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Joy in 3 Nephi

Author(s): Daniel McKinlay

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JOY IN 3 NEPHI

Daniel McKinlay

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While much is written about the Book of Mormon from a theoretical point of view (literary, cultural, military), Elder L. Tom Perry points out that the second standard work is a passionate book. While the methodology of this paper is analytical it reaches into the emotional and personal realm of the book, which should have meaning for most of its readers.

In 3 Nephi Jesus tells the Lehites at Bountiful that his joy is full. He is surrounded by survivors of the cataclysm, those with the highest spiritual sensitivities and the greatest commitment. Witnessing their response and love for him enables him to enjoy a potent sense of fulfilment. This setting opposes in large measure the environment from which he came in Judea and Jerusalem. Those who are fortunate to be beneficiaries of his ministry at Bountiful also experience great joy.

The words “joy” and “rejoice,” and their cognates, are found throughout the Book of Mormon, but they reach their apex in 3 Nephi. The intent of this paper is to analyze the settings in which characters in the Book of Mormon, both individuals and groups, experienced joy, with the surpassing examples in 3 Nephi as the ultimate examples of ineffable euphoria. Some of the accounts deal with joy as portrayed in the unfolding vicissitudes of human interactions.

For convenience the incidents of joy and rejoicing in the Book of Mormon will be broken down into categories, with a number of examples from each. In some cases particular mentions of the words could overlap into other groupings.

MUNDANE JOY

In some instances the Book of Mormon informs us that individuals or groups experience joy when circumstances characteristic of human life occur. On occasion moments like these had a spiritual tinge to them.

When the sons of Lehi and Sariah returned from their frightening assignment to obtain the plates of brass from the pompous Laban the two parents were “filled with joy;” they “did rejoice exceedingly” (1 Nephi 5:1,9). Lehi’s whole party suffered temporal setbacks when Nephi’s bow was damaged, and they were bereft of nourishment. But when Nephi returned with slaughtered game the family experienced joy (1 Nephi 16:32). The group rejoiced when they arrived at the seashore (1 Nephi

17:6). The original inhabitants of Zarahemla (the Mulekites) rejoiced when the Nephites brought with them the plates of brass, thus enabling the people to have a standard for their language and a history of their origins in Palestine (Omni 1:14).

The sheepish men who abandoned their wives and children when they followed King Noah into the wilderness rejoiced when they discovered that their loved ones had survived the ominous intentions of the Lamanites (Mosiah 19:24). Limhi “was filled with exceedingly great joy” when he learned that Ammon, at first suspected of being one of the priests of Noah, had come from Zarahemla to investigate those who had belong to the colony of Zeniff (Mosiah 21:24). Similarly Limhi was joyful when Ammon informed him that Mosiah, in Zarahemla, was a seer and had the gift to translate the 24 plates some of his people had discovered (Mosiah 8:19; 21:28). When Limhi’s subjects and Alma’s band returned to Zarahemla, Mosiah received them with joy (Mosiah 22:14; 24:25).

Upon hearing the fate of Zeniff’s colony of Nephites Mosiah’s people were filled with both joy and sorrow (Mosiah 25:8). Likewise, both emotions were felt when the people were informed about the Jaredites and how their civilization ended (Mosiah 28:18). After Mosiah announced that he would not be succeeded in the kingship and that the form of government would change, the Nephites rejoiced that they could vote for judges and were free (Mosiah 29:39).

Amlici wanted the government to return to kingship, with himself as king. When the vote was tallied most of the Nephites rejoiced that the outcome did not favor him (Alma 2:8). A few years later, when Pahoran won the election over the kingmen, his people rejoiced (Alma 51:7). Realizing that he was at the mercy of Ammon, Lamoni’s father rejoiced that the Nephite spared his life (Alma 20:25). In their correspondence Moroni and Lehi rejoiced in each other’s safety (Alma 53:2). And Moroni greatly rejoiced at the successes of Helaman (59:1). Anti pus “did rejoice exceedingly” when the 2000 Ammonite boys joined his army (Alma 56: 10). Also, they gave the Nephite forces “great hopes and much joy” (Alma 57:17. Helaman had “great joy” that not one of his “sons” had perished in battle (Alma 56:56). In fact, the preservation of all 2060 soldiers brought joy to the Nephite army generally (Alma 57:25). The Lamanite guards received with joy the offer Of Moroni’s servant or soldier for some tasty wine (Alma 55:9). When Nephi prayed for much needed rain and it came, the Nephites rejoiced and esteemed him to be a great prophet (Helaman 11:18).

SPIRITUAL EVENTS

There were moments when individuals or groups in the Book of Mormon experienced elation. The narrative offers us some rich and vivid examples.

Jared's party bowed and prayed and shed tears of joy when they landed in the Americas, because of the Lord's tender mercies (Ether 6:12).

We already encounter joy when we turn to the first chapter of the Book of Mormon. Nephi describes the reaction of Lehi to his apocalyptic vision, a throne theophany.¹ Lehi praised God, "for his soul did rejoice, and his whole heart was filled, because of the things which he had seen" (1 Nephi 1:15).

As Lehi began to relate to his family his remarkable dream of the tree of life he noted that he had cause to rejoice over Sam and Nephi as he witnessed their response to the wondrous fruit, but in contrast he "feared exceedingly" concerning the reaction of Laman and Lemuel. Lehi reported that he experienced joy when he partook of the fruit (1 Nephi 8:3-4,12). Reciting his own encounter with more or less the same dream, Nephi learned that the love radiated from the tree of life was joyous to the soul (1 Nephi 11:22-23). Enos' contemplation of Jacob's reference to the joy of the saints sank deep into his heart (Enos 1:3). Implicitly, Enos himself knew joy.

When King Benjamin's subjects answered his summons to gather by the temple they offered burnt offerings and rejoiced that he had been sent to them (Mosiah 2:4). Because they were spiritually ready they responded with joy to Benjamin's remarkable sermon. In fact, they "could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was their joy." (Mosiah 4:3,11, 20; 5:4). Converts at the Waters of Mormon clapped their hands for joy when they were invited by Alma the elder to commit their resolve through the covenant of baptism (Mosiah 18:11). Their feelings were so acute that the oasis at Mormon, by association with a spiritual outpour, became especially beautiful to them. The record tells us that when Alma and Helam came out of the water in a baptismal rite they rejoiced, being filled with the Spirit (Mosiah 18:14). In the land of Zarahemla Alma rejoiced when his wayward and stricken son was laid before him (Mosiah 27:20). The son, as the father probably expected, was thoroughly converted. His encounter with the angel was traumatic, but in the second encounter the same angel told him to rejoice freely, because he had been faithful to the commandments (Alma 8:15). The irruption of an angelic rebuke so moved the sons of Mosiah that they wanted their menacing cousins, the Lamanites, "to rejoice in the Lord their God" (Mosiah 28:2).

Alma the younger experienced exceedingly great joy when the people of Zarahemla had again been "established in the ways of [the Lord's] righteousness" (Alma 7:4). But this joy came after wading

¹ See Blake T. Ostler, "The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis," *BYU Studies* 26/4 (Fall 1986), 67-87.

through much affliction and sorrow (Alma 7:4-5).² In contrast to the people in Zarahemla, those who lived in the valley of Gideon were already actuated by faith, which gave Alma great joy (Alma 7: 17,26). As Alma was traveling the land after his dramatic experience in Ammonihah, he encountered the sons of Mosiah, who were returning from their ministry among the Lamanites. Alma “did rejoice exceedingly” to see them, “and what added more to his joy [was that] they were still his brethren in the Lord” (Alma 17:1-2).

The perceptive Ammon, acting as a servant to King Lamoni, when he observed the weeping dismay of the other servants when rustlers scattered the king’s sheep, “his heart was swollen within him for joy,” because he knew that the scene presented a catalyst for demonstrating the power of the Lord (Alma 17:29). Shortly after this event Ammon had the opportunity to explain his missionary message to Lamoni. In his response the king was so overcome that he fell to the ground. Ammon was pleased at this situation, for “he knew that the dark veil of unbelief was being cast away from [Lamoni’s] mind, and the light which did light up his mind, which was the light of the glory of God, which was a marvelous light of his goodness-yea, this light had infused such joy into his soul. . . that the light of everlasting life was lit up in his soul.” Ammon knew that this spiritual experience “had overcome [Lamoni’s] natural frame, and he was carried away in God” (Alma 18:42; 19:6).³ After Lamoni arose from his encounter with spiritual things he spoke to his wife about the Redeemer. “Now when he had said these words, his heart was swollen within him, and he sunk again for joy; and the queen also sunk down, being overpowered by the Spirit” (Alma 19:13). Seeing this, Ammon, thinking about the flagrant iniquity of the Lamanites up to that point, “fell upon his knees, and began to pour out his soul in prayer and thanksgiving to God for what he had done for his brethren; and he was also overpowered with joy; and thus they all three had sunk to the earth” (Alma 19:14). When the queen arose “she clasped her hands, being filled with joy” (Alma 19:30). Sometime after this episode Aaron explained the plan of redemption to Lamoni’s father. The king asked what he needed to do to be born again, have the evil spirit rooted out of him, and be filled with joy. Like his son, he had an experience that drew him away from a consciousness of his surroundings. He likely did experience joy (see Alma 22:13-18).

In response to Aaron’s remonstrance to Ammon about being joyful to the point of boasting, the latter said that he did not boast in his own strength or wisdom, but he insisted, “my joy is full, yea, my

² This condition reminds one of Elder John A. Widtsoe’s curious phrase, “joyful struggle.” See CR April 1938, 52

³ In a contrasting editorial comment Mormon tells us, “thus we see the great reason of sorrow, and also of rejoicing—sorrow because of death and destruction among men, and joy because of the light of Christ unto life” (Alma 28:14).

heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God.” Ammon says further, “we will glory in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full” (Alma 26:16).

Mormon returns in the narrative to the encounter of Alma and the sons of Mosiah, and says that it “was a joyful meeting.” But specifically, the record says that “the joy of Ammon was great even that he was full; yea he was swallowed up in the joy of his God, even to the exhausting of his strength; and he fell again to the earth” (Alma 27:16-17). Mormon asks, “Now was not this exceeding joy? Behold, this is joy which none receiveth save it be the truly penitent and humble seeker of happiness” (Alma 27:18).⁴ Pondering on the remarkable success of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites, Alma acknowledges that “my soul is carried away, even to the separation of it from the body, as it were, so great is my joy” (Alma 29:16).

Alma experienced “great joy” when he recognized the humility of the impoverished segment of the Zoramites (Alma 32:6). Amulek quoted a prayer from Zenos, who acknowledged that his joy was in God because of the mercy of his Son (Alma 33:11). Under the leadership of Moroni the Nephites were delivered from the ambitions of Zerahemnah and some of the Lamanites. Mormon reports that the Nephites “did fast much and pray much, and they did worship God with exceedingly great joy” (Alma 45: 1). During the time Moroni contended with Amalickiah “there were many who died, firmly believing that their souls were redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ; thus they went out of the world rejoicing” (Alma 46:39).

Nephi, Lehi and the ill-intentioned Lamanites in a prison were surrounded by darkness, but when they were subsequently encircled by a pillar of undamaging fire, “they were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory” (Helaman 5:44). As a result of the conversion of some of those Lamanites “the people of the church did have great joy,” and both Nephites and Lamanites “did fellowship one with another, and did rejoice one with another, and did have great joy” (Helaman 6:3).

As the time drew near when the major signs were to be given of Christ’s birth as prophesied by Samuel, great signs and wonders occurred, and angels appeared to wise men and “did declare unto them “glad tidings of great joy” (Helaman 16:14).⁵ In a tender comment of Mormon to his son Moroni the father said, “I rejoice exceedingly that your Lord Jesus Christ hath called you to his ministry, and to his holy work” (Moroni 8:2).

⁴ Along this line President Hugh B. Brown, “Father, Are You There?” BYU Stakes Fireside Address, Provo: BYU Press, 8 October 1967, 12, noted that “the ecstasy of religious experience comes from a clean soul.”

⁵ The verbiage here is similar to what an angel said to King Benjamin (Mosiah 3:3). Also, as Alma reminded the recalcitrant of Ammonihah, “the voice of the Lord , by the mouth of angels doth declare it to all nations . . . that they may have glad tidings of great joy” (Alma 13:22).

FUTURE JOY

Lehi told Sariah that he rejoiced in the prospect of a promised land (1 Nephi 5:5). Nephi asked his brothers rhetorically if their seed would not rejoice when they would come to a knowledge of their redeemer (1 Nephi 15:14-15). In his dying testament Lehi hoped he would have joy in Laman and Lemuel (2 Nephi 1:21). Jacob told his listeners to rejoice because of the blessings to be bestowed upon their children (2 Nephi 9:3). He also informed his audience that those who have eschewed the crosses of the world and despised their shame, and who inherit the Kingdom of God will have joy forever (2 Nephi 9:18). He hoped that the children of the Nephites would receive with joy the knowledge of their first parents (Lehi, Sariah and their righteous children), as written on the plates prepared by him (Jacob 4:3). In the allegory of the olive tree the lord of the vineyard hopes to have joy in the fruit of the tree (Jacob 5:60,71,75). Enos rejoiced at the contemplation that he would stand before his redeemer and see his face with pleasure (Enos 1:27). Limhi's people would rejoice knowing that their brethren in Zarahemla were accounted for (Mosiah 7:14). Many of the Nephites "were taught that [Christ] would appear unto them after his resurrection; and this the people did hear with great joy and gladness" (Alma 16:20). Those who mourned the loss of their loved ones through war nevertheless rejoiced in the knowledge that they would dwell on the right hand of God in neverending happiness (Alma 28:12). Alma trusted that he would have great joy in his son Shiblon, and had already experienced a measure of joy (Alma 38:2-3).

PROLEPTIC JOY

A proleptic event assumes the reality of something that has not yet taken place but will occur some time down the road. For example, Abinadi spoke of redemption as if it had already come (Mosiah 16:6). Many of the Lehites before the coming of Christ accepted the atonement as efficacious to them.

Father Abraham was filled with gladness and rejoiced at the coming of Christ (Helaman 8:17). The patriarch Jacob had joy in his son Joseph because, like the preserved remnant of his garment, a remnant of his posterity would be taken unto God (Alma 46:25). The Jaredite Emer saw the Son of Righteousness and rejoiced (Ether 9:22).

Jacob and others rejoiced that by engraving plates they would pass on knowledge to their descendants (Jacob 4:3). According to King Benjamin, people who accepted the word of the prophets concerning the forgiveness of sin as a result of the future coming of Christ could rejoice with exceeding great joy (Mosiah 3:13). Some of the Nephites were filled with great joy because of the

resurrection yet to come (Alma 4:14). Many of the Nephites, beginning with Lehi, proleptically rejoiced at the coming of Christ (Helaman 8:22).

THE JOYFUL CONDITION

Before the Fall Adam and Eve knew no joy because they knew no misery (2 Nephi 2:23). The ultimate objective for humankind is to have joy (2 Nephi 2:25).

In the narrative in 1 Nephi 17:48 Nephi reports that when his angry brothers were going to lay their hands upon him with mischievous intent he warned them not to touch him, “for I am filled with the power of God, even unto the consuming of my flesh.” In his psalm in 2 Nephi 4:21 he varies the words to say that the Lord had “filled [him] with his love, even unto the consuming of [his] flesh.” Love and godly power seem to go hand in hand. In sobering moments Nephi primed himself to rejoice rather than droop in sin (2 Nephi 4:28, 30). Jacob advised his audience to pray continually, offer thanks, and let their hearts rejoice (2 Nephi 9:52). The focal point in rejoicing is Christ. In Nephi’s community in the promised land the people rejoiced in Christ (2 Nephi 25:26). Enos rejoiced above all in the world when he preached of Christ (Enos 1:26).

Rejoicing flourishes in a climate of humility. King Benjamin informed his people that God had caused them to rejoice and had done other pleasing things, yet they were unprofitable servants (Mosiah 2:20). Conversely, he told his listeners that if they would recognize their nothingness and unworthiness and humble themselves to the depths they could always rejoice and be filled with the love of God (Mosiah 4:12).

The sons of Mosiah experienced incomprehensible exhilaration as a result of their labors (Alma 25:17; 28:8). Thousands of Lamanites rejoiced due to the ministry of Mosiah’s sons (Alma 26:4). Witnessing the fruits of missionary labors can bring satisfaction. This was the case with Alma the younger, “that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance; and this is my joy. 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” (Alma 29:9-10). Alma’s joy was not only full as a result of his own fruitful labors, but he was thrilled with the joy of his beloved brethren, the sons of Mosiah (Alma 29:13-14; 36:25).

The ministry of the Nephite prophets was not geared to temporal gain. In his face-off with Korihor, Alma asks, “And now, if we do not receive anything for our labors in the church, what doth it profit us to labor in the church, save it were to declare the truth, that we may have rejoicings in the joy of our brethren” (Alma 30:34)? The setbacks of the missionaries were compensated by joy. After

Alma offered his anguished prayer regarding the gross apostasy of the Zoramites, he and his companions separated so they could spread their influence more widely. The record says that “the Lord provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst; yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ” (Alma 31:38). As Alma concluded his discourse to the receptive portion of the Zoramites he blessed them in these words: “And then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son” (Alma 33:23).

Alma’s life covered both ends of the human spectrum. In a tender recounting of his conversion story to his son, Helaman, he described what happened after his reproof from the angel and he was transferred to another dimension: “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” (Alma 36:21). The joy that he experienced on that occasion was so potent that it motivated the balance of his eventful life. He tells Helaman, “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 which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Alma 36:24).

Mormon describes Captain Moroni as a passionate man. He identified with Moroni to the point that he named his son after the great military leader. Moroni was the ultimate patriot. Among other things, Mormon says that he was “a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery” (Alma 48:11). In response to a frustrated and scathing letter from Moroni, Pahoran said, “And now, in your epistle you have censured me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart,” and Pahoran also said, “I do joy in receiving your epistle” (Alma 61:9,19).

At times joy was communal. There was a brief season of righteousness after the wars of which Captain Moroni was a part. Mormon tells us that “there was continual rejoicing in the land of Zarahemla, and in all the regions round about . . . there was peace and exceedingly great joy in the remainder of the forty and ninth year; and also there was continual peace and great joy in the fiftieth year of the reign of the judges” (Helaman 3:31-32). But the joy was fragile, and it was not long before pride interfered with the happy feeling some of the Nephites had (Alma 33-34). Yet the more tenacious of the righteous “did fast and pray oft, and did wax 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” (Helaman 3:35).

SINISTER OR ABORTED JOY

The many examples in this paper of joy stress the beatific nature of the rewarding sensations that many felt. There are also some instances of what we might call counterfeit joy. There are also cases where the desire of some people to experience joy is undercut or at least limited as a result of circumstances.

Laman and Lemuel rejoiced over the sorrow of Nephi when they refused to help construct a ship (1 Nephi 17:19). King Noah’s army temporarily drove back the Lamanites, for which they rejoiced (Mosiah 11:18). Pahoran in an epistle told Moroni that he did not joy in the latter’s afflictions, but there were some who did joy in his setbacks (Alma 61:2-3). The enemies of God rejoiced when they thought Samuel the Lamanite’s time had passed for the sign to be given of Christ’s birth (3 Nephi 1:6). The army of Giddianhi had vain joy when they saw the Nephites fall to the earth, supposedly in fear of them (3 Nephi 4:9). With the destruction of many cities the devil laughed and his angels rejoiced (3 Nephi 9:2).

In a personal poem or psalm about his relationship with God Nephi candidly wrote of a struggle that related to his fallenness as a mortal being . He reflected that when he “desire[d] to rejoice” his heart would groan in the consciousness of his sins, though he acknowledged that he had had surpassing experiences with deity (2 Nephi 4:18-25). His brother Jacob, in a pointed sermon to the Nephites, said that his heart would rejoice exceedingly if he did not have to talk about anything worse than pride, namely, unauthorized plurality of wives (Jacob 2:22)

Nehor sought to persuade the Nephites that they did not need to fear and tremble but lift up their heads and rejoice, because in the end all would be saved (Alma 1:4). The high priest Giddonah charged Korihor, with his blandishments, of interrupting the rejoicings of the Nephites (Alma 30:22). The risen Lord told the surviving Lehites that those who built the church by men or the devil only had joy for a season (3 Nephi 27:11). Mormon reluctantly came to realize that his joy over his soldiers had been vain, because the Nephites had not really repented (Mormon 2:13).

JOY IN 3 NEPHI

The above survey reveals that joy and rejoicing are quite common occurrences in the Book of Mormon. Although many of the instances when people experienced joy in the narrative were simply

happy moments incidental to the mortal condition, some of them bordered on the ecstatic. Given the nature of Christ's visit in the land of Bountiful, it is not surprising that the sensations of joy were on a high level.

When looking at the joy of the risen Lord in his Book of Mormon ministry it is instructive to recognize the contrast that makes it particularly meaningful. In the preface to a short story based on 3 Nephi, Truman Madsen notes the impetus that led to its writing. "It springs out of a concern that has haunted me ever since I began to understand the New Testament. What would Christ say, what would he do, what more of himself would he unfold if he were surrounded by persons whose love for him was as intense as the hate of those who crucified him? The Nephite multitude provided such a setting."⁶ There must have been quite an aura of electrified bliss in Bountiful around 34 AD!

Notwithstanding the stark contrast in the scenes in Jerusalem and Bountiful, a curious blending took place in Jesus earthly experience. President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., referred to "the spiritual agony and ecstasy of Gethsemane."⁷ Speaking of Christ, Elder Stephen L Richards expressed this view:

It is true that he made sacrifice, it is true that his life was filled with many wrongs to him, and that he suffered inexplicably, and yet I cannot but think that in all his sufferings, indeed, even in the giving of his life he experienced a joy that transcends the comprehension of the finite mind. He knew of the vitality of the work which he did. He knew he was the Savior of mankind. He knew of the beneficent results that would follow his supreme sacrifice, and that knowledge could not have failed to transport him with a joy that no one that no one can fully appreciate and realize.⁸

Elder Robert D. Hales testified that "in [Christ's] darkest hour, the light of peace and joy did not fade. It grew bright!"⁹ Plainly, when he ministered to the survivors of the cataclysm described in 3 Nephi, his joy was in the forefront. One might propose that Jesus' joy was as intense as it was precisely because he had experienced the dregs on such a gargantuan scale. This model is aptly expressed in the wording, in the English translation, of Alma's conversion ordeal: Both his pain and his joy were

⁶ Truman G. Madsen, "Ye Are My Witnesses," *Christ in the Inner Life*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978, 43; also in *Five Classics* by Truman G. Madsen, Salt Lake City: Eagle Gate, 2002, 171. The story was originally published in the *New England Advocate*, a missionary journal, while Brother Madsen was a mission president.

⁷ J. Reuben Clark, Jr., CR, April 1933, 104.

⁸ Stephen L Richards, CR, April, 1928, 31-32?

⁹ Robert D. Hales, "Faith through Tribulation Brings Peace and Joy," *Ensign* 33 (May 2003), 17.

exquisite (Alma 36:21). When Lehi informs Jacob that “men are that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25), he makes that statement within the context of opposition in all things.

The translator of the Book of Mormon, the Prophet Joseph, went through a similar process. Truman Madsen speaks of two women who posed opposing questions. One woman wondered why the Prophet was subjected to such severe buffetings throughout his life. The other woman asked why the Prophet was so profusely favored with visions and spiritual gifts. Brother Madsen responds, “Those two answer each other. With the knowledge of God’s truth comes the power of opposition and responsibility.”¹⁰ One of the weighty oracles the Prophet dictated from the plates was stated by Lehi to Jacob. Said he, “behold, in thy childhood thou hast suffered afflictions and much sorrow, because of the rudeness of thy brethren. Nevertheless . . . , thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain (2 Nephi 2:1- 2). When he translated that statement of Lehi could the Prophet have foreseen that the Lord would reveal something similar to him later in his life, at Liberty Jail, when he emphatically stated, “know thou, my son, that all these experiences shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7).

Throughout his teenage years and beyond Joseph was nettled by harassments, both by people and circumstances; however, according to Elder Francis M. Lyman, “he had always waded through a sea of trouble; yet the Lord made his heart joyous and light.”¹¹ This brings to mind the softening of afflictions to Alma the elder and his faithful church members when they were under the domination of unsympathetic Lamanites and especially Alma’s former colleague among the wicked priests of King Noah, the malignant Amulon (Mosiah 24:14).

In a review of Abraham’s heavy trials Hugh Nibley speaks of that patriarch’s trans- generational peers.

All of Moses’ life was toil and danger, the real, intimate, ever-present danger such as only the Near East can sustain at a high level for indefinite periods of time. No one would ask to go through what Lehi did, or Jared and his brother, or Joseph Smith in his dispensation. And the one who suffered most of all was the Lord himself, “despised, rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” In short, the leaders

¹⁰ BYU Travel Study Church History Tour Lectures by Lynn A McKinlay, Truman G. Madsen, and Howard H. Barron, August 2-7, 1962, 136-37. Lecture was given about Liberty Jail. Copy of the transcripts are in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at the Harold B. Lee Library at BYU.

¹¹ Francis M. Lyman, CR April 1905, 26.

of the great dispensations have truly earned their calling and their glory, paying a price that the rest of the human race could not pay even if they would.¹²

After enumerating various trials of Abraham with quotations from Genesis, Brother Nibley concludes that “any one of these crises is enough to break any man’s spirit.”¹³ If that was true of Abraham, how much more so for the Christ!

The experience of those who met the risen Lord in bountiful must have been surpassing. Elder Richard L. Evans noted that God is “an infinite intelligence with an infinite love for us.”¹⁴ Assuming that this is also true of Christ one can only imagine what the Lehites encountered when he interacted with them as a group as well as individually. The fact that the Lord appeared in full-bloom embodiment is a precious ingredient for us who accept the genuineness of the account in 3 Nephi. The narrative is marvelously personal. The Lord revealed in D&C 93:33-34 that “man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy; and when separated, man cannot receive a fulness of joy.” Truman Madsen comments: “In this segment of the life of Christ (in 3 Nephi), otherwise unknown, He is a resurrected, composite self. He has received ‘the glory of the Father’ and dares to apply the word ‘perfect’ to Himself. His is not an abstract, or metaphysical, or ‘utterly other’ perfection. He is, in all the highest senses of flesh and spirit, a personality. He can be felt, embraced—loved.”¹⁵

Not only were the people of Lehi face to face with a magnificent resurrected figure, they were able to look into the countenance of a being who had experienced the totality of life, one who understood utter human degradation and yet the most noble and exalting of human sensations. They must have gazed with wonder, knowing that here was a man who understood the full spectrum. Countering a cynical outlook, it was encouraging to see this personage experiencing and expressing joy. The record provides us with this lovely passage: “And it came to pass that Jesus blessed them as they did pray unto him; and his countenance did smile upon them, and the light of his countenance did shine upon them, and behold they were as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus; and behold, the whiteness thereof did exceed all the whiteness, yea, even there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof (3 Nephi 19:25). After dismissing himself to pray to the Father, we

¹² Hugh Nibley, “Setting the Stage—The World of Abraham,” *Improvement Era*, 72/10 (October 1969) 89. This is part of a series titled, *A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price*.”

¹³ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁴ Richard L. Evans, CR April 1962, 97.

¹⁵ Truman Madsen, “Joseph Smith and the Sources of Love, Four Essays on Love, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 19??, ??; reprinted in *Five Classics* by Truman G. Madsen, Salt Lake City: Eagle Gate, 2002, 73.

learn that “when Jesus had spoken these words he came again unto his disciples; and behold they did pray steadfastly, without ceasing, unto him; and he did smile upon them again; and behold they were white, even as Jesus” (3 Nephi 19:30). The radiance of their Lord reflected on those sanctified people. Their privileged luminousness was derivative of the Man who bore joy. He was joyful, they were joyful.

According to 3 Nephi 10:10 the mourning of the Nephites over the convulsing of the earth turned to joy after the tumult ceased. Their lamentations shifted “into the praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ, their Redeemer.” The joy continued throughout Jesus’ visit. When he repeated more or less the antitheses of the Sermon at the Mount (it was the Sermon at the Temple in Bountiful), he told the Lehites that they could experience joy when they were persecuted (3 Nephi 12:12).¹⁶ While the language in 3 Nephi infers that the Lehites continually rejoiced, there were definite high points. They heard Jesus offer an ineffable intercessory prayer, which manifested his love for them. Says the record:

And no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak; and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father.

And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of praying unto the Father, he arose; but so great was the joy of the multitude that they were overcome.

And it came to pass that Jesus spake unto them, and bade them arise

And they arose from the earth, and he said unto them: Blessed are ye because of your faith, and now behold, my joy is full (3 Nephi 17:17-20).

This passage may imply that when the Lehites were overcome with joy they did what Ammon and several of the Lamanite leaders had done earlier in the Book of Mormon, when light infused joy into their souls (Alma 19:6): they lost consciousness, but only for a few moments.

Hugh Nibley has a curious reflection on this passage. He notes that we bear suffering and pain “without end ... there’s no limit to the suffering. But how do you contain joy?” He refers to when the patriarch Joseph met his brothers after several years separation. “He was the great ruler of Egypt, but he had to go into the other room and cry his eyes out because he was so happy to see them. So it is

¹⁶ From the report we have in 4 Nephi it appears that those who heard this part of the Sermon at the Temple had to bear little if any persecution, since the people carried a lifelong memory of their cherished days with the Lord.

here.”¹⁷ Elsewhere Brother Nibley contrast pain with joy. While pain is hard, “joy is so much harder to take. You don’t know what to do with it . . . when pain becomes too great you black out automatically . . . it’s the same thing with joy if you can’t contain it. When you don’t know how to handle a problem psychologically, what do you do? You black out. This is your defense.”¹⁸ While acknowledging that joy can be daunting under some circumstances, Brother Nibley recognizes that Adam and Eve “were created especially to have joy.”¹⁹ – which goes along with Lehi’s dictum to Jacob that “men are that they might have joy (2 Nephi 2:24). In a letter Brother Nibley assured one of his sons that “[W]e are perfectly free to have joy and rejoicing without limit whenever we are ready, enjoying to the fullest the faith that brushes aside every dark and foreboding cloud of gloom, the hope that leads us on with never a moment’s boredom since we are always seeing something wonderful ahead, and above all the luxury of charity for all.”²⁰

Although Brother Nibley believes that while we can experience a high dosage of joy in this world, “[b]eing aware, instructed, and informed does not complete a fulness of joy, we are told (D&C 93:33-34), which can come only when spirit is united with the body.”²¹ Elder Dallin H. Oaks agrees, when he tells us that “despite all we can do, we cannot have a fulness of joy in this world or through our own efforts. Only in Christ can our joy be full. . . . We are able to have a fulness of joy only when spirit and body are inseparably connected in the glorious resurrection to celestial glory. That joy, of course, comes only through the mercy of the Holy Messiah, whose resurrection broke the bands of death and whose atonement unlocks the reservoir of mercy by which we can be cleansed of our sins and come into the presence of God to receive the fulness of the Father.”²²

Another ingredient in reaching a fulness of joy relates to kindred relations. In the moving scene described in 3 Nephi 17, where Jesus interacts with the little children, he prays for them collectively and then blesses them individually. The event is so touching that he weeps before and after administering the blessings. “And he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little

¹⁷ Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Semester 3*, Provo: FARMS, 1988-90, 350. See also *Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Semester 4*, Provo: FARMS, 1988-90, 106.

¹⁸ Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Semester 2*, Provo: FARMS, 1988-90, 386-87. See also Hugh Nibley, “Prophets and Glad Tidings,” *The World and the Prophets*, vol.3 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book and FARMS, 264-65.

¹⁹ Hugh Nibley, “Gifts,” *Approaching Zion*, vol. 9 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book and FARMS, 106.

²⁰ Boyd Jay Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life*, Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2002, 129.

²¹ Hugh Nibley, “But What Kind of Work?” *Approaching Zion*, vol. 9 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book and FARMS, 267.

²² Dallin H. Oaks, “Joy and Mercy,” *Ensign*, 21/11 (November 1991), 74

ones” (verse 23). The children are then favored with ministrations from angels, and all are encircled by fire. This transcendent event left an indelible impression upon those present, so that the memory fired the righteous motivation of three subsequent generations, and a good share of the fourth. Keeping in mind this extraordinary demonstration of love of the resurrected Jesus towards the surviving Lehites in Bountiful, a statement by President Rudger Clawson resonates: “If men and women are to enter into a fulness of joy it must needs be that the family relationship should continue throughout eternity.”²³ In this context the joy and pain of Lehi, when he reports the vision of the tree of life, makes sense—joy over Sam and Nephi, pain over Laman and Lemuel. We feel the poignancy with Lehi as Nephi informs us that “he did exhort [Laman and Lemuel] then with all the feeling of a tender parent” (1 Nephi 8:37). But we are happy when Alma tells his son Shiblon that he trusts that he will have joy in him, and has already felt that joy (Alma 38:2-3). We also sense Alma’s love for another son, Corianton, in his more lengthy interview with him than with the two older brothers (Alma 39-42).

The contemplation of elation felt for family is not confined to life in the resurrection. Truman Madsen observes that “[a]most all of the occurrences of the word “joy” in the Book of Mormon and the occasions leading to it are shared joy. They come in the sharing of times of blessedness and sociality and kinship and participating with others.”²⁴ Referring to Lehi’s summon to his family members to partake of the delicious fruit from the tree of life, Elder Marion D. Hanks proposes: “That which is beautiful and good and satisfying to the soul is infinitely more so when shared with those we love.”²⁵ The Prophet Joseph Smith took note of a happy gathering early in his career: “On the 28th and 29th [March 1832], I visited the brethren above Big Blue River, in Kaw Township, a few miles west of Independence, and received a welcome only known by brethren and sisters united as one in the same faith, and by the same baptism, and supported by the same Lord. The Colesville branch, in particular, rejoiced as the ancient Saints did with Paul. It is good to rejoice with the people of God.”²⁶

The Prophet’s comment that the brethren were “united as one” points to a prior condition, the thing that makes social unification meaningful—fellowship with God. “To be in union with God,” says Elder Marion G. Romney, “is to be in harmony with Him. . . . Disharmony is the thing which makes unhappiness. One so in harmony partakes of the divine nature or love of God which Nephi said was

²³ Rudger Clawson, CR October 1928, 46.

²⁴ Truman G. Madsen, *The Sacrament: Feasting at the Lord’s Table*, Provo: Amalphi Publishing, 2008, 17.

²⁵ Marion D. Hanks, *Improvement Era* 64/12 (December 1961) 929-30.

²⁶ HC 1: 269.

‘most desirable above all things,’ and to which the angel responded, ‘yea, and the most joyous to the soul’ (1 Nephi 11:22-23).²⁷ The Lehites at Bountiful were one with Christ, which enhanced their spiritual enjoyments.

Sanctified joy is associated with love, more specifically, the pure love of Christ. According to Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, “[t]he most cherished and sacred moments of our lives are those filled with the spirit of love. The greater the measure of our love, the greater is our joy. In the end, the development of such love is the true measure of success in life.”²⁸ The prophets assure us that ultimately joy does not need to be short lived. Elder Lorenzo Snow entreated the saints to experience “practical holiness,” which he defined as “being imbued with the love of God to-day, and walking in the light of the Lord in this world, not leaving these things for the world to come.”²⁹ Says Elder James E. Faust, “The joy we seek is not a temporary emotional high, but a habitual inner joy learned from long experience and trust in God.”³⁰

Yet the love we experience in mortal life is potentially a foretaste of things to come. Elder Parley P. Pratt believes “that our intellect and our affection only buds in time, and ripens in eternity.” He explains:

There we shall be know and love our kindred and our friends; and there we shall be capable of exercising all those pure emotions of friendship and love, which fill our hearts with such inexpressible delight in this world. And not only so, but our love will be far more strong and perfect in many respects. First, because we shall know and realize more. Secondly, because our organs of thought will be more strong and durable. Thirdly, because we shall be free from those mean, selfish, groveling, envious and disagreeable influences which disturb, and hinder the free exercise of our affections in this world. And lastly, because we shall be associated with a more extensive and numerous society of those who are filled with the same freedom of spirit and affection that we are, and therefore are objects truly worthy of our love.³¹

²⁷ Marion G. Romney, “Faith—the Key to Happiness,” Speeches of the Year, January 28, 1958, 2

²⁸ Joseph B. Wirthlin, “The Great Commandment,” *Ensign*, 37/11 (November 2007), 30.

²⁹ Lorenzo Snow, *Millennial Star* 42/44 (November 1, 1880), 690.

³⁰ James E. Faust, “The Voice of the Spirit,” Brigham Young University 1993-94 Speeches, September 5, 1993, Provo: BYU, 1.

³¹ Parley P. Pratt, “Intelligence and Affection,” *Writings of Parley Parker Pratt*, ed. Parker

The Book of Mormon, and especially 3 Nephi, guarantee that love and joy are here for the taking. We can experience it now and can anticipate and intensification in the future. Elder Neal A. Maxwell testifies that “[God’s] hand is a loving hand, stretched out to love and lead us, if we will, into a fullness of joy.”³² It is Elder Robert D. Hales’ prayer that we can “find the faith, courage, and strength to endure to the end so that we may feel the joy of faithfully returning to the arms of our Heavenly Father.”³³ If that happens we will be in the same beatific condition as the Lehites at Bountiful, who communed with Christ.

³² Neal A. Maxwell, “Brim with Joy’ (Alma 26:11),” Brigham Young University 1995-96 Speeches, January 23, 1996, Provo: BYU, 150.

³³ Robert D. Hales, “Behold, We Count Them Happy Which Endure’,” Ensign 28/5, (May 1998), 77.