scott H. Faulring, "[An Examination of the 1829 'Articles of the Church of Christ,' in Relation to Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants,](#)" *BYU Studies* 43 no. 4 (2004): 57–91; see also Scott H. Faulring, "[The Book of Mormon: A Blueprint for Organizing the Church,](#)" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 60–69, 71.

John W. Welch, "[The Book of Mormon as the Keystone of Church Administration,](#)" in *A Firm Foundation: Church Organization and Administration*, ed. Whittaker and Garr (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2011), 15–58; reprinted in *Religious Educator* 12, no. 2 (2011).

John W. Welch, "[From Presence to Practice: Jesus, the Sacrament Prayers, the Priesthood, and Church Discipline in 3 Nephi 18 and Moroni 2–6,](#)" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 120–129.

Evidence Central, "[Book of Mormon Evidence: Parallels between the Didache and Moroni 2–6,](#)" September 19, 2020, online at evidencecentral.org.

Moroni 1

One might wonder why (and be grateful that!) Moroni took up writing again after having twice written endings and farewells at the end of Mormon 9 and Ether 15. As his last days

approached, it becomes apparent what his primary concerns were. Perhaps we all can learn something from his use of his time, and from his final priorities.

Above all, Moroni states clearly that he will not deny the Lord, no matter the cost (1:3). He certainly knew the words of his father and perhaps he had even helped him record the series of “woes” that included the following: “Wo unto him that spurneth at the doings of the Lord; yea, wo unto him that shall deny the Christ and his works!” (3 Nephi 29:5). So often we express confidently that we would do as Moroni did, and refuse to deny Christ even at the pain of death. But we might well think: In what smaller things do we show less faith? In what ways are we leaving a legacy for future generations, as Moroni so admirably and so arduously did?

Moroni 1:1–4 — We Should Not Deny the Christ

When Moroni finished the abridgement of the Book of Ether, he probably did not expect to survive to be able to write more. With his faith still powerfully strong amid the death of his people, he stated, “I, Moroni, will not deny the Christ; wherefore, I wander whithersoever I can for the safety of mine own life” (1:3). Some Nephites had deserted and denied Christ to be spared (Moroni 9:24), and Moroni wanted his position to be clear to posterity.

We can learn a great deal from his courage and faith. Moroni knew what the Savior had taught at the temple in Bountiful. He understood the covenants he had made, and he knew what taking the name of Christ upon yourself meant. By his declaration, he tells his readers how he would handle being captured. He was not going to deny Christ, even at the expense of his own life.

As we partake of the sacrament and renew our baptismal covenants, we take upon ourselves the name of Christ and promise to remember him always. Remembering infers that we will not deny—in other words, forgetting or pretending that we cannot remember what we once knew. There is a covenantal dimension to Moroni’s statement. He wants us to remember that life will be difficult. There will be real challenges. We need to be prepared to stand with Christ no matter what. This is typical of Moroni’s masterful style of understatement, where you have to stop and consider each of his words.

Moroni 1:2 – Why Were the Lamanites Fighting?

Why were the Lamanites now fighting amongst themselves? They ought to have been dancing in the streets. They had finally gotten rid of the pesky Nephites. The world should have been wonderful for them, but what was happening?

Is this part of human nature? Has this ever happened in history before? The Lamanites were probably not a single group of people with one king. There were many tribes, and

their world had deteriorated. When everything collapsed at the end of 4 Nephi, Mormon makes a point of noting that the people became tribalized, regionalized, and divided. There had been great unity and there were no manner of *ites*, but then corruption entered. Everyone split off into their own social, economic, or ideological groups.

Many of these groups had a common enemy—the Nephites. They were ready to get rid of them. However, once they had, we see the occurrence of a familiar pattern. If a political group is only brought together by an enemy, once that enemy is gone, there is not much to hold them together any longer. They begin dividing up the spoils and wondering who would get what. They inevitably turn on each other and start fighting. If a civilization is not a peaceful one to begin with, they are likely not going to become peaceful when they achieve power and success.

Moroni 1:4 – “Perhaps They May Be of Worth”

Moroni decided to write what he could that “perhaps they may be of worth unto my brethren, the Lamanites, in some future day” (Moroni 1:4). He understood that having the priesthood and the Holy Ghost is foundational. There is nothing more important than that.

He started his instructional episode with the authority to give the Holy Ghost. If you do not have the Holy Ghost, how are you going to know how to choose the right? How can you have the spirit of “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you” (John 14:27)? Moroni knew that, and he knew it was important to start with the Gift of the Holy Ghost, given by proper priesthood authority in a manner prescribed by and authorized by the Savior.

Following this, the Church must have priesthood holders (Moroni 3) so that the saints can partake of the sacrament (Moroni 4 and 5). Moroni gave us the prayers that the Nephites were using for blessing and partaking of the sacrament. Moroni really knew about the importance of covenant renewal: he placed the Holy Ghost at number one and priesthood at number two. We can see how he was starting with the most important points. Then chapter 6 is about meeting together, having a community, observing the Sabbath day, fasting and praying together, and teaching. Oh, how Moroni must have missed the blessings of meeting together! His being solitary and lonely is not altogether different from what we are missing these days (due to the pandemic in 2020) by not being able to enjoy the sociality of worship and serving together in our wards, classes, and quorums!

Moroni 2

Moroni 2:1–3 — Authority to Bestow the Holy Ghost

The first guidance that Moroni records is how the Nephite disciples were given the authority to give the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the manner in which that ordinance should be performed. These instructions were given by the resurrected Savior in his first appearing. In 3 Nephi 18:36–37, Jesus touched the twelve, but the multitude did not hear what he said. The disciples witnessed that he gave them the power to give the Holy Ghost.

Mormon, or whoever recorded the final version of that incident, added a note that said, “And I will show unto you hereafter that this record is true.” One wonders if Mormon reminded Moroni to be sure to add that actual information. We are not sure, for he could have received that information from the Three Nephites, who had visited him, and if so, they would have been first-hand witnesses. Nevertheless, Moroni’s report leaves us procedural guidance for administering that ordinance.

Joseph Smith was once asked by U.S. President Martin Van Buren, “wherein” Latter-day Saints “differed from other religions of the day.” His answer was that we have the gift of the Holy Ghost and that it is given by the laying-on of hands, and “all other considerations were contained in the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Joseph’s letter to Hyrum, December 5, 1839). That most important factor really does differentiate Zion people from other people.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Moroni Keep Writing? \(Moroni 2:3\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 249 (December 9, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[From Presence to Practice: Jesus, the Sacrament Prayers, the Priesthood, and Church Discipline in 3 Nephi 18 and Moroni 2–6](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 119–139.

Moroni 3

Moroni 3:1–4 — Ordaining Priests and Teachers

In chapter 3, Moroni provides the instructions and words for ordination to the priesthood. Jesus told the disciples who were soon “called the elders of the church” (3:1) that they should first “call on the Father in my name, in mighty prayer” (2:2) and then “after they had prayed unto the Father” (3:2), they should place their hands on the heads of the persons being ordained and ordain them. This manner of conducting ordinations can

certainly remind us of the importance of preparing prayerfully before performing any priesthood ordinance or service unto the Lord.

The main charge that was then given to the priests and teachers was that they should “preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end” (3:3).

Note that the giving of the authority to give the gift of the Holy Ghost, the actual giving of the Holy Ghost, and the ordination of priests and teachers, all required the laying on of hands. This is reminiscent of Moses laying hands upon Joshua: “And Moses did as the Lord commanded him: and he took Joshua, and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation: And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses” (Numbers 27:23).

In Deuteronomy 34:9, we read of the effect that this had on Joshua; “And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him.” This was also the common practice of early Christians, especially in the New Testament. See *Guide to the Scriptures*, “[Hands, Laying on of.](#)”

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “[From Presence to Practice: Jesus, the Sacrament Prayers, the Priesthood, and Church Discipline in 3 Nephi 18 and Moroni 2–6](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 119–139.

Moroni Chapters 4–5

Where did the Nephites get the words of the sacrament prayers? They were “according to the commandments of Christ; wherefore we know the manner to be true” (Moroni 4:1). The followers of Christ continued in righteousness to use the words the Savior taught in 3 Nephi 18, when the people were ready to enter into a covenant to remember him and obey his commandments that he had just given them. The following table compares the words that Moroni recorded with the words in 3 Nephi 18, on which the sacrament prayers were based. In 3 Nephi 18, Jesus of course spoke in the first and second person (“I, my” and “you, your”). Notice how, with necessary and appropriate adjustments, the words of Jesus have been carefully preserved and reformulated so that they can be spoken by the priests (“we ask,” etc.) with references to the people (“they,” “them”) and to Jesus (“he, his, him”) as follows:

Moroni 4–5	3 Nephi 18
O God, <i>the</i> Eternal <i>Father</i> , we <i>ask thee in the name</i> of thy Son, Jesus Christ,	<i>ask the Father in my name</i> (3 Nephi 18:20)
to <i>bless</i> and sanctify this <i>bread</i>	he took of the <i>bread</i> and break and <i>blessed</i> it (3 Nephi 18:3)
to the souls of <i>all those who</i> partake of it; that	<i>unto all those who</i> shall believe (3 Nephi 18:5)
they may eat <i>in remembrance of the body</i> of thy Son	this shall ye do <i>in remembrance of my body</i> which I have shown unto you (3 Nephi 18:7)
and <i>witness unto</i> thee, O God, <i>the</i> Eternal <i>Father</i>	it shall be a <i>testimony unto the Father</i> (3 Nephi 18:7)
<i>that</i> they <i>are willing to</i> take upon them	<i>that</i> ye <i>are willing to</i> do (3 Nephi 18:10)
the name of thy Son, and <i>always remember</i> him,	that ye do <i>always remember</i> me (3 Nephi 18:7)
and keep his <i>commandments which he hath given</i> them,	that <i>which I have commanded</i> you (3 Nephi 18:10)
that they may always <i>have his Spirit to be with</i> them, Amen.	ye shall <i>have my Spirit to be with</i> you (3 Nephi 18:7)
O God, <i>the</i> Eternal <i>Father</i> , we <i>ask thee in the name</i> of thy Son, Jesus Christ,	<i>ask the Father in my name</i> (3 Nephi 18:20)
to bless and sanctify this <i>wine</i> to the souls of	take of the <i>wine</i> (3 Nephi 18:8)
<i>all those who</i>	<i>all those who</i> (3 Nephi 18:5)
<i>drink</i> of it, that they	they did <i>drink</i> (3 Nephi 18:9)
may <i>do it in remembrance of the blood</i> of thy Son,	<i>do it in remembrance of my blood</i> (3 Nephi 18:11)
<i>which</i> was <i>shed for</i> them;	<i>which</i> I have <i>shed for</i> you (3 Nephi 18:11)

that they <i>may witness unto</i> thee, O God, <i>the Eternal Father</i> ,	that ye <i>may witness unto the Father</i> (3 Nephi 18:11)
<i>that</i> they <i>do always remember</i> him,	<i>that</i> ye <i>do always remember</i> me (3 Nephi 18:11)
that they may <i>have</i> his <i>Spirit to be with</i> them. Amen	ye shall <i>have</i> my <i>Spirit to be with</i> you (3 Nephi 18:11).

On the left-hand column, we have the words from Moroni 4 and 5—the bread and the wine prayers. On the right-hand column we have the words that Christ spoke when he administered the Sacrament as recorded in 3 Nephi 18. The difference arises from the fact that Jesus himself spoke the Sacrament prayers in 3 Nephi, while for the Nephites, and for us, ordained priesthood holders do it on his behalf. Thus, we get Jesus saying, “ask the Father *in my name*,” but in our prayer, the officiator says, “*we ask thee in the name of thy Son*.” Jesus’ words are all in 1st and 2nd person, “*I—you*” language, or more formally “*I—thou*.” In addition, as Jesus was no longer present, the prayers are directed to the Father.

We do not know when the sacrament prayer was taken from Jesus’ 1st and 2nd person pronoun formulation and recast into the 3rd person as we see it in Moroni. It probably happened very early, because the very next day in 3 Nephi 19, Jesus came back. Each of the twelve disciples presided over one large group and administered the sacrament to them. What prayer were they using there? Jesus was not speaking the words that he used in 3 Nephi 18, but the prayer must have been revoiced so that it made sense for a priest to say these words. But the content remained the same until Moroni’s day, and the Restoration brought these sacred words into our lives today.

One particularly noteworthy phrase appears in the prayers as found in Moroni 4–5 that was not included in the recorded words of Christ in 3 Nephi 18: “that they are *willing to take upon them* the name of thy Son” (Moroni 4:3) That phrase parallels King Benjamin’s words as he put his people under covenant to take upon themselves the name of Christ (Mosiah 5:8) about 150 years before the appearance of Christ at the temple in Bountiful. It seems that Nephite texts and traditions have combined and coalesced beautifully into the final sacrament prayers in Moroni 4–5. Elder Dallin H. Oaks emphasized the word *willingness*, pointing to a future consummation. Elder Oaks said: “[B]y partaking of the sacrament we witness our willingness to participate in the sacred ordinances of the temple and to receive the highest blessings available through the name and by the authority of

the Savior when he chooses to confer them upon us.” Dallin H. Oaks, “Taking upon Us the Name of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign* (May 1985): 81.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “Where did Moroni Get the Sacramental Prayers from?” (Moroni 4:1), *KnoWhy* 250 (December 12, 2016).

John W. Welch, “Benjamin’s Covenant as a Precursor to the Sacrament Prayers,” chapter 10 in John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, editors, *King Benjamin’s Speech: That Ye May Learn Wisdom* (Provo, UT, F.A.R.M.S., 1998), 295-314.

John W. Welch, “From Presence to Practice: Jesus, the Sacrament Prayers, the Priesthood, and Church Discipline in 3 Nephi 18 and Moroni 2–6,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 119–139.

John W. Welch, “Our Nephite Sacrament Prayers,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 286–289.

Moroni 6

Moroni 6:2–3 — Moroni Expounds the Requirements of Baptism

The requirement for repentance and baptism are given in 4 Nephi 1:1: “As many as did come unto them, and did truly repent of their sins, were baptized in the name of Jesus; and they did also receive the Holy Ghost.” Moroni 6:2–3 clarifies the expectations: “Neither did they receive any unto baptism save they came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins. And none were received unto baptism save they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end.” Moroni’s people also helped all Church members remain faithful to their baptismal covenant: “As oft as they repented and sought forgiveness, with real intent, they were forgiven” (6:8).

Moroni 6:5–9 — Saints Meet Together Oft

4 Nephi 1:12 discussed how and why the saints met together: “[T]hey did walk after the commandments which they had received from their Lord and their God, continuing in fasting and prayer, and in meeting together oft both to pray and to hear the word of the Lord.” Moroni 6:6, now mentions additionally that they did “meet together oft to brake of bread and wine in remembrance of the Lord Jesus Christ.” They were strict about how

they behaved and who could participate (see verse 7). We are blessed in our own worship practices to know how to worship in a Zion manner the way they did.

When they met together, it says in verse 9 that their meetings were conducted by the church after the manner of the workings of the spirit and by the power of the Holy Ghost: “[F]or as the power of the Holy Ghost led them, whether to preach or to exhort or to pray or to supplicate or to sing, even so it was done.” Of course, it may not have been so open a meeting as to be a free-for-all. However, there are often changes in our meetings, and spontaneous speakers are occasionally asked to participate, and testimonies are borne. If one person presides and is influenced by the power of the Holy Ghost, and everyone else has that same gift, it is not a chaotic situation. There have been some spontaneous parts in Sacrament meetings that have been very effective. Sometimes spontaneity is even more effective because it occurs within a framework or structure in which people are not expecting it.

Singing and music was also a part of their worship services. This carried over the traditional uses of the Old Testament Psalms and other hymns of praise and joy that were long-standing parts of ancient Israelite family and temple worship. Singing and praising God (see 3 Nephi 4:31) was endorsed by Jesus as he quoted Isaiah in 3 Nephi 16:18–19; 20:32–34; and 22:1.

In addition, at the end of verse 5, it says that when they met, it was “to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls.” Is that a clear enough part of our pattern today? One may hope that in the study of scriptures, in priesthood and Relief Society classes, concentration is on the welfare of souls, and how well everyone is doing, and that the lessons are pulled together to focus on the real purpose of getting together. In that case, the Spirit can guide us more specifically.

That is how ministering contacts, training sessions, and Ward Council meetings are handled, by relying on the Spirit. For Family Home Evening, it is good to have a lesson planned, but if the lesson turns out to not be what the Spirit says needs to be said, the teacher needs to be flexible enough to adjust for the welfare of the family.

Some years ago, President Boyd K. Packer was presiding at a regional training meeting that I attended. He asked the people to move closer to the front, and no one moved. After asking several times, he abruptly ended the meeting. When later asked by the stake presidents, as my stake president reported to us, about why he did that, President Packer replied, “Because revelation stopped.” He explained to them that the disobedience of the brethren in not moving down caused revelation to cease; therefore, he stopped the meeting, and that was the appropriate thing to do. This gave new meaning to me of the

passage in Doctrine and Covenants 42:14, “If you do not have the spirit, ye shall not teach.” That does not just mean you *will not* teach; it means that you *cannot* teach and *should not* teach.

Moroni and his predecessors maintained and provided the means for us to do as Jesus had commanded his twelve disciples: “Ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do *that shall ye also do*” (3 Nephi 27:21, emphasis added). Using the methods given for ordinances and meetings, and applying the guidance in Moroni 1–6 will give us the means to become closer to being a Zion society, as it did the people in 4 Nephi.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Can an Ancient Christian Text Tell us About the Book of Mormon?](#) (Moroni 6:5), *KnoWhy* 450 (July 17, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Was Singing Hymns a Part of Nephite Worship Services?](#) (Moroni 6:9), *KnoWhy* 251, (December 13, 2016). “Evidently, the Nephite church, as Moroni knew it, made singing a part of their worship services, as guided by the Holy Ghost. Although the text does not indicate when this practice was officially instituted, there is a long history of the use of music and hymns in Judeo-Christian worship. Nephite worship practices fit nicely into this tradition.”

MORONI 7–9

John W. Welch Notes



Moroni 7

Moroni 7 — Overview Questions

- When in his life did Mormon deliver the words found in this chapter? During a time of war or a time of peace? Was it a time of discouragement or of hope?
- Can you identify all of the connections in Mormon's writing here with statements found in the Savior's Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 11–18? Why might Mormon have turned especially to the words that Jesus spoke on that first day at the temple in Bountiful?
- What do you learn in Mormon's sermon in Moroni 7 about the connectivity between faith, hope, and charity? How does each of these three depend upon the other two? How does each build upon the others? How does each lead to the others?
- Although this chapter is especially remembered for what it says about faith, hope, and charity, what else does Mormon have to say about the following other topics?
 - making an offering to God
 - praying to God
 - knowing good and evil
 - laying hold on every good thing
 - miracles
 - messengers
 - repentance
 - covenants
 - meekness

- confessing Christ
- becoming the purified sons and daughters of God

Moroni 7 — Mormon's Sermon in the Context of the Ten-Year Peace Treaty

In approximately AD 350, the Lamanites, the Gadianton Robbers, and the Nephites made a serious, inviolate peace treaty that lasted ten years (Mormon 3:1). One should note the monumental timing of the peace treaty. If, as scholars believe, it coincided with a great sabbatical celebration of peace and jubilee, what better time for a prophet like Mormon to have given his magnum opus—the most important words that he could give to his people.

The occasion must have been very solemn, as everyone on both sides of the war was willing to take a sabbatical from the killing and violence. At the end of the period, the king of the Lamanites wrote and announced that the treaty had ended (Mormon 3:4). This peaceful decade may have been the only time in Mormon's life when he could sit still long enough to work on his abridgement of the records. In addition, Mormon had recently been commanded to call people to repentance and to build up the Church again (Mormon 3:2).

It seems likely that Mormon's speech was written at the beginning of this ten-year time of peace, a period when he was again given permission to preach (see Mormon 1:16; 3:2). The occasion was in a synagogue that the people had built. Perhaps it was at some kind of "dedication" of that synagogue. The Nephites had been driven north (Mormon 2:20) and had been granted the right to settle in a land northward (Mormon 2:29), where they lived during the ten-year peace. It would make sense for them to have built a new synagogue there, and that Mormon would have been the most appropriate candidate to have spoken on that occasion, as people tried to reclaim their faith, rebuild their hope, and try especially to love everyone, even their enemies.

Moroni, who would have been a young man then, was probably present when his father gave the sermon, which was likely also written and distributed among the "brethren" who were leaders in that synagogue. Although we do not know when Moroni got his copy of this speech, he clearly treasured it, along with two other letters from his father. Even when Moroni was wandering alone and fleeing from his enemies, he carried these three writings with him as his great personal legacy from his father. He must have regarded them as worthy of recording for our time.

As one recognizes the nature of the problems that had surrounded Mormon and the few faithful Nephites during that era, one may better appreciate the power of this very plain talk from a different angle than ever before. One can see why he said what he said, and how he enhanced their understanding of the Savior's teachings. During this time of peace, Mormon was not only using his time to provide physical fortifications to prepare for

attack from the Lamanites, but was also making an outstanding effort to fortify the people spiritually to choose wise behavior to lead them to Christ after the end of the peace.

This is not embellished rhetoric. Mormon’s vocabulary was very straightforward. When he spoke about the Savior, he used very plain and clear language. He was a leader who did not produce flowery, elaborate expressions. He was a forthright speaker of truth. This same man conveyed the candid history of the whole Nephite people. He was direct and to the point, and he bore his testimony openly. He was a man of great wisdom and truth, a sober man, and we are blessed to have this little window into his wonderful sermon.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why is the 10-Year Peace Treaty Important?](#) (Mormon 3:1),” *KnoWhy* 228 (November 10, 2016).

Moroni 7 — Mormon’s Sermon Often Echoes the Sermon at the Temple

The Sermon at the Temple, like the Sermon on the Mount, contains some of the most sacred words that Jesus had given. At the time of Mormon’s sermon, his people were living north of the narrow neck of land. They were in the land of Jashon, near Bountiful where Jesus had visited the Nephites and given his sermon. Those words of Jesus would likely have been vivid and poignant to the people who were present during Mormon’s address. This context is reminiscent of Samuel the Lamanite using King Benjamin’s words when he stood on the walls of Zarahemla—the place where Benjamin had given those words. These people would not have heard the Savior’s words from the Savior himself. At the time of Mormon’s speech, it was 320 years after that event, but Mormon knew what had happened there, and he drew on the Savior’s sacred sermon as a main source for his teaching.

Although Mormon frequently used or alluded to the Savior’s words, he explained further and even added new concepts to meet the local needs. For example, the following are some of the crucial words and phrases that unmistakably echo the resurrected Lord’s Sermon:

“By their works ye shall know them” (Moroni 7:5) has changed only one word from 3 Nephi 14:20, “fruits” to “works.”

“A man being evil cannot do that which is good” (Moroni 7:6) declaratively and deliberately answers the rhetorical question of 3 Nephi 14:6, “Do men gather grapes of thorns?”

“Neither will he give a good gift” (7:10) makes the clearest sense when understood against the background of 3 Nephi 14:11: “If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children.”

“For with *that same* judgment *which* ye judge ye shall *also* be judged” (7:18) simply adds emphasis to the original words of the sermon: “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged” (3 Nephi 14:2).

Mormon’s promise, “Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be done unto you” (7:26), repeats, with two qualifications, the words of the sermon: “Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (14:7; see also 27:29).

Mormon’s emphasis on “meekness” (7:39, 43, 44)—a virtue that was sorely lacking among his people, who were losing their lands—is likely an elliptical reference to the statement “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (3 Nephi 12:5).

Of course, some of Mormon’s words and teachings can be found scattered elsewhere among the writings of earlier Nephites before the coming of Christ. But the density and proximity of these apparent allusions to the Savior’s preeminent teachings at the temple in Bountiful make it the most likely source, rhetorically as well as authoritatively, for Mormon’s urgent preaching on this occasion. It should also be remembered that Mormon saw himself first and foremost as “a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, ... called to declare *his* word” (3 Nephi 5:13; emphasis added). The basic text behind our version of the words of Jesus in 3 Nephi must have been frequently used in Nephite religion and culture, and so Mormon would have known it well and would have had several reasons to use and develop those authoritative words as he implored his people to repent, to regroup, and to revive their faith and commitment to their Savior Jesus Christ.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why is the Sermon at the Temple Echoed throughout the Rest of 3 Nephi?](#)” (3 Nephi 16:6),” *KnoWhy* 208 (October 13, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[Echoes from the Sermon on the Mount](#),” in *The Sermon on the Mount in Latter-day Scripture*, ed. Gaye Strathearn, Thomas A. Wayment, and Daniel L. Belnap (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 314–315; reprinted as “[Reusages of the Words of Christ](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies and Other Restoration Scripture*, 22 no. 1 (2013): 63–71.

Moroni 7:1 — The Nephites Build Places of Worship

Moroni 7:1 describes this record as a speech that Mormon gave in a synagogue “which they had built for the place of worship.” One may glide over that little statement, not noticing that these people had been on the run, and were now able to settle down for a period of peace. They may have been quite proud of building this synagogue. It looks like they are expecting to be there for a while, although that would not happen.

In that synagogue, to the faithful (or relatively faithful) Mormon addressed several themes that related especially to his time and situation. He tailored his teaching to address the background and circumstance, and even the level of faith of his audience. If one can recognize the impetus for his talk and the problems with which he was dealing at the time, the teachings in Moroni 7 become all the more forceful, relevant, and meaningful.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Alma and Amulek Preach in Synagogues?](#) (Alma 16:13),” *KnoWhy* 124 (June 17, 2016).

A. Keith Thompson, “[Nephite Insights into Israelite Worship Practices Before the Babylonian Captivity](#),” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 3 (2013): 155–195.

William J. Adams Jr., “[Synagogues in the Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 4–13, 76.

John W. Welch, “[Synagogues in the Book of Mormon](#),” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 193–195.

Moroni 7:3–4 — Mormon’s Audience

In Moroni 7:3, Mormon began by saying, “I would speak unto you that are of the church.” It appears that the text in Moroni 7 is Mormon’s opening speech after being commanded to teach and build up the church. In Mormon 3:2, he had received the call to preach again. The Lord had said, “Cry unto this people. Repent ye and come unto me and be baptized and build up again my church and ye shall be spared” — a principle with a promise. In verse 2, Mormon explicitly said, “I am permitted to speak unto you at this time.” The Lord had permitted it, after a period of being asked not to preach, and he began by speaking to the more faithful.

Mormon’s wording aimed right at the hearts of his audience. He said, “I would speak unto you that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven.” Any Nephite listening to Mormon would have been weary from being on the run. They were a war-torn generation. All they had known was strife and instability. Yearning for the peace that comes from entering into the rest of the Lord would have been a very powerful way for him to begin his talk, especially as a ten-year period of peace had been negotiated.

“And now my brethren, I judge these things of you because of your peaceable walk with the children of men.” He is speaking to his synagogue, his beloved brethren, his church, and

his people. He was blessed with an inner-group of faithful believers. He was leading Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, and many different people; but here, he is likely addressing the leaders, the ones who really held the Nephite tradition together. They were people who had hope in the “Rest of the Lord.” They had a start, and he wanted to stir them to greater works. Fourteen times, Mormon interrupts his train of thought by calling out to his “brethren,” and nine of those times he refers to them as “my beloved brethren.”

Moroni 7:5–13 — “By Their Works Ye Shall Know Them”

Mormon’s statement in verse 5, “For I remember the word of God which saith by their works ye shall know them; for if their works be good, then they are good also,” echoes the words of the Savior at the Temple, in 3 Nephi 14:16–20. There Jesus said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them.”

Mormon, however, says, “By their works ye shall know them.” Whereas the Savior commonly used metaphors to illustrate principles, Mormon tended to use a more straightforward style of sentence structure, unembellished and very plain. His adaptations of the text come predominately through developing the concepts and principles to benefit his audience. He often added a new level of understanding to the words and phrases. In this case, the word “works” is more active, progressive, and ongoing, whereas “fruits” might be thought of as more final, specific, and result oriented.

Following this reference to the Savior’s sermon, Mormon went on to develop the thought even further. He explained that if their works were good, then they were good. He said, in verse 10, “Behold, God has said, a man being evil cannot do that which is good.” This refers back to Jesus’s metaphor of the tree in 3 Nephi 14:17–19, in which a tree, being a good tree, cannot bring forth evil fruit. Mormon continued, “For if he offereth a gift or prayeth unto God, except he shall do it with real intent, it profiteth him nothing.”

Giving a gift, making an offering, or praying without real intent (i.e. doing so casually or grudgingly) is not counted as righteousness and one might as well not have performed the “righteous” action at all. Such gifts or offerings can be meaningfully compared to the giving of tithing today. In Mormon 2:14, Mormon had recorded that the people had refused to offer the ultimate and most desirable sacrifice—that of a broken heart and contrite spirit. Notice further that Moroni reused the words “with real intent” in his encouragement to pray to know the truth of the Book of Mormon in Moroni 10:4–5. Moroni had learned this from his father.

Moroni 7:11 — “Ye Cannot Serve God and Mammon”

Mormon also added a metaphor of his own in verse 11 to clarify his point and move forward into the next topic. He pointed out that “a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water, neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water, wherefore a man being a servant of the Devil cannot follow Christ and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil.” That statement is related to a passage in the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 13:24: “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.” Mormon’s people could not sit on the fence in this world. They needed to be soldiers, following Mormon, living righteously, and trying to fight the war. They didn’t have the luxury of choosing their lifestyle. However, they could choose how they responded to their circumstances. They could either face their challenges with the Savior or without him.

Further Reading

Matthew L. Bowen, *“‘That Which They Most Desired’: The Waters of Mormon, Baptism, the Love of God, and the Bitter Fountain,”* *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 39 (2020): 261–298.

Moroni 7:12–15 — All Good Things Come from God

In verse 12, developing the thought of choosing between God and Mammon, Mormon concluded his message about good works versus evil works with a concept that pointed to his next topic: “Wherefore all things which are good cometh from God, and that which is evil cometh from the devil, an enemy unto God who fighteth against him continually.” He was preparing to teach them how to choose, or judge, between good and evil using this principle.

The image of the devil fighting God continually would have resonated with this audience. The war-torn but faithful Nephites would have understood what was being said. His imagery is consistent with his congregation’s experience.

Choosing the good from the bad at a time of oppression or in the heat of battle is especially hard. Mormon’s method of judging what is good—checking to see if a certain choice persuades them to believe in Christ through the Spirit or Light of Christ—is available to everyone even under trying circumstances. Mormon warns people not to judge good things to be of the devil, or evil things to be of God, and he assures them that there is a way for them to know the difference “with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night” (7:15). Mormon may have been thinking here about Alma’s meditation about how the growth of faith can lead to a “perfect knowledge,” a concept that Alma includes seven times in Alma 32:21, 26, 29, 34 and 35.

Moroni 7:16–18 — The Light of Christ

In verse 16, Mormon taught a very significant new concept. He explained that the spirit of Christ—or what today is more often called the “Light of Christ”—is given to everyone. And this source of divine light can help us make righteous judgements: “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.” The idea that things “invite” people to do good (7:13, 16) is a very open part of the generously repeated message of the Book of Mormon to all the world.

There was a lot of emphasis on “light” in Christ’s Sermon on at the Temple. For instance, Christ wanted his followers themselves to become “the light of this people,” much like a candlestick (oil lamp) gives light unto a room, or like a city on a hill can give light to surrounding areas (3 Nephi 12:14–16). Jesus also taught, “The light of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light” (3 Nephi 13:22). The eye is the organ by which we discern between physical light and darkness. Now, here in Mormon’s discourse, he also is discussing light and discernment. His ultimate purpose is to help his listeners discern how to “lay hold upon every good thing” (Moroni 7:18). It can be achieved through faith, hope, and charity. Thus, he introduces the theme of the rest of his talk, having built a solid foundation upon the words of Christ, explained, as needed to his audience’s circumstances.

Further Reading

David A. Bednar, “[Quick to Observe](#),” BYU Devotional Address, 2005, online at speeches.byu.edu: “I repeat again for emphasis the truth that discernment is a light of protection and direction in a world that grows increasingly dark. In these latter days you and I can press forward safely and successfully through the mist of darkness and have a clear sense of spiritual direction. Discernment is so much more than recognizing right from wrong. It helps us to distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant, the important from the unimportant, and the necessary from that which is merely nice. The gift of discernment opens to us vistas that stretch far beyond what can be seen with natural eyes or heard with natural ears. Discerning is seeing with spiritual eyes *and* feeling with the heart—seeing and feeling the falsehood of an idea or the goodness in another person. Discerning is hearing with spiritual ears and feeling with the heart—hearing and feeling the unspoken concern in a statement or the truthfulness of a testimony or doctrine.”

Moroni 7:18 — “Judge Not, That Ye Be Not Judged”

Mormon taught, “See that ye do not judge wrongfully, for with that same judgment which ye judge, ye shall also be judged” (Moroni 7:18). This language is clearly adapted from Christ’s Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 14:1–2: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.” As Mormon has, by this point, made

abundantly clear, his message isn't concerned with making final judgments about other individuals—as we might think of “judging” others today in a negative way. Instead, the judgment to which he refers has more to do with generally discerning between good and evil in a variety of settings or applications. Our judgments must be informed and guided by the divine light or Spirit of Christ. When seen in the broader context of judging between good and evil, it is actually imperative that we *do* and must make judgments. As Mormon declared in verse 15: “it is given unto you to judge.” Judge we must, but we do so at our peril, if we do not learn to judge righteously using the light of Christ.

Further Reading

Dallin H. Oaks, “‘Judge Not’ and Judging,” *Ensign*, August 1999, online at archive.bookofmormoncentral.org.

Moroni 7:21–22 — Mormon on Goodness Being Only in and through Christ

In the opening twenty verses of his speech, Mormon built a foundation on the teachings of the Savior to prepare for the main body of his sermon. He had taught them to be righteous by doing righteous acts, by evaluating decisions by virtue of the light of Christ, and making choices based on the potential for leading them to Christ. Now, he continued by teaching them, as he generalizes this in verse 21, that they should “lay hold on *every* good thing,” and in verse 22 that “in Christ there should come *every* good thing.”

That axiom stands at the logical and theological foundation of Mormon's message, being as fundamental to Mormon's thinking as Euclid's first axiom was to his mathematics. The same point was not lost on Moroni. As his father's protégé, Moroni begins his own final exhortations in his final chapter with a related contrapositive postulate: “And whatsoever thing is good is just and true; wherefore, *nothing that is good* denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is” (10:6).

By establishing the foundational proposition that Christ is absolutely essential in all that pertains to “the good,” the stage is then set for Mormon's first expository lesson, which is about faith in Jesus Christ; and faith will in turn lead, secondly, to and also depend on hope; and the results of hope will, finally, be found in charity, good works, and the pure love of Christ.

While readers usually think of Moroni chapter 7 as Mormon's great speech about charity, this oration is actually about four topics: “the good,” “faith,” “hope,” and then finally “charity.” Rhetorically, verses 5–28 are saturated with the word “good,” which appears in those verse 26 times! But in verses 29–48, the word “good” never appears.

Starting in verse 21, the word “faith” is blended in and appears a total of 24 times, scattered fairly evenly over verses 21–44.

The word “hope” is then used 10 times, with all (except for the one in verse 3) coming between verses 40–48, while the word “charity” is used only 8 times, all in the final verses 44–47.

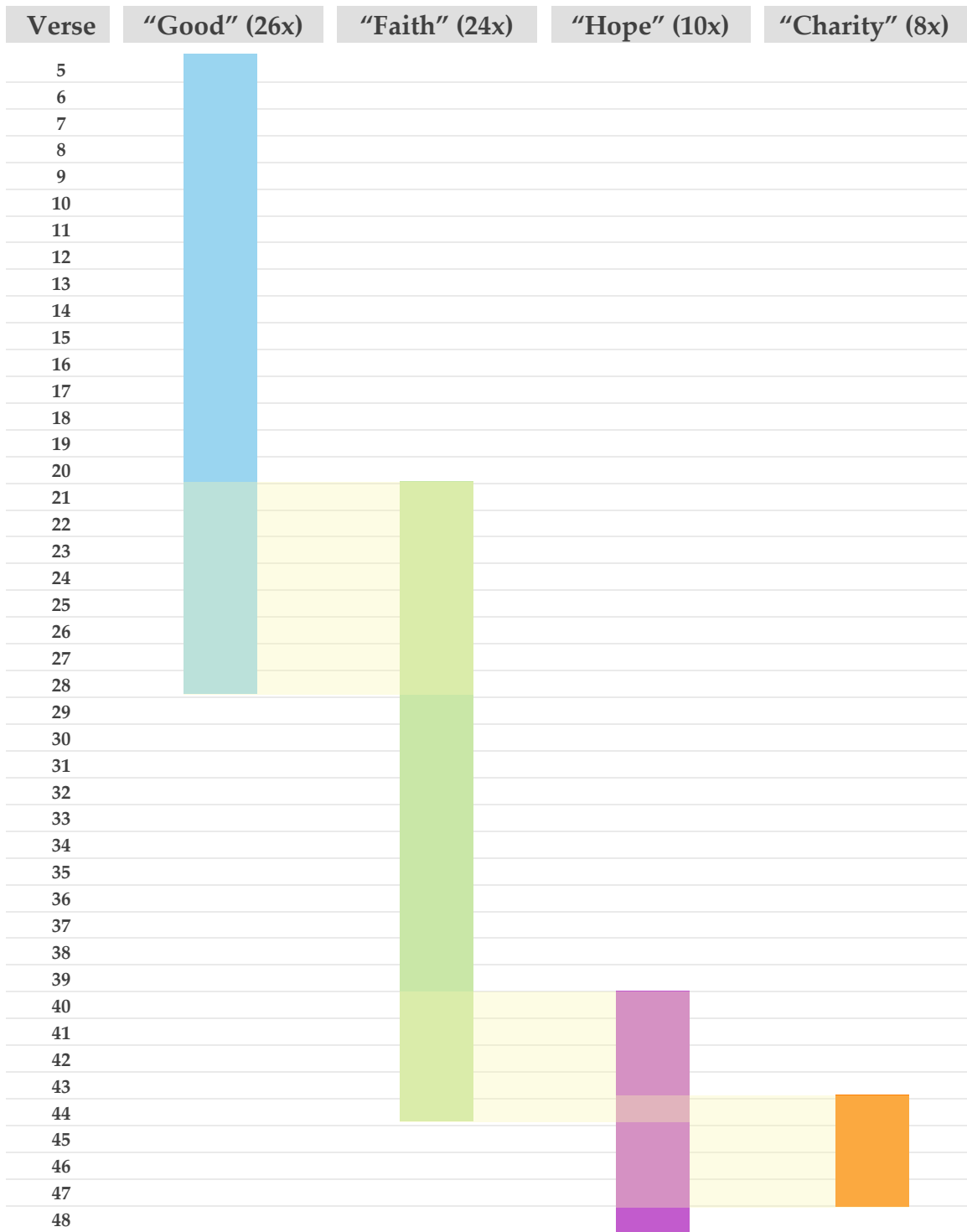
In other words, Mormon starts with “good” alone (in verses 5–20), then unites “good” with “faith” (in 21–28), then speaks of “faith” alone (29– 39), then connects “faith” with “hope” (in 40–44), and finishes with a combination of the final two, “hope” and “charity” (44–48). This is an interesting, and well thought out, meditation on the interdependent spiritual movements from good, to faith, to hope, and to charity.

Word Usage in Moroni 7

Verse	“Good” (26x)	“Faith” (24x)	“Hope” (10x)	“Charity” (8x)
5	2x			
6	1x			
7				
8				
9				
10	2x			
11	2x			
12	1x			
13	2x			
14	1x			
15	1x			
16	2x			
17	1x			
18				
19	2x			
20	1x			
21	1x	1x		
22	1x			
23				

24	3x			
25	1x	2x		
26	1x	3x		
27				
28	1x	2x		
29				
30		1x		
31				
32		1x		
33		1x		
34		1x		
35				
36				
37		2x		
38		2x		
39		2x		
40		1x	2x	
41		1x	2x	
42		2x	2x	
43		1x	1x	
44		1x	1x	3x
45			1x	1x
46				3x
47				1x
48			1x	

Word Usage in Moroni 7



Further Reading

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Faith, Hope, and Charity: The ‘Three Principal Rounds’ of the Ladder of Heavenly Ascent,” in *“To Seek the Law of the Lord”: Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 59–112.

H. Dean Garrett, “Light in Our Vessels: Faith, Hope, and Charity,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi Through Moroni, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1995), 81–93.

Moroni 7:21–39 — Mormon on Faith

Of the three next interrelated sections, the longest is on faith. In Mormon 1:13, Mormon had described the wickedness of his people: “But wickedness did prevail upon the face of the whole land insomuch that the Lord did take away his beloved disciples and the work of miracles and of healing did cease because of the iniquity of the people.” His congregation was aware that miracles were not happening any longer, and they likely wondered why not.

Mormon mentioned this problem three times, in verses 27, 29, and 35, in which he asks three rhetorical questions. In verse 27, he asked, “Wherefore my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased because Christ is ascended into heaven?” The people were apparently arguing that the Savior was living up in heaven and had distanced himself from them. Mormon countered in verse 29 with his second question: “And because he hath done this [ascended into heaven], my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased? Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men.” As part of his evidence that miracles had not actually ceased, he taught the importance of angels and their mission, their ministry of calling people to repentance and seeing that the covenants of God are fulfilled.

After that brief clarification, he asked the same question again in a sequence of reasoning. Verse 35 Mormon again asks: “If this be the case that these things are true which I have spoken unto you, and God will show unto you, with power and great glory at the last day, that they are true, and if they are true has the day of miracles ceased?” Mormon explained that it was not because of their theories, but that it was because of the iniquity of the people, because of lack of faith. In verse 37, he concluded that, “It is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men; wherefore, if these things have ceased wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain.” Mormon uses

questions here very effectively. In many cases, a good question is indeed half the answer, which is expressed in a German adage as: Gute Frage ist halbe Antwort.

Mormon also had spoken, in his earlier historical description, about the Holy Ghost being withheld. Mormon 1:14 declares, “And because of this iniquity there were no gifts from the Lord and the Holy Ghost did not come upon any.” Here one sees the contemporaneous problems, and the basis on which he builds his preaching. If miracles were to cease, and they had, verse 38 warns, “Awful is the state of man.”

Yet Mormon also made it clear that it was not God, or his angels, or the Holy Ghost who had ceased to appear or to work with humans here on earth. Again, he asks three more rapid-fire questions to show that God will not withhold his power so long as “there shall be one man upon the face of the earth to be saved” (7:36). (That reference to “one man upon the face of the earth” may well have haunted Moroni as he wandered as a lone survivor for many years upon the land.) Mormon also encouraged his audience by explaining that he knew that they could be faithful (7:37) and meek, and that they (and also we) could thus be “fit to be numbered among the people of his church” (7:39).

Moroni 7:40–43 — Mormon on Hope

Following his treatment of faith, Mormon delicately intertwined that theme with his teachings on hope. Here he asks his two final questions: How can a person obtain faith except together with hope? And what should one hope for? (7:40–41). Again, one learns predominantly and specifically from Mormon, as one saw briefly with Alma, that if the power of the Holy Ghost is active, one hopes to be resurrected and to stand again in the presence of God (7:41). That is the last place the wicked want to be. Cleaving to the good and developing faith leads to hope in Christ, and those elements lead to charity. Faith is a necessary and sufficient condition for hope: If you have faith, you must have hope, for without faith there is no hope (7:42). Moreover, a person cannot have faith and hope unless they are meek and lowly of heart (7:43), and that meekness necessarily leads to charity (7:44).

Moroni 7:44–45 — Mormon on Charity

Three results of true faith and hope are (1) being “acceptable before God,” (2) meekly confessing “by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ,” and (3) having charity (7:44). Mormon’s logic here is that if you don’t have charity you *are* “nothing,” and, on the contrary, when a person *is* “acceptable before God,” that person must be something, not nothing, and thus must have charity. This is another way of saying that charity is essential, of the essence, even a necessary condition for existence in the presence of God.

Then, beginning in verse 45, Mormon used words that parallel some of Paul’s language in 1 Corinthians 13 about holy love (*agape*) or charity. In this text, Mormon (like Paul) told his audience what charity is and is not, and what it does and does not do:

“Charity (love) suffers long, and is kind.” (Moroni 7:45; 1 Cor. 13:4)

“Charity envies not [thou shalt not covet], is not puffed up [is not proud], seeks not its own [is not selfish or egocentric], not easily provoked [is not irritable or defensive], and thinks no evil [for as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he].” These five track 1 Corinthians 13:5, but “vaunteth not itself” and “does not behave itself unseemly” are absent in Moroni 7:45, so the two lists are not exactly the same.

Charity “rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” (Moroni 7:45; 1 Cor. 13:4).

Then, after concluding, “wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, *ye are* nothing” (Moroni 7:46) [compare “and have not charity, *I am* nothing” [1 Cor. 13: 3], Mormon says, “for charity never faileth” (Moroni 7:46; 1 Cor. 13:8).

Mormon then tells his audience absolutely to “cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all” (7:46), while Paul glosses over this by saying merely that of these three, “faith, hope, charity, . . . the greatest of *these* is charity,” and beyond that, he says that what should be desired even more than charity is “rather that ye may prophesy” (1 Cor. 13:13–14:1). Mormon, on the other hand, emphatically concludes that “charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever” (7:47).

So, these two texts, while very close, are not exactly the same, nor do they understand charity or speak of it in the same ways or for the same purposes.

But still, one wonders how these wordings in these two texts came to be so similar to each other. One possibility is that Jesus spoke these words to Mormon, who was “visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of *the goodness of Jesus*” (Mormon 1:15). Here in Moroni 7, Mormon speaks as a personal witness of the pure love of Jesus and of obtaining “every good thing” through Him.

Additionally, Jesus may have spoken these words to his disciples, who recorded them in the fuller version of Jesus’s ministry among the Nephites briefly reported in 3 Nephi. Mormon’s abridging still left in the point that Jesus spoke a hundred times more during those days than could be written (3 Nephi 26:6).

But, one might wonder, didn’t Paul write the “hymn to charity” in 1 Corinthians 13? Maybe he did, but maybe not. In answering a question asked of him by the editors of the

Church News section of the *Deseret News* in 1961 about why Joseph Smith used King James English in translating the Book of Mormon, Hugh Nibley happily pointed out that esteemed scholars, such as Harnack, Weiss, and Reizenstein, had independently come to the same conclusion that “the Hymn to Charity” in 1 Corinthians 13 had not originated with Paul at all, but went “back to some older but unknown source: Paul is merely quoting from the record,” as other early Christians, such as Clement, also did. In addition, Nibley added, “It is the same Savior speaking in both, and the same Holy Ghost, and so we can expect the same doctrines in the same language.” (See Hugh Nibley, “Literary Style Used in Book of Mormon Insured Accurate Translation,” in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 8* [Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1989], 216, 254). Other Latter-day Saint scholars have recently also allowed this as a possibility. (See Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, *Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017], 625).

Indeed, it is also not necessary to think that Paul invented the triad of faith, hope, and charity. While Paul was fond of using that triplet (he repeats that triad in other places in his letters; see Romans 5:1–5; Galatians 5:5–6; Ephesians 4:2–5; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8; Hebrews 6:10–12; 10:22–24), this triplet also occurs in other early Christian writings such as 1 Peter 1:3–8, 21; the Epistle of Barnabas 1:4; 11:8; and Polycarp 3:2. So, it appears that it was not unique to Paul. For it to have gained such early and widespread usage, it may well have originated with Jesus himself, who spoke often of “faith” (*pistis*), especially in the first half of the Gospel of John, and of “charity” or “love” (*agape*) particularly in the second half of John. This triad also appears in Alma 7:24. Its widespread prevalence gives substance to the theory that this cluster belonged to a more primitive stratum in Jesus’ teachings, as it also rings of divine truth.

And finally, I would add that the chiasmic structure of 1 Corinthians 13 supports the idea that this “hymn” preexisted Paul’s writing of 1 Corinthians in about AD 55. It seems to be an independent composition inserted helpfully by Paul into the flow of his thought. But it has its own literary character, and it is presented as authoritative, without any need for argument or persuasive buttressing. Moreover, the fact that the list of words that also appears in Moroni 7:45 is featured precisely at the C-D-C’ center of this chiasmic structure would help explain why those words in particular would have stood out in the early Christian collective memory as a jewel coming from a treasured source. The following chart from *Charting the New Testament* (<https://byustudies.byu.edu/charts/15-18-chiasmic-hymn-charity>) uses my translation, reflecting the Greek’s word orders and suggesting idiomatic additional meanings.

Chiastic Hymn to Charity

1Cor 12:31–14:1

- A** Seek after the *greatest* gifts, and indeed here is the *greatest* way:
- B** If I speak in *tongues* with men, yea even with angels
 But have not love
 I am but raucous bronze and rattling cymbals.
 If I have the gift of *prophecy* and know *mysteries* all and all knowledge
 But have not love
 I am nothing.
 If I give away all I have or lay down my body to get glory
 But have not love
 I have gotten absolutely nothing.
- C** Love is *patient* toward others
Mercifully kind is love.
- D** Not greedy
 Not a show-off
 Not conceited
 Not shameless
 Not with ulterior design, selfishness or cliquishness
 Not irritable
 Does not rationalize wickedness
 Has no joy when things are not right
 But rejoices in truth.
- C'** Love is *patient* under all circumstances
 Always believing
 Always hoping
 Love endures to the end.
- B'** Love will never lose its importance
 But *prophecy* will come to an end
 Speaking in *tongues* will cease
 And some day knowing *mysteries* will be nothing special.
 For now we just know little bits
 And we prophesy of little glimpses
 But when Christ comes all will be perfectly whole
 And all our partial experiences will be no more.
 When I was a child
 I spoke as a child
 I had the intellect of a child
 I figured like a child
 When I became a man
 I had no more use for childish things.
 For now we just see faint images of our real selves
 But then we shall see face to face
 Now we just know little bits
 But then I shall know and be known completely.
 What lasts are faith, hope, love, these three,
- A'** But the *greatest* of these is love.

Interestingly, Joseph Smith did not include charity among the gifts of the Spirit in D&C 46:13–25 or in his Articles of Faith 7, but he often spoke of its need. And more curiously, Moroni did not include charity in his list of gifts of the spirit in Moroni 10:9–16, and neither did Paul in his list in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. Lynne Wilson suggests that this may be because Joseph Smith (and others) may have felt that charity stood as a macro category by itself, which should be developed as an essential pervasive trait of character rather than received as a particular, received gift.

Further Reading

See Lynne Wilson, “[1 Corinthians 8–13](#),” in *Come Follow Me Commentary: The New Testament* (Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2019), note 41.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Do New Testament Words and Phrases Show Up in the Book of Mormon?](#) (2 Nephi 3:12),” *KnoWhy* 525 (July 19, 2019). See also Book of Mormon Central, “[Why New Testament Words and Phrases Are in the Book of Mormon Part 7: How Often Did These Commonalities Come through the Hand of Mormon or Moroni?](#) (Words of Mormon 1:1–2),” *KnoWhy* 537 (October 24, 2019).

Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, *Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 625.

Hugh Nibley, “Literary Style Used in Book of Mormon Insured Accurate Translation,” in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 8* (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1989), 216, 254.

Moroni 7:46–47 — Mormon’s Definitions of Charity

Charity Never Faileth, of course, is the motto of the Relief Society. Joseph Smith read 1 Corinthians 13 (apparently the whole chapter, not just these three words) in one of his first speeches to the women in Nauvoo, at the organization of the Relief Society.

In Paul’s Greek, the word for faileth literally means to “fall, i.e., dead,” and in Mormon’s war-torn world, to say something like charity would never die, or never fall dead, or come to naught, was a potent way of ending his promise about the unending salvific role of charity. Charity, Mormon claimed, was an immortal power, and that reassurance would have been very heartening for his people to hear, who were desperately worried about the survival of themselves individually and of their posterity. To be taught that they would not fail, or ultimately perish, so long as they had charity, added purpose and a desire for them to “lay hold on every good thing.”

Mormon alone then went on to provide an additional elevated definition of what the scriptures mean by charity, by this love. “Charity is the pure love of Christ” (7:47). The word “of” may be understood in several ways. It may refer to charity being Christ’s love of all mankind, and thus it may also mean that true charity refers to the love that one has when one loves as Christ loves. Additionally, it may also refer to the way that a person purely loves Christ, for His faithful flock may love Him, with charity then meaning our love of Him, of Christ. Scholars accept these different possible meanings of the English word *of* in that sentence. There is no reason it cannot be all three. Mormon provides a powerful and effective explanation of how one may develop faith, hope, and charity and weave them together to humanize the path of returning to our Father in Heaven.

Further Reading

Matthew O. Richardson, “‘The Pure Love of Christ’: The Divine Precept of Charity in Moroni 7,” in *Living the Book of Mormon: Abiding by Its Precepts*, ed. Gaye Strathearn and Charles Swift (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and BYU Religious Studies Center, 2007), 290–301.

Moroni 7:48 — Pray with Real Intent to Gain these Eternal Blessings

In the end, verse 48 gives the key to attaining these blessings: “Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart that ye may be filled with his love.” Mormon had said at the beginning of this speech that one must pray with real intent (7:6, a stipulation that Moroni will reiterate in 10:4), and thus he returns at the end of his sermon, full circle, coming back to the need for the giving of offerings and prayers in their worship in their new synagogue with fullness of intent and withholding nothing.

Then, this love, or charity, which will be bestowed upon all true followers of Jesus Christ, allows that they “may become sons of God, and when he shall appear, we shall be like him for we shall see him *as he is*” (7:48). The apostle John recalls this same promise, one which he knew because he had known Jesus, but which the world did not know, as he says, “because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1–2). The idea of both the potential and also of the obligation to become “even as he is” derives, in the Nephites’ minds, from these words of Jesus: “I would that ye should be perfect *even as I [am]*” (3 Nephi 12:48) and also from his words to his disciples, “what manner of men ought yet to be? Verily, I say unto you, *even as I am*” (3 Nephi 27:27).

Mormon then finishes with encouragement that all “may have this hope that we may be purified *even as he is pure*, Amen.” What a powerful ending to this relatively brief but logically dense and spiritually potent speech!

Moroni 8

Moroni 8 — Background Questions

- What evidence do we have to help us date the time when Mormon wrote Moroni 8 to his son Moroni? What parallels or links can you find between the events and phrases in Mormon 3 and the words and concerns in Moroni 8 that might give some indications about the setting of this letter?
- How poignant is it that Mormon would refer in this setting to Jesus as God's "holy Child?" (Moroni 8:3)?
- How did Mormon feel about children? Why might he especially have felt that way?
- What might a person's attitude about little children reveal about that person's spiritual state and understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ?
- Why do you suppose that the baptism of little children was introduced during Mormon's day?
- Why is baptizing little children a "gross error" (8:6), a "solemn mockery" (8:9, 23), and "awful wickedness" (8:19)? These are strong words. Do we feel and speak this way about infant baptism today? If not, why not?
- How can it help us in times of trial and anxiety to be assured that "perfect love casteth out all fear"?
- How many times does the word "repent/repentance" appear in Moroni 8, and why is it so crucially central to Mormon's persuasive logic and prophetic declaration regarding infant baptism in particular and to the situation of his people in general?
- What can we do better to prepare our little children to fully appreciate and remember their baptism?

Moroni 8:1 — Dating This Epistle of Mormon to Moroni

It is very interesting to evaluate what can be extracted from the writings in Mormon chapter 3 that may indicate when Mormon wrote this epistle to Moroni, who did not note an exact date, just that it was "soon after my calling to the ministry." The dating evidence is circumstantial, but there are enough matching pieces in each text to estimate that it was written close to the same period that Mormon addressed in Mormon chapter 3, which was just after the conclusion of the ten-year peace. Having enjoyed learning and working together with Mormon as his assistant in making plates, reading records, selecting passages to include in the abridgment, and discussing with him the spans of Nephite and Jaredite history, Moroni would have been about 29 years old in AD 362. At that time, he could have been sent out to work in the wider field of the church, especially as serious problems were already brewing.

In Mormon 3, the prophet Mormon had been commanded to preach repentance to the people. In Mormon’s letter recorded in Moroni 8, the words *repent* and *repentance* were used twelve times, five as a verb and seven as the noun. This builds upon the two nouns and one verb found in Mormon 3. Since repentance was a pressing matter at this time, it is quite possible that he wrote this letter during his period of being an idle witness.

Although Moroni 8 is commonly thought of as only being about the baptism of infants, it is also about repentance. The dominant refrain is “Repent! Repent!” Sinners are called to repentance; parents must teach repentance; parents must repent; little children need no repentance. The whole letter circles back to the issue of repentance. Little children should not be baptized because they cannot repent. They do not need to repent. They are unable to repent. The first fruits of repentance are baptism. One may not, then, baptize children until they are able to repent. Repentance makes baptism and the atonement meaningful.

Further Reading and Additional Views

Joseph M. Spencer, “[On the Dating of Moroni 8–9](#),” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 22 (2016): 131–148.

Alan C. Miner, “[A Chronological Setting for the Epistles of Mormon to Moroni](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no 2. (1994): 94–113.

Moroni 8:1 — Mormon Was Obviously Familiar with the Nephite Scriptures

Mormon certainly knew the scriptures well. In Moroni 7, we recognize his superb conversance with the Sermon at the Temple and words of Jesus. In this chapter 8, it becomes clear that he is also very familiar with King Benjamin’s speech. Having abridged the book of Mosiah, which contains King Benjamin’s speech, Mormon had Benjamin’s speech well in mind and likely close at hand as he wrote this letter to Moroni.

Moroni 8:3 — Why Did Mormon Call Jesus “The Holy Child?”

In Moroni 8:3, Mormon calls Jesus the Holy Child. This is the only time in the Book of Mormon that this name of Christ appears. That is very interesting because Mormon has met Jesus. Jesus has appeared to him, and he did not appear as an infant. Why, then, did Mormon here and at this time refer to the Savior as a Holy Child? For one thing, since the theme of this whole chapter is that children are pure like Christ, by using that name for Jesus at the beginning of this epistle—seeing Jesus as God’s Holy Child—Mormon is already subtly establishing the basis of his argument that children do not need to be cleansed from any sin. As Jesus, even as a child, was holy, so are all children.

Moroni 8:4–6 — Infant Baptisms Begin among the Nephites

Why had the Nephites begun baptizing infants? Why did this start? We do not know exactly, but there may be several possibilities.

Looking Back to Circumcision

We can assume that the Nephites practiced circumcision before the coming of Christ, since they were strict in keeping the law of Moses and were descendants of the House of Israel through Manasseh (Lehi), as well as probably Ephraim (Ishmael), and Judah (Zoram and Mulek). Circumcision, if you go back into the Old Testament, served several purposes and one of them in Exodus 4, was that if you are circumcised, it will turn away threats of death and will give you victory. Now if you have a bunch of people who are taking the offensive and going out into the battlefield and they want to enhance their chances of victory, maybe they started circumcising people as a way of imploring God to help them all.

With the coming of Christ and the introduction of baptism as the new sign of the covenant, they would not have been circumcising at that time, and so, they may have thought, “We ought to try this.” After all, before Joshua could lead the Israelites of his day into the Promised Land, the males were all circumcised so that they would be given victory. Maybe the Nephites in Mormon’s day began doing this as a way of enhancing their chances with victory by expressing this as an additional sign of covenant, and although they had it wrong, maybe they were trying to bind the Lord to help them. In addition, since baptism was a sign of spiritually dying and being reborn of God, using infant baptism as a spiritual symbol of death and rebirth is at least better than actually using infant sacrifice, which was practiced in several places in the ancient world. Whatever the background or context or their arguments may have been, the Nephites at this time started the practice of baptizing young children. Perhaps, since they circumcised newborn male infants, that ceremony influenced them to move baptism to that point in a child’s life as well.

The Rise of Infant Baptism in the Mediterranean

In the history of Christianity in the Mediterranean world, the baptizing of infants was not done until the fourth Century, as the written and archaeological records are fairly clear. For example, there are thousands upon thousands of Christian burials in the catacombs under Rome, and dates are given for most of these burials. The dates given are usually the birth date, the baptism date, and the death date, and this information allows for analysis of their baptismal customs.

In the case of burials from the second and third centuries, there is a birth date, and then quite some time later, a baptism date, about the time when you would expect for a teenager, a young adult, or a convert—and many but not all of these people were converts to Christianity. However, there are no infant baptisms shown in these years, and the death dates were normally long after the baptism.

In the fourth century, there occurred a change in the routine. For records early in that century, there began to appear a sequence of a birth date, and then a baptism date very much later, followed a couple days later by the death date. Then there was yet another change: the birth dates began to appear with a week later the baptism date, then eventually a death date long after. Thus, it certainly appears that infant baptisms either began or became much more common about the middle of the fourth century AD.

The German scholar, Joachim Jeremias, who analyzed these dates, surmised that people had wanted to have their sins washed away right before they died, so that they could go right to heaven without any blemishes on their record. They were delaying baptism wrongly, so they could treat it as a last unction before death and not worry about living sinful lives. The reaction of the church leader in Rome was to begin baptizing everyone as infants to solve that problem. In their attempt to solve one problem, they created a new one. Christian theologians would rationalize infant baptism as a sign of the covenant, just as circumcision of infant boys eight days after birth had become a sign of the covenant of God with Abraham among the Jews. But that was always understood as a birthright, not as a rebirth following the remission of sins.

Did Something Similar Happen to Cause This Change in the Nephite World?

From the Nephite world, there is no information about why they began infant baptism, but a totally new pattern had arisen, and Mormon was astonished, even offended by it. He was appalled at how wrongly they were thinking.

Parents may have begun having their children baptized out of fear. In the absence of guidance from the Holy Ghost, people do what appears logical at the time. Perhaps some parents were getting really worried that their children were going to die. They were starving and were heading for gruesome times of warfare that did not spare the children. Parents may have been afraid that the children would never get a chance to be baptized. This may have been well intended. There are usually motivations that cause such changes, but whatever motivated this practice, Mormon did not like it. Can there be any doubt that Mormon thought that this was a bad idea? Look at the words he used, “A gross error,” “a solemn mockery,” used twice. He claimed that anyone who would do this was in the gall of bitterness. He saw this as an awful wickedness.

Mormon was most concerned because infant baptism very clearly denies the whole process of repentance that allows the whole process of the mercy of Christ to operate. It abrogates the whole purpose of Christ’s Atonement, and thus it creates a bigger problem within the entire church. If people are not willing to teach their children to repent so that they can be baptized and then they cease repenting, wicked conditions would certainly ensue.

Mormon's response leads to an important question: What does a person's attitude about the baptism of little children reveal about a person's spiritual state and his understanding of the gospel? Mormon wanted people to understand how the gospel really worked. He declared that they were denying Christ's Atonement by not recognizing that children are alive in Christ. They may have been administering ordinances, but they had lost the point of them.

One may wonder if in an effort to have power, they had started their own splinter church organizations by deciding to do something differently in order to appease the people and to stay in control of the situation. Such people, one might say, would have the appearance of good efforts, but they would lack the authority to make such changes. In response, Mormon was quite harsh, and did not identify any righteous reason for the change. In Mormon 3:2, the Lord says to Mormon, "Cry unto my people, repent ye ... and build up again my church," which may indicate that there actually had arisen another church competing for the people's minds and hearts. Forming alternative religious orders, as with the Order of Nehors, had a long history among the Nephites.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Moroni Include Mormon's Condemnation of Infant Baptism?](#) (Moroni 8:12)," *KnoWhy* 253 (December 15, 2016).

Moroni 8:8 — The Whole Need No Physician

Mormon countered this new trend by turning also to practices and revelations from previous Nephite eras, especially King Benjamin. Back in Mosiah 3:11, Benjamin had talked about how little children are free from any transgression, and he also explained, as does Mormon, that (1) through the atonement of Christ the effects of the Fall of Adam are taken away, that (2) Jesus Christ's infinite sacrifice atones for the sins of all who die without the law. It also (3) covers all of the transgressions that are committed ignorantly or unaccountably. Mormon mentions all three of those features of the atonement of Jesus Christ. Compare Moroni 8:8 with Mosiah 3:11:

Mosiah 3:11	Moroni 8:8, 22
<p>For behold, and also his blood atoneth for the sins of those <i>who have fallen by the transgression of Adam</i>, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have <i>ignorantly sinned</i>.</p>	<p>The whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are <i>not capable</i> of committing sin; wherefore the <i>curse of Adam is taken from them</i> in me, that it hath no power over them ... [as] on all them that have no law.</p>

Moroni 8:10 — All Parents Must Become Like Children

In his letter to his son in Moroni 8:10, Mormon also says that parents must humble themselves like their little children, which again is very reminiscent of King Benjamin’s Speech, specifically, Mosiah 3:18–19. One must put off the natural man by becoming a child, submissive, meek, and humble.

Mosiah 3:18–19

For behold he judgeth, and his judgment is just; and *the infant perisheth not* that dieth in his infancy; but men drink damnation to their own souls except they *humble themselves and become as little children*, and believe that *salvation* was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent. For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and *becometh as a child*, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.

Moroni 8:10

Behold I say unto you that this thing shall ye teach—repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin; yea, teach parents that they must repent and be baptized, and *humble themselves as their little children*, and *they shall all be saved with their little children*.

Moroni 8:17 — How Did Mormon Perceive Children?

In this letter, one may observe how Mormon felt about children. Mormon’s childhood was a rare one. He was a very observant, precocious child, and he probably had quite fond memories of his childhood. He was entrusted with important responsibilities. He liked childhood, and apparently liked children generally. He was certainly especially pained at seeing the children around him being killed. They were starving; they were deprived; they were maltreated in the war. He must have been enormously pained. In our modern day, people worry about what the economy is going to be like for their children and grandchildren. Mormon knew what the future was going to be like for his civilization’s children and grandchildren. It was likely to be very bleak at best.

In verse 17, he said that he loved little children, “I love little children with a perfect love; and they are all alike and partakers of salvation.” That statement says a great deal about

a military commander-in-chief. They are alike to him because of their purity, their freedom from blame. A person who truly believes that, who has it embedded in their understanding of the gospel and humanity, will demonstrate that in the way they deal with little children who are all perfectly pure. Now, that is a great ideal for Latter-day Saints as they interact with children, grandchildren, children in the Primary, or any engagement with children.

Moroni 8:20–22 — All Children Are Clean and Need No Repentance Thanks to the Atonement

Mormon makes clear the status of little children, as does King Benjamin:

Mosiah 3:16	Moroni 8:20
<p>And even if it were possible that little children could sin they could not be saved; but I say unto you they are blessed; for behold, as in Adam, or by nature, they fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins.</p>	<p>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.</p>

Surely from these passages we can see that Mormon was familiar with King Benjamin’s speech when the topic of child baptism arose. Since it was so relevant, he rightly used it to address the current topic of concern. Besides being a prophet, King Benjamin had been a mighty warrior, even wielding the sword of Laban in successful battles. Mormon would clearly have admired and identified with Benjamin on many accounts. Mormon must also have lamented his own inability to bring his people to a mighty change of heart and covenant renewal, as Benjamin had done.

Notice the universality of Mormon’s repeated affirmation that *all* children are clean: “all children are alike unto me,” “they are all alike and partakers of salvation,” “for they are all alive in him because of his mercy,” and “all little children are alive in Christ” (8:17, 17, 19, 22). Mormon leaves no room for questions about the certitude and the scope of his conviction that infant baptism sets “at naught the atonement of [Christ] and the power of his redemption,” and “is mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ, and the power of his Holy Spirit” (8:20, 23).

Moroni 8:27 — Fighting Might Resume Soon

In Moroni 8:27, Mormon said that he would write again unless he had to go back out to battle soon. How would he have known that he might need to go back out to battle soon? In Mormon 3, he referred to a warning letter from the Lamanite king reminding him that

the ten years of peace was over. Thus, there may be a connection between Mormon's epistle in Moroni 8 and that setting in Mormon 3. There are a few clues like this that potentially suggest a shared context.

Moroni 8:28–29 — The Nephites Were Rebellious in Nature

Finally, we know from the ending of Moroni 8, in verse 28, that the people were rejecting all religious power and authority: "They are also seeking to put down all power and authority which cometh from God." This condition was terminal, as is also clearly reflected in Mormon 3, when the people were reported as refusing to listen to Mormon's leadership. In Mormon 3:3, Mormon had similarly written:

And I did cry unto this people, but it was in vain; and they did not realize that it was the Lord that had spared them, and granted unto them a chance for repentance. And behold they did harden their hearts against the Lord their God.

Moroni 9

Moroni 9 Thought Questions

- Moroni 9 begins with Mormon's tender expression of love for his son Moroni, but that sentiment is soon overwhelmed. How bad was their situation?
- What factors might have contributed to the complete collapse of military order, martial law, and diplomatic communication at this time?
- The question of cannibalism is surely going to come up in Moroni 9:8–10. Is there evidence that this type of behavior was practiced anciently? If so, why would people do this? And why would Moroni include his father's letter with such gruesome details?
- Do genocides really happen? If so, why? And why does the Book of Mormon tell us about this one?

Moroni 9:1 — Mormon's Final Epistle to Moroni

The approximate timing of Mormon's letter to Moroni (recorded in Moroni 9) may be identified through triangulation with other data from Mormon's writings, comparing it with the description of the same events in Mormon chapters 4, 5, and 6. The historical accuracy of what we have here shines through quite magnificently.

Comparing the contents of Mormon 4–6 and Moroni 9 provides an opportunity to triangulate the events that Mormon described there with details that he covers in greater detail in this personal letter. Indeed, in his historical account, Mormon gave a general

story about what was happening, and his letter elucidates those events and clarifies why the events in his narrative record were happening.

It is very unlikely that Joseph Smith, after he had encountered the narrative in Mormon 4–6, then continued to translate, finished Mormon 7–9, went on through the whole story of the Jaredites in Ether 1–15, and then finished most of the book of Moroni in chapters 1–8, only at that point finally included this letter that fit right into a previous historical moment mentioned briefly much earlier. Those who witnessed his translating never even suggested that Joseph ever went back to consult previously translated passages or to check back on details.

Scholars generally, but not always, concur that Moroni 9 was probably written at the end of the hiatus between the years AD 367 to 375 (see Mormon 4:15–16), right before that last big invasion in 375, when the Nephites were on the run for ten years. For a chart comparing nine details found in Mormon 4 with specific statements found in Moroni 9, see my previous Notes on Mormon 1–6, pp. 1059–1060, and the discussions below. See also a similar chart by Robert F. Smith, “Epistolary Form,” pp. 131–132. As a rule, I favor the idea that Moroni 7, 8, and 9 were written in the same order in which Moroni gives them to us. Without giving some indication of a “flashback,” Mormon and Moroni use a strict chronological framework for their introduction of documents into the finished record. This would mean that Moroni 9 comes last of these three, and not in the earlier 345–350 AD time frame, which would be the only other possible time period. (Since it is not likely that Moroni 8 was written before 345–350 AD, when Moroni was too young to have been called to the ministry, and also since the speech in Moroni 7 would have to have been given even earlier, at a time before Mormon would have had worked extensively on abridging 3 Nephi, I would suggest that that earlier time frame for Moroni 9 seems improbable.)

There are several beautiful pearls among the descriptions of the horrendous sufferings and trials in Moroni 9. Perhaps they are things that one may want to remember, and maybe they are all the more memorable, because they come out of this crucible of intensity. If Mormon could say such poignant things when he was in the midst of horrific struggles, readers may gain great strength from them, especially during times of their own intense trials and disappointments. Below, are some of those pearls. As a reader, you may find many more!

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “[Mormon 1–6](#),” in *John W. Welch Notes* (Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 1037–1068.

Book of Mormon Central, “When Did Mormon Write His Letter Recorded in Moroni 9? (Mormon 9:1),” *KnoWhy* 477 (October 18, 2018).

Joseph M. Spencer, “On the Dating of Moroni 8–9,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 22 (2016): 131–148.

Robert F. Smith, “Epistolary Form in the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 22, no. 2 (2010): 125–135, dates Moroni 9 to ca. AD 366 AD.

Alan C. Miner, “A Chronological Setting for the Epistles of Mormon to Moroni,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 2. (1994): 94–113.

Moroni 9:2 — Nephites Did Not Conquer in Battle (see Mormon 4:13)

In Moroni 9:2, Mormon reported a battle in which the Nephites ultimately did not conquer. This may have been the result of several earlier skirmishes in which Mormon was personally involved, but this time it seems to have been a major turning point. In Mormon 2:19 the Nephites had been routed temporarily, but in 2:25 they regrouped and stood their ground and in 2:27 they retook their lands of inheritance. In Mormon 4:13, for the first time, there will be no such recovery.

The fact that Mormon says here “I have had a sore battle with the Lamanites in which we did not conquer” is admittedly an important statement. It would mean that Moroni 9 was not written between AD 362 and 375, during the period when Mormon was not serving as the leader, unless it is possible that Mormon was involved in the battle mentioned in Moroni 9:2 in some way other than as the commander or leader. But, more likely, that battle in which the Nephites “did not conquer” occurred at the time when Mormon had just begun again as commander and the Nephites were forced to flee from the battlefield, taking refuge in the city of Jordan (Mormon 5:3, about AD 376).

Mentioning over a dozen specific points or words found in Mormon 4, the letter in Moroni 9 then goes on to describe the awful depths to which the Nephites had sunk during the decade from AD 366 to 375. Recapping that deterioration of Nephite faith, civility, and worthiness before God, Moroni 9 sets forth Mormon’s justifications for his despondent assessment of the hopeless condition of the Nephites around AD 375–376.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, “Mormon 1–6,” in *John W. Welch Notes* (Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 1059–1060.

Moroni 9:3–5 — The Nephites Fought to Sate Their Anger (see Mormon 4:15)

Both documents convey intense emotion. In Mormon 4:15 the Nephites were overwhelmed with anger because the Lamanites had taken their women and children

captive and offered them up unto idol gods. They wanted revenge for the atrocities inflicted upon their fellow Nephites. Similarly, in Moroni 9:5, Mormon records, “For so exceedingly do they anger that it seemeth me that they have no fear of death; ... and they thirst after blood and revenge continually.”

Moroni 9:5 — The Nephites Lost Their Love One Towards Another

Losing love towards one another eliminates the critical characteristic of Eternal Life, and prevents guidance by the Holy Ghost. Other motivations for action take precedence, and righteousness is not part of the equation.

Hate and anger, which become so prevalent in times of war, can take over the hearts of both sides. Hatred and anger are even used as a viable strategy for winning. According to our brother here in the Edgemont Stake, Dr. Demetrius Kepas (who was a teenager in Athens), intense hate and anger permeated the Greek Civil War with the communists; as he personally reported in class, he observed that hate, and how anger took over.

In a much earlier example, the *Iliad* is the great epic of the Greek war against Troy. The whole story is about Achilles throwing temper tantrums. For years, he was so angry and obsessed with the anger, that he drove out all feeling of love and concern, even for his dearest friend, Patroclus, who eventually was killed.

Moroni 9:6 — Mormon and Moroni Remain Faithful (see Mormon 5:1)

Back in Mormon 5:1, after he had moved the records, Mormon said, “And it came to pass that I did go forth among the Nephites and I did repent of the oath which I had made.” He had previously sworn an oath that he would not lead the Nephites in battle anymore. He was planning to stand by as an idle witness. In order to break that oath, he had to retract or redeem his vow, and doing that in ancient times would have required him to seek the approval or forgiveness of the Lord. He had sworn to God that he would no longer lead them, and even if it was for what he now thought was a more righteous need, Mormon was still needing to rescind his previous oath.

Now, in a parallel text in Moroni 9:6, Mormon wrote, “...notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay.” Mormon was talking about his spiritual decision to repent of his oath. He was essentially saying, “Well, we are still here. God has spared our lives. As long as we are alive, he expects us to be working. We must carry on with the responsibilities that he has given us.” Again, the history and the letter carry parallel information. Plainly, Mormon’s letter here is describing the same conditions and events as are reported in the historical records in

Mormon 4 and 5. These details securely place the letter in Moroni 9 in the same context as Mormon's previous historical writings.

Moroni 9:6 — Rest Our Souls in the Kingdom of God

In Moroni 9:6, Mormon had retained a feeling of peace throughout the crises, retaining an eternal perspective in the midst of all the awful chaos. He pleaded, "that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness and rest our souls in the Kingdom of God." This is how most readers would like to feel at a time like that.

Moroni 9:7 — Nephites Taken Prisoners (see also Mormon 4:2, 14)

For the first time, many Nephites were taken prisoner by the Lamanites, and this is clearly recorded in both the history in Moron 4:2 and 14, and also here in Mormon's letter.

Moroni 9:8, 16 — Human Sacrifice Performed (see also Mormon 4:11, 14–15, 21)

Each record describes unspeakable suffering and even human sacrifice being inflicted extraordinarily upon the prisoners.

Further Reading

Evidence Central, "[Book of Mormon Evidence: Human Sacrifice and Ritual Cannibalism](https://evidencecentral.org/2020/09/19/book-of-mormon-evidence-human-sacrifice-and-ritual-cannibalism/)," September 19, 2020, online at evidencecentral.org.

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did the Lamanites Sacrifice Women and Children to Idols?](https://www.bookofmormoncentral.org/2016/11/11/why-did-the-lamanites-sacrifice-women-and-children-to-idols/) (Mormon 4:14)," *KnoWhy* 229 (November 11, 2016).

Moroni 9:9–10 — Nephite Wickedness Explained (compare Mormon 4:12, 15)

In these verses, Mormon recounted the wickedness of the Nephites in carrying out their revenge. Their efforts failed miserably, and they lost again, as is likewise reported in Mormon 4:12, 15.

Moroni 9:11–15 — Mormon's Lamentation

Here Mormon offers up another lamentation, not unlike his final lament over his fallen "fair ones" in Mormon 7. Foreshadowing his final extended elegy (see JWW Notes, 1063–1068), here Mormon cries out: "O my beloved son, how can a people like this ... , how can a people like this ... , how can we expect ... , Wo unto this people. Come out in judgment, O God."

Here also, Mormon loves the repeated refrain of terms of affectionate address. As his speech in Moroni 7 had repeated "my beloved brethren," here in Moroni 9 Mormon calls out "my son," "my son," even "my beloved son," exactly ten times.

Moroni 9:20 — The Nephites Were “Without Principle, and Past Feeling”

One may ask whether order is related to principle. In verse 18, the Nephites were without order, without mercy, and then in verse 20, they were without principle and past feeling. In fact, their civilization had fallen apart. When these people became unprincipled and past feeling, their actions were no longer for the advantage of their own side of the war. They became obsessed with killing, lost all sense of obedience and order, and eventually the military system and society devolved into disorder, disarray, and then chaos.

Moroni 9:24 — Securing the Records (see Mormon 4:23)

In Mormon 4:23, Mormon wrote that he had been to the Hill Shim to remove the records. He decided to get the records, protect them, and do whatever he could to complete his responsibility. He needed to hide the records and convey them to his son Moroni. It was clear that he was not going to be able to protect them for very long.

And here Mormon already mentions the Jaredites (9:23), whose demise was a foreboding precursor of what would happen to the Nephites and also a prescient reminder to Moroni that he, someday, would be the one who would abridge the Jaredite plates of Ether.

Then in Moroni 9:24, Mormon wrote to Moroni, “But I trust that I may see thee soon, for I have sacred records that I would deliver up unto thee.” This has a strong connection with the way Mormon ended chapter 4: “And now, I, Mormon, seeing that the Lamanites were about to overthrow the land, therefore I did go to the Hill Shim and did take up all the records which Ammaron had hid up unto the Lord.” This was likely referring to the same situation, and since Mormon was saying, “I hope to see you soon,” he probably had just been to the hill. He was apparently saying to himself, I now have the records, and I have to get together with my son Moroni. I will write him this letter and tell him what is happened.

Moroni 9:24 — Nephites Swept Off “As Dew Before the Sun” (see Mormon 4:18)

In Mormon 4, Mormon said that at that time the Nephites were being swept off as “a dew before the sun.” One may picture the ancient weapons such as the macuahuitl weapon and visualize it sweeping away the losers. How graphic that is. Many were on the run or involved in mass desertions, and women and children were captured and abused.

In Moroni 9:24, Mormon ended his letter by saying likewise, “Many of our brethren have deserted over to the Lamanites.” One may ask why they would have done that. They likely did not want to die, but how could they have avoided being killed? They would have been required to “deny the Christ” (as we learn from Moroni 1:2–3). This was more than a political war. The people that chose to stay with Mormon did so at least partly for religious reasons, and some chose to die rather than default on their faith.

Moroni 9:25–26 — Be Faithful in Christ

In conclusion, Mormon explained that he did not tell Moroni about these great sorrows to weigh him down. He was saying that great suffering could allow Christ to lift people.

He offered a blessing, that his son would have divine peace and hope in Christ despite the awful circumstances. He asked that Christ would lift his son, and plant in his mind the time when Jesus visited the Nephites and showed his body unto Mormon and Moroni's "fathers." This is a message of great hope. Mormon issues a powerful request that all the attributes and achievements of Christ may "rest in your mind forever" (9:25).

In verse 26, Mormon, trusting in the Savior, pronounced a further blessing for his son to have the same confidence in the Father and the Son that he had. He asked that the grace of God the Father and Jesus Christ would abide with his son forever. These two joyous blessings are assertions that can be quoted in any time of trial, raising hope and refocusing one's mind on Eternal Life.

This attitude is reminiscent of when Jesus healed the blind man in Jerusalem in John 9:1–3. The witnesses asked who had sinned to make the man blind, the man or his parents. Jesus answered that no one had sinned. The man was blind so the glory of God could be made manifest. Mormon was essentially of the same view. As awful as the circumstances were, he did not want his son to feel the sorrow to the point of death, or focus on who had sinned to bring about this calamity, but he pleaded that he would be brought to Christ with an understanding that the Savior's sufferings and death were even worse than those he was hearing of, or that he could even imagine. Those thoughts were uplifting enough for Moroni that he kept this otherwise awful letter for over 45 years. Mormon's closing words of blessing here, as he faced his final extremities, can be equally heartening for the modern reader as well.

MORONI 10

John W. Welch Notes



Questions to Ponder at the Outset

For many reasons, this chapter is one of the all-time favorites for Latter-day Saints. Almost every verse extends the desperate, if not exhausted, efforts of Moroni to draw his lifelong work and commission to a proper conclusion. After a total of 36 years of being, as far as we know, totally alone—with the exception of the personal visitations of Jesus Christ (Ether 12:39), the three Nephites (Mormon 8:11), and, most of all, the companionship of the Holy Spirit—Moroni succeeds in finally leaving the Book of Mormon where he would like us to find it.

As you read Moroni 10, you may wish to ponder personally, and share conversations with others, about any of the following details and questions. If we don't know where we're going, how will we know when we get there?

- **Moroni 10:1.** Four hundred and twenty-one years have passed since the birth of Jesus when Moroni wrote this last chapter. To put that date into perspective, in Europe, between AD 385 and 420, wars were fought between the western and eastern halves of the Roman empire, Christianity became the state religion, and invasions were mounted from the northeast into France, Germany, the Balkans and other Roman territories. Also, there have been 421 years between AD 1599 (when Queen Elizabeth and Shakespeare were alive) and the present year of 2020. The year 1620 (when the Mayflower landed at Plymouth Rock) was also four centuries ago. That is a long time ago, in which much has happened. How does that awareness of the wide scope of history give you perspectives that help you put Moroni's final words into a broad timeframe?
- **Moroni 10:1, 24.** Moroni first said that he was writing here to the Lamanites, then he turned to addressing "all the ends of the earth." And next, in his Title Page,

- Moroni says that he hopes that his message will reach three groups—the Lamanites and Jews in the House of Israel, and also the Gentiles—to whom he was writing. How is Moroni’s desired purpose being fulfilled today? What is your role personally in seeing that the Book of Mormon is fulfilling its purposes to these audiences?
- **Moroni 10:3.** What does Moroni suggest that people ponder before they ask if the record is true? How does remembering the previous mercies of God help prepare any person to know the truth of the Book of Mormon and to receive any gifts of the Spirit from God?
 - **Moroni 10:4.** In what way is the three-witness law evident in verse 4? Who are the three witnesses that bear testimony to us of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon? Why would Moroni have called particularly upon those three as his witnesses? What traditional functions does this fulfill in certifying the accuracy of his record?
 - **Moroni 10:7.** We are asked here not to deny the power of God. On what principles will God apply his powers for the benefit of His children?
 - **Moroni 10:8.** Moroni repeatedly asks us not to deny the gifts of God. Moroni then lists some of the spiritual gifts that are available. Which gifts are included in Moron’s list, and why? For what purposes are these many gifts given? What did Amaleki say about spiritual gifts in Omni 1:25? What spiritual gifts did Alma mention in Alma 9:21–22? How do these lists, and other such lists, compare with each other and relate to their particular times and circumstances?
 - **Moroni 10:9–17.** What does Moroni say about spiritual gifts being available in our day? What drives away the gifts of the spirit? Consider and compare the list in D&C 46:8–27. In D&C 46:8, for what important purpose did the Lord suggest we could use these gifts? How do the purposes, availability, and the list of gifts in D&C 46 line up with those in Moroni 10? Do you have any of these gifts? How do you use them? If you need a gift for a righteous purpose, when and how can you, or have you, sought for that gift?
 - **Moroni 10:27.** Moroni declared that his words would come forth “out of the dust.” When that occurred, what ancient prophecy was being fulfilled, and in what ways was it fulfilled?
 - **Moroni 10:27, 34.** Here again (twice now), Moroni tells us that he will meet us at the “bar,” even the “pleasing bar” of God. Why might he have called it a “pleasing bar”? What circumstances led Moroni to add this final conclusion and witness to his record when he had already done so at the end of his Jaredite record? See Ether 5:6. Who else will be there at the judgment bar of God to testify? See also 2 Nephi 33:11.
 - **Moroni 10:30.** Isaiah gave guidance similar to this verse in Isaiah 52:11. What are “unclean things”? How are we to avoid them? Look at Genesis 39:12. When

Potiphar's wife was tempting him, it says that Joseph "fled and got him out." How can and should we maintain purity in our lives?

- **Moroni 10:31.** What ancient prophet is Moroni quoting here? How well did Moroni know the scriptures from which these phrases have come and also in general?
- **Moroni 10:31–33.** How may we become "perfected in Christ"? What does it mean to be perfected in Christ? What does it not mean?

Moroni Concludes His Writings

Moroni had written what he had believed was going to be his final words in Mormon chapters 8 and 9. In that earlier conclusion, he focused on fulfilling his father's requests—writing things that were important and necessary to be included in the Nephite record. Although his words were heartfelt, Moroni was recording these things as part of his duty as his father's scribe and editor.

Now, in Moroni chapter 10, Moroni opened up his heart and expressed what he really wanted to say. These were the things about which he felt passionate. There could be no better ending to the Book of Mormon than chapter 10 of Moroni.

Hugh Nibley often spoke candidly about the relevance of the Book of Mormon to our day, and particularly the words of Moroni. Nibley memorably stated, "I intend to take Moroni as my guide to the present world situation." He pointed out that the Book of Mormon gives answers to issues of today—important questions of "prosperity and security—the great inseparably related issues of wealth and war." He further noted, "In the Book of Mormon, the very questions which now oppress the liberal and fundamentalist alike, to the imminent overthrow of their fondest beliefs, are fully and clearly treated. No other book gives such a perfect and exhaustive explanation of the eschatological problem. ... Here you will find anticipated and answered every logical objection that the intelligence and vanity of men even in this sophisticated age has been able to devise against the preaching of the word. And here one may find a description of our own age so vivid and so accurate that none can fail to recognize it."

Further Reading

Hugh W. Nibley, "Gifts," in *Approaching Zion* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 89.

Gary P. Gillum, ed. and comp., *Of All Things: A Nibley Quote Book* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1981), 86–87.

John W. Welch, "[Hugh Nibley and the Book of Mormon](#)," *Ensign*, April 1985, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

Moroni 10:1 — Moroni’s Words to the Lamanites

At the beginning of chapter 10, Moroni addressed the Lamanites, his former enemies. He wanted to warn and urge them to be righteous. Moroni used the word “exhort” eight times as he warned and taught. While there can be many powerful dimensions in the meanings of the word “exhort,” Moroni was careful to not be overly zealous, which could turn the Lamanites and readers away from his teachings. He also did not use here the more pointed questioning and challenging verbal registers that he had used earlier in Mormon 8–9.

How might we speak like Moroni and avoid offending people and prevent our teachings from being rejected? How can we avoid going too far with “exhortations”? From Moroni, notice that in verses 18 and 19, he twice added the words “my beloved brethren” into his exhortation. These words were used a dozen times by Mormon in his three letters which Moroni treasured. As missionaries exhort people to come unto Christ, love and understanding make that invitation more pleasant. If a person understands that the missionaries teaching them actually care and have concern for them, their words carry a stronger message without sharpness.

Moroni 10:2 — “I Seal up These Records”

Usually, when people talk about sealing something, they are thinking of licking and sealing an envelope. Perhaps Moroni’s closing up the stone box would have been considered a kind of sealing, but the phrase “to seal” has a lot more to do with authority than closure. When people are sealed in the temple, it does not mean they are glued together forever; rather, they are authenticated as part of the eternal family.

In the ancient world, court or state officials often had a unique seal, which may have been a little cylinder seal or a signet ring that left an impression when rolled onto clay or wax. When a seal of approval was placed on something, it became official. Jewish law required three witnesses to sign and put their seal on a lump of clay that was then attached to the document. This was necessary in order for a document to be legally binding. Only a judge could break the seal and if the seal was otherwise broken, the integrity of the document was compromised. A broken seal indicated someone may have tampered with the contents. Without sealing a document, someone could rub a character out of a metal plate and scratch in a new one, changing the original intent of the document.

Two Roman brass plates from AD 109, which we acquired in 2005, were witnessed in this ancient manner and now reside in the BYU Special Collections Library. They are an official decree of the Roman Emperor Trajan granting citizenship to a retiring Roman soldier who had fought for 25 years in the Roman Army. This doubled, sealed, witnessed document served as the soldier’s retirement passport, giving him Roman citizenship and privileges

as a retiree. Fragments of such plates are found all over the old Roman Empire. However, there are less than twenty such sets of two plates—and one of them is archived at BYU. These ancient sealed Roman plates are interesting because they are composed of two bronze plates connected by a ring so that they open like a book. The full text is written on the outside (equivalent to the front cover) and then the same text is replicated on the inside. On the back are listed the official names of seven witnesses, as required by Roman law. These witnesses are officials of the Roman Empire. All such documents have not only the names of seven Roman officials, but also the personal seals of these seven witnesses.

When the Book of Revelation chapter 5 talks about John seeing a book that was written on the inside and on the outside, sealed with seven seals, and given to the judge who can then break the seal, he may well have been using this standard kind of authentication of documents. A similar mode of authenticating a real estate deed is found in Jeremiah 32. This authentication method is evident in Hebrew, in Greek, and in Latin. It was used in Mesopotamia for over 2000 years before the time of Christ. There are numerous ancient legal documents authenticated this way.



Figure 1 Pre-exilic Hebrew royal seal, in the Louvre Museum, Paris. Photo by John W. Welch

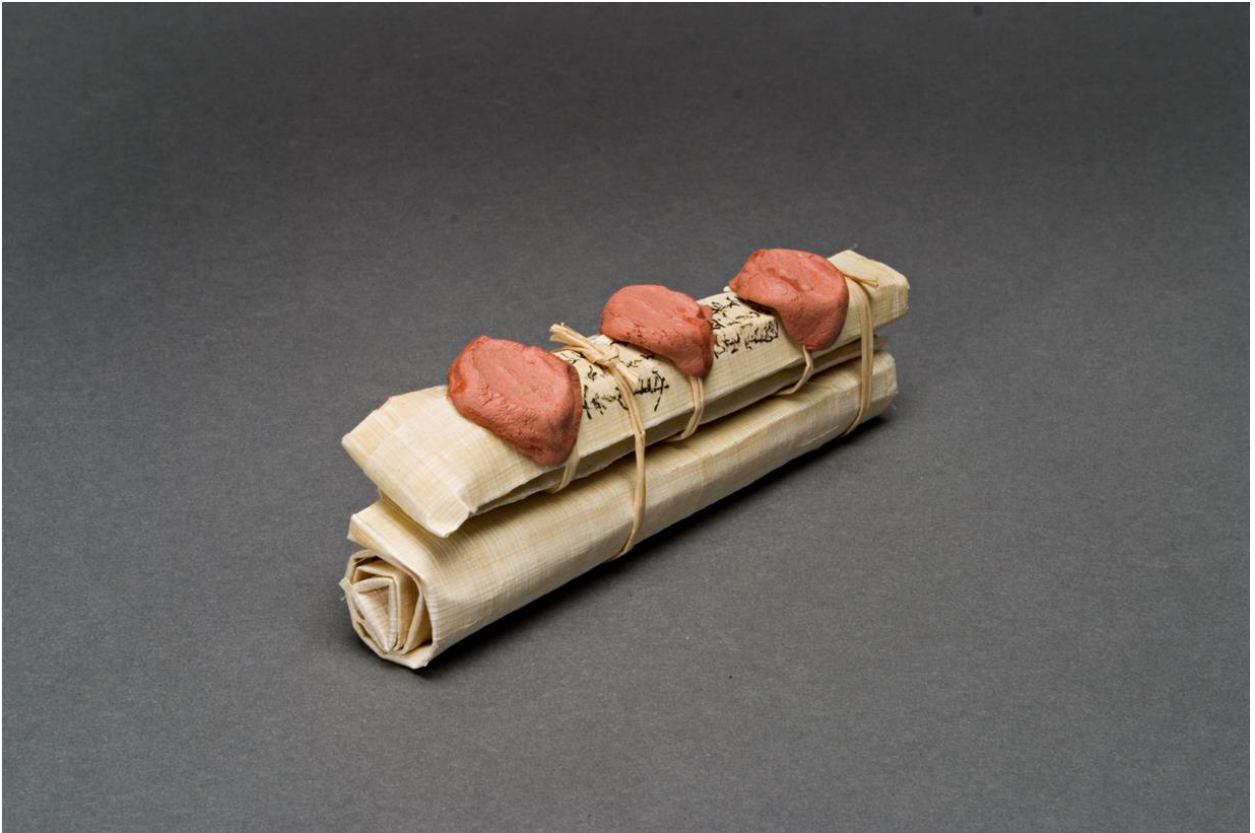


Figure 2 Model of typical Hebrew papyrus legal document from Elephantine, Egypt, showing the names and seals of the required three witnesses. From the BYU Studies and FARMS exhibition of Two Doubled, Sealed, Roman Metal Plates, currently in the library of the LDS

Putting on the official binder with the seal of the witnesses would have been an important part of closing up an official document in Moroni's mind. This was standard operating procedure for any legal documentation in the ancient world.

In addition, Moroni knew Isaiah's prophecy about "a book that is sealed" (Isaiah 29:11) that would come forth "out from the dust" (Isaiah 29:4), as it was quoted by Nephi in 2 Nephi 27:7–9. No doubt Moroni had Isaiah 29 in mind when he finally sealed up the final record.

Further Reading

Evidence Central, "[Book of Mormon Evidence: Doubled, Sealed, and Witnessed Documents](#)," September 19, 2020, online at evidencecentral.org.

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Was the Heavenly Book Sealed with Seven Seals?](#) (2 Nephi 27:17)," *KnoWhy* 541 (December 12, 2019).

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Would a Book Be Sealed?](#) (2 Nephi 27:10)," *KnoWhy* 53 (March 14, 2016).

John W. Welch and Kelsey D. Lambert, “Two Ancient Roman Plates,” *BYU Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 55–76.

John A. Tvedtnes, “Sealed Books,” in *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: “Out of Darkness Unto Light”* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 59–73.

John W. Welch, “Doubled, Sealed, Witnessed Documents: From the Ancient World to the Book of Mormon,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 391–444.

Moroni 10:2 — Moroni’s Eight Exhortations

Moroni organized his final message by giving a series of exhortations. He used a form of the word “exhort” nine times in this chapter—first, as he introduced this section and then eight more times as he gave eight specific exhortations. This word sets the main tone that runs throughout this final chapter. Moroni had exhorted his readers in similar ways earlier in Mormon 8 and 9. However, in his final words in Moroni 10, something gentler and more compassionate is now found, even though his message is still very intense and urgent. Here, Moroni took time to offer more explanation and instruction together with each of his exhortations.

In Greek, the origin of the word “exhort” is related to swearing an oath and “to encourage extremely or strongly.” In English, it means “to encourage, entreat, persuade, preach, urge, and warn.” Moroni knew that this was his last chance to communicate with his readers. He said, in effect, “Do not procrastinate and set this message aside,” and he said repeatedly, “I would exhort you ... I would exhort you.”

Moroni’s Four Pairs of Exhortations in Moroni 10

Pair Item	Scripture	Context
Pair One		
1	10:3	Remember God’s mercy
2	10:4	Ask God in the name of Christ
Pair Two		
3	10:7	Deny not the power of God
4	10:8	Deny not the gifts of God

Pair Three		
5	10:18	Remember that every good gift cometh from Christ
6	10:19	Remember that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever
Pair Four		
7	10:27	Remember all these things
8	10:30	Come unto Christ

These exhortations and the method in which Moroni presented them are valuable to anyone leading Come Follow Me discussions, giving Home Evening lessons, doing missionary work, seeking personal improvement, and teaching the gospel in general. Each exhortation given by Moroni, or for that matter the earlier prophets, may be usefully studied by following their themes as they run through the Book of Mormon. These settings increase understanding, give enlightenment, guidance, and ideas for application. Moroni's final exhortations were not included as mere afterthoughts. Moroni worked with this text intentionally, intricately, and intimately. He knew every theme in the materials that he and his father had abridged, and he understood which themes would be most important for those who would eventually read the record. Each of these important exhortations deserve to be discussed separately and contemplated as necessary parts of one great whole.

Further Reading

James E. Faulconer, "Sealings and Mercies: Moroni's Final Exhortations in Moroni 10," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 22, no. 1 (2013), 5–19.

Moroni 10:3 — Remember the Lord's Mercy (First Exhortation)

In verse 3, Moroni's first exhortation was, "I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, *that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men.*" The theme of remembering how merciful the Lord has been is threaded throughout the entire Book of Mormon. For example, Alma, Benjamin, and Jacob all addressed this topic. Because it is such a strong theme throughout the Book of Mormon, the words "mercy," "mercies," or "merciful" appear in the book very frequently: "Mercy" appears 85 times; "mercies," especially tender mercies, 18 times; and merciful appears 47 times. That is a lot of use for any content-rich word in the Book of Mormon.

Putting on a special lens to watch for a particular topic, such as “God’s mercy,” is an effective way to study the Book of Mormon. Searching for instances in the Book of Mormon where the word “mercy” is mentioned explicitly or linked through a story about a merciful aspect of God, will reveal a great deal about the mercy of God and will demonstrate how, why, and when God’s mercy works. Studying the scriptures by subject or topic is a very effective method of delving deeply into gospel doctrine. Are there any better places to learn about God’s mercy than by studying the Book of Mormon?

In fact, the first chapter of the entire Book of Mormon launches the theme of the Lord’s mercy as a key concept that runs throughout this record, making it all the more appropriate that Moroni ends with that theme as well. In 1 Nephi 1:1, while not specifically using the word “merciful,” Nephi introduced this concept by stating that he had seen many afflictions, “nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and mysteries of God ...” Referring implicitly to God’s mercy, Nephi assures us as his readers that the Lord visits, helps, reassures, blesses, and reveals his will to people.

A few verses later, in 1 Nephi 1:14, Lehi made the following observation, after receiving his vision of the destruction of Jerusalem:

Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and **mercy** are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish.”

What did Lehi consider merciful about the destruction of Jerusalem? Lehi understood that there would be an opportunity for repentance for any person who chose to come back to the Lord—the Lord will save any who come to Him. Part of the mercy is that God always points out the mistakes for which people can repent. How would they know what they needed to correct if there were no schoolmaster; if they had no one loving enough to say, “If you keep going down this path, it is not going to work out”? Warning is an act of mercy.

Six verses later, in 1 Nephi 1:20, responding to the Jews’ treatment of his father, Nephi adopted this theme as one of the main purposes for his writing: “But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.”

Indeed, the mercy of the Lord extends throughout all time and to all people. In Jacob 4:10, Jacob recorded, “For behold, ye yourselves know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great **mercy**, over all his works.”

When discussing the great plan of God that includes the Atonement, Alma referred to the entire plan as the “Plan of Mercy.” In his words to his son Corianton, in Alma 42:15, Alma explained:

And now, the plan of **mercy** could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of **mercy**, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a **merciful** God also.

God’s “Eternal Plan,” when viewed from different perspectives is variously called the “Plan of Happiness,” the “Plan of Salvation,” or in the Book of Mormon, the “Plan of Redemption.” God’s mercy is a prime focus, no matter which name is used for God’s plan. Therefore, the mercy of God is demonstrated and presented throughout the whole Book of Mormon.

And why is it important for people to remember how merciful God has been from the time of Adam until now? If a person gratefully remembers the mercy and the love of God, instead of demanding God’s attention or being afraid of God’s condemnation, the attitude of appreciation softens the heart, making one more receptive to God’s Spirit, God’s word, and God’s personal revelation. Knowing that God has been merciful in the past gives people confidence that He will be generous and openhanded again. We can learn something important, and often overlooked, from Moroni’s approach. If you want to encourage righteousness, begin by remembering the mercy of God.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can We Be Delivered through the Lord’s Tender Mercies?](#) (1 Nephi 1:20),” *KnoWhy* 447 (July 5, 2018).

Evidence Central, “[Book of Mormon Evidence: Politeness Formula in Ancient Epistles](#),” September 19, 2020, online at evidencecentral.org.

Moroni 10:4–5 — Moroni’s Promise: Ask God in the Name of Christ (Second Exhortation)

Moroni instructed and exhorted his readers next to “*ask God the Eternal Father in the name of Christ, if these things are not true.*” Using the name of Jesus Christ was sacred and important in Moroni’s mind, as it should be in ours. In 3 Nephi, as the Lord instructed and demonstrated how to administer the sacrament, Jesus himself gave priesthood authority to ask and to do things in his name. The authority to righteously use the name of Jesus Christ, especially in ordinances, was and is a sacred priesthood responsibility. That may be why Moroni waited to the very end (see Moroni 4 and 5) to record the exact

wording for the sacrament prayers—not wanting these prayers over the emblems of Christ’s sacrifice to fall into unworthy hands.

The witness of the Holy Ghost, of course, is crucial to knowing the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon—or for that matter, to knowing any truth by revelation. Moroni 10 is where Moroni promises us that if we will ask God, the Holy Ghost will testify to us of the truthfulness of this ancient scriptural record. We want people who are investigating, or who are having questions, to get to the point where they will pray in faith and actually ask God for an answer to their probing questions. It might help the person seeking answers if she or he understands why and what Moroni was doing at the very end of his book. Here Moroni was putting his personal conclusion, his colophon—his “seal”—on the record. In this case, the form of the seal was to invite you to ask God if it is true. Moroni’s promise was that the Holy Ghost would “seal” or validate the authenticity of the record.

Normally, upon completion of such plates, when a scribe sealed and closed up an important record, he would not authenticate the record by simply stating “I Nephi” or “I Mormon” wrote these things. He would call upon other people to authenticate the record—to be witnesses, to sign their names, and to put their official seal—either a stamped seal or a cylinder seal—on the record to testify, “I validate what is being said.” Put yourself in Moroni’s position. He was all alone. Who was he going to get to serve as a witness?

Providing witnesses for foundational documents was a legal requirement in ancient times as it is today, and Moroni fulfilled that requirement, though not in the traditional manner. His exhortation and promise in Moroni 10:4 provided much more than a testimony-building moment. Ancient Hebrew law required that there be two or three witnesses in order for an article to be legally enforced. In Matthew 18:16, Jesus, referring to the laws such as those in Deuteronomy, chapters 17 and 19, said, “[I]n the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” This practice was extended to legal documents. No bill of divorcement, deed, or will was enforceable without calling the witnesses who had sealed it.

It is interesting that 2 Nephi 27:12 records that there will be three witnesses to the plates that had been delivered to the prophet for translation: “Wherefore, at that day when the book shall be delivered unto the man of whom I have spoken, 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.”

The first edition of the translated Book of Mormon followed the ancient pattern of having the statement of three witnesses authenticate the record. The testimonies of eight

additional witnesses were later added. In subsequent editions of the Book of Mormon, the statements of the witnesses were placed on the page following the introduction to the book, so readers could read the witness testimonies first.

One may well ask how Moroni provided for the witnessing of his completed work. How did he follow traditional practices in the sealing and witnessing of the plates? Whom did he call as witnesses? We know that Moroni, being entirely alone, had no people around to call as his witnesses. Yet, he planned to perform a kind of sealing as explained in Moroni 10:2: “And I seal up these records, after I have spoken a few words by way of exhortation unto you.”

Moroni, performing his final acts as a scribe, named three witnesses who would testify of the truthfulness of what he had written—not in the way that ordinary witnesses might testify, because he had no ordinary witnesses. The three that he called upon are the members of the Godhead. Moroni 10:4 states, “And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask *God, the Eternal Father*, in the name of *Christ*, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the *power of the Holy Ghost*.”

These are the three most reliable witnesses that will repeatedly provide the final legal function of authenticating truth for any era. They are far more reliable than any earthly witnesses. They will testify of the correctness of scriptural records, not only during people’s earth-lives today, but also at the judgment bar. In verse 27, Moroni states that we will know that his record is true and that he did not lie, “for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?”

Thus, Moroni was able to complete the ancient procedures of authentication and verification and thereby proved himself a worthy editor and scribe. The seal on Moroni’s record is greater than that found on any important record, and it is incumbent upon the reader to observe Moroni’s closing and seventh exhortation in verses 24 through 27—to believe and trust the record that he has provided.

Confirmation of truth by the Spirit is the ultimate desire and is of utmost importance when receiving revelation. However, we are told that we need to seek wisdom by study and also by faith. When we are seeking answers or when we are working with people seeking answers, we must use both tools—the Spirit and learning. B. H. Roberts, writing a hundred or so years ago, stated the following in his introduction to a couple of books entitled, *A New Witness for God in America*: “The Holy Ghost will always be the ultimate

source; the most important source of our knowledge. But the clearer the truth can be stated, the greater the opportunity will the Holy Ghost have of bearing witness of the truth of what is being said.” We have to be articulate, specific, and clear about what we are asking of God so that the Holy Ghost can penetrate through and touch a soul who may not initially seem ready.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Will God Manifest the Truth of the Book of Mormon?](#) (Moroni 10:4),” *KnoWhy* 254 (December 16, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Important Was it to Moroni that We Pray about the Book of Mormon?](#) (Moroni 10:4-5),” *KnoWhy* 359 (August 30, 2017).

Robert L. Marrott, “[Witnesses, Law of,](#)” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992), 4:1569–1570.

Moroni 10:6–18 — Moroni Teaches about the Gifts of the Spirit

God blesses us with specific gifts of the Spirit necessary to bring about our own conversion, the conversion of others, and to build the Kingdom of God here on earth. These are the purposes of gifts of the Spirit—not for our own self-aggrandizement; not to satisfy our own curiosity or to prove something because we lack faith.

Moroni discussed the source of spiritual gifts—the Spirit of Christ—as well as their various manifestations. He explained “there are different ways that these gifts are administered; but it is the same God who worketh all in all; and they are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God unto men, to profit them” (Moroni 10:8).

By applying this principle, Moroni helps us understand that we should not confine the expected confirmation of truth to a specific type of spiritual manifestation, but rather should be open to the various ways or gifts through which God communicates inspiration and revelation. Elder David A. Bednar taught, “Revelations are conveyed in a variety of ways, including, for example, dreams, visions, conversations with heavenly messengers, and inspiration. Some revelations are received immediately and intensely; some are recognized gradually and subtly.”

Personal revelation has been a theme of President Russell M. Nelson since the early part of his ministry. He has emphasized the importance of receiving our own personal revelation and has explained that receiving personal revelation is especially crucial for those of us living in these, the latter days. He has stated:

Through personal revelation you can receive your own witness that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, that Joseph Smith is a prophet, and that this is the

Lord’s Church. Regardless of what others may say or do, no one can ever take away a witness borne to your heart and mind about what is true. ... In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.

Moroni certainly understood our day and knew what counsel would be most important.

Further Reading

David A. Bednar, *“The Spirit of Revelation,”* *Ensign*, May 2011 or online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

Russell M. Nelson, *“Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,”* *Ensign*, May 2018 or online at churchofjesuschrist.org

Moroni 10:6–7 — Deny Not the Power of God (Third Exhortation)

Moroni preceded his discussion about the gifts of God with an exhortation to “deny not the power of God,” and later explained that when people are unbelieving, “the power and gifts of God shall be done away” (Moroni 10:24). We must have faith in Jesus Christ before God’s power can reveal truth.

Whatever the timing or method of personal revelation, Moroni declared that God only “worketh by power according to the faith of the children of men” (Moroni 10:7). In all cases, it is faith in Jesus Christ that activates the spiritual witness of truth.

Moroni’s Seven “Deny” Statements in Moroni 10

Block Item	Scripture	Context
Block One		
1	10:6	Nothing that is good denieth the Christ
2	10:7	Deny not the power of God
3	10:8	Deny not the gifts of God
Block Two		
4	10:32	Deny yourselves of all ungodliness
5	10:32	Deny yourselves of all ungodliness

6	10:32	If by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God
7	10:33	If ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Does It Really Mean to Be a Good Person? \(Moroni 10:6\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 499 (January 24, 2019).

Moroni 10:8–16 — Deny Not the Gifts of God—Block One (Fourth Exhortation)

In the context of attesting, testifying, exhorting, and warning in Moroni 10, Moroni uses the word *deny* exactly seven times.

He first uses the word *deny* three times in three verses in addressing his future Lamanite readers, and anyone else who might be listening in.

1. He declares that “nothing that is good *denieth* the Christ” but rather that which is good acknowledgeth that he is (10:6). And then he then exhorts these people:
2. to “*deny not* the power of God” (10:7) and
3. to “*deny not* the gifts of God, ... [which] are given by the *manifestations* of the Spirit of God unto men, to profit them” (10:8).

First and second, people must not deny Christ or the power of God. Third, people must not deny the panoply of the many gifts of God. It is important to recognize that these gifts are manifested in many ways. God, after all, is a God of fullness and abundance.

There are thus many gifts of the Spirit, some of which Moroni listed in verses 8–17. It is interesting, but not coincidental, that the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants all contain sections explaining gifts of the Spirit. The prophet Moroni, the apostle Paul, and the prophet Joseph Smith list these gifts, respectively, in Moroni 10, 1 Corinthians 12, and D&C 46. Obviously, this multiplicity indicates the importance of this topic in order for us to gain and maintain a testimony of Jesus Christ and his gospel. Where else in the world can one go to receive a patriarchal blessing to help recognize and embrace the spiritual blessings God has particularly afforded to us individually?

As readers reach the end of the Book of Mormon, some may have already received a witness of the truthfulness of the record but perhaps may not have recognized it for what it was. Others might be seeking a specific type of spiritual manifestation and yet overlooked how the Spirit works through a number of different manifestations. Those who carefully read

the context of Moroni's promise will more fully understand the wide variety of spiritual manifestations that are given for our benefit. The abundance of these gifts helps us to "*deny not the power of God*" and to "*deny not the gifts of God*" (Moroni 10:7–8).

It is probable that Moroni's teaching about spiritual gifts was triggered by what he himself had learned as he worked on the Nephite record. As he abridged the text of the Book of Mormon, Moroni was undoubtedly touched by the many narratives of faithful people who were blessed with and by gifts of the Spirit. For example, he likely recognized that Nephi, the people of Ammon, and many others had the gift of exceeding great faith. He was familiar with narratives of people who "beheld angels and ministering spirits" — including Nephi and his brothers, Alma the Younger and his companions, the people and their children upon Christ's appearance in Bountiful, and many others. Moroni was intimately familiar with the plates which were full of accounts of people who saw, experienced, and worked "mighty miracles."

Moroni, himself, was blessed with many gifts of the Spirit throughout his lifetime. These things were part of his personal testimony and experience. The Lord blessed Moroni with the gift of "tongues and interpretation of languages" as he worked on the plates in general. He relied on these gifts as he abridged the Jaredite records. Undoubtedly, Moroni recognized and knew that King Mosiah also had these same gifts.

Spiritual gifts are necessary and present in all dispensations of the gospel. Moroni received personal revelation about the Nephite record coming forth in a future day by the gift and power of God. He understood that special spiritual gifts would be necessary for interpreting and translating the record. In addition, Moroni knew that his work would go to the Lamanites, Gentiles, and Jews—people of many languages. Spiritual gifts are indispensable in providing and increasing faith in Jesus Christ and for communicating the word of the Lord and bringing it into the hearts of people everywhere.

Moroni's four other uses of "deny" occur near the end of chapter 10, in verses 32 and 33 (see below).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How did the Book of Mormon Help the Early Saints Understand Spiritual Gifts?](#) (Moroni 10:8)," *KnoWhy* 299 (April 12, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Will God Manifest the Truth of the Book of Mormon?](#) (Moroni 10:4)," *KnoWhy* 254 (December 16, 2016).

Moroni 10:17 — Gifts of the Spirit Come unto Every Man *Severally*

Verse 17 states that “all these gifts come by the Spirit of Christ; and they come unto every man severally, according as he will.” It is not a gift from God if we somehow create these things by ourselves. It is a spiritual gift when it is given by Christ and by God’s will.

What does the word “severally” mean? The phrase “joint and several liability” is familiar legal terminology. People who are “jointly liable” can be sued as a group and, if any one person in the group is found to be in the wrong, each person would pay an equal amount due the victim or plaintiff. However, if the liability is several, then each one of them can be sued individually without involving the entire group or whole partnership. “Severally” is an old way of saying “individually.” “Collectively” or “individually” means the same as “jointly” or “severally.”

For instance, in the Parable of the Talents, before traveling into a far country, a man called his servants together and gave one of his servants one talent, two to another, and five to another— “to every man according to his several ability” (Matthew 25:15).

Moroni was saying that the spiritual gifts are given severally —individually— because God knows who we are. He knows what we can do, what we should do, and what he would like us to have the opportunity to do. It is useless to envy the gifts of others.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Will God Manifest the Truth of the Book of Mormon?](#) (Moroni 10:4),” *KnoWhy* 254 (December 16, 2016).

Moroni 10:18 — Remember That Every Good Gift Cometh from Christ (Fifth Exhortation)

Following Moroni’s list of gifts of the Spirit and his explanation of the origin and nature of gifts, Moroni exhorted the reader to remember that “*every good gift cometh from Christ*” (verse 18). This statement presumes the existence of bad gifts. Indeed, in verse 30, Moroni reminded his readers to “touch not the evil gift.” These evil gifts come from those who do not have other people’s best interests at heart. Think of the Trojan horse given by the Greeks in the Trojan War. “Evil gifts” may initially look enticing or helpful, but they lead down the wrong path or encourage pride.

The Book of Mormon contains many references to the principle of learning by the Spirit, which is done by relying on gifts of the Spirit and not relying on the philosophies of men. For example, in 2 Nephi 9:28–29 Nephi warned of “the evil one” and of “the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men.” He explained:

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.

Although Moroni was speaking predominantly to the Lamanites in verse 18, it is a valid warning for everyone today. The Book of Mormon is a blessing and is truly a gift to anyone who receives it, reads it, and then applies Moroni's promise from Moroni 10:4–5. Receiving and acting upon spiritual gifts may lead to another principle: "by their fruits ye shall know them" (3 Nephi 14:20). By the fruits that are borne of "good gifts," we can recognize and harvest the benefits or abilities that they generate.

Moroni 10:19 — Remember God Is the Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever (Sixth Exhortation)

Moroni's sixth exhortation is to remember that *God always remains the same, meaning he is constant in keeping his covenants*. God's promises are sure—he will keep his side of the bargain.

Covenants are a very important focus of the Book of Mormon. Covenants are mentioned in the title page of this book of scripture. One of the main reasons the entire record was written was so people will know God's covenants and will know that God is the same today as he was when he made each covenant. Moroni's themes fold back on each other.

President Spencer W. Kimball was fond of teaching that the most important word in the dictionary could be "remember." Kimball believed that "because we have made covenants with God, our greatest need is to 'remember' them."

Further Reading

Evidence Central, "[Book of Mormon Evidence: To Remember and to Forget](#)," September 19, 2020, online at evidencecentral.org.

Henry B. Eyring, "[Always Remember Him](#)," *Liahona*, February 2018, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

Moroni 10:20–23 — Faith, Hope and Charity

Moroni's writings in these verses contain a sequence that illustrates the rising effect of faith, hope, and charity that leads, in steps, to positive eternal consequences. This upwardly rising list is followed by an equivalent downward spiral that transpires if one does not have faith—a spiral that leads to despair because of iniquity. Moroni does not go into detail as he mentions the necessity of having faith, hope, and charity, probably because he has already included his father's lengthy discourse on this grand trilogy in Moroni 7.

But Moroni does add an important summation of the necessary co-existence of these three (in verse 20), and then states (in the opposite order) the necessary requirement of having charity, hope, and faith (verses 21, 22, and 23). He stresses that these three are both necessary and sufficient. One can be “saved in the kingdom of God” if and only if one has all three.

And he also quotes, as his father had done, a saying of Jesus that we don’t otherwise have. Mormon had quoted this saying as follows, “And Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall *have power* to do whatsoever *thing* is expedient *in me*” (Moroni 7:33). Moroni then intensified that saying to read: “And Christ *truly* said *unto our fathers*: If ye have faith ye *can* do *all things* which are expedient *unto me*” (10:23).

Moroni 10:24–27 — Remember All These Things (Seventh Exhortation)

Initially, Moroni’s message in chapter 10 was directed to the Lamanites (verses 1–23). However, in verse 24, Moroni turned his attention to “all the ends of the earth.” Expounding further on the gifts of God, he warned that if the gifts of God were to be “done away,” it would be because of unbelief, and unrighteousness. This is followed by his seventh exhortation in verse 27. Speaking still to the entire world, he explained why we must remember:

... for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?

Among his exhortations in chapter 10, Moroni encouraged his readers to “remember” four times. The theme of “remembering” permeates the Book of Mormon. The first three of Moroni’s appeals to remember were directed at the reader to remember a particular good, loving, or divine trait of the Father and Christ—including the advice to remember that they will not change (verses 3, 18, and 19). The fourth was an injunction to remember what Moroni had said—to act, obey, and accept Christ.

Both “remember” and “forget” are words through which one may gainfully study the whole Book of Mormon. These two words are used repeatedly throughout the record. King Benjamin said, “And now, O man, remember, and perish not” (Mosiah 4:30). There is more to remembering than just being able to memorize something, like a multiplication table. “Remembering” in the sense of memorizing something may be helpful with certain points of the gospel, but there is more to remembering than just recalling memorized material. Moroni does not direct us to “memorize” or “recall.” He exhorts us to “remember.”

The Hebrew word behind “remember” is the word for “obey.” When you really remember something, you obey it. How many mothers have said, “Remember what I said?” Mothers were not asking, “Can you repeat back to me what I said.” They were asking, “Why did you not do it?” The same meaning accompanies the Hebrew understanding of the word “hear.” “Hear, O Israel!” does not just mean to listen and let it go in one ear and out the other. There is an element of obeying when you really “hear” and “remember.”

Sister Julie Beck, who served as Relief Society General President, gave a talk at General Conference that explained the process of “remembering.” The word “member” means “a part of something.” To “re-member” means “to put the parts back together.” A memory of one particular experience with the Spirit may be vague. However, by consciously putting together one memory after another—adding each spiritual experience one piece at a time—you recognize the validity and strength of God’s dealings in your life. This process builds and strengthens testimony. That is remembering in a very active way. This is what Moroni wanted us to do when he exhorted us to remember. He was not asking us to memorize or make a list. He was asking us to recall and then to put back together and feel again what we experienced every time a good gift came to us. He was giving us a recipe for building, strengthening, and maintaining our testimony of Jesus Christ.

Further Reading

Evidence Central, “[Book of Mormon Evidence: To Remember and to Forget](#),” September 19, 2020, online at evidencecentral.org.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why is the Book of Mormon’s Historical Authenticity So Important?](#) (Moroni 10:27),” *KnowWhy* 480 (October 30, 2018).

Julie B. Beck, “[Remembering, Repenting and Changing](#),” *Ensign*, May 2007 or online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

Moroni 10:30–31 — Touch Not the Unclean Thing, as Jesus and Isaiah Commanded

Moroni was not the first to warn, “touch not the unclean thing.” This was a quotation from Isaiah 52:11 where he stated, “Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.” This phrase was used in Alma 5:57: “Be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things.” Jesus quoted Isaiah almost verbatim at Bountiful in 3 Nephi 20:41. Moroni, then, was not the first to touch on the theme, “do not touch the unclean thing.” There is plenty of material throughout the Book of Mormon for a study of that theme. In his summary, Moroni was teaching principles that had been demonstrated and taught throughout the record.

In verse 31, Moroni followed that quotation by stating, “awake and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem,” quoting from Isaiah 52:1–2. Moroni continued with “and put on thy beautiful

garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever." He blended three passages from Isaiah 52 and Isaiah 54, all of which Jesus had quoted in 3 Nephi chapters 20 and 22. Moroni was echoing the words of Jesus as he invited us to come unto Jesus. He was pulling his teachings from the strong themes of the Savior and the earlier prophets.

In addition to incorporating these important concepts in this powerful conclusion in verse 31, Moroni also included phrases from Isaiah and 3 Nephi in the Title Page, which was the last thing written by Moroni. The Title Page is included as the first page in modern versions of the Book of Mormon, even though it was probably the last of Moroni's writings. It mentions the Lord's confounding the language of the people of Jared and gives reassurance that the House of Israel "are not cast off forever." The "covenants of the Lord" are also mentioned on the title page. In Moroni's summary in verse 31, he reassures the reader that people will "no more be confounded" and that "the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O House of Israel, may be fulfilled." In other words, the House of Israel will not be cast off forever.

Moroni 10:30–32 — Come unto Christ and Be Perfected by His Grace (Eighth Exhortation)

In these verses, Moroni presents a sequence of steps to attain the goal of coming unto Christ and being perfected in him. This is a checklist for Celestial behavior.

In order to become perfected, Moroni explains that one must deny oneself of all ungodliness, which is a path to not denying the power of God. By doing these things, we will love God with all our might, mind and strength. Jesus identified this as the greatest commandment. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." This was part of the Law of Moses delineated in Deuteronomy 6:5 and was reiterated by Jesus to the Pharisee in Matthew 22:37.

By taking these measures, the grace of Christ will be sufficient for perfection or completeness. The Lord's grace is given unconditionally, but it will only be effective and sufficient after these preliminary steps have been taken. His grace is always there. But Moroni powerfully says in these verses, that unless these outlined steps are taken—denying all ungodliness, recognizing the power of God, and loving God—the grace of Christ will not be sufficient. Members of the Church believe that grace is always there—but, like the light in a room, it does not do us much good as long as our eyes are closed.

What does it mean to be perfected in Christ? The word "perfected" means "finished." The word for "perfected" in Hebrew means "to be at peace, finally settled, everything is calm." The Hebrew greeting, "Shalom," comes from that same root. In Greek, the words

“to be perfected” mean “to come across a finish line.” The concept does not mean that everything is over or that a person is totally finished. It means a person has finished a race or finished a course—one has come to an endpoint.

After going through the ordinances of the gospel and following Moroni’s steps, one is perfected in a sense—one is finished, but not yet a perfect being. The course is completed. Paul used this when he said that he had finished the course set before him (2 Timothy 4:7).

Elder Bednar has addressed this matter:

We will not attain a state of perfection in this life but we can and should press forward with faith in Christ along the straight and narrow path and make steady progress toward our eternal destiny. The Lord’s pattern for spiritual development is line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. Small, steady, incremental, spiritual improvements are the steps the Lord would have us take. Preparing to walk guiltless before God is one of the primary purposes of mortality and the pursuit of the lifetime. It does not result from sporadic spurts of intense, spiritual activity.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Does It Mean to Love God with ‘All Thy Mind’?](#) (Moroni 10:32),” *KnoWhy* 517 (May 23, 2019).

David A. Bednar, “[Clean Hands and a Pure Heart](#)” *Ensign*, November 2007, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

Brent J. Schmidt, [Relational Grace](#) (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 158–160.

Moroni 10:32–33 — Deny Not: Block 2

Four final exhortations to “deny not” are all included in verses 32 and 33. After having expanded his range of audience to include people in “all the ends of the earth” (10:24), Moroni goes on to exhort everyone to “come unto Christ and lay hold upon every good gift.” He then places the next two “denys” at the center of a small inverted parallelism or chiasm in 10:32:

4. “Come unto [1] Christ,

and [2] be perfected in him,

and [3] *deny* yourselves of all ungodliness;

5. and if ye shall [3] *deny* yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, minds, and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace

ye may [2] be perfect
in [1] Christ.”

And then in 10:32–33, he doubly intensifies his final point, with a direct parallelism:

6. “And if [4] by the grace of God

ye are [5] perfect

in [6] Christ, ye can in nowise

[7] *deny* the power of God” (10:32).

7. “And again, if [4] ye by the grace of God

are [5] perfect

in [6] Christ,

and [7] *deny not* his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ” (10:33).

Having completed his seven-fold emphasis on the word “deny,” Moroni signals to all readers that everyone should make special efforts to avoid ever wrongly denying the manifestations of God’s spirit unto us.

Obviously, the exhortation to “deny not” occupies a profoundly central place here in Moroni 10, as it has throughout the Book of Mormon. It was a key concern for Mormon as well as for Moroni. The word deny (denied, denieth, or denying) is used 83 times in the Book of Mormon, more than twice as often as it is found in the Bible.

In trying to unpack fully why Moroni chose to end his writings with this particular set of instructions and warnings regarding “denying,” it helps to make use of a full set of analytic tools. For example, here are some reflections in this regard that I find most intriguing and beneficial.

Why Seven Times?

Here is yet another significant set of seven in scripture. This number may convey several meanings. It is an apocalyptic number of completion (7 vials, 7 trumpets, 7 seals, etc.), and thus is appropriate here at the completion of the Book of Mormon. Note also the importance of sealing in Moroni 10:2, so perhaps Moroni intended these 7 words to function in way as his fully authoritative personal seal. Seven was also a number of priestly sanctification, especially with the 7-fold sprinklings of the blood in Leviticus (and note the mention of the blood of Christ in 10:33). It also signified power and victory, as Joshua conquered Jericho marching around the city seven times, blowing trumpets, rams’

horns. The usage in Moroni 10 seems purposeful, to herald in, as Moroni says, Christ's coming in triumph through the air to meet us at the judgment bar of God (10:34).

It would also seem purposeful that these negative 7 *denies* are counterbalanced with precisely fourteen (7 x 2) appearances in Moroni 10 of the most positive word, Christ. In effect, Moroni is saying that the grace of God, perfecting us in Christ, both in heaven and earth, will outdo *by double* any inclination we might have to deny the power or the gifts or the goodness of God.

Legalistically, How the Idea of "Denial" Accentuates the Legal Nature of Moroni 10

Realizing that the word "deny" is used often in legal contexts, especially in the courtroom challenges or judicial interrogations reported in the cases of Sherem, Korihor, and others in the Book of Mormon, this may also help us notice the full force and effect of the judicial nature of Moroni 10. Here Moroni deals pointedly with God's justice, with our ultimate courtroom appearance before the judgment bar of God. In Moroni's exhortations that we "deny not the power" and "deny not the gifts" of God, strong threads of legalisms can also be found. This legal register intensifies the seriousness of denying things that should not be denied, as the following consideration of Moroni 10 through this lens repeatedly shows.

1. There is the legal context of sealing. In ancient legal practice known in Lehi's day, as we can tell from Jeremiah 32, in finalizing a legal document, the document would be written with one part open and the other part sealed so that the document could be opened someday by an authorized judge to determine the validity of the terms of the document. Thus, Jeremiah buried a deed of acquisition in a jar to be available in years to come to prove the truth of his prophecies and make them undeniable.
2. From other sources, including actual Hebrew or Aramaic documents, three witnesses were required, and they would impress their private seals on clay or wax attached to the document as their affirmation that the document was legally authorized and binding. As Moroni has no other humans that he can call as his witnesses, he calls upon the most undeniable witnesses possible, namely God the Eternal Father, Christ, and the Holy Ghost, to manifest the truth of his record, with certitude, to all who would know in this life or who will know in the world to come.
3. Accurately discerning the truth has practical, philosophical, and theological importance in ordinary life, but it is also the primary reason for calling witnesses in a judicial proceeding. Notice that Moroni avers not only that we may know by this means "the truth" but also may know that which is "just" (10:6), another indication that Moroni is thinking of eternal justice and judgment in his concluding affidavit.

4. Seeing the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost in their principal role as witnesses stems directly from the opening words of the resurrected Christ in 3 Nephi 11. Of all the things that he could have said about the Godhead, Jesus there explained their reciprocal roles of mutual witnessing and corroboration. Each member of the Godhead is sustained and validated by the testimony of the two others, so that in the mouth of two witnesses each of them, and all things, can be established. Jesus said, "And I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me" (11:32). It was Jesus's foundational logic of legitimacy that he bore record of his doctrine from the Father, and if anyone believes in Christ, he also believes in the Father, and unto him "will the Father bear record of [Jesus], for [the Father] will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost" (11:35). Moroni invokes precisely this theological understanding of the divine order of justice as he buried his sealed record and promised that all may know epistemologically the truth of that record as well as the ethical goodness of it by the power and gifts of God, who bears witness of the Holy Ghost by giving manifestations of the Spirit.

5. Moroni next mentions ten gifts of the Spirit, arranging them in five pairs. Perhaps he has the structure of the Ten Commandments in mind here, with their two tables of five each. Under the law, the Ten Commandments will be used in the heavenly court, and what we, the defendants or the accused, can offer in our behalf is the evidence of all the gifts that we have accepted, and not denied. For unto those who have received in few things will be given more, but from those who have rejected or refused will be taken. Thus, it seems that Moroni lists these gifts here not only because he knows these gifts personally, but also that they are the kinds of gifts that everyone can seek after and obtain. These gifts come to each person separately, meaning individually and personally, "according as he will" (17), meaning according to the desires of our hearts, and thus they are the evidence that reveals our inner character and spirit. As gifts of the Spirit are evidenced in our lives, we are proven to be Christ's followers.

6. Moroni then exhorts the Lamanites to remember that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. In a legal context this can mean that he can be absolutely counted on to judge righteously and to always keep his promises (10:19).

7. Moroni next summarizes briefly his father's words on faith, hope, and charity, now in the context of legally qualifying someone to be admitted into the presence and kingdom of God.

8. Finally, in speaking to his first audience, Moroni introduces into evidence the veracity of Christ's own testimony: "And Christ *truly* said unto *our* fathers: If ye have faith you can

do all things which are expedient unto me" (10:23), thus concluding his adjuration to the Lamanites.

9. Turning his attention to his second audience, to all the ends of the earth, Moroni then comments on his depositing of the record, entering it into the heavenly court's record, and by giving his deposition of its integrity, as he testifies as its final scribe and custodian. Here again, in speaking to the universal audience, we find many broader legal or jurisprudential elements.

10. Moroni then inveighs two conditional curses upon all people, using the traditional "Wo," or curse formula:

First, "Wo unto you if the power and gifts of God shall be done away among you because of your unbelief," but Moroni adds here a saving clause, namely allowing for the condition that even if only one person has spiritual gifts, that's still good, because it means that faith, hope and charity have not completely passed away (10:24–25).

Second, "Wo unto them who shall do these things away [or in other words, deny the gifts of the Spirit and power of God], and die in their sins." But again there is a saving proviso, namely that the curse will not have effect if one repents, touches not the evil gift, and comes unto Christ.

11. Then, in addition to testifying for a second time that he speaks this according to the words of Christ (10:23, 26), Moroni offers two absolute declarations that he is telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth: First, "I lie not" (10:26), and second, "You will see I lie not" (10:27).

12. Twice he situates the listeners before the judgment seat of God: "for ye shall see me at the bar of God" (10:27), and a I will "meet you before the bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge" (10:34). Whether the judgment bar is pleasing or pleading (the spelling of this word in the Original Manuscript is questionable) is quite beside the point. Obviously, it will be pleasing for Moroni who expects to find himself fully vindicated, while for those who meet him there it may or may not be so pleasing but rather, for some of them, they will be found pleading.

13. At that bar, twice Moroni announces that he plans to call God as his witness. God will be asked to answer Moroni's question and answer: "Did I not declare?" and God will show that "what I have written is true" (10:29)

14. Twice Moroni talks about apprehending and producing evidence: Say "yes" to *laying hold* on every good gift, but say "no" to even touching the evil gift or the unclean thing (10:30). Laying hold on or possessing these good gifts will be an advantage in court, as

these bring forth their evidences of good, just, and true works. But if people have refused these gifts and instead have defiled themselves with evil or unholy things, those things will surely be evidence testifying against themselves.

15. Interestingly, Moroni still sees merely touching something unholy as sufficient to transfer impurity, apparently a holdover from the ritual purity system as it was understood in ancient Israel. Perhaps, conversely, he now also associated the transfer of purity and power with touching, as he knows of the times when the people touched the resurrected Lord, when he touched each child one by one (3 Nephi 17:21), and “touched with his hand” each of his disciples and “gave them power to give the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 18:37), and in the same manner did the Nephite elders ordain priests and teachers by laying their hands upon them (Moroni 3:2).

16. What will then hopefully be the favorable legal verdict and order from this heavenly court is announced by Moroni in advance in a beautiful couplet: “awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion” (10:31).

17. The covenant of God is mentioned twice, first attesting that the legal covenants of the Eternal Father will be fulfilled (10:31), and second, that we may by the grace of God become perfect in Christ through the shedding of the blood of Christ, in fulfillment of the covenant of the Father (10:33).

Perhaps these many doublets are all here to invoke the unstated but fundamental talonic principle that surely operates in this divine court, namely that if we have denied or refused the Christ and his gifts on earth, he must deny or renounce us before God in heaven.

18. Thus, the conditions of a favorable judgment are then given: “Deny yourselves of all ungodliness” and “love God with all your might, mind, and strength” (10:32), which is the first and the greatest of all the commandments.

19. Finally, the fulfillment of the promise of sanctification, holiness, and being without spot is certified, both “in the covenant of the Father,” and “through the shedding of the blood of Christ,” and “unto the remission of [our] sins” (10:33).

Linguistically, There Are Many Meanings for the Word “Deny”

To succeed, it is most important, as Moroni repeatedly says, for us to “deny not,” in any way, shape or form. Linguistically, it helps to identify all that it might actually mean to “deny” something or someone. The English word “deny” comes from the Latin *de-nego*, or *denare*, literally meaning “to not say yes.” The word “deny,” whether in English, or in the Hebrew (which is *kay-khash*) or the Greek (*arneomai*) which stand behind the word “deny” in the KJV, has many strong meanings, at least a dozen, all of which can be

instructive in reading Moroni 10. All of these commonly associated meanings appear to have meant something important to Moroni. Considering them all can help us can grasp all that Moroni is trying to tell us.

1. The word may mean to declare something not true or to declare something false *propositionally*. Thus, Moroni's instruction that we deny not the spirit would mean we should not say that the affirmations of the Spirit are false. Moroni, of course, had preferred to be killed rather than deny or declare as false his testimony of Christ. This veracity, he said, would be borne out by the validation of his words by the Lord God himself, who will say at the Judgment, "did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man?" (10:27). In that way, all will know propositionally that Moroni has lied not (10:26).

2. The word may also mean to deny the existence of something *ontologically*, such as by asserting that the power of God and the manifestations of the Spirit are imaginary or fictitious, thus nullifying their existence. For Moroni, the existence of Christ was beyond dispute, although he knew that many people in his own day, as well as in future days, would still deny this. But Moroni had seen Christ, and he was absolutely confident that all people will meet him at the judgment bar of God, and so a denial in an ontological sense was also to be prohibited. This sense is found explicitly in Moroni 10:6: good denieth not the Christ, but acknowledgeth *that he is*.

3. The Latin etymology of the word deny conveys a connotation of pushing away from. In other words, one denies to oneself the good gifts of God when one *rejects or refuses* to welcome or allow them or the Spirit into one's life. The Greek *arneomai*, can mean to refuse an inheritance, or recline to be useful, blindly turning away from that which is fortunate. In this sense, Moroni punctuates his admonition to deny not the gifts of God with the emphatic reassurance that "they are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God unto man, to *profit* them" (10:8). In this sense, Moroni had spent his life hoping that those who oppose him would no longer choose to push the gospel and the spirit away, but rather would voluntarily "come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift" (10:30), and not refuse or push them away.

4. One also may deny someone or something to others by refusing to *openly acknowledge* those things. In this sense, an open denial or repudiation of the gifts becomes a public action and not just a personal abnegation. Moroni had seen such denials in the public actions of many of his recalcitrant brethren who, for example, denied members blessings of the spirit by propounding and implementing incorrect practices, such as infant baptism.

5. One can also deny *by withholding something or not affording it to others*. Understood this way, one would deny the gifts and power of God by seeing the needs of others for

priesthood blessings or for encouraging validation of spiritual experiences and yet by discouraging or holding back the facilitation of the receipt of those gifts by those in need. In this vein, Moroni advises all to be generous and charitable, for “except he have charity ye can in nowise be saved in the kingdom of God” (10:21). This problem becomes even more extreme when one refuses to grant a specific request made by one in need, turning the spiritual beggar away, thus choosing to deny such a request.

6. There is also a *relational* sense in which one may deny one’s loyalty to someone else, by not admitting familiarity with or knowledge of that person. Thus, one would deny the gifts of God by failing to acknowledge openly that the gifts came *from God*, to recognize his hand in all things, and to thank him for those gifts. The Greek *arneomai*, which means “deny,” is often used in a legal context, and means to personally deny, disown, decline, resist, or reject, to renounce a duty or office. It often implies turning away from “a previous relationship of obedience and fidelity.” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1:470).

7. In a legal sense, one might negate or deny a contractual or covenant relationship *simply by saying no*. Jesus said, in a covenant-making context, let your speech be yes, yes or no, no, and the Latin word *denego* literally means saying no and not yes in a covenant making context. Thus, Moroni’s mention of “the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins” at the end of chapter 10 (in v. 33, see also v. 31) might then be the ultimate outcome of denying the gifts, particularly those relational blessings that are extended by the Father to his children as beneficiaries through his eternal covenant.

8. Similarly, either party to a promise may deny himself or herself by *acting in contradiction to that promise*. 2 Timothy assures that God himself cannot act in contradiction to his character or promises, which would be to deny himself. Moroni, somewhat similarly, works with this same concept as he exhorts readers to remember that God “is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that all these gifts [of which Moroni has spoken], which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the unbelief of the children of men” (10:19). Moroni’s point here is not to make an unhelpful theological statement that God is unchanging, impassive, and immobile, but rather to reassure positively that God will not and cannot walk away from the gifts of the Holy Ghost which Jesus promised or bestowed, either himself or through his twelve empowered and ordained disciples.

9. Finally, there are senses in which one may *turn away from a bad thing*, such as in denying yourself of all ungodliness (as Moroni says twice in 10:32 that we should do). One might abstain from or forego some temporal good, sacrificially denying oneself that optional benefit for some higher good. But one should not deny oneself something that one has

been commanded to do, such as to seek the gifts of the spirit or to believe, as that would be to deny the faith.

Judging by his choice of words throughout this chapter, Moroni may well have had all nine of these meanings in mind. They all explain to us ways in which we should assiduously guard against ever denying the gifts or power of God. Just as King Benjamin could not state all the ways in which one can commit sin (Mosiah 4:29), we cannot say all the ways in which we can deny the powers and gifts of God. This topic was obviously of urgent importance in Moroni's mind. We would do well to check ourselves to be sure that we do not deny anything improperly. Otherwise, if we do not watch ourselves, our thoughts, our words, and our deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in faith, even unto the end of our lives, we must perish (see Mosiah 4:30).

Moroni 10:33 — Sanctification Comes through Christ

The scriptures teach that no unclean thing may enter into the presence of God, but Moroni commented on an additional benefit of becoming perfected in Christ:

[I]f ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then ye are sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye may become holy, without spot.

What an invitation! What a wonderful, enabling instruction on how to receive the grace of Christ—be perfected in him, made holy, and without spot; all of which will qualify us to abide in his holy presence.

One can truly enjoy the spirit of Moroni's distillation of everything that he was trying to convey. It is inspiring to observe how the principles that we encounter at the end of the Book of Mormon have been taught throughout the record, how the way had been prepared, and how the groundwork had been laid all along so that Moroni could tie it together for a meaningful conclusion. There is hardly a single verse in the whole Book of Mormon that is not somehow directed at channeling the reader to these concluding points. It is a brilliantly superb summation of the entire Book of Mormon and, in and of itself, it is a truly remarkable, communicative conclusion and composition.

Moroni 10:34 — Moroni Finally Invokes the Name Jehovah

Moroni's thoughts completely turned to Jesus Christ and to the Father as he was putting the final stamp of divine imprimatur and validity upon the record.

The name "Jehovah" only appears one time in the whole Book of Mormon, except for places where it is in a quotation from Isaiah or some other ancient prophet. Why is that

the case? Why would Moroni wait to the very end and say, “Until ... I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead”?

One possibility for using the name “Jehovah” very sparingly is that the name of Jehovah was extremely sacred to the ancient Israelites. In attempts to carefully observe the commandment not to take God’s name in vain, they did not speak openly using the name of God, considering his name to be very sacred. This is one reason why there was confusion among the Jews and others about who Jesus was, who Jehovah was, who Elohim was, and who God the Father was.

Every year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest had the name of Jehovah (YHWH - “Yaweh”) written on his forehead. On this day, as the High Priest performed the atoning sacrifices, he was acting in the place of the Savior, who would perform the real eternal atonement. Under the Law of Moses, so sacred was the name “Jehovah,” it could only be pronounced out loud on the Day of Atonement. Otherwise, when the Israelites spoke of Jehovah, they would use a euphemism of some kind in place of using the name “Jehovah” – using the title “Lord,” among others.

In King Benjamin’s Speech, the phrase “Lord God” is mentioned ten times. “Ten” was considered the number of perfection. King Benjamin said the name or title of God a perfect number of times. A High Priest could mention God’s name on the Day of Atonement, but he had to mention it out loud in the prayers a perfect number of times. The name “Jehovah” appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls in a few places. Where the name “Jehovah” does appear, the ancient Hebrew scribes would not spell out the four letters of the name in Hebrew (JHWH). Instead, they put four dots to remind people that they should not say the sacred name out loud.

When Moroni got to the very end of the Nephite record, he put the very sacred name “Jehovah” as the final punctuation mark on his text, sealing it with the name of God. The sacred name written in the Nephite record made the record itself sacred. Moroni felt that he could safely and respectfully write the name of Jehovah because he then buried the record in the ground so no unauthorized person or natural event would damage it. There would be no risk of someone reading the holy name of Jehovah and misusing it until God brought the record forth. This indicated the reverence that Moroni had for Jesus Christ and for his name, Jehovah.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Alma Repeat the Lord’s Name Ten Times While in Prayer?](#) (Alma 31:26),” *KnoWhy* 139 (July 8, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Does an Angel Reveal the Name of Christ to Jacob? (2 Nephi 10:3)," *KnoWhy* 36 (February 18, 2016).

Moroni 10:34 — The Pleasing Bar

Moroni ended his words by bidding farewell until he is "brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead." There has been discussion about Moroni's use of the word "pleasing." How can the judgment bar be pleasing?

For the righteous, accountability and judgment before God is going to be a pleasant experience. The word "pleasing" is very powerful in this context and setting. This same phrase is also found in Jacob's farewell recorded in Jacob 6:13. Moroni knew the cultural norms for saying goodbye—indeed, Jacob's and Moroni's farewells are very similar.

Believing the word "pleading" gives the phrase stronger textural weight, Royal Skousen, in his critical edition, suggests that the phrasing might also possibly read, "pleading bar of Christ." And indeed, as shown above, in a courtroom setting, people do plead for mercy and for justice.

But since the word "pleasing" is used in both Moroni 10:34 and Jacob 6:13, it is a little hard to imagine the same "hearing error" occurring twice during the translation process between Joseph Smith and his scribe. Thus, the word "pleasing" need not be emended.

Moreover, Jacob used the word "pleasing" six times in his short, sensitive book (see John W. Welch Notes, p. 280), and it appears a total of twelve times in the Book of Mormon. The word "pleading" appears only once in all the Book of Mormon, in a non-judicial setting in Alma 55:23, when captured soldiers are pleading for mercy. So, it is more likely that Moroni was using the fairly widespread word "pleasing" or "pleased," if not the more particular expression "pleasing bar" used by Jacob. The word "pleasing" was a familiar piece of traditional Nephite language.

It is also important to note that God is going to be both just *and* merciful, which seeming paradox transcends the powers usually open to judges on earth. That may also have influenced Moroni in calling it the "pleasing bar." Alma 42 makes it very clear that God is both just and merciful, and that the one cannot exist without the other. Understanding God as a merciful judge provides us with great reassurance.

Moroni's life was dedicated to bringing all people and all readers of this treasured book of scripture to that threshold—come unto Christ, remember, ask, believe, and come unto the Savior to receive all promised blessings. What a wonderful privilege it is to be able to talk about this beautiful text. The Holy Ghost bears witness that this book is true.

Further Reading

John S. Welch, "Keep the Old Wine in Old Wineskins: The Pleasing (Not Pleading) Bar of God," *FARMS Review* 18 no. 1 (2006): 139–147. It is true that one finds "a variety of examples of 'pleading bar' on the internet, all dating back to the 1600s," referring to a cage or limited area in English courtrooms where accused criminals were barricaded (hence the English word "bar" or "barrier"), where they were allowed to state in court their "plea" of guilty or innocent. See Royal Skousen, "The Language of the Original Text of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2018), 87–88. But, as I would add in friendly reply, that British and American colonial courtroom feature was not a part of any Nephite or Hebraic places of criminal judgment known to Moroni, and much less, one would think, a feature in God's heavenly place of our final judgment.

In the End, Seeing Moroni 10 as a Summation of Moroni's Book of Moroni

To understand why Moroni structured his final comments the way he did, it helps to look back, one final time, at the overall composition of the book of Moroni as a whole. Seeing what he has included in chapters 1 to 9, emphatically punctuates his parting words in chapter 10.

For at least 36 years Moroni had lived in excruciating terror, not only of loneliness but also of fear of being put to death for refusing to deny Christ. He opens his final book by emphasizing that he has not made himself known to the Lamanites, "lest they should destroy me." Because of their enmity "they put to death every Nephite that will not deny the Christ" (Moroni 1:1–2). And despite all that he must go through as a consequence and everything else he might gain by doing so, Moroni absolutely attests, "and I, Moroni, will not deny the Christ" (1:3). This being his constant driving force, he makes this ground of his very being the dominant *Leitmotif* of his concluding book.

Knowing and planning that his final statement would culminate in his exhortations about how people might know things through the power of the Holy Ghost, so that they would know that which is good and does not deny the Christ (10:6), and desiring to warn people not to deny the gifts administered by the Spirit of God so that they could become perfected, finished and completed themselves and "in nowise deny the power of God" (10:32), Moroni began his book purposefully in a very deliberate way. In chapter 2, he lays the foundation for Moroni 10:4 by disclosing the words of Christ, which were spoken in 3 Nephi 18 as he gave them the power to give the Holy Ghost.

Then, in chapter 3, he told the manner in which elders were ordained "to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of *faith* on his name to the end" (3:3), and he made a point of emphasizing the fact that they were called and ordained "according to the *gifts* and callings of God unto men" and that they were ordained "by the

power of the Holy Ghost which was in them” (3:4). Then, in order that all members of the church might “always have [Christ’s] Spirit to be with them,” which are the words with which both of the sacrament prayers end (4:3; 5:2), Moroni set forth the priesthood directions for the administration of the bread of the wine, in remembrance of the body which he had shown them and of the *blood* which was shed for them (see 10:33).

Then, after explaining the requirements for baptism, Moroni explained how the church follow the directives of Christ at the end of 3 Nephi 18, by which the church maintained a faithful membership, which required three witnesses (Moroni 6:7), in order to call a person to repentance, so that their meetings could then proceed “after the manner of the workings of the Spirit, and by the power of the Holy Ghost,” which led them either to preach or exhort, or to pray or to supplicate, or to sing in joy and praise of God (6:9).

Readers may wonder why Moroni has placed these treasured ecclesiastical and liturgical instructions at the beginning of his final farewell. But their emphasis on facilitating and protecting the gifts of the Holy Ghost clearly seem purposefully aimed at laying the groundwork for Moroni’s final exhortations about asking for and experiencing the gift of the Holy Ghost, perfection in Christ, and the fulfillments of the covenants of God, the Eternal Father (10:31, 33).

And then one may also wonder why Moroni then pulls out of his satchel three letters that he has treasured all these years, that were written to him by his father about 70, 60, and 40 years earlier. In the first letter, Moroni 7:17, Mormon speaks of how “the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; ... 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 that it is of God. But whatsoever thing persuaded men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil” (7:16–17). The obvious relationships between these words and Moroni’s statements in chapter 10 about knowing the truth of all things by the power of the Holy Ghost and denying not the power and gifts of God, as well as his restatement of the triad of faith, hope, and charity, prepare the reader to connect these precedents and to recognize and embrace Moroni’s powerful exhortations and concluding invitations.

And likewise, Moroni chapter 8, about the lamentable rise of the practice of infant baptism, also includes a four-fold warning regarding this practice as a denial of the gift and power of the atonement of Christ. Mormon’s words here find several echoes in Moroni 10: “God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity. Little children cannot repent; wherefore, it is awful wickedness to *deny* the pure *mercies of God* unto them; ... But it is mockery before God,

denying the mercies of Christ, and the power of his Holy Spirit, ... and they are *denying* the Holy Ghost" (8:18–19, 23, 28). Moroni carries this torch forward, stringently warning people to "deny not."

One may also wonder why Moroni included the gruesome chapter 9, about the total depravity of both Nephites and Lamanites obsessed in the convulsions of terminal warfare. Perhaps he did this for two reasons: first, simply to help us understand the reality of the fears that he had lived with for 36 years, all because he would not deny Christ; and second because, in spite of all those ugly atrocities, Moroni had clung to his father's final blessing to him, that "May Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind for ever. And may the grace of God the Father, whose throne is high in the heavens, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who sit on the right hand of his power, until all things shall become subject under him, be, and abide with you forever. Amen" (9:25–26). Moroni's final blessing in Moroni 10:30–34 extends unto all the ends of the earth the gist of these very personal words of comfort and encouragement that he had received from his own father.

Of Endings and Beginnings: Where to Start?

Steve Walker has said it well: "I find the final section of the Book of Mormon to be particularly engaging. Like any good climax, it tends to be the most intense part of the book. It is arguably the most significant section. This culmination of a thousand-year chronicle puts the whole volume into overview mode—the summary at the end of the book that encapsulates what has mattered most. T. S. Eliot observed that 'what we call the beginning is often the end / and to make an end is to make a beginning. / The end is where we start from.' Endings reorient us." (Steven C. Walker, "Last Words," in *The Reader's Book of Mormon*, ed. Robert Reese and Eugene England, 7 [Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2008], pp. x-xi, quoting "Little Gidding," in *Four Quartets* [London: Faber and Faber, 1942]). And so it is with Moroni 10. It reorients us. The end is where we really start.

And indeed, as we learn where the Book of Mormon was bound and determined, from the beginning, to end, we can now look backward to see how Mormon and Moroni have carefully brought us to this all-important conclusion. More than summarizing all that has been said before, these endings tell us Mormon's and Moroni's concerns that shaped their book. Those concerns of the Lord, made plain in Moroni's masterful final ending, indeed have masterminded the entire Book of Mormon project from its outset.