

CHAPTER 3

1 Nephi 6–11

Introduction

Nephi wrote to persuade men to come unto Jesus Christ (see 1 Nephi 6:3–4). While studying 1 Nephi 6–11, seek to understand how Nephi’s writings fulfill this purpose. In particular, note how the vision of the tree of life testifies of the love of God and the mission of the Savior. Nephi received this vision as a result of his righteous desires and willingness to be obedient. As you align your desires and actions with the will of the Lord like Nephi, you can also receive personal revelation “by the power of the Holy Ghost” (1 Nephi 10:19).



Commentary

1 Nephi 6:4. “The Fulness of Mine Intent”

- Nephi’s motive for writing was to bring people to Jesus Christ so they could be saved. President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) explained how the Book of Mormon accomplishes this important purpose: “The

Book of Mormon brings men to Christ. . . . It tells in a plain manner of Christ and His gospel. It testifies of His divinity and of the necessity for a Redeemer and the need of our putting trust in Him. It bears witness of the Fall and the Atonement and the first principles of the gospel, including our need of a broken heart and a contrite spirit and a spiritual rebirth. It proclaims we must endure to the end in righteousness and live the moral life of a Saint” (“We Add Our Witness,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1989, 5).

- President Benson explained that the phrase “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” refers to the Savior: “We must keep in mind who Jesus was before He was born. He was the Creator of all things, the great Jehovah, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was and is the Holy One of Israel” (“Five Marks of the Divinity of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2001, 10).

1 Nephi 7:1. “Raise Up Seed unto the Lord”

- The sons and daughters of Lehi and Ishmael would marry and rear children “unto the Lord in the land of promise” (1 Nephi 7:1). Righteous families are an integral part of the Lord’s divine purposes. The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles proclaimed that “marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children. . . .

“The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102).

- President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, testified that joy comes from following the divine pattern for parenthood:

“Our destiny is so established that man can only find complete fulfillment and fill the divine purpose for his creation with a woman to whom he is legally and lawfully married. The union of man and woman begets

babies that are conceived and cross that frail footpath into mortality.

“This divine pattern was planned and the gospel designed from ‘before the world was’ (D&C 49:17). The plan provides for us to come to the world into a mortal body. It is ‘the great plan of happiness’ (Alma 42:8). We did not design it. If we follow the pattern, happiness and joy will follow” (*Children of God* [BYU Women’s Conference, May 5, 2006], 5–6).

1 Nephi 7:2. Ishmael Is of Ephraim

- The Book of Mormon is sometimes referred to as the “stick of Joseph” (Ezekiel 37:19) or the “stick of Ephraim” (D&C 27:5). Lehi was a descendant of Manasseh (see Alma 10:3) and Ishmael was a descendant of Ephraim. The prophecies of Jacob (see Genesis 48:16; 49:22) were fulfilled as Ishmael (Ephraim) came to the American continent with Lehi (Manasseh).

Elder Erastus Snow (1818–88) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles discussed the importance of Ishmael’s lineage: “Whoever has read the Book of Mormon carefully will have learned that the remnants of the house of Joseph dwelt upon the American continent; and that Lehi learned by searching the records of his fathers that were written upon the plates of brass, that he was of the lineage of Manasseh. The Prophet Joseph informed us that the record of Lehi was contained on the 116 pages that were first translated and subsequently stolen, and of which an abridgment is given us in the first Book of Nephi, which is the record of Nephi individually, he himself being of the lineage of Manasseh; but that Ishmael was of the lineage of Ephraim, and that his sons married into Lehi’s family, and Lehi’s sons married Ishmael’s daughters, thus fulfilling the words of Jacob upon Ephraim and Manasseh in the 48th chapter of Genesis, which says: ‘And let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the land.’ Thus these descendants of Manasseh and Ephraim grew together upon this American continent” (in Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* [1976], 199).

- Refer to the chart “The Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph” in the appendix (p. 412).

1 NEPHI 7:10–12

What spiritual experiences did Laman and Lemuel forget? How can we keep from forgetting what we should remember?

1 Nephi 7:14. A Result of Rejecting the Prophets

- Nephi explained that the Jews in Jerusalem in his day rejected God; as a result, the Spirit of the Lord would no longer be with them. If the Lord’s people reject His prophets, the prophets are taken out of their midst and tragedy follows (see 1 Nephi 3:17–18; Helaman 13:24–27). “When the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction” (2 Nephi 26:11). Such was the case in Noah’s day (see Moses 8:17), with the Nephites (see Mormon 5:16), and with the Jaredites (see Ether 15:19). The same warning has been given in the latter days (see D&C 1:33).

1 Nephi 7:15. “Ye Have Choice”

- Laman and those influenced by him were not captives on the journey toward the land of promise. Nephi answered their desire to return to Jerusalem by declaring a fundamental doctrine, “Ye have choice” (1 Nephi 7:15). As President Thomas S. Monson stated, “Each of us has the responsibility to choose. You may ask, ‘Are decisions really that important?’ I say to you, decisions determine destiny. You can’t make eternal decisions without eternal consequences” (“Pathways to Perfection,” *Ensign*, May 2002, 100).

Nephi warned his brothers and those who wanted to go with them that they would perish if they returned to Jerusalem. Blinded by hardheartedness and disobedience, those rebelling against Lehi and Nephi failed to perceive the truth of Lehi’s prophecies concerning the destruction that awaited Jerusalem. According to the Bible, soon after Lehi’s colony left, the city was surrounded by the Babylonians, “there was no bread for the people of the land,” the “city was broken up,” and Zedekiah’s army was scattered (see 2 Kings 25:1–7). If Laman and Lemuel had returned to Jerusalem, they would have suffered captivity or death. Because they chose to follow Lehi and Nephi, they

enjoyed the fruit and honey of the land of Bountiful while preparing for an inheritance in the land of promise (see 1 Nephi 17:3–6).

1 Nephi 7:17–19. Delivered from Bonds

• Elder Gene R. Cook of the Seventy pointed out that, like Nephi, we can be delivered from our own bonds by the prayer of faith: “Note that they [Nephi, Alma, and Amulek] did not have faith in their own strength; they trusted in the Lord and relied on his strength. It is faith in Christ that will deliver us from our own bonds; it is increasing our faith in Christ that will give us added power in prayer” (*Receiving Answers to Our Prayers* [1996], 18).

1 Nephi 8:4–35. Vision of the Tree of Life

• The following chart identifies some of what Nephi learned about his father’s dream:



Symbol from Lehi’s Dream (1 Nephi 8)	Interpretation Given to Nephi (1 Nephi 11–12)
The tree with white fruit (see vv. 10–11)	The love of God, which He showed by giving His Son to be our Savior (see 11:21–25; called “the tree of life” in 15:22)
The river of filthy water (see v. 13; 12:16)	The depths of hell into which the wicked fall (see 12:16; called “filthiness” in 15:27)
The rod of iron (see v. 19)	The word of God, which leads to the tree of life (see 11:25)
The mist of darkness (see v. 23)	The temptations of the devil, which blind people so they lose their way and cannot find the tree (see 12:17)
The great and spacious building in the air (see v. 26)	The pride and vain imaginations of the world (see 11:36; 12:18)
People who start on the path to the tree but are lost in the mist (see vv. 21–23)	Nephi saw the following kinds of people in the dream: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multitudes who heard Jesus but “cast him out” (11:28) • People who crucified Jesus even after He healed the sick and cast out devils (see 11:31–33) • Multitudes who gathered together in a large and spacious building to fight against the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb (see 11:34–36) • Nephites and Lamanites who were gathered together to battle and were slaughtered in war (see 12:1–4, 13–15) • Nephites who, because of pride, were destroyed by the Lamanites and dwindled in unbelief (see 12:19–23)
People who make it to the tree (and taste the fruit) by holding onto the rod but fall away when they are mocked (see vv. 24–25, 28)	
People who desire the great and spacious building more than the tree (see vv. 26–27, 31–33)	
People who held onto the rod and partook of the fruit; they ignored the mockers and did not fall away (see vv. 30, 33)	Those who partake of the greatest of all of God’s gifts—eternal life (see 15:36)

1 Nephi 8:10–12; 11:8–25. The Tree of Life as a Symbol of Jesus Christ and His Atonement

- Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that the tree of life represents the Savior and His Atonement: “The Spirit made explicit that the Tree of Life and its precious fruit are symbols of Christ’s redemption” (*Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* [1997], 160).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles further emphasized that partaking of the love of God means partaking of the blessings of the Atonement. The tree of life is a symbol of God’s love and Christ’s Atonement: “The tree of life . . . is the love of God (see 1 Nephi 11:25). The love of God for His children is most profoundly expressed in His gift of Jesus as our Redeemer: ‘God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son’ (John 3:16). To partake of the love of God is to partake of Jesus’ Atonement and the emancipations and joys which it can bring” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1999, 6; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 8).

1 Nephi 8:20. The “Strait and Narrow Path”

- Jesus Christ taught that He is the only path or “the way” that will lead to the Father (see John 14:6). Elder Lowell M. Snow of the Seventy testified of the constant direction the Savior provides:

“Life is full of many intersecting roads and trails. There are so many paths to follow, so many voices calling out ‘lo, here’ or ‘lo, there’ [Joseph Smith—History 1:5]. There is such a variety and volume of media flooding our personal space, most of it intent on herding us down a path that is broad and traveled by many.

“When pondering which of these voices to listen to or which road among the many is right, have you ever asked yourself, as Joseph Smith did: ‘What is to be done? Who of all these [voices and roads is] right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?’ [Joseph Smith—History 1:10].

“My witness to you is that Jesus Christ continues to mark the path, lead the way, and define every point on our journey. His path is strait and narrow and leads

toward ‘light and life and endless day’ [*Hymns*, no. 195]” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2005, 100; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 96).

1 Nephi 8:23–33. Are We Holding Fast to the Rod of Iron?

- Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained what it means to hold fast to the rod of iron:

“Let me suggest that holding fast to the iron rod entails the prayerful and consistent use of all three of the ways of obtaining living water that we have discussed tonight [reading, studying, and searching].

“. . . The regular use of all three methods produces a more constant flow of living water and is in large measure what it means to hold fast to the rod of iron. . . .

“Are you and I daily reading, studying, and searching the scriptures in a way that enables us to hold fast to the rod of iron . . . ?” (“A Reservoir of Living Water” [CES fireside for young adults, Feb. 4, 2007], 10–11, www.ldsces.org).

- Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin (1917–2008) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained not only the importance of “holding fast” to the rod but also explained how to get back if we lose our hold: “You must hold firmly to the rod of iron through the mists and darkneses, the hardships and trials of life. If you relax your grip and slip from the path, the iron rod might become lost in the darkness for a time until you repent and regain your grasp of it” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1989, 93; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 74).

1 NEPHI 8:24

What words and phrases describe an individual’s faithfulness to the word of God?

1 Nephi 8:26–27. “Great and Spacious Building”

- The great and spacious building stands in opposition to the Savior, who is the tree of life. Elder Glenn L. Pace of the Seventy contrasted the standards of God

with the behaviors of the people in the great and spacious building:

“To those of you who are inching your way closer and closer to that great and spacious building, let me make it completely clear that the people in that building have absolutely nothing to offer except instant, short-term gratification inescapably connected to long-term sorrow and suffering. The commandments you observe were not given by a dispassionate God to prevent you from having fun, but by a loving Father in Heaven who wants you to be happy while you are living on this earth as well as in the hereafter.

“Compare the blessings of living the Word of Wisdom to those available to you if you choose to party with those in the great and spacious building. Compare the joy of intelligent humor and wit to drunken, silly, crude, loud laughter. Compare our faithful young women who still have a blush in their cheeks with those who, having long lost their blush, try to persuade you to join them in their loss. Compare lifting people up to putting people down. Compare the ability to receive personal revelation and direction in your life to being tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine. Compare holding the priesthood of God with anything you see going on in that great and spacious building” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1987, 49–50; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 40).

- Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles warned that preoccupation with material possessions is a behavior typical of those people in the great and spacious building: “The current cries we hear coming from the great and spacious building tempt us to compete for ownership in the things of this world. We think we need a larger home, with a three-car garage and a recreational vehicle parked next to it. We long for designer clothes, extra TV sets (all with [DVDs]), the latest model computers, and the newest car. Often these items are purchased with borrowed money without giving any thought to providing for our future needs. The result of all this instant gratification is overloaded bankruptcy courts and families that are far too preoccupied with their financial burdens” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 45; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 35).

- In Lehi’s vision, the scorners and mockers ridiculed those who were partaking of the fruit—those who love God and want to serve Him. Elder Neal A. Maxwell reminded us to hold up the shield of faith when scorners can be seen and heard from the great and spacious building: “Let us expect that many will regard us indifferently. Others will see us as quaint or misled. Let us bear the pointing fingers which, ironically, belong to those finally who, being bored, find the ‘great and spacious building’ to be a stale and cramped third-class hotel (see 1 Nephi 8:31–33). Let us revile not the revilers and heed them not (see D&C 31:9). Instead, let us use our energy to hold up the shield of faith to quench the incoming fiery darts” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2003, 108; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 102).



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1 Nephi 8:37. “Feelings of a Tender Parent”

- Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that parents can follow Lehi’s example when dealing with wayward children: “We too must have the faith to teach our children and bid them to keep the commandments. We should not let their choices weaken our faith. Our worthiness will not be measured according to their righteousness. Lehi did not lose the blessing of feasting at the tree of life because Laman and Lemuel refused to partake of its fruit. Sometimes as parents we feel we have failed when our children make mistakes or stray. Parents are never failures when they do their best to love, teach, pray, and care for their children. Their faith, prayers, and efforts will be consecrated to the good of their children” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 90; or *Ensign*, May 2004, 88).

1 Nephi 9:1–5. “A Wise Purpose”

- Although Nephi had already begun a record of the secular history of his people, the Lord inspired him to make a second record containing the religious history of his people. The following list clarifies the differences and similarities between the two accounts:

1. Verses 1–5 in 1 Nephi 9 are an account taken directly from the small plates.
2. When Nephi used the term *these* he was referring to the small plates.
3. When Nephi used the term *those* or *other* he was referring to the large plates.
4. The large plates were first made about 590 B.C.
5. The small plates were made 20 years later, about 570 B.C.
6. Nephi’s explanation of why the Lord commanded him to make a second record (the small plates) is in 1 Nephi 9:5.
7. The large plates cover a period from 570 B.C.–A.D. 385 and cover the account of kings, wars, and history.
8. The small plates cover a period from 570–130 B.C. and give an account of the Nephite ministry.

Although Nephi did not know the reason for the duplicate record, he trusted that it was “for a wise purpose” (1 Nephi 9:5) that was known to the Lord (see commentary for Words of Mormon 1:7 on p. 134).

- Elder Marvin J. Ashton (1915–94) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles observed that we can obey as Nephi did, even when we do not understand the reason: “Sometimes when we are asked to be obedient, we do not know why, except the Lord has commanded. Nephi followed instructions even though he didn’t fully understand the wise purpose. His obedience resulted in blessings to mankind all over the world. By not obeying our present-day leaders, we plant our seeds in stony places and may forfeit the harvest” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1978, 76; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 51).

1 Nephi 9:6. “The Lord Knoweth All Things”

- Elder Neal A. Maxwell testified that there is no limit to God’s knowledge:

“Some have sincere faith in the existence of a God but not necessarily in a revealing and omniscient God. Other sincere individuals question God’s omniscience, wondering, even though respectfully, whether even God can know the future. But an omniscient and revealing God can at any present moment disclose things future. This is possible because ‘in the presence of God, . . . all things for their glory are manifest, past, present, and future, and are continually before the Lord’ (D&C 130:7). Thus God ‘knoweth all things, for all things are present before [his] eyes’ (D&C 38:2). He

told Moses, ‘There is no God beside me, and all things are present with me, for I know them all’ (Moses 1:6).

“No qualifiers on the scope of God’s knowledge appear in holy writ. Instead, we read: ‘O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it.’ (2 Nephi 9:20.)” (*If Thou Endure It Well* [1996], 46).

1 Nephi 10:11–14. Scattering and Gathering of Israel

- Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained why Israel was scattered and what some of the considerations are in the gathering of Israel:

“Why was Israel scattered? The answer is clear; it is plain; of it there is no doubt. Our Israelite forebears were scattered because they rejected the gospel, defiled the priesthood, forsook the church, and departed from the kingdom. They were scattered because they turned from the Lord, worshipped false gods, and walked in all the ways of the heathen nations. . . . Israel was scattered for apostasy. The Lord in his wrath, because of their wickedness and rebellion, scattered them among the heathen in all the nations of the earth.

“What, then, is involved in the gathering of Israel? The gathering of Israel consists in believing and accepting and living in harmony with all that the Lord once offered his ancient chosen people. It consists of having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of repenting, of being baptized and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and of keeping the commandments of God. It consists of believing the gospel, joining the Church, and coming into the kingdom. It consists of receiving the holy priesthood, being endowed in holy places with power from on high, and receiving all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through the ordinance of celestial marriage. And it may also consist of assembling to an appointed place or land of worship.

“Having this concept of the scattering and gathering of the chosen seed, we are able to understand the prophetic word relative thereto” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* [1985], 515).

- For more information on the scattering of Israel, refer to “Brief History of the Scattering of Israel” in

the appendix (p. 415). For more information on the gathering of Israel, refer to “The Gathering of Israel” in the appendix (p. 416).

1 Nephi 10:17–19. Learn by the Power of the Holy Ghost

- Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles emphasized our need to learn gospel truths by the power of the Holy Ghost: “Living the Lord’s standards requires that we cultivate the gift of the Holy Ghost. That gift helps us understand doctrine and apply it personally. Because truth that is given by revelation can be understood only by revelation, our studies need to be prayerful” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 19; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 17).

- Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that we must avoid anything that offends the Spirit:

“The Spirit of the Lord usually communicates with us in ways that are quiet, delicate, and subtle. . . .

“The standard is clear. If something we think, see, hear, or do distances us from the Holy Ghost, then we should stop thinking, seeing, hearing, or doing that thing. 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. Because the Spirit cannot abide that which is vulgar, crude, or immodest, then clearly such things are not for us. Because we estrange the Spirit of the Lord when we engage in activities we know we should shun, then such things definitely are not for us” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2006, 29–30; or *Ensign*, May 2006, 29–30).

1 NEPHI 10:17–19; 11:1–8

What principles for receiving revelation can you identify from Nephi’s experience?

1 Nephi 11:16, 26. The Condescension of God

- *Condescension* means a voluntary descent from rank or dignity. Elder Gerald N. Lund, formerly of the Seventy, commented on how well this word describes the coming of the Savior into mortality:

“Here was Jesus—a member of the Godhead, the Firstborn of the Father, the Creator, Jehovah of the Old Testament—now leaving His divine and holy station; divesting Himself of all that glory and majesty and entering the body of a tiny infant; helpless, completely dependent on His mother and earthly father. That He should not come to the finest of earthly palaces and be . . . showered with jewels but should come to a lowly stable is astonishing. Little wonder that the angel should say to Nephi, ‘Behold the condescension of God!’” (*Jesus Christ, Key to the Plan of Salvation* [1991], 16).

Points to Ponder

- Think of the many individuals presented in Lehi’s vision of the tree of life. How can you emulate those who reached the tree, partook of it, and remained faithful?
- How has scripture study and following the words of the prophets helped you stay on the strait and narrow path, despite the mists of darkness?
- What steps could you take to more “diligently seek” to understand the “mysteries of God . . . by the power of the Holy Ghost”? (1 Nephi 10:19).

Suggested Assignments

- Lehi’s dream contains intricate symbolism. Draw a diagram that includes the elements of Lehi’s dream to help you visualize the relationship of the various symbols.
- Only those who held fast to the iron rod partook of the fruit of the tree. Outline a personal plan for daily scripture study to help you draw closer to the Savior and more fully receive the blessings of the Atonement.
- Nephi was shown Jehovah’s condescension into mortality. Read the accounts of the Savior’s birth found in Matthew 1–2; Luke 1–2; and John 1:1–13. Record in your journal or scriptures new insights you discover about this event.



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