



BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL  
<http://bookofmormoncentral.org/>



Religious Studies Center  
<https://rsc.byu.edu/>

---

## The Centrality of Nephi's Vision

Author(s): Steven L. Olsen

Source: *Religious Educator*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2010), pp. 50–65

Published by: BYU Religious Studies Center

---



The Religious Studies Center is collaborating with Book of Mormon Central to preserve and extend access to scholarly research on the Book of Mormon. Items are archived by the permission of the Religious Studies Center.

<https://rsc.byu.edu/>



C. C. A. Christensen, *Nephi's Vision of the Virgin and the Son of God*, oil on board, 1890, courtesy of Church History Museum.

An angel instructs the Book of Mormon prophet Nephi about the birth and mission of the Savior (see 1 Nephi 11). This painting is part of a series of scenes from the Book of Mormon commissioned by the Sunday School for use as instructional aids.

# *The Centrality of Nephi’s Vision*

STEVEN L. OLSEN

Steven L. Olsen (OlsenSL@ldschurch.org) is senior historic sites curator in the Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

---

This article proposes that Nephi’s vision (1 Nephi 11–14) forms the interpretative centerpiece of his writings. Implied in this thesis are the premises that Nephi had an explicit purpose in writing, sufficient literary skills, and control of his source material to accomplish his purpose.<sup>1</sup> To establish this thesis, I will consider several themes in Nephi’s vision and then demonstrate how these themes pervade the books of 1 and 2 Nephi.

## **The Structure of Nephi’s Writings**

We recall that Nephi was commanded to keep two sets of records. The first was begun shortly after his arrival in the promised land (see 1 Nephi 19:1) and became the basis of the record that we now call the large plates.<sup>2</sup> Nephi’s second account—the subject of this article—formed the bulk of the record that we now call the small plates of Nephi (1 Nephi to Omni).

Nephi began the small plates by abridging a record of his father’s ministry and then writing a record of his own (1 Nephi 1:16–17; 6:3; 8:29; 10:1; 15). In Nephi’s abridgment of his father’s record, Lehi is clearly the protagonist—the

main actor who initiates or motivates most of the events in the story—as he receives and carries out God’s commands.<sup>3</sup> Nephi’s role in Lehi’s record is to help fulfill his father’s leadership.<sup>4</sup> Although Nephi remains deferential to his father throughout his whole life, once he begins the account of his own ministry he exercises increasingly greater leadership and more direct influence in the story.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, Nephi never demeans his father’s contributions or supplants his authority. In fact, Nephi begins the account of his own ministry with a summary of Lehi’s major prophecies (1 Nephi 10). Nevertheless, he recognizes and begins to accomplish his own divine commission.

Lehi’s and Nephi’s records are tied together by more than historical contiguity. More importantly, they are connected by thematic emphasis and spiritual significance. Lehi’s dream of the tree of life appropriately concludes his record. It details in largely allegorical terms the promise of salvation that Lehi had received in the “dreams and visions” with which Nephi begins his father’s record (see 1 Nephi 1:5–19). Similarly, Nephi begins his own record with a vision of the plan of salvation (1 Nephi 11–14) and, as we shall see, concludes with an extended prophecy based on that vision (2 Nephi 25–33).

These structural similarities between the two records are not accidental. They signal Nephi’s continuing deference to the patriarchal authority of his father and reveal a central purpose of these records: to illustrate that revelations and spiritual experiences serve as the foundation of sacred historical narrative. In this article, I argue that Nephi’s vision provides the core themes that guide and direct his writings. Within Nephi’s account, the vision plays several crucial roles: (1) it defines the plan of salvation, (2) it provides a framework for Nephi’s historical narrative, (3) it defines a covenant-based identity for the Nephites, and (4) it unifies the Nephites’ prophetic tradition.

### **Plan of Salvation**

Nephi receives his vision because of his desire to “know the things that my father had seen” (1 Nephi 11:1) in his dream. While Lehi’s and Nephi’s experiences both center on the plan of salvation, they represent, for the most part, different literary genres. Lehi’s dream is largely allegorical, while Nephi’s vision is largely a historical narrative. An allegory is a certain kind of symbolic representation whose particular features—the iron rod, mists of darkness, and the great and spacious building—are not actual places or things. Rather they are symbols; they stand for spiritual realities whose significance transcends the precise denotation of their referent. While these elements have no

empirical place in the material world, they are not ephemeral. Each object and event in the allegory symbolizes a critical truth of the plan of salvation, as the following table shows:

| Symbol                                      | Meaning                                    |
|---|--|
| tree of life; the fountain of living waters | love of God (see 1 Nephi 11:21–25)         |
| rod of iron                                 | word of God (see 1 Nephi 11:25)            |
| fountain of filthy water                    | depths of hell (see 1 Nephi 12:16)         |
| mists of darkness                           | temptations (see 1 Nephi 12:17)            |
| large and spacious building                 | vanity and pride (see 1 Nephi 12:18).      |
| fruit of the tree                           | eternal life (see 1 Nephi 15:36; D&C 14:7) |

These and other elements are woven into an allegory that describes five logical possibilities for God's children in relation to the plan of salvation:

1. Some lose their way when they encounter temptations (see 1 Nephi 8:23).
2. After experiencing the goodness of the gospel, some become ashamed because of the vanity of the world (1 Nephi 8:24–28).
3. Some are saved by faithfully following the word of God (1 Nephi 8:30).
4. Some consciously seek for and embrace worldly vices (1 Nephi 8:31).
5. Many are destroyed by the filthiness of the world (1 Nephi 8:32).

The overall message is that through the exercise of agency, everyone will eventually realize one or another of these five alternatives. The dream assures that the blessings of eternal life are available to all who receive the word of God and remain faithful to it throughout their lives. However, those who compromise or reject God's plan inevitably experience sorrow, misery, or spiritual destruction.

After hearing his father recount the dream, Nephi seeks divine confirmation through reflection and prayer. The resulting spiritual experience includes a similar allegory of redemption so that Nephi can interpret the dream for himself and his brothers, including elements that Lehi had omitted in his own retelling (see 1 Nephi 15:21–36). Nephi's vision, however, adds a literal dimension. Nephi sees relevant future events as they would transpire in real space and time and as they would involve real people. Rather than depict logical alternatives, Nephi's drama of deliverance occurs in four historical acts

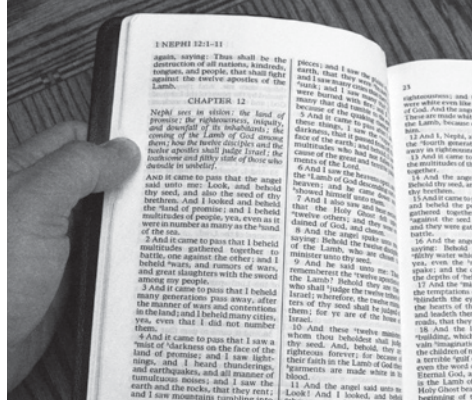
differentiated by time, place, persons, and purpose.

*Christ's mission (1 Nephi 11).* In this act, the Savior of the World is born of a virgin (vv. 13–20), ministers unto the people (vv. 21–28), chooses twelve Apostles and blesses and heals multitudes (vv. 29–31), and is crucified (vv. 32–33). The world then fights against the Apostles (vv. 34–35), and the wicked are eventually destroyed (v. 36).

*The promised land (1 Nephi 12).* The second act of the vision is divided into four successive scenes: wars, contentions, and destructions among the Nephites and Lamanites (vv. 2–5), the ministry of the Lamb of God among the Nephites following his resurrection (vv. 6–8), four generations of righteousness resulting from Christ's ministry (vv. 11–12), and the final destruction of the Nephites because of their wickedness (vv. 13–19).

*The chosen people (1 Nephi 13).* The third act reveals a “great and abominable church” among the Gentiles, whose founder is the devil (v. 6). It persecutes and kills the Saints of God, scatters his chosen people, perverts the Bible, and champions worldly vices (vv. 5–9, 26–29). Some Gentiles come to the promised land and establish a mighty nation that is delivered by God (vv. 10–19). Here God begins to fulfill his ancient covenants of salvation by bringing forth the inspired record of Nephi’s people, which contains the fulness of the gospel of the Lamb of God. This promise of salvation is stated explicitly: “And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb; and whoso shall publish peace, yea, tidings of great joy, how beautiful upon the mountains shall they be” (1 Nephi 13:37).

*The covenant fulfilled (1 Nephi 14).* By means of a “great and a marvelous work” (v. 7), the Gentiles are converted to the gospel of the Lamb and are numbered among the covenant people of the Lord. The “church of the Lamb of God” spreads throughout the earth, although its “dominions . . .



The second act of the vision is divided into four successive scenes.



were small,” when compared with those of the great and abominable church (v. 12). In order to save the “church of the Lamb,” God sends his wrath upon the “mother of harlots” through wars among all the nations and kindreds of the earth (vv. 13–17).

In summary, Nephi's vision develops a narrative of salvation around three dominant themes:

*Christ's gospel.* The plan of salvation is made effective through the gospel of Jesus Christ, the foundation of which is the Atonement.

*Promised land.* The central earthly developments of the plan of salvation occur in lands of promise, including the Holy Land and the promised land.

*Chosen people.* Those who accept and live Christ's gospel are considered his church and the covenant people of God.

### Historical Framework

The three main themes of Nephi's vision appear in various forms in his historical writings. Woven together, these themes present a compelling account of how time and eternity, man and God, and earth and heaven work together to fulfill God's divine purposes.

*Christ's gospel.* At the beginning of his record, Nephi identifies the “power of deliverance” as a prime purpose of his writing: “I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20).<sup>6</sup> The eternal dimensions of deliverance are amply illustrated in the sermons and exhortations of his narrative.<sup>7</sup> In Nephi's writings, the blessings of salvation become effective in individuals' lives through their conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the blessings of the Atonement.

Reflecting the importance of conversion in individuals' lives is the fact that Nephi's own conversion is his first explicit act in his small plates record. Nephi (1) recognizes a spiritual deficiency in his life, (2) seeks God's help to overcome, (3) receives blessings from God through the Holy Spirit, and (4) obeys God's commandments and serves others as a result (1 Nephi 2:16–18). The account of his own conversion establishes a pattern for all other people in the story. All of the details that Nephi includes in his narrative about Lehi, Nephi, Sariah, Laman, Lemuel, and Jacob emphasize one or more of these steps of conversion, either in a positive or negative way.

*Promised land.* Nephi's historical narrative is nearly consumed with his extended family's preparing for and obtaining the promised land. In fact, they repeatedly risk health, wealth, safety, and life to do so. They continually submit themselves to privation and suffering and receive, in turn, miracles, revelations, and heavenly aids (for example, the Liahona) to obtain this goal. Reinforcing the importance of this concept, Nephi's record contains the term "land(s)" 164 times, and the phrase "promised land(s)" or "land(s) of promise" 28 times, making the concept one of the most oft repeated in his account. Nephi's emphasis echoes the divinely directed odysseys of Abraham and Moses in their respective quests for a land of promise. "And I will also be your light in the wilderness; and I will prepare the way before you, if it so be that ye shall keep my commandments; wherefore, inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall be led towards the promised land; and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led. Yea, and the Lord said also that: After ye have arrived in the promised land, ye shall know that I, the Lord, am God; and that I, the Lord, did deliver you from destruction" (1 Nephi 17:13–14).

*Chosen people.* A third dominant theme of Nephi's historical narrative concerns his family, the people led by God to inhabit the promised land. Lehi's abiding desire to preserve his entire family in righteousness is manifest in taking them all, not just the willing, into the wilderness (1 Nephi 2:1–5), in his recruiting Ishmael's family to "raise up seed unto the Lord in the land of promise" (1 Nephi 7:1), and in his desire "that my family should partake of [the fruit of the tree of life] also" (1 Nephi 8:12). Reinforcing the place of this theme in Nephi's record is the fact that the term "people" appears 183 times in Nephi's writings, making it even more frequently mentioned and centrally placed than "land(s)."

As soon as we learn about Lehi's family, we become aware of the rift between Laman and Lemuel, on the one hand, and the rest of the family, on the other. This rift and its consequences become one of the dominant themes of Nephi's narrative, contrasting their reactions to gospel teachings, spiritual experiences, divine commandments, priesthood authority, and historical challenges (see 1 Nephi 2:8–14; 3:28–31; 7:8–21; 15:1–16:5; 17:19–55; 18:9–21; 2 Nephi 1; 4; 5).

### **Covenant Identity**

In addition to framing Nephi's historical narrative, the core themes of the vision—Christ's gospel, promised land, and chosen people—serve as signs of



a covenant by which the blessings of salvation are promised to the Nephites. In their basic form, each covenant theme is introduced at the beginning of the narrative through revelations to Lehi and Nephi and then enlarged throughout Nephi's record.

*Covenant of Christ's gospel.* Nephi observes that Lehi, "testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book, manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah, and also of the redemption of the world" (1 Nephi 1:19). As Nephi's narrative unfolds, the promise of redemption is expressed in the general availability to mankind of the fruit of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 8:11–15), "the greatest of all the gifts of God" (1 Nephi 15:36) and is made explicit in the mission and sacrifice of the "Redeemer of the world," who was "slain for the sins of the world" (1 Nephi 11:27, 33). The terms of the covenant of Christ's gospel are concisely defined in Nephi's vision: "The Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world; and . . . all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved" (1 Nephi 13:40). This passage goes on to say that the "words of the Lamb" contained in the records of both the Nephites and "the twelve apostles of the Lamb" will clarify the means whereby all nations may avail themselves of redemption through his sacrifice (see 1 Nephi 13:40–42; see also 2 Nephi 2:27–29; 9:23–24).

*Covenant of the promised land.* This covenant first appears as part of Nephi's conversion experience. After blessing Nephi because of his faith, the Lord defines *how* he intends to bless Nephi: "Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands. And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord" (see 1 Nephi 2:19–21; see also 1 Nephi 4:14; 2 Nephi 1:20; 4:4; 5:20).

As defined in Nephi's record, the promised land is the sign of an eternal covenant with God. As long as the Nephites obey God's commandments, they prosper, which, for the Nephites, meant living in mortality *as if* in the presence of God and in eternity in his literal presence. In contrast, when they fail to keep this covenant, they do not prosper in mortality and lose the promise of his presence and the quality of his life in eternity.

*Covenant of the chosen people.* The covenant of the chosen people is also revealed to Nephi as a consequence of his conversion.

And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren.

For behold, in that day that they shall rebel against me, I will curse them even with a sore curse, and they shall have no power over thy seed except they shall rebel against me also.

And if it so be that they rebel against me, they shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in the ways of remembrance. (1 Nephi 2:22–24)

The most general statement of the covenant of the chosen people is found in Nephi's commentary on his vision: "Wherefore, our father hath not spoken of our seed alone, but also of all the house of Israel, pointing to the covenant which should be fulfilled in the latter days; which covenant the Lord made to our father Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed" (1 Nephi 15:18).

Accordingly, the progressive distinction of Lamanites and Nephites throughout Nephi's record, including the curse that befell the Lamanites after being separated from the Nephites, reflects the terms of this covenant.<sup>8</sup> Complying with the leadership condition of the covenant of the chosen people, Nephi also consecrated his brothers Jacob and Joseph to be "priests and teachers" over his people to help ensure that they were governed properly (2 Nephi 5:26; see also 1 Nephi 2:22). Nephi ends his commentary on the covenant-based society of his followers with a general assessment of Nephite life: "We lived after the manner of happiness" (2 Nephi 5:27).

### Prophecy

In addition to his vision, which serves as an extended prophecy of the works of God in earth's mortal existence, Nephi's account contains four major prophetic discourses, focusing on and developing the three dominant themes of the vision.

*Lehi blesses his posterity.* At the end of his life, Lehi gathers his extended family around him to give them final blessings and instructions. Nephi does not record all of Lehi's counsel on this occasion (2 Nephi 4:14); however, what he does include focuses on the covenants and conditions of salvation introduced in his vision.

Lehi's first blessing is bestowed upon Laman and Lemuel on condition that they obey their younger brother, and upon Nephi and his followers if Laman and Lemuel do not obey (see 2 Nephi 1:28–32; 4:11). This first blessing takes the form of an extended prophecy about the covenant of the promised land in the last days. The formal terms of the covenant are twice

reaffirmed (see 2 Nephi 1:9, 20), and Lehi introduces what it means to prosper in terms of this covenant (see 2 Nephi 1:9). To this end, Lehi exhorts his family to “remember to observe the statutes and judgments of the Lord,” “be determined in one mind and in one heart, united in all things,” “put on the armor of righteousness,” and “rebel no more against your brother” (see 2 Nephi 1:16, 21, 23, 24). By contrast, Lehi reminds them that those who break this covenant will “dwindle in unbelief,” be “scattered and smitten,” be “cut off” from God’s presence, and “come down into captivity” (2 Nephi 1:10, 11, 17, 21).<sup>9</sup>

Lehi’s blessing to Jacob emphasizes the covenant of Christ’s gospel and takes the form of a prophetic discourse on the doctrine of Christ. Lehi first testifies that Jacob had been redeemed from the fall and that the Atonement is central to the redemption of mankind (2 Nephi 2:2–7). Lehi next asserts that Christ’s atoning sacrifice not only makes possible the remission of sins but also “brings to pass the resurrection of the dead” (2 Nephi 2:8), thus preparing the way for the judgment of mankind. Also required for the judgment is moral agency, which is made explicit in mankind’s being enticed by and having to choose between competing alternatives. This “opposition in all things” is built into the very structure of existence; hence the whole of creation is engineered to clarify the essential choices that mankind, as moral agents, must make, thus preparing them inevitably for the Judgment (see 2 Nephi 2:5, 10–16).

Lehi continues his blessing to Jacob with an examination of the role of the Redeemer in overcoming evil and the Fall of Adam. Lehi reveals that evil and its related vices and consequences were introduced to the world by Satan, who rebelled in the premortal existence and enticed Adam and Eve to disobey God’s commandment in the Garden of Eden. As a consequence of the Fall, God created a probationary state that allowed mankind to repent of their sins. The remission of sins and the resulting blessings of liberty and eternal life would not be possible without the mission and sacrifice of Jesus Christ and without the faith, repentance, and obedience of his disciples. By contrast, those who reject the blessings of Christ’s sacrifice will suffer the captivity and death of the devil (see 2 Nephi 2:16–29).

Lehi’s final blessing to his posterity is directed toward Joseph and focuses on the covenant of the chosen people. In this blessing, Lehi identifies himself as a descendant of the patriarch Joseph, who delivered the house of Israel from destruction. Commenting that “great were the covenants of the Lord

which he made unto Joseph” (2 Nephi 3:4), Lehi specifically testifies that in the latter days:

- “The Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel . . . to be remembered in the covenants of the Lord” (2 Nephi 3:5).
- A “choice seer unto the fruit of my loins” will help to restore the ancient covenants to earth. His name and that of his father will be Joseph (2 Nephi 3:6–11, 15).
- The records of Joseph’s and Judah’s descendants together will confound false doctrines, eliminate contention, establish peace among the chosen people, and help restore the house of Israel. The record of Joseph’s descendants will be brought to light by the work of this seer (see 2 Nephi 3:12, 17–19, 24).
- The Lord will preserve Lehi’s seed forever (see 2 Nephi 3:16).

*Jacob’s commentary.* Nephi includes in his record some of Jacob’s comments on why the prophecies of Isaiah are so important to the covenant people:

I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the house of Israel—

That he has spoken unto the Jews, by the mouth of his holy prophets, even from the beginning down, from generation to generation, until the time comes that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God [covenant of Christ’s gospel]; when they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance [covenant of the chosen people], and shall be established in all their lands of promise [covenant of the promised land].

Behold my beloved brethren, I speak unto you these things that ye may rejoice, and lift up your heads forever, because of the blessings which the Lord God shall bestow upon your children. (2 Nephi 9:1–3)

In commenting on Jacob’s prophecies, Nephi observes that although Jacob spoke “many more things to my people at that time” (2 Nephi 11:1), those which Nephi includes in his record serve his purposes, which further develop his covenant-based interpretive framework. He then declares the central purposes for keeping the record of his ministry. Each of these is key to the message of salvation as defined by his vision.

Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ. . . .

And also my soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers; yea, my soul delighteth in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death.

And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish. (2 Nephi 11:4–6)

*Isaiah's prophecies.* While Lehi's interest in the brass plates centers on the genealogy of his fathers (see 1 Nephi 3:3, 12; 5:11–16), Nephi emphasizes the prophecies of Isaiah (1 Nephi 6:1; 20–21; 2 Nephi 7, 12–24). These prophecies provide an authoritative antecedent to and doctrinal elaboration of Nephi's vision, as summarized in the following table.

| Isaiah's prophecies  | Nephi's vision |
|--|----------------|
| Scattering and affliction of unfaithful Israel (chosen people) (see 1 Nephi 20:1–8; 2 Nephi 7:1–11; 12:6–22; 13:1–26; 15:1–25; 16:10–12; 19:13–21) | 1 Nephi 13     |
| Gathering of repentant Israel in the latter days (chosen people) (1 Nephi 21:1–6; 2 Nephi 15:26–30; 21:11–16)                                      | 1 Nephi 13     |
| Birth and mortal mission of the Savior (Christ's gospel) (2 Nephi 17:14–16; 19:1–7)  | 1 Nephi 11     |
| Conversion of Jews and Gentiles to Christ, their Redeemer (chosen people and Christ's gospel) (1 Nephi 21:22; 2 Nephi 22:1–6; 24:1–7)              | 1 Nephi 13     |
| Establishment of Zion in the last days (promised land) (1 Nephi 21:7–21; 2 Nephi 12:1–4; 14:1–6; 24:26–32)   | 1 Nephi 13     |
| Destruction of the wicked in the last days (Christ's gospel) (1 Nephi 20:14; 21:24–26; 2 Nephi 20:1–34; 23:1–22; 24:9–25)                          | 1 Nephi 14     |
| Fulfillment of God's ancient covenants of salvation (all three) (1 Nephi 20:9–22; 21:23–26; 2 Nephi 8; 21:1–9)                                     | 1 Nephi 14     |

The strong thematic connections between Isaiah's prophecies and Nephi's vision allow Nephi to liken Isaiah's prophecies unto his people, "for our profit and learning" (1 Nephi 19:23). In short, Nephi is able to interpret Isaiah's prophecies authoritatively because he had received a comparable vision. An implication of this correspondence is that Nephi selected the prophecies from the brass plates that provide historical antecedence and spiritual legitimacy for his own.

*Nephi's prophecies.* In the extended testimony that follows the Isaiah passages and concludes his record, Nephi reprises the central themes of his vision, placing them once again in the context of the plan of salvation. The correspondence between Nephi's vision and his final testimony is summarized in the table below.

| Theme                                       | Vision<br>(1 Nephi) | Testimony<br>(2 Nephi)        |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| Christ ministers to Jews in the Holy Land   | 11:27–28, 31        | 25:10–12, 19                  |
| Christ ordains twelve apostles              | 11:29, 34           |                               |
| Christ is tried and crucified               | 11:32–33            | 25:13                         |
| Apostles are persecuted; Jews scattered     | 11:34               | 25:14–15                      |
| Restoration of Israel by the Nephite record | 13:34–37            | 25:17–22; 27:6–35;<br>29:1–14 |
| Destruction of wicked at the end of time    | 11:35–36            | 30:9–10                       |
| Wars and destructions among Nephites        | 12:1–5              | 26:2–7                        |
| Christ’s ministry to Nephites               | 12:6–10             | 26:1, 8–9                     |
| Righteous utopia among Nephites             | 12:11–12            | 26:9                          |
| Nephites destroyed as a people              | 12:13–19            | 26:10–11                      |
| Conversion of Jews and Gentiles             | 13:33–37; 14:5–17   | 26:12–16                      |
| Conditions of apostasy                      | 13:1–9              | 26:20–22; 27:1–5;<br>28:3–32  |
| Gentiles to occupy the promised land        | 13:10–19            | 26:19                         |
| The “record of the Jews”                    | 13:20–29            |                               |
| Salvation of God’s children                 | 13:37–42; 14:7–17   | 30:8–18                       |
| Condition of salvation for Gentiles         | 14:1–6              | 30:1–7                        |

Although common themes receive roughly comparable treatment in both accounts, the final testimony greatly expands the role of Nephi’s record in restoring the covenants of salvation in the latter days. While the responsibility to write only that which is sacred occupies Nephi’s attention throughout his life, his focus becomes particularly acute at the end. A detailed comparison of the two accounts is instructive for the purpose of this study.

Although Nephi’s vision reveals the general contours of the plan of salvation in material, temporal, and human contexts and although righteousness triumphs in the end—its proximate story is filled with destruction, death, and despair: the Saints are scattered following Christ’s crucifixion, the Nephites are destroyed, and the Gentiles pervert the “record of the Jews” and oppress the “remnant of Israel.” At the point in the vision of almost total hopelessness, the angel who guides Nephi through each scene gives him three assurances of an eventual deliverance (see 1 Nephi 13:30–32). These promises provide a turning point for the vision. Challenges still exist, but progress toward the



complete achievement of the plan of redemption is steady and sure from this point until its ultimate fulfillment.

The first step in this transformation involves the Gentiles: “Wherefore saith the Lamb of God: I will be merciful unto the Gentiles, unto the visiting of the remnant of the house of Israel in great judgment . . . insomuch that I will bring forth unto them . . . much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious” (1 Nephi 13:33–34). The key to this step is explained in the following verses:

For behold, saith the Lamb: I will manifest myself unto thy seed, that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious; and after thy seed shall be destroyed, and dwindle in unbelief, and also the seed of thy brethren, behold, these things shall be hid up, to come forth unto the Gentiles, by the gift and power of the Lamb.

And in them shall be written my gospel, saith the Lamb, and my rock and my salvation. (1 Nephi 13:35–36)

In short, the blessings of salvation will be made available to all mankind in the latter days by the sacred writings of Nephi and subsequent writers of the record, which will not only define and document the plan of salvation but also bring to pass its fulfillment in the last days. Nephi's vision further predicts that his sacred record will complement the “record of the Jews” (Old Testament) and the “records of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (New Testament) in order to unite both Jew and Gentile—the entire human race—in the bonds of the gospel (see 1 Nephi 13:23, 38–42).

Nephi expands this theme in his final testimony. He testifies that the Book of Mormon will serve as a standard of truth in the Final Judgment (see 2 Nephi 25:18) and correct false doctrines and convince the Gentiles of their apostate conditions (see 2 Nephi 28). At the end of his testimony, Nephi witnesses to the truthfulness of his record in terms that are unique and powerful in all of revealed scripture:

Hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good.

And if they are not the words of Christ, judge ye—for Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that they are his words, at the last day; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things, notwithstanding my weakness. (2 Nephi 33:10–11)

Also included in Nephi's final testimony is a witness that the promise of salvation will be realized by those who accept and keep its covenants. In holiness and solemnity, Nephi rehearses a formal dialogue with the Father and the Son regarding the requirements of salvation. This dialogue concludes with the promise to the faithful, "behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life," and with the declaration that the doctrine of Christ is the only way to realize this blessing (see 2 Nephi 3 1:11–21, especially v. 20). Nephi shares his personal witness of this promise: "I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell" (2 Nephi 33:6).

### Conclusion

This brief overview indicates the extent to which Nephi's vision provides a framework for interpreting the historical, exegetical, and prophetic contents of his record. Taken as a whole, his vision presents a drama of salvation whose blessings are defined in revelation, expanded in prophetic discourse, partially realized in the historical experience of a covenant community, fully realized by select members of Lehi's immediate family, and promised eventually to all of God's children who meet the conditions of the associated covenants. **RE**

### Notes

1. As part of his upbringing, Nephi acknowledges receiving formal training in "the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 1:2). In addition, Nephi had the faithful example of his father, Lehi, whose record was essential to his own prophetic legacy.

2. Mormon's abridgment of Nephi's first account was part of the 116 pages of translated manuscript that were lost when Joseph Smith entrusted them to Martin Harris to convince his doubting wife of the veracity of the ancient record (see Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005], 66–69).

3. Examples include warning the people of Jerusalem of impending destruction (see 1 Nephi 1:13–20), fleeing Jerusalem with his family (see 1 Nephi 2:1–15), sending his sons to obtain the brass plates (see 1 Nephi 3), and recruiting Ishmael and his family for the journey (see 1 Nephi 7).

4. For example, Nephi seeks a testimony in order to accept his father's visionary leadership (see 1 Nephi 2:16), carries out Lehi's inspired directions (see 1 Nephi 3:7), and considers "the tent of my father" as the family's spiritual center (see 1 Nephi 3:1, 7:22).

5. Nephi's vision is not simply a meaningful retelling of Lehi's dream. It is also an expansion of and commentary on it. The vision confirms Nephi's spiritual gifts and justifies his prophetic perspective. In other words, Nephi's vision is a powerful statement of the divine authority of his own ministry.

6. Examples of "deliverance" or its synonyms include "deliver" (see 1 Nephi 3:29–31, 4:11–17; 5:5–8; 7:11–17; 13:19; 17:14), "preserve" (1 Nephi 5:14–15; 19:10; 21:6–8), and

“save” or “salvation” (1 Nephi 13:40; 15:14–15; 19:11, 17). Antonyms of “deliverance” illustrate the consequences of disobedience—for example, “captivity” (1 Nephi 10:13), “scattering” (1 Nephi 10:13), and “destruction” (1 Nephi 3:17; 7:13).

7. Examples include Lehi to his sons (see 1 Nephi 2:9–10; 2 Nephi 1–4); Nephi to his brothers (see 1 Nephi 4:1–3; 15:6–16:4; 17:23–55); Jacob to the Nephites (see 2 Nephi 6–9); and Nephi to his posterity (see 2 Nephi 3 1–33).

8. Contrast the distinguishing characteristics of Nephite society—obedience to God’s commands, domesticated economies, preservation of sacred records and objects, raising families, appropriate defense, effective use of natural resources, temple worship, industriousness, and righteous leadership—with those of the Lamanites—“sore cursing,” “iniquity,” “hardened their hearts,” “skin of blackness,” “loathsome,” “idle people, full of mischief and subtlety” (see 2 Nephi 5:10–24).

9. As a qualification of this covenant, the descendants of Laman and Lemuel are promised that they will be preserved so that the blessings of salvation can be made available to some of them when they eventually accept this covenant.