

CHAPTER 4

1 Nephi 12–15

Introduction

President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, spoke of Heavenly Father's desire to give us the righteous desires of our hearts: "No message appears in scripture more times, in more ways than 'Ask, and ye shall receive'" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1991, 26; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 21). Nephi applied the invitation to ask for the "things that [his] father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known" (1 Nephi 11:1). Nephi's righteous desires were rewarded, for he not only recorded information that was similar to what we have recorded about Lehi's vision, but he recorded a panoramic vision of this world to the end of time (see 1 Nephi 14:18–30). This vision was similar to the vision of John in the New Testament book of Revelation. As you study Nephi's vision, look for specific prophecies that have been or will be fulfilled in the events of history—especially important are the effects of the Apostasy, the eventual Restoration of the gospel, and the ultimate triumph of good.

Commentary

1 Nephi 12:11. "Made White in the Blood of the Lamb"

- White is a symbol for cleanliness, righteousness, and holiness. Being completely clean is necessary to be like the Savior. To have white garments symbolizes that a person is clothed in purity, or that purity is a characteristic of that individual. Such cleanliness is made possible only through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, in which His blood was shed for our sins.

- President John Taylor (1808–87) spoke of the necessity of going beyond simply being members of the Lord's Church if we are to be sufficiently worthy to stand before our Father in Heaven: "There is something that goes a little further than we think about sometimes; and that is, while we profess to be followers of the Lord, while we profess to have received the Gospel and to be governed by it, a profession will amount to nothing unless we have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. It is not enough for us to be connected with the Zion of God, for the Zion of God must consist of men that are pure in heart and pure in life and spotless before God, at least that is what we have got to arrive at. We are not there yet, but we must

get there before we shall be prepared to inherit glory and exaltation; therefore a form of godliness will amount to but little with any of us. . . . It is not enough for us to embrace the Gospel . . . and be associated with the people of God, attend our meetings

and partake of the Sacrament of the Lord's supper, and endeavor to move along without much blame of any kind attached to us; for notwithstanding all this, if our hearts are not right, if we are not pure in heart before God, if we have not pure hearts and pure consciences, fearing God and keeping His commandments, we shall not, unless we repent, participate in these blessings about which I have spoken, and of which the Prophets bear testimony" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor* [2001], 114–15).



1 Nephi 12–14. Overview

- The following chart helps us visualize significant events leading to the establishment of God's kingdom on earth:

Sequence of Events Leading to the Establishment of God's Kingdom	
An illustration showing a large group of people in a landscape, some appearing to be in conflict or fleeing, representing the destruction of the Nephite nation.	Nephite nation destroyed (see 1 Nephi 12:19–23)
An illustration showing a person sitting on the ground, surrounded by many scrolls or books, representing the preservation of the Nephite record.	Nephite record preserved (see 1 Nephi 13:35, 40)
An illustration showing a person in a dark, hooded robe holding a globe, representing the discovery of the land of promise by Gentiles.	Land of promise discovered by Gentiles (see 1 Nephi 13:12)
An illustration showing a person in a dark, hooded robe sitting at a desk with an open book, representing the settlement of the land of promise by Gentiles.	Land of promise settled by Gentiles (see 1 Nephi 13:13–16)

Sequence of Events Leading to the Establishment of God's Kingdom



An international war in the land of promise (Revolutionary War; see 1 Nephi 13:16–19)

Gentiles who hearken to the Lord may be “numbered among the house of Israel” (Restoration of the gospel; see 1 Nephi 14:1–2)



New scripture comes forth (see 1 Nephi 13:35–40; 14:7)

Christ's Church restored (see 1 Nephi 14:10–17)

1 Nephi 13:1–9. The Great and Abominable Church

- “In relation to the kingdom of God, the devil always sets up his kingdom at the very same time in opposition to God” (Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 6:364).
- Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles defined the great and abominable church: “The titles *church of the devil* and *great and abominable church* are used to identify all . . . organizations of whatever name or nature—whether political, philosophical, educational, economic, social, fraternal, civic, or religious—which are designed to take men on a course that leads away from God and his laws and thus from salvation in the kingdom of God” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. [1966], 137–38).

• One commentator explained that the great and abominable church consists of more than one entity: “Actually, no single known historical church, denomination, or set of believers meets all the requirements for the great and abominable church: it

must have formed among the Gentiles; it must have edited and controlled the distribution of the scriptures; it must have slain the Saints of God, including the Apostles and prophets; it must be in league with civil governments and use their police power to enforce its religious views; it must have dominion over all the earth; it must pursue great wealth and sexual immorality; and it must last until close to the end of the world. No single denomination or system of beliefs fits the entire description. Rather, the role of Babylon has been played by many different agencies, ideologies, and churches in many different times. . . .

“Can we, then, identify the historical agency that acted as the great and abominable church in earliest Christianity? Such an agent would have had its origins in the second half of the first century and would have done much of its work by the middle of the second century.

“This period might be called the blind spot in Christian history, for it is here that the fewest primary historical sources have been preserved. We have good sources for New Testament Christianity; then the lights go out, so to speak, and we hear the muffled sounds of a great struggle. When the lights come on again a hundred or so years later, we find that someone has rearranged all the furniture and Christianity has become something very different from what it was in the beginning” (Stephen E. Robinson, “Warring against the Saints of God,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1988, 38–39).

1 NEPHI 13:4–9

List several general characteristics associated with the great and abominable church. How can recognizing these help you avoid deception?

1 Nephi 13:12. “A Man among the Gentiles”

- President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) identified this man among the Gentiles as Christopher Columbus: “God inspired ‘a man among the Gentiles’ (1 Nephi 13:12) who, by the Spirit of God was led to rediscover the land of America and bring this rich new land to the

attention of the people in Europe. That man, of course, was Christopher Columbus, who testified that he was inspired in what he did.

“‘Our Lord,’ said Columbus, ‘unlocked my mind, sent me upon the sea, and gave me fire for the deed. Those who heard of my enterprise called it foolish, mocked me, and laughed. But who can doubt but that the Holy Ghost inspired me?’ (Jacob Wasserman, *Columbus, Don Quixote of the Seas*, pp. 19–20.)” (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [1988], 577).



© 1992 Robert Barrett

- President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) revered Columbus as being inspired of the Lord: “A host of critics have spoken out against [Christopher Columbus]. I do not dispute that there were others who came to this Western Hemisphere before him. But it was he who in faith lighted a lamp to look for a new way to China and who in the process discovered America. His was an awesome undertaking—to sail west across the unknown seas farther than any before him of his generation. He it was who, in spite of the terror of the unknown and the complaints and near mutiny of his crew, sailed on with frequent prayers to the Almighty for guidance. In his reports to the sovereigns of Spain, Columbus repeatedly asserted that his voyage was for the glory of God and the spread of the Christian faith. Properly do we honor him for his unyielding strength in the face of uncertainty and danger” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1992, 73–74; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 52).

1 Nephi 13:12–19. The Lord’s Hand in the History of the United States of America

- President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) linked the establishment of the United States of America with the Restoration of the gospel: “This great American nation the Almighty raised up by the power of his omnipotent hand, that it might be possible in the latter days for the kingdom of God to be established in the earth. If the Lord had not prepared the way by laying the foundations of this glorious nation, it would have been

impossible (under the stringent laws and bigotry of the monarchical governments of the world) to have laid the foundations for the coming of his great kingdom. The Lord has done this” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], 409).

- Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke of how God inspired the founders of America to establish a new nation with religious freedom for all in preparation for the Restoration of the gospel: “Over a century later [after the discovery of America] such religious feeling guided founders of a new nation on the American continent. Under God’s hand they secured religious freedom for every citizen with an inspired Bill of Rights. Fourteen years later, on December 23, 1805, the Prophet Joseph Smith was born. The preparation was nearing its completion for the Restoration” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2005, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 90).

1 NEPHI 13:20–29

Nephi mentioned a book with parts taken out. What is the book? What are some of the things that were removed? Why were they removed?

1 Nephi 13:20–29. Plain and Precious Truths Removed from the Bible

- Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained the meaning of “plain and precious”: “Elements . . . missing from the Bible were both ‘plain and most precious.’ They were plain in their simplicity and clarity, being easy to ‘the understanding of . . . men’; they were precious in their purity and profound worth, their saving significance and eternal importance to the children of God” (*Christ and the New Covenant* [1997], 5).

- One educator suggested the following explanation for changes in the scriptures:

“Apparently the original manuscripts of the Bible disappeared very early. This seems particularly true of the New Testament. Sir Frederic Kenyon, one of the greatest textual scholars of the early twentieth century,

commented thus: ‘The originals of the several books have long ago disappeared. They must have perished in the very infancy of the Church; for no allusion is ever made to them by any Christian writer.’ Kenyon’s statement is particularly important to us because it means that for centuries there has not been an original Bible manuscript to guide the reader. Even in the early decades of the original Christian church, the original texts seem to have been absent. . . .

“The angel [in 1 Nephi 13:21–29] makes it clear that he is not talking about subtle accidents of hand and eye, resulting in a few misplaced letters or words—the unplanned errors of copyists. He pointedly ascribes these changes to the planned editorial work of designing men [see 1 Nephi 13:27–28]. . . .

“As we read the words of the angel, we discover that the world never has had a complete Bible, for it was massively—even cataclysmically—corrupted *before* it was distributed. Of course, in addition to the major willful corruption of the Bible in the early Christian era, the manuscripts have also continued to suffer the gradual and relatively mild changes, due to errors of hand and eye, that the scholars talk about. Thus there have been two processes at work: (1) a major, sudden, and deliberate editorial corruption of the text and (2) a gradual promulgation of variants that has occurred as a natural consequence of copying and translation” (Robert J. Matthews, *A Bible! A Bible!* [1990], 74–75).

Joseph Smith taught that “many important points touching the salvation of man, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled” (*History of the Church*, 1:245). He also said that the Bible was correct as “it came from the pen of the original writers,” but that “ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors” (*History of the Church*, 6:57.)



1 Nephi 13:32–40. Plain and Precious Things Restored

- President James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the First Presidency spoke of how the standard works of the Church have been the principal means of restoring lost truths:

“The Apostle John saw in vision the time when an angel would come to the earth as part of the Restoration of the gospel. That angel was Moroni, who appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith. He directed Joseph to the place where golden plates containing ancient writings were deposited. Joseph Smith then translated these plates by the gift and power of God, and the Book of Mormon was published. This is a record of two groups of people who lived centuries ago on the American continent. Little was known about them before the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. But more importantly, the Book of Mormon is another testament of Christ. It restored precious truths concerning the Fall, the Atonement, the Resurrection, and life after death.

“Prior to the Restoration, the heavens had been closed for centuries. But with prophets and apostles upon the earth once more, the heavens were opened once again with visions and revelations. Many of the revelations that came to the Prophet Joseph Smith were written down in a book that came to be known as the Doctrine and Covenants. This contains further insights about principles and ordinances and is a valuable source concerning the structure of the priesthood. In addition, we have another canon of scripture called the Pearl of Great Price. It contains the book of Moses, which came by revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the book of Abraham, which he translated from a purchased Egyptian scroll. From these we learn not only a great deal more about Moses, Abraham, Enoch, and other prophets but also many more details about the Creation. We learn that the gospel of Jesus Christ was taught to all of the prophets from the beginning—even from the time of Adam” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2006, 68; or *Ensign*, May 2006, 67–68).

- The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible also helps restore many plain and precious truths. The Joseph Smith Translation is “a revision or translation of the King James Version of the Bible in English, which the Prophet Joseph Smith began in June 1830. He was commanded by God to make the translation and regarded it as part of his calling as a prophet. . . .

“The Joseph Smith Translation has restored some of the plain and precious things that have been lost from the Bible (1 Nephi 13). Although it is not the official Bible of the Church, this translation does offer many interesting insights and is very valuable in understanding the Bible. It is also a witness for the divine calling and ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith” (Guide to the Scriptures, “Joseph Smith Translation”; see also 2 Nephi 3:11; *History of the Church*, 1:238).

With continuing revelation in the Lord’s Church, the process of bringing the plain and precious doctrines and principles of the gospel to people throughout the world is an ongoing process. The conference reports and other inspired writings from the Lord’s apostles and prophets are vital for gospel understanding of the plain and precious truths.

1 Nephi 14:7. “A Great and a Marvelous Work”

- The scriptures describe the Restoration of the gospel and the organization of the Church as “a great and a marvelous work” (1 Nephi 14:7; 3 Nephi 21:9). In this context, the word *great* means significant and meaningful, while *marvelous* means wonderful and incomprehensible. *Work* speaks of an act or accomplishment that is everlasting.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that the significance of the Church is two-fold: “This church, the great institutional body of Christ, is a marvelous work and a wonder not only because of what it does for the faithful but also because of what the faithful do for it. Your lives are at the very heart of that marvel. You are evidence of the wonder of it all” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 42; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 32).

1 NEPHI 14:10–14

What did Nephi prophesy regarding latter-day Church members?

1 Nephi 14:14. Armed with Righteousness and Power

- Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that righteousness will be the power of the Lord’s people: “So let us look at ourselves. For the Church, the scriptures suggest both an accelerated sifting and accelerated spiritual numerical growth—with all this preceding the time when the people of God will be ‘armed with righteousness’—not weapons—and when the Lord’s glory will be poured out upon them (1 Nephi 14:14; see also 1 Peter 4:17; D&C 112:25). The Lord is determined to have a tried, pure, and proven people (see D&C 100:16; 101:4; 136:31), and ‘there is nothing that the Lord thy God shall take in his heart to do but what he will do it’ (Abraham 3:17)” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1988, 8; or *Ensign*, May 1988, 8).

- Elder Maxwell further explained that honoring our covenants is vital to the reception of this promise: “Church members have a special rendezvous to keep, brothers and sisters. Nephi saw it. One future day, he said, Jesus’ covenant people, ‘scattered upon all the face of the earth,’ will be ‘armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory’ (1 Nephi 14:14). This will happen, but only after more members become more saintly and more consecrated in conduct” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1991, 43; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 32).

1 Nephi 14:18–30. The Record of John the Revelator

- Verses 18–30 in 1 Nephi 14 refer to the book of Revelation, the last book in the New Testament, written by the Apostle John. Nephi saw the events of our day but was not allowed to write them because it was John’s responsibility. Verse 26 could have reference to the portion of the Book of Mormon that was sealed.

(For further information about the sealed portion, see 2 Nephi 27:7; 3 Nephi 26:7–11; Ether 4:7.)

1 Nephi 15:2–11. “Hard in Their Hearts”

- Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles discussed how a hard heart limits our spirituality:

“Nephi attempted to teach his brothers that they could know the meaning of their father’s prophetic utterances, ‘which were hard to be understood, save a man should inquire of the Lord’ (1 Ne. 15:3). Nephi told them if they did not harden their hearts and would keep the commandments and inquire of the Lord in faith, ‘surely these things shall be made known unto you’ (1 Ne. 15:11).

“If we harden our hearts, reject continuing revelation, and limit our learning to what we can obtain by study and reason on the precise language of the present canon of scriptures, our understanding will be limited to what Alma called ‘the lesser portion of the word’ (Alma 12:11). If we seek and accept revelation and inspiration to enlarge our understanding of the scriptures, we will realize a fulfillment of Nephi’s inspired promise that those who diligently seek will have ‘the mysteries of God . . . unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost’ (1 Ne. 10:19)” (“Scripture Reading and Revelation,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1995, 7).



- The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that not only could Laman and Lemuel know the things Nephi and his father knew, but that this principle applies to us as well: “Could we all come together with one heart and one mind in perfect faith the veil might as well be rent today as next week, or any other time” (*Teachings of*

the Prophet Joseph Smith, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 9).

“God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them” (*History of the Church*, 3:380).

1 Nephi 15:12–13. Jews and Gentiles

- We frequently read about the Jews and Gentiles in the Book of Mormon. Sometimes it is difficult to understand whom the text is speaking to. Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles provided help with this challenge: “Both Lehi and Nephi divide all men into two camps, Jews and Gentiles. The Jews were either the nationals of the kingdom of Judah or their descendants; all others were considered to be Gentiles. Thus, we are the Gentiles of whom this scripture speaks; we are the ones who have received the fulness of the gospel; and we shall take it to the Lamanites, who are Jews, because their fathers came from Jerusalem and from the kingdom of Judah” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* [1985], 556).

Elder McConkie also identified one gentile who would greatly assist in the Restoration: “Joseph Smith . . . was the Gentile by whose hand the Book of Mormon came forth, and the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints . . . are the Gentiles who carry salvation to the Lamanites and to the Jews” (*The Millennial Messiah* [1982], 233).

1 Nephi 15:13–16. Latter-day Restoration of the Gospel

- President Gordon B. Hinckley declared the impact of the Restoration in history: “My brethren and sisters, do you realize what we have? Do you recognize our place in the great drama of human history? This is the focal point of all that has gone before. This is the season of restitution. These are the days of restoration. This is the time when men from over the earth come to the mountain of the Lord’s house to seek and learn of His ways and to walk in His paths. This is the summation of all of the centuries of time since the birth of Christ to this present and wonderful day” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1999, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 74).

1 Nephi 15:12–20. The Gathering of Israel

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

1 Nephi 15:24. The Word of God and Fiery Darts

- President Ezra Taft Benson spoke of the blessing of having the word of God in our possession. It will not only lead us to great blessings, but gives us the strength to stand firm in the face of temptation: “In his dream, Lehi saw an iron rod which led through the mists of darkness. He saw that if people would hold fast to that rod, they could avoid the rivers of filthiness, stay away from the forbidden paths, stop from wandering in the strange roads that lead to destruction. Later his son Nephi clearly explained the symbolism of the iron rod. When Laman and Lemuel asked, ‘What meaneth the rod of iron?’ Nephi answered, ‘It was the word of God; and [note this promise] *whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction.*’ (1 Ne. 15:23–24; italics added.) Not only will the word of God lead us to the fruit which is desirable above all others, but in the word of God and through it we can find the power to resist temptation, the power to thwart the work of Satan and his emissaries” (“The Power of the Word,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 80).

1 Nephi 15:32–35. “Judged of Their Works”

- Elder Dallin H. Oaks spoke of how our works define who we are. What we become through our works constitutes the judgment we will receive:

“Many Bible and modern scriptures speak of a final judgment at which all persons will be rewarded according to their deeds or works or the desires of their hearts. But other scriptures enlarge upon this by referring to our being judged by the *condition* we have achieved.

“The prophet Nephi describes the Final Judgment in terms of what we *have become*: ‘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’ (1 Nephi 15:33; italics added). Moroni declares, ‘He that *is* filthy

shall be filthy still; and he that *is* righteous shall be righteous still’ (Mormon 9:14; italics added; see also Revelation 22:11–12; 2 Nephi 9:16; D&C 88:35). The same would be true of ‘selfish’ or ‘disobedient’ or any other personal attribute inconsistent with the requirements of God. Referring to the ‘state’ of the wicked in the Final Judgment, Alma explains that if we are condemned by our words, our works, and our thoughts, ‘we shall not be found spotless; . . . and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God’ (Alma 12:14).

“From such teachings we conclude that the Final Judgment is not just an evaluation of a sum total of good and evil acts—what we have *done*. It is an acknowledgment of the final effect of our acts and thoughts—what we have *become*. It is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions. The commandments, ordinances, and covenants of the gospel are not a list of deposits required to be made in some heavenly account. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a plan that shows us how to become what our Heavenly Father desires us to become” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 41; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 32).

1 Nephi 15:34–35. The Final State of Souls

- A clear distinction exists between good and evil, light and darkness, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil. Hell is the place prepared for the filthy who follow Satan, while the righteous who have followed God enjoy the peace and glory of His kingdom. But how can the *final state* of all people be divided into just two groups—those who “dwell in the kingdom of God” or those who will be “cast out”? (1 Nephi 15:35).



The key to answering this question is found in Doctrine and Covenants 76:43, which summarizes the work of Jesus Christ as follows: “[He] glorifies the Father, and saves all the works of his hands, except those sons of perdition who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him.” Thus, the final state will include the grouping of saved individuals and unsaved individuals, or sons of perdition. Saved individuals will include those who are allowed to enter a degree of glory. Doctrine and Covenants 76 names three degrees of glory—celestial, terrestrial, and telestial—with information about the individuals who are worthy of each place in God’s kingdom. Thus, salvation within the kingdom of God occurs in all three degrees of glory, while those who do not qualify are sons of perdition.

Points to Ponder

- How can you use Nephi’s example of inquiring of the Lord to make inspiration and revelation a more important part of your life?
- In what ways did the Lord prepare for the Restoration of the gospel in this dispensation?
- How would you define the term “fiery darts of the adversary”? What specific fiery darts afflict your life? What do you need to do to better withstand the fiery darts that inhibit your spiritual growth?

Suggested Assignments

- Write a short essay on one of the following questions:
 1. In what ways are you progressing toward the tree of life?
 2. What does the “great and abominable church” represent?
 3. How does 1 Nephi 13 relate to the eighth article of faith?