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Learning to Love the Book of Mormon - The First Book of Nephi

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Abstract: This work consists of a rather comprehensive commentary on the verses of the Book of Mormon. I believe it may be read and enjoyed by the casual student of the Book of Mormon who might, for example, find use for it as a reference source. The book's intended purpose, however, is to assist the serious student who would like to begin a thorough, intensive, and searching tour through the book.

Learning to Love the Book of Mormon

Updated August 2013 to February 2014

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Introduction

In the Church, our study and understanding of the Book of Mormon has undergone a most interesting evolution since the book's translation in 1829. As late as the early twentieth century our understanding of the book was not far advanced. Almost no serious studies of the book and its contents had been published, and the book was not heavily used in worship service discourse or in gospel instruction. There was even some skepticism about the literal divine origins of the Book within the LDS community, particularly among the more educated. By the mid 1900s, beginning with an acknowledged assumption of the book's divine origins, Sidney B. Sperry, Hugh W. Nibley, John L. Sorenson, and a few others had launched serious scholarly inquiries into the book. In the mid-1970s the rate of publications on Book of Mormon topics began to increase.

The rate of publications on the Book of Mormon particularly soared after President Ezra Taft Benson, soon after his ordination as president and prophet, called the Church to repentance in November of 1985 and at the April General Conference of the Church in 1986. The Church worked the Book of Mormon into the regular cycle of the new correlated curriculum for adults, and church leaders began using the Book of Mormon more frequently and systematically in speeches and instructional situations. Since then, the book's authenticity as an ancient scriptural record has become more firmly and generally established. Those who remain vocal doubters of the book's literal divine origins are no longer identified with the committed LDS community.

In the October General Conference in 1986, President Benson said:

We must make the Book of Mormon a center focus of our study [because] it was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us. . . . Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, [Mormon] abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us. . . .

If they [the Book of Mormon writers] saw our day then chose those things which would be of greatest worth to us, is not that how we should study the Book of Mormon? We should constantly ask ourselves, "Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?" (*Conference Report*, October 1986, 3-7).

President Benson would later write:

It is not just that the Book of Mormon teaches us truth, though it indeed does that. It is not just that the Book of Mormon bears testimony of Christ, though it indeed does that, too. But there is something more. There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You

will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called the “words of life” (D&C 84:85), and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance (“The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November, 1986, 16:7).

Further:

I would like to speak about one of the most significant gifts given to the world in modern times. The gift I am thinking of is more important than any of the inventions that have come out of the industrial and technological revolutions. This is a gift of greater value to mankind than even the many wonderful advances we have seen in modern medicine. It is of greater worth to mankind than the development of flight or space travel. I speak of the gift of the Book of Mormon (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft] 1988, 51).

President Benson often reiterated the prophet Joseph Smith’s statement when Joseph referred to the Book of Mormon as “the keystone of our religion” (*TPJS*, 194). A keystone, sometimes called the headstone, is the central stone in an arch. It holds all the other stones in place, and if it is removed, the arch crumbles.

Your author has developed the habit, as I read the Book of Mormon, of reading slowly and actually looking for words or phrases or concepts whose meanings are unclear. I search for ideas that are not completely compatible with the framework of knowledge I already possess. I have been surprised to learn that I seldom have to read more than two or three verses before coming upon some puzzlement, large or small. On each occasion, I am left with an unsettled perplexity, a sort of uncomfortable disequilibrium. “Why are there so many verses in this basic scriptural work,” I have wondered, “that cause me to struggle so?” Disquieting as these feelings are, I have come to recognize them as a first step in learning some valuable new insight.

Once I come upon a phrase or verse I don’t understand, I begin my search for the answer by reading and re-reading the “offending” passage, by checking cross references, by reading supplemental explanatory materials, by sometimes asking help of my learned friends, and often praying about the verse. Mercifully, I have found that my efforts are most always fruitful. I am able to re-establish my equilibrium with the verse, and, at the same time, find myself possessing a greater insight on some particular point. With some satisfaction, I then continue on in my reading, only to find the process beginning again a verse or two later. I heartily recommend this same approach to my readers, and I have attempted in this commentary to spare you some of the pain of finding your answers. I hope I have anticipated many of your perplexities as you study the Book of Mormon, yet I suspect that each of us will encounter and be obliged to overcome our own unique set of questions. There is certainly a magic in enduring in this process, for certainly as we do so, we are “treasur[ing] up . . . the words of life” (D&C 84:85).

Your author prefers to think of this work as an “enrichment commentary.” I believe it may be read and enjoyed by the casual student of the Book of Mormon who might, for example, find use for it as a reference source. The book’s intended purpose, however, is to assist the serious student who would like to begin a thorough, intensive, and searching tour through the book. Though it may be useful to the student who wishes to skip from one verse here to another verse there, it is intended to be read sequentially. Some concepts discussed in earlier verses in the book or even earlier verses in a particular chapter may receive more casual attention when encountered later in the text.

This work consists of a rather comprehensive commentary on the verses of the Book of Mormon. Some may have reservations about the basic concept of this book. I am aware of Peter’s warning: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men: but Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:20-21). I have endeavored in this project not to add or detract from the scripture, but only clarify. Some will say that such a comprehensive commentary is not possible without placing a “private interpretation” on some verses. I have earnestly attempted to avoid assigning any purely individual or private interpretations to the scriptural verses. Your author is a student of the Book of Mormon and in no wise an expert. To create this volume I have prayerfully studied and utilized the thoughts and explanations of many authors and scholars whose explanations of the Book of Mormon verses might be generally considered to be “authoritative” and “scholarly.” I have collected materials from general authorities and from individuals with undeniable scholarly credentials who openly profess a spiritual witness of the book. When I have borrowed their ideas only, and have rephrased them for my purposes, no reference will be cited. When I have quoted another author’s wording, acknowledgment is provided. Indeed, I have begun and completed this project as a student who is simply trying to make it possible for myself and for others to understand the book’s sometimes difficult verses. I acknowledge the fact, however, that my private biases have not been completely eliminated.

I am also sensitive to the need to avoid proof-texting in a work such as this. That is, I have tried very hard to let the scriptures speak for themselves. An author guilty of proof-texting presupposes the doctrine and then seeks support from the scriptures. I have attempted to consider each verse in its historical and sequential context.

I have tried to include timely and necessary background information to make the book’s words, phrases, and verses really come alive. I have tried to avoid rhetoric and concentrate on the meat. It is not my purpose to preach about the principles contained in the book, rather my goal is to improve understanding. This work presupposes, in its reader, an “average” understanding of the Book of Mormon. I have tried to eliminate those commentary materials which would likely be redundant and unnecessary for my

so-called average reader. It is my intent to explain, clarify, and enrich your study and understanding of the book.

The work includes a variety of “supplemental articles” to which reference is made appropriately in the text. Among these supplemental articles is a purely historical telling of the Book of Mormon story entitled, *A Narrative Summary of the Book of Mormon*. From this “historical” summary, doctrinal materials have been omitted, but all characters, events, and places are included. It is hope that this historical account may be useful to the student who wishes to quickly “brush up” on the historical narrative.

A few “housekeeping” notes about this work are pertinent. The text of the Book of Mormon is included in bold with a blue color to clearly distinguish it from the commentary. All commentary is colored black. The paragraphs of commentary material are often preceded by a quoted phrase, also of blue color, without any punctuation except for quotation marks. These are phrases taken directly from the verse of text immediately above the commentary paragraph. The commentary then follows these quoted phrases. Sometimes the verse commentary for a group of verses will precede, rather than follow, the actual text rendering of the verses. This is done if it felt that a word of explanation before reading a passage would be helpful. Most block quotes appear in red print and are not double-indented. Finally, in this current updated version of this commentary (2014) page numbers have been eliminated, as they are considered unnecessary.

In reading the Book of Mormon, often we tend to regard some of the materials contained therein as non-essential. We wonder, “Why was the report of this battle or that incident included in the book?” As we study the book, we will assume that there is no “filler” material in the Book of Mormon. Every item in the book was placed there for a reason and purpose. In making his abridgment of the sacred records of the Book of Mormon people, Mormon wrote, “I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people” (Words of Mormon 1:5). Hence, we must assume that all items in the book have been included following thoughtful and inspired consideration.

There is a miracle in the scriptures. If a person reads the scriptures regularly, he or she will invariably have his or her life touched by them eventually. “Whosoever believeth on my words,” the Lord said in reference to the Book of Mormon, “them will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit” (D&C 5:16). Isaiah prophesied that the Book of Mormon would bring a spiritually blind generation to an understanding of the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 27:35; Isaiah 29:24). It has been suggested by those experienced in gospel study that no individual who studies the scriptures daily will be remiss in keeping the commandments.

Our scriptures advise us of several other books of scripture yet to come forth. One day, “all things shall be revealed unto the children of men which ever have been . . . and which ever will be” (2 Nephi 27:11). Perhaps, though, we will never be privileged to receive additional scriptures until we learn to appreciate fully those we already have.

Consider the following testimony of The Book of Mormon by President Ezra Taft Benson:

We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, another testament of Jesus Christ.

The Bible sits on the pulpit of hundreds of different religious sects. The Book of Mormon, the record of Joseph, verifies and clarifies the Bible. It removes stumbling blocks, it restores many plain and precious things. We testify that when used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, and establish peace (see 2 Nephi 3:12).

We do not have to prove that the Book of Mormon is true. The Book is its own proof. All we need to do is read it and declare it! The Book of Mormon is not on trial—the people of the world, including the members of the Church, are on trial as to what they will do with this second witness for Christ” (*Conference Report*, October 1984, 7; *Ensign* November 1984, 8).

I am deeply committed to the book as an authentic ancient scripture. The Spirit has born witness to my soul on numerous occasions as I have studied and pondered its verses. I know with all my heart that the book was written by ancient prophets who intended for their writings to come forth to the world and be translated in our day by Joseph Smith, Jr., through the “gift and power of God.”

Michael J. Preece

The First Book of Nephi

His Reign and Ministry

An account of Lehi and his wife Sariah, and his four sons, being called, (beginning at the eldest) Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi. The Lord warns Lehi to depart out of the land of Jerusalem, because he prophesieth unto the people concerning their iniquity and they seek to destroy his life. He taketh three days' journey into the wilderness with his family. Nephi taketh his brethren and returneth to the land of Jerusalem after the record of the Jews. The account of their sufferings. They take the daughters of Ishmael to wife. They take their families and depart into the wilderness. Their sufferings and afflictions in the wilderness. The course of their travels. They come to the large waters. Nephi's brethren rebel against him. He confoundeth them, and buildeth a ship. They call the name of the place Bountiful. They cross the large waters into the promised land, and so forth. This is according to the account of Nephi; or in other words, I, Nephi, wrote this record.

This “headnote” or “superscription” for 1 Nephi is part of the original text and was not added by modern writers. These headnotes may also be referred to as *colophons*. A colophon is a brief introduction or outline of what will follow. A colophon usually precedes the text to which it applies, but can also occur *following* the pertinent text and be a brief summary of what preceded in the book. Colophons are typical features of ancient Near Eastern (including Egyptian) literature.

There are other headnotes or colophons preceding some of the individual books of the Book of Mormon, and all are similarly a part of the original record (see the books of 2 Nephi, Jacob, Alma, Helaman, 3 Nephi, and 4 Nephi).

Most of the headers that precede each chapter in the Book of Mormon are later additions and are not part of the ancient record. There are, however, several chapter headers or colophons that are part of the original record. Examples include: Mosiah chapters 9, 23, and 24, Alma chapters 5, 7, 9, 17, 21, 36, 38, 39, and 45, Helaman chapters 7, 13, and 3 Nephi chapter 11. Some of the book and chapter headers are part of the original text but have modern day additions such as “chapters 7 to 16 inclusive.”

The colophon may extend beyond the headnote or heading. 1 Nephi 1:1-3, for example, also serves as a colophon for the book of 1 Nephi. Other examples of colophons which extend beyond the header include 1 Nephi 9 (the entire chapter); 1 Nephi 22:30-31; Jacob 1:2; 7:27; Jarom 1:1-2; Omni 1:1, 3-4; Words of Mormon 1:9; Mosiah 1:4; 9:1; Helaman 16:25; and 3 Nephi 5:8-26. We will have more to say about colophons in the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1-3.

Chapter Outline of 1 Nephi

A brief chapter outline of 1 Nephi, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

1 Nephi 3-5 Lehi's sons return to Jerusalem from the Valley of Lemuel for the brass plates of Laban.

1 Nephi 7 Lehi's sons return again to Jerusalem for Ishmael and his family.

1 Nephi 8 Lehi's Vision of the Tree of Life

1 Nephi 11-15 Nephi's Vision of the Tree of Life and the Future of the World

1 Nephi 13-14 Nephi's Vision of the Great and Abominable Church

1 Nephi 16 Lehi and his family find the Liahona and depart the Valley of Lemuel.

1 Nephi 17 Building the Ship

1 Nephi 18 Voyage to the Promised Land

1 Nephi 19 Nephi commanded to make the large plates of Nephi and begin engraving his record on them

1 Nephi 20-21 Isaiah chapters 48-49

1 Nephi Chapter 1

This chapter summarizes the events that took place in Jerusalem prior to the departure of Lehi's family into the wilderness.

1 I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days.

verse 1 "I, Nephi" Is *Nephi* an authentic name of this period in Judah? We will comment many times on the considerable Egyptian cultural influence found among the Book of Mormon peoples. This is logical since Egyptian influence was pervasive in Judah at the time Lehi and his family departed Jerusalem. Brother John Gee has pointed out that Nephi is, indeed, an authentic Egyptian name of that period ("A Note on the Name Nephi," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1, fall, 1992, 189; see also Frank L. Benz, *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions: A Catalog, Grammatical Study, and Glossary of Elements* [Rome: Biblical Institute, 1972], 192; Walter E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1939], 240). See also the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

"goodly parents" Does "goodly" mean simply *good*? It does have the archaic meaning of being "of good quality" (*Random House Webster's College Dictionary*). *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines goodly as, "Being of a handsome form; beautiful; graceful; pleasant; agreeable; desirable."

It has been suggested that in this verse's context, "goodly" might be additionally interpreted as having adequate material possessions or being *wealthy*. Because Lehi was a man of material means, Nephi was able to enjoy the privilege of education ("therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father"). We will read later in the Book of Mormon that King Benjamin will afford similar educational opportunities to his three sons (Mosiah 1:2). It appears that a righteous characteristic of "goodly parents" is their willingness to spend some of their resources educating their children and teaching them the things of God.

"learning of my father" Part of the "learning of my father" here must certainly have been the schooling Nephi received from Lehi in a special manner of writing which Nephi and the other Book of Mormon prophets would use to record the events and teachings contained in the Book of Mormon. In what language was the Book of Mormon written? For a discussion of this important topic, please read the supplemental article, *The Language of the Book of Mormon*.

"having seen many afflictions in the course of my days" We will later learn that at the beginning of the Book of Mormon story Nephi is "exceedingly young" (1 Nephi 2:16), and it will be speculated that he was probably between fourteen and sixteen years old. How could it be that at such a tender age he could already have experienced "many afflictions in the course of [his] days?" Keep in mind that we are now reading from the translation of the small plates of Nephi which Nephi did not even start to engrave until some thirty years after he and his family left Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 5:28-33).

As mentioned, the first three verses of 1 Nephi chapter 1 are introductory and are written as a sort of brief preface, or colophon, to the Book of Mormon story. They have reference to Nephi's experiences throughout these thirty years since the exodus from Jerusalem, up until the commencement of the writing of the record on the small plates of Nephi.

"mysteries of God" The term *mystery* is used two ways in the modern Church. Used positively, it means necessary or useful information that can be obtained only by revelation from God. It remains an unknown mystery unless and until the Spirit participates in communicating the concept. The scriptures always use "mysteries" in this positive sense. Consistent with this definition of mysteries, Harold B. Lee taught that a mystery is a spiritual truth which may be grasped only through divine revelation, a fact or concept that can truly be understood only with the help and influence of the Spirit of God. All spiritual truths are "mysteries," or unknown or not understood, to those who are "hard-hearted" or "stiff-necked." Those unresponsive to the Spirit are simply unable to understand them. This definition seems to pertain in this particular verse and throughout the Book of Mormon (*Ye Are the Light of the World* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974], 211).

On the other hand, the term *mysteries* is used more commonly in the contemporary Church in a negative sense to mean information unnecessary for our salvation or for our personal progress. It is information that the Lord has chosen, for whatever reason, to withhold from us. At least, he has not afforded us a complete explanation. A preoccupation with such things can distract us from the really important truths that have been revealed and often leads to a loss of spiritual balance, then to contention, doubt, and apostasy.

2 Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians.

verse 2 “I make a record in the language of my father” If you have not yet read the article, *The Language of the Book of Mormon*, then please do so now.

3 And I know that the record which I make is true; and I make it with mine own hand; and I make it according to my knowledge.

verse 3 “I know that the record which I make is true” In this day when the Book of Mormon is frequently attacked and regarded by some “scholars” as a nineteenth century document, it is vital to remember that we Latter-day Saints are firmly committed to the authenticity of the book in absolute terms. It is not symbolic or allegorical. It is not “spiritual fictional.” It is a book about real people, real events, and real places, all in an ancient setting.

verses 1-3 In this commentary the point will soon be further made that there was prominent Egyptian cultural influence in Palestine at the time the Book of Mormon story began (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:4). As already mentioned, in Egyptian writing it is typical to begin a new chapter or section with a “header” or “colophon” which states the author and the sources and describes what is to be found in the material that follows. The colophon almost serves as a table of contents. It also may include a testimony of or a certification as to the authenticity of the record. These three verses comprise a continuation of the colophon begun in the header for this first section of the Book of Mormon.

Brother Hugh Nibley has written of the use of colophons in the Book of Mormon:

The major writings of the Book of Mormon are introduced and concluded by “colophons,” which have the purpose of acquainting the reader with the source of the material given and informing him of the authorship of the particular manuscript. . . . In his opening colophon Nephi refers to the excellence of his parents, the good education his father has given him, tells how he has been blessed of heaven, describes the nature of the record he is writing and the sources from which he is taking it, including personal experience—“a record of my proceedings in my days”—and the important information that he can vouch for the truth of the record, having written it with his own hand. This

advertising of one's own virtues, in particular one's reliability, is a correct and indeed a required fixture of any properly composed Egyptian autobiography of Nephi's time—a time at which the writing of autobiographies was very fashionable (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 151-152).

The header or colophon for the next major section is the entire chapter 1 Nephi 9. To see why 1 Nephi 9 begins a new section, see the introductory comments for that chapter. As also mentioned, sometimes a colophon, or explanatory paragraph, may appear at the end of a section rather than at the beginning. Actually all of 1 Nephi 9 serves as an explanation about what Nephi had been recording in the previous eight chapters as well as what he intends now to write. Nephi will often conclude his editorial colophons with “amen.” Note also that in 1 Nephi 14 he summarizes the preceding chapters and then again concludes with “amen.”

“Amen” is an interjection meaning *truly* or *surely*, derived from the Hebrew root *aman* meaning to confirm or support. It is spoken at the conclusion of testimonies (e.g., 1 Nephi 9:6), sermons (e.g., 1 Nephi 15:36), prayers (e.g., 3 Nephi 13:9-13), and blessings (e.g., 2 Nephi 3:25). Also, as we have just discussed, Nephi sometimes concluded his colophons with amen.

4 For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, (my father, Lehi, having dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days); and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed.

verse 4 “it came to pass” This is the first time this introductory phrase is found in the Book of Mormon text. It is a phrase of Hebrew origin and is found very commonly in the Old and New Testaments and in almost every book of the Book of Mormon. Only the book of Moroni fails to use this phrase. Several variations of the phrase are also found in the Book of Mormon, including “now it came to pass” (Alma 62:37); “for behold it came to pass” (Alma 43:4); “but behold, it came to pass” (Alma 53:16); and “and it shall come to pass” (2 Nephi 29:13). Interestingly, the word “utchi” in the Mayan language has been found to have a similar meaning, and a Mayan language glyph or symbol has been identified which means the same (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, Joseph L. Allen, 31-33).

This phrase is used frequently in the scriptures to join consecutive events in historical narrative. In the Old Testament, the phrase “and it came to pass” reflects the Hebrew expression *wa-y’hee*, which means “and it was.” In the Book of Mormon, as in the Old Testament, it is often followed by a time phrase. This verse is an example: “in the commencement of the first year . . .” Other examples include “Now it came to pass that not many days after the battle” (Alma 3:20), or, “And it came to pass that in the same year” (Alma 50:37).

Chronological references in our commentary will be based on the helpful article by Randall P. Spackman, "Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates," a FARMS reprint.

The political setting in which the Israelites of Palestine existed from about 800 BC on, is perhaps best understood by acknowledging that Judah was a small country surrounded by three military superpowers. These were Egypt to the southwest and Assyria and Babylon to the northeast. These three were constantly contending with one another for land and influence. Palestine was caught in the middle and was sometimes reduced to the role of pawn in the hands of these three major powers. Between 732 and 722 BC, Assyria advanced into Palestine and carried away captive the major part of the Northern Kingdom of Israel with its capital in Samaria. It was the practice of the Assyrians to deport members of the upper classes of conquered peoples to other parts of their empire in order to dissipate rebellious energies. Assyria's influence was prominent in all of Palestine from that time until about 640 BC.

Lehi was probably born about 650 BC. Following Lehi's birth, Assyria's stifling influence began to wane and much needed reform began to occur. In 640 BC King Josiah assumed the throne and leadership of Palestine. Over the next twenty years he introduced sweeping religious reforms including the purging of pagan religious practices which had flourished in the Assyria-dominated Palestine. It seems likely that the Lord blessed Palestine during the period of Josiah's reign and allowed them some degree of independence from Assyria.

Josiah was tragically killed at Megiddo in 609 BC as he led a plucky little Judean force against an Egyptian advance through Palestine. Egypt was marching to support the last Assyrian king in a stand against the new Babylonian Empire. Josiah was apparently trying to limit Assyria's control over Judah. Following Josiah's death, Egyptian influence overran all aspects of Judah's political life. This Egyptian domination lasted until shortly before the Babylonian invasion.

After Josiah's death, his son Jehoahaz was made king, but the Pharaoh soon took him away to Egypt and put Jehoahaz's brother Jehoiakim on the throne. Egyptian control of Palestine lasted until the Egyptians were defeated by Babylon in the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. Thereafter Babylon began to rule in Palestine.

Jehoiakim reigned in Judah for eleven years and then died in Jerusalem possibly at the hand of an assassin. Jehoiakim's eighteen year old son Jehoiachin succeeded his father. Jehoiachin resented the control of Palestine by Babylon and revolted against the firm hand of Babylon. Only three months after Jehoiachin had succeeded to the throne in 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar (alternatively Nebuchadrezzar), the king of Babylon, defeated Jerusalem on March 10, 597 BC and a few weeks later on April 16, 597 BC began carrying away captive to Babylon Jehoiachin and thousands of others, including Ezekiel.

Nebuchadrezzar placed Jehoiachin's uncle, the twenty-one year old Zedekiah, on the throne. The Book of Mormon history begins in this year, 597 BC. Thus we learn that the Babylonian deportation of Jews had begun already at the time of the preaching of the prophet Lehi.

For more detail of the historical setting of Jerusalem at the time of Lehi, see the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the time of Lehi*.

“in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah” It is of interest that in Hebrew writings, important historical moments are often referred to according to the reigning king (see Isaiah 6:1 and Ezekiel 1:1-2). We will learn that the important event being referred to here is the calling of Lehi.

There is actually some ambiguity in this verse if one reads it carefully. The coronation of Zedekiah probably took place in October of 597 BC (Randall P. Spackman, “Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” a FARMS reprint, 7). It is not clear whether the calling of Lehi occurred in the commencement of the year 597 BC in which Zedekiah was installed as king or whether it occurred in the first year following Zedekiah's formal coronation. In either case, the year 597 BC is the earliest time when Lehi might have prophesied at Jerusalem.

“at Jerusalem” In those days, towns, villages, or rural areas surrounding major cities were regarded as belonging to the cities. Thus the area surrounding Jerusalem might well have been referred to as the “land of Jerusalem.” It is interesting that this pattern is carried on throughout the Book of Mormon. For example, the city of Zarahemla is the political and spiritual center of the greater land of Zarahemla. The temple and the political leadership of the “land” is located in the “city.” See also the commentary for 1 Nephi 3:22-23. The same convention made it possible for Socrates to be an Athenian, and nothing else, even though he came from the village of Alopeke, at some distance from the city. Hugh Nibley observed: “While the Book of Mormon refers to the city of Jerusalem plainly and unmistakably over sixty times, it refers over forty times to another and entirely different geographical entity which is always designated as ‘the land of Jerusalem.’ In the New World also every major Book-of-Mormon city is surrounded by a land of the same name” (*An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch, 3rd ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989], 101).

It is now clear that Lehi's home was in the city of Jerusalem, probably in area of the city known as the Mishneh. We will also later read of “the land of our father's inheritance” (1 Nephi 3:16) which is neither within the city of Jerusalem nor within the larger land of Jerusalem (see the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the time of Lehi*).

“many prophets” Among these prophets who preached in those days in Jerusalem were the major biblical prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel who were contemporaries of Lehi. Other prophet contemporaries of Lehi included Nahum,

Huldah, Habakkuk, Urijah of Kirjath-jearim (Jeremiah 26:20), and Zephaniah. You can bet that the Lord would never allow a people to be destroyed without ample warnings through his prophets (Amos 3:7). A major devastation was in the offing, and “many prophets” were required to do the warning (see also Jeremiah 35:15). It was typical at that time for prophets to work largely by themselves, separate from other prophets. The Book of Mormon account is silent on any involvement Lehi might have had with his fellow prophets.

5 Wherefore it came to pass that my father, Lehi, as he went forth prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people.

verse 5 “Lehi, as he went forth” Hugh Nibley has provided us with helpful insight into this interesting man, Lehi:

Lehi was a man possessed of exceeding great wealth in the form of “gold and silver, and all manner of riches” (1 Nephi 3:16; 2:4). He had “his own house at Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 1:7); yet he was accustomed to “go forth” from the city from time to time (1 Nephi 1:5-7), and his paternal estate, the land of his inheritance, where the bulk of his fortune reposed, was some distance from the town (1 Nephi 3:16, 22; 2:4). He came of an old, distinguished, and cultured family (1 Nephi 5:14-16). The opening verse of the Book of Mormon explains the expression “goodly parents” not so much in a moral sense as in a social one: Nephi tells us he came from a good family and “therefore” received a good traditional education: “I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father” (1 Nephi 1:1). He was of the tribe of Manasseh, which of all the tribes retained the old desert ways and was most active in the caravan trade. He seems to have had particularly close ties with Sidon (for the name appears repeatedly in the Book of Mormon, both in its Hebrew and Egyptian forms), which at that time was one of the two harbors through which the Israelites carried on an extremely active trade with Egypt and the West. He was proud of his knowledge of Egyptian and insisted on his sons learning it (Mosiah 1:4). He was a meticulous record keeper, conscientious to a fault, and given to addressing long moral tirades to youth (1 Nephi 1:16-17 and elsewhere). From his sons Nephi and Jacob one gathers that Lehi must have been something of an expert in wine, olive, and fig and honey culture (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, 6:46-47).

When Lehi “went forth” to pray, he was probably exiting the city walls, just as Nephi himself did later when he said, “I went forth unto my brethren, who were without the walls” (1 Nephi 4:27).

It is presumed that Lehi’s call from the Lord to become his prophet occurred during Lehi’s experience described in the next few verses. It is notable that the way in which Lehi was called was similar to the manner in which other Hebrew prophets had previously been called. For a thorough discussion of this similarity, see Blake T. Ostler’s article, “The Throne Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi,” a

FARMS reprint. For example, study the calls of Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19-22), Isaiah (Isaiah 6), and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1-3; 21). The pattern is that of a righteous individual who becomes concerned because of the wickedness of his people. He prays on their behalf and is carried away in a vision in which he sees God on his throne attended by his heavenly council. He also receives a heavenly book which explains the impending disaster of his people. The vision is completed with a call or commission extended from the heavenly council to the individual to warn his people of their inevitable destruction. He is also forewarned that his people will reject him.

“Lehi . . . prayed . . . in behalf of his people.” This might be referred to as Lehi’s intercessory prayer.

6 And it came to pass as he prayed unto the Lord, there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard much; and because of the things which he saw and heard he did quake and tremble exceedingly.

verse 6 “pillar of fire” Brightness or fire are often associated with visual manifestations of the Lord. Joseph Smith taught that God dwells in “everlasting burnings,” as will all of those who obtain the celestial degree of glory. Recall, for example, Joseph Smith’s First Vision (“a pillar of light . . . above the brightness of the sun”) and God’s appearance to Moses in a burning bush (Exodus 3:2) and on a flaming Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:18).

We cannot be certain who or what Lehi saw in the pillar of fire. Did he see the Lord? Since his vision of God himself is reported in the next stage of the vision, it seems more likely that he beheld on this occasion a messenger of God.

“he did quake and tremble exceedingly” It is unlikely that Lehi was quaking and trembling from fear. Those favored few who have been allowed into the presence of the Lord have reported feelings of a perfect peace which replaces all mortal concerns. It seems more likely he is reporting some type of phenomenon produced by the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. Joseph Smith also experienced this phenomenon (see D&C 85:6). There Joseph referred to “the still small voice, which whispereth through and pierceth all things, and often times it maketh my bones to quake.”

7 And it came to pass that he returned to his own house at Jerusalem; and he cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen.

verse 7 Lehi was undoubtedly physically exhausted by this spiritual experience, so much so that he went home and went to bed! For other examples of how a profound spiritual experience can be physically enervating see 1 Nephi 17:47, 1 Nephi 19:20, Alma 27:17, Daniel 10:8, and Moses 1:9-10. The bed, in this experience, was also necessary because during this experience the prophet enters into a state wherein

physical strength and consciousness are suspended while access to the heavenly realm is gained.

8 And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God.

verse 8 This verse might be referred to as Lehi's "throne theophany" or his vision of God upon his throne.

In these verses, keep in mind that we are reading from Nephi's abridgement of the record of his father Lehi (see verses 16-17). This verse, however, may be a verbatim quotation from Lehi's record. This might be suspected since Alma the younger will later quote these same words as a first-person from the prophet Lehi (see Alma 36:22).

"he was carried away in a vision" Apparently this thing of being "carried away" and even transported to other locations while receiving a vision is common (see 1 Nephi 11:1; 2 Nephi 4:25; Moses 1:1; Revelation 21:10; D&C 137:1-2).

This vision experience of Lehi apparently is his call to become a prophet. Compare this vision, for example, with the one had by Isaiah when he was called to his ministry (Isaiah 6:1). This vision scene, including the throne of God, was seen also by other ancient Hebrew prophets when they were called (again, see Blake Ostler's, "The Throne Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi," a FARMS reprint). In actuality Lehi was allowed to meet in a heavenly council, and then he was dispatched by the council to proclaim the message of warning to Jerusalem (Jeremiah 23:18).

Contemporary scholarship has begun to notice and discuss a general pattern for the calling of ancient Hebrew prophets. That pattern is seen more clearly here in this verse than anywhere in the Bible. Actually this verse could serve as a textbook illustration of prophetic visions and calls as they are recounted in ancient literature. This verse is clearly a vision of the divine council, known today from many ancient Near Eastern texts, that surrounds God and over which he presides. The Hebrew word *sod*, which denotes that council, also refers to the counsel issued from it. It can often be interchanged, in this sense, with the Greek word *mysterion*. In ancient conceptions, it is frequently the prophet's admission to this council as a mortal human being, and his knowledge of its decrees and secrets (counsels), that lends him authority as an earthly spokesman for God. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing," said the ancient Israelite prophet Amos of Tekoa, "but he revealeth his secret [sod] unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

9 And it came to pass that he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day.

verse 9 “One descending out of the midst of heaven” This is likely Jesus Christ.

10 And he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament.

verse 10 “twelve others” These will become the twelve Old World apostles of Christ’s mortal ministry.

11 And they came down and went forth upon the face of the earth; and the first came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a book, and bade him that he should read.

verse 11 “the first” This is likely Jesus Christ who stood before Lehi (*CR*, October 1970, 28).

“a book” This “book” could have been a scroll, or it might have been comprised of tablets. It contained the judgment to be passed upon Jerusalem which was death and captivity in Babylon. This may be the same book shown to Ezekiel, a contemporary of Lehi, in which he read of “lamentations, and mourning, and woe” (Ezekiel 2:9-10; 3:1-3).

“bade him” Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *bade* as, “the past tense of bid—to ask; to request; to invite.”

12 And it came to pass that as he read, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord.

verses 11-12 The book suggests that perhaps such a spiritual experience as Lehi is having is not an entirely passive experience. He is required to participate actively to the extent, at least, of reading the book.

13 And he read, saying: Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations! Yea, and many things did my father read concerning Jerusalem—that it should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon.

verse 13 This is the first use of the word “abominations” in the Book of Mormon text. It will yet be used some seventy-four additional times. It is a broad term and covers every thought, deed, and attitude that is offensive to God who “cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (Alma 45:16; D&C 1:31). All abominations are a reflection of the worldly or carnal mind and, therefore, of ungodliness.

14 And it came to pass that when my father had read and seen many great and marvelous things, he did exclaim many things unto the Lord; such as: Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of

the earth, and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!

verse 14 After reading in the book, Lehi was moved to exclaim, or perhaps to sing, a hymn or psalm of praise to the Lord. It is likely that Nephi's quoting of his father in this verse and in the previous verse were direct quotes from the record of Lehi. See the discussion of the record of Lehi in the commentary for verses 16-17.

15 And after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God; for his soul did rejoice, and his whole heart was filled, because of the things which he had seen, yea, which the Lord had shown unto him.

16 And now I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written, for he hath written many things which he saw in visions and in dreams; and he also hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children, of which I shall not make a full account.

17 But I shall make an account of my proceedings in my days. Behold, I make an abridgment of the record of my father, upon plates which I have made with mine own hands; wherefore, after I have abridged the record of my father then will I make an account of mine own life.

verses 16-17 “an abridgement of the record of my father” It is clear that Nephi had access to a record written by his father Lehi. This record was actually written by Lehi himself. It was quite distinct and separate from any of the Book of Mormon plates. We have no way of knowing what material Lehi kept his record on, but probably it was perishable. A remark made by Lehi's son Jacob supports this view. Jacob notes, “We know that the things which we write upon plates must remain; but whatsoever things we write upon anything save it be upon plates must perish and vanish away” (Jacob 4:1-2). It seems likely that the record of Lehi was completed by the time Nephi began writing on the large plates of Nephi in about 590 BC. Both Nephi and his brother Jacob will make use of Lehi's record in their writings.

Nephi engraved a synopsis of this record onto his small plates of Nephi. The first eight chapters of 1 Nephi consist of that synopsis. Nephi also engraved an even more extensive synopsis of the record of Lehi onto the large plates of Nephi (1 Nephi 19:1). This synopsis was engraved onto the large plates of Nephi by Nephi himself. It was eventually abridged by the prophet Mormon and became the first segment of Mormon's plates of Mormon. It was called the book of Lehi (see the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*).

The book of Lehi apparently began before the family departed Jerusalem and extended down to the reign of King Benjamin. Obviously, then, the book of Lehi contained more than the writings of Lehi and Nephi, since the reign of King Benjamin probably began in about 160 BC.

Joseph Smith began his translation of the Book of Mormon with the book of Lehi in the spring of 1828 with Martin Harris functioning as scribe. After the book of Lehi was translated, Martin had recorded some 116 pages of manuscript. The rest of the story is well known. Martin Harris borrowed the manuscript and took it home to show it to his wife and a few other selected individuals. The manuscript was apparently stolen from Martin. Thus the translation of Mormon's abridgement of the book of Lehi was lost.

Fortunately, we do have another account of Lehi's writings in the book of Lehi. It is Nephi's abridgement of those writings found in these first eight chapters of 1 Nephi. Chapter 9 is an explanatory editorial comment written by the prophet Nephi. Nephi's own writings, the "account of my proceedings in my days . . . an account of mine own life," actually begins with 1 Nephi 10:1.

Verse 16 does tell us something about the contents of the record of Lehi. It contained "many things which he saw in visions and in dreams; and he also hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children." These would likely include Lehi's experiences described in 1 Nephi 1:6-7; 1 Nephi 1:8-14; 1 Nephi 2:1-2; 1 Nephi 3:2-6; 1 Nephi 8:2-28; 1 Nephi 16:24-25, and 2 Nephi 1:4.

18 Therefore, I would that ye should know, that after the Lord had shown so many marvelous things unto my father, Lehi, yea, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, behold he went forth among the people, and began to prophesy and to declare unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard.

verse 18 Does a prophet have a choice of whether or not he goes forth to preach and warn the people? Prophets are impelled and constrained by the Spirit. They speak out because they must. They cannot hold back what they know. If Lehi had not delivered the warning which God commanded him to deliver, the blood of the wicked who died without being warned would be on his hands (Ezekiel 3:17-19).

19 And it came to pass that the Jews did mock him because of the things which he testified of them; for he truly testified of their wickedness and their abominations; and he 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 the Messiah, and also the redemption of the world.

verse 19 "the book" This is the book first mentioned in verse 11 given to Lehi by the Lord during Lehi's vision.

20 And when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him; yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away. But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath

chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.

verse 20 “when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him” The word *anger* is used in the Book of Mormon largely to describe the feelings of those opposed to God’s prophets and their teachings (see also 2 Nephi 33:5), or as a goal of Satan or dissenters to “stir” up anger in others (2 Nephi 28:20; Alma 27:2, 12; 43:8; 47:1; Helaman 4:4). *Anger* is also used to describe the displeasure of God (2 Nephi 15:25; Helaman 13:30, 39) and his righteous servants (2 Nephi 1:26; Alma 44:17). The use of the word “wrath” appears to be used synonymously with anger and is used most often to represent an attribute of God and not man (2 Nephi 19:19; 23:9, 13; Ether 9:20).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell explained, “God’s anger is kindled not because we have harmed him, but because we have harmed ourselves” (*Sermons Not Spoken*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985, 85).

Mankind’s self-centered anger is clearly contrary to the Lord’s will.

verses 19-20 “he testified . . . plainly of the coming of the Messiah, and also the redemption of the world” “And when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him; yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away”

The Jews were angry enough at Lehi that they sought his life. Was this simply because he railed against them because of their sins? Probably not. There is likely a more important reason why the Jews were angry enough at Lehi to seek his life. The Hebrew scripture contained prophecies concerning both the Savior’s first and second comings. At his first coming he would come as a Redeemer-Messiah and be killed by his own people (1 Nephi 19:10; Helaman 8:17-18; Moses 7:55). At his second coming he would come as a King-Messiah or a Conqueror-Messiah who would subdue all the enemies of Israel and set up a kingdom which would never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44).

The prophecies of the Messiah’s first coming were offensive to the Jews. How could anyone think that they would kill their own Messiah. The Jews were outraged when their prophets began to preach that their Messiah would be a Jew and would be killed by his own people. Two prophets were killed for prophesying of Christ’s first coming. They were Zenos (Helaman 8:19) and Zenock (Alma 3:17). The Jews became convinced that the story of the Redeemer-Messiah was a myth—a fable that some of the enemies of the Jews had concocted. It apparently became an established policy among the Jews to purge their scriptures of all references to the first coming. Any person caught teaching this prohibited doctrine—that the Messiah would be slain by his own people—was stoned to death. We wouldn’t know of this purging except that we have another parallel set of scriptures that is much clearer on the topic. This other record is the brass plates, the scriptural record of Old Testament times kept by the remnant of the tribe of Joseph. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:14. By reviewing the

prophecies from the brass plates, we are able to see how the Jewish scholars attempted to delete from the scriptural record all prophetic references to the first coming or mortal advent of the Redeemer-Messiah. Some Old Testament prophets who did testify and prophesy of Christ, but whose testimonies we do not have in the Old Testament record include Enoch (Moses 7:55), Abraham (Helaman 8:17-18), Zenos, Zenock, Neum (1 Nephi 19:10), and Ezias (Helaman 8:20).

It is no wonder that the Jews of Christ's day thought that he was simply an imposter. The scriptural background that might have conditioned them to expect the Messiah to be born as a Redeemer and not as a King had been destroyed. Even his own disciples had difficulty understanding his mission during his mortal advent. The Revelator said: "He was in the world . . . and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:10-11). All during Jesus's mortal ministry neither his apostles nor his followers recognized him in his true role as one who had come to be sacrificed for the sins of the world. From the beginning they looked upon him as the long awaited King-Messiah, and it was not until after his resurrection that they fully realized the truth about him. Even though Christ patiently taught his disciples that he would be crucified, they seemed not to understand. In the gospel of Mark we read: "For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him" (Mark 9:31-32; see also Luke 18:31, 33-34; John 20:9). On one occasion when his disciples James and John observed Jesus's being persecuted by the Samaritans, they asked him, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?" (Luke 9:54). They did not fully realize that the Redeemer-Messiah standing before them had not come to destroy anyone with fire from heaven. Rather he was the Lamb of God and was being prepared for the sacrifice. When the apostles saw the Savior's mental distress and depression at the Last Supper, they began to lose faith in him. On the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, the scripture says: "The disciples began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy and to complain in their hearts wondering if this be the Messiah" (JST Mark 14:36).

The mind-set of the Jews at the time of Christ's mortal sojourn was that the time was ripe for the destruction of their Roman oppressors and the restoration of the Davidic kingdom as had been described by Daniel. They looked for a Conqueror-Messiah, not a Redeemer-Messiah. It is no wonder they looked beyond the mark.

Interestingly the Jewish rabbis and scribes who served to purge the Old Testament missed one whole chapter which in part describes Christ's first coming. It is Isaiah 53. Apparently they misinterpreted this chapter. Just prior to this chapter Isaiah was writing about the glorious second coming (Isaiah 52). Then Isaiah proceeded to say that this glorified being of the second coming would be the same Messiah who would come earlier and be rejected (see Isaiah 53:2-5; 8-9; 11).

There may have also been a political reason why some of the Jews of Lehi's day sought his life. Let us briefly review the situation in that day (see also the commentary for verse 4 and the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the time of Lehi*). Judah was a vassal state of Babylonia and was ruled by a puppet king, the twenty-one-year-old Zedekiah. In addition to Babylon, the other super powers were: Egypt, which had passed its prime but still had great cultural and economic influence, and Assyria, which had conquered and carried away captive the northern kingdom of Israel between 732 and 722 BC and was looking for other opportunities for conquest. Zedekiah, even though he was a puppet monarch allowed to "rule" by Babylon, resented the control that Babylon had over his kingdom, and he was considering forming an alliance with Egypt hoping to thus rid himself of Babylonian control. Lehi and Jeremiah and other prophets were warning against such an alliance. Two political parties thus existed in the land—the loyalists who stood by Babylon and the hotheads who looked to Egypt for help. These two were pitched against each other to the point of violence and bloodshed (Margolis and Marx, *History of the Jewish People*, 110). Since the prophets took a position opposite that of the political leaders of Judah and of many of the common Jews, they were in danger of being imprisoned, persecuted, and even killed.

Hugh Nibley has written insightfully of the history of the Jews:

From the Book of Mormon we learn that through the centuries the Jews have had, as it were, a double history. Along with the conventional story of the nation as recorded in the official accounts kept closely under the control of the schoolmen, there has coexisted in enforced obscurity another Israel, a society of righteous seekers zealously devoting their lives to the preservation of the law of their fathers in all its purity and considering the bulk of their nation to have fallen into sin and transgression Often they took to the desert and lived in family groups or communities there, teaching the law and the prophets to each other and looking forward prayerfully to the coming of the Messiah. There were many dreamers among them and real prophets as well, for they believed—unlike the scribes and doctors of official Jewry—in continued prophecy. Also they practiced rites rejected by the majority of the nation and talked constantly of such things as the resurrection of the flesh and the eternities to come—things which, though they figure prominently enough in the apocryphal writings and also the Talmud, are hardly found at all in the official canon of Jewish scripture. They were a sober, watchful, industrious people, sorely distressed by the wickedness of their nation as a whole, and that nation would have nothing to do with them and did all it could to obscure the fact that they even existed. This briefly is the picture the Book of Mormon paints of Lehi and his ancestors, who had, from time to time, been driven out of Jerusalem for looking forward too eagerly for the Messiah. It is also the picture that now meets us in the abundant and ever-increasing documents which have come forth from the caves in Palestine almost in a steady stream since the first find was made in 1947. For some years the best scholars, Jewish and Christian, fought strenuously against accepting any

of the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls as genuine—they must be medieval forgeries, it was argued, since the picture they presented was one totally at variance with the picture which had been delineated by the meticulous labors of generations of devoted scholars. . . . And as new scrolls are unrolled, the picture itself is unrolling—the picture of that other Israel that lived in obscurity and hope, first sketched out for us in the Book of Mormon and not for the first time emerging into the light of history (*The World and the Prophets*, ed. John W. Welch, Gary P. Gillum, and Don E. Norton [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987], 211-13).

“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.” Don’t make the mistake of passing by this statement of Nephi’s and dismissing it as just so much rhetoric. How does one become “mighty even unto the power of deliverance” by one’s faith? If the reader chooses to digress and pursue this subject, he might wish to read the articles on the concept of faith in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapters 9, *Revealed Faith*, 10 *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*, and 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

The scriptural word *chosen* is most interesting. It means, of course, to be singled out by God for some purpose. Most commonly it means to be called of God while yet in the premortal world for a particular labor or purpose here on earth. Those receiving premortal appointments are also spoken of as having been “called,” “elected,” “ordained of God,” or “foreordained.” We may thus speak of a chosen or elect people.

To be chosen may also mean to be singled out for exaltation while here on earth, or to have received one’s election—to have been elected to celestial glory.

A scriptural passage commonly quoted in the Church is “Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen” (D&C 121:34). This passage means that many are called—chosen or foreordained in the premortal world to particular purposes—but only a few are chosen here on earth—receive their election or exaltation.

A closely related concept is that of a covenant people. Those who are chosen in the premortal world also enter into a covenant with the Lord. For a discussion of the important concept of covenants and a covenant people, see the chapter titled, *Covenants and Covenant Making* in volume 2, chapter 3 in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. Those who entered into the covenant relationship with the Lord in the pre-existence are born here on earth through the covenant line, the house of Israel. These are the Lord’s covenant people. Those covenants and promises which are binding on the Lord’s people have been defined for them in the Abrahamic covenant (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8).

1 Nephi Chapter 2

This chapter provides an account of Lehi's family's journey into the wilderness.

1 For behold, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto my father, yea, even in a dream, and said unto him: Blessed art thou Lehi, because of the things which thou hast done; and because thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee, behold, they seek to take away thy life.

2 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness.

verse 2 From the vantage point of your comfortable chair, don't make the mistake of taking this commandment of the Lord lightly. This was a monumental and frightening assignment. The "wilderness" or desert was a challenging and foreboding place.

The word *wilderness* is used more than 300 times in the Book of Mormon. The word has different meaning depending on when and where it is used. For example, in the western hemisphere the term likely refers to thick forests or jungle in which travel is difficult and in which it is easy to become entangled and lost. However, in the Judean desert, wilderness is quite different from jungle. There are actually two Hebrew words for wilderness. The first is *midbar* which refers to lands which receive modest rainfall and therefore have sparse vegetation. These lands were used for pasturing cattle. The second is *jeshimon* which refers to desolate arid lands which receive little rain and have little drinking water available. Initially Lehi and his family would have encountered *midbar*, but later on, *jeshimon*.

There is a tendency for all of us to depersonalize the scriptures as we read them—to separate ourselves and our situations from those of the scriptural characters. After all, these people lived an awfully long time ago. In those days it must have been easier for a prophet and his wife and family to leave their home and travel into a wilderness. Isn't that what ancient prophets and their families are supposed to do? They were not like us . . . or were they? It is difficult to identify with someone who lived in centuries past and in far different circumstances. However, the scriptures will come alive for us if we can overcome this obstacle. These were real people very much like us. In most everything, they thought, felt, suffered, and gloried for the same reasons we do today. How would we respond if we were asked to give up everything for which we have worked and take our family into a wilderness, never to return?

3 And it came to pass that he was obedient unto the word of the Lord, wherefore he did as the Lord commanded him.

4 And it came to pass that he departed into the wilderness. And he left his house, and the land of his inheritance, and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things, and took nothing with him, save it were his family, and provisions, and tents, and departed into the wilderness.

verse 4 One might well ask: Why was father Lehi picked to lead this group to a promised land? What special qualifications did he have? What was his profession? How poor or wealthy was he? Because of the casual mention of tents in this verse and in 1 Nephi 2:15, it has been suggested that he was a merchant and trader who traveled, and while traveling, lived in a tent. Perhaps he was comfortable in a tent, and probably even knew the trade routes—especially the locations of favorable locations in which to set up camp. Alternate speculations have been made regarding Lehi’s profession. For example, John A. Tvedtnes, a specialist in Hebrew studies, argues that Lehi and Nephi were blacksmiths, hence their appreciation for fine metal craftsmanship and their ability to make metal tools and plates (“Was Lehi a Caravaner?”, a FARMS reprint). See the supplemental article, *Lehi’s Life and Profession in Jerusalem*. Lehi does seem to have been wealthy as noted here and in 1 Nephi 3:16, 22, and 25.

More recently the idea that Lehi was a caravaner and trader has been questioned (George Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 59-61). Apparently caravaners did not use tents. Ownership of tents seems to have been common amongst the descendants of Lehi (Mosiah 2:5-6), yet they were neither nomads nor long-distance travelers. The wealthy families of Palestine maintained vineyards and pasture lands some distance from the city where their urban homes were located. An example of this form of commerce is the parable of the householder who planted a vineyard in a far-off place (Matthew 21:33-34). Householders, such as the house of Lehi would have required tents and camels for these operations. Potter and Wellington provide the following lines of evidence in support of the idea that Lehi and his sons were anything but professional desert haulers:

1. A tradition in the Middle East was that the sons from their earliest years grew up working beside their father in the family trade. Lehi’s eldest sons showed little evidence of being trained in the caravan trade nor of having earned the nobility manifested by an experienced caravan overseer. They complained bitterly of having left the comforts of Jerusalem and their family wealth. After a relatively easy trek from Jerusalem to the valley of Lemuel with its sheltering cliffs, fresh water supply, and abundant food, Laman and Lemuel became convinced they would perish in the wilderness (1 Nephi 2:11).

2. Sariah, Lehi’s wife, did not display the hardened disposition of a mother whose family traveled long periods of time away from home. When her sons made a short journey to Jerusalem from the valley of Lemuel she began to “mourn,” supposing her sons had perished in the wilderness (1 Nephi 5:1-2).

3. When the going got tough, Lehi does not appear to have been a seasoned caravan captain. In times of difficulty, he began “to murmur against the Lord” (1 Nephi 16:20). It was here that Nephi, perhaps still a teenager, took the lead.

4. If Lehi did lead caravans, he would have known some basic navigational skills. Alma wrote that they “tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course” when they did not give heed to the Liahona (Alma 37:41-43). In other words, during certain parts of the journey, the family became lost.

5. Finally, an experienced and well-equipped caravaner could have made the journey from Jerusalem to Dhofar in less than four months. The fact that Lehi took eight years would seem to indicate that he had neither the knowledge nor the experience necessary to make a speedy journey.

Whatever Lehi’s profession may have been and whatever the extent of his material estate, would it be surprising if God selected a man for this important calling who, in addition to his spiritual preparation, already had skills that qualified him for the task at hand?

“And it came to pass that he departed into the wilderness” By what route did Lehi and his family travel from Jerusalem to the Red Sea? At the time of Lehi, there were well known trade routes which ran from Jerusalem to the Gulf of Aqaba (“The route of Salt, Sugar, and Balsam Caravans in the Judean Desert,” *GeoJournal* 2/6 [1978]: 549-56). There are four possible routes of escape that Lehi could have used to reach the shores of the Red Sea. Traveling south from Jerusalem there are two routes. One goes straight south to Hebron, through Arad, and then to the Jordan Valley and down to the Red Sea. The other is more to the east and closer to the Dead Sea. It passes through the Oasis of Ein Gedi, on the west shore of the Dead Sea, then south to the Red Sea keeping at first to the west shore of the Dead Sea. There are also two routes which pass eastward from Jerusalem, south of Jericho and to the east side of the Dead Sea. Eventually both of these join the Jordan Valley south of the Dead Sea and lead toward the Red Sea. It would seem that one of the latter two routes is most likely since they allowed Lehi to head immediately for the wilderness on his way to Arabia. Lehi would have wished to travel quickly, so he would no doubt have chosen an existing route in order to escape Zedekiah’s sphere of influence as quickly as possible. It is doubtful that Lehi would have followed either of the two routes to the south which passed through lands controlled by Zedekiah. At the time of Christ the area across from Jericho over the Jordan River was known as the “wilderness of Judea.” The scriptures tell us that John the Baptist was “preaching in the wilderness of Judea” (Matthew 3:1).

Lehi’s use of camels is a certainty because they brought with them tents, each of which doubtless weighed in excess of 250 pounds. To westerners, a camel is an odd curiosity, but to one crossing ancient Arabia, this animal was a lifeline. Of constant concern to Lehi would have been the welfare of his camel herd. Dromedaries break down on mountains and rocky paths. Wilfred Thesiger, famous for his explorations of

Arabia, wrote in his journal, “If we did not find grazing, the camels would collapse, and that would be the end of us all” (Taylor, *Traveling the Sands*, 132). For this reason, despite its bad breath and belligerent temperament, the camel is beloved by the Arab. According to the Qur’an it is a gift from God. We do not know if Lehi shared the same admiration for the camel as do the Arabs, yet despite its constant companions—the flies and four-inch camel spiders—and its habit of spitting at or biting its handlers, the camels were vital assets.

“the land of his inheritance” It seems likely that Lehi and his forbears had lived in the land of Jerusalem for many years, perhaps since before the time Assyria conquered the northern Kingdom of Israel between 732 and 722 BC. “The land of his inheritance” was, however, a land quite apart from Jerusalem. See 1 Nephi 3:16 and its commentary.

It is interesting to note that Lehi and his family were likely not the only people who left Jerusalem for northwest Arabia shortly before the Babylonian destruction of the Holy City. Oral traditions of several Jewish colonies tell of others. Abu Hurairah, an early Islamic period geographer, wrote of the Jews who settled in northwest Arabia to escape the persecution of Nebuchadnezzar (*Northern Hijaz*, 196-97). According to Reuben Ahroni: “As a result of this prophecy of doom (Jeremiah 38:2), seventy-five thousand courageous men . . . who firmly believed Jeremiah’s prophecy of impending national catastrophe—accompanied by priests, Levites, and slaves . . . crossed the Jordan River and went into the desert,” eventually making their way to Yemen, all the way to the south coast of the Arabian Peninsula (*Yemenite Jewry*, 25). A similar story of escape from Nebuchadnezzar is told by the descendants of the Jewish colony in India (Meyer, “Jews of Cochin”).

5 And he came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea; and he traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea; and he did travel in the wilderness with his family, which consisted of my mother, Sariah, and my elder brothers, who were Laman, Lemuel, and Sam.

verse 5 “And he came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea” In Arabic, the name of the mountains in northwest Arabia, the Hijaz, means something like the “border” or “barrier.” In the Semitic or Hebrew language, the words for mountain and border share a common derivation—the Hebrew word *gebul* means border. *Gebul* cognates with Arabic *jabal* (jebel, djebel), which means mountain. Dr. Hugh Nibley has also taught that in the ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian languages the word *borders* meant mountains.

“my mother, Sariah” The name Sariah is not found in the Bible. The skeptic might thus suggest that this name was an invention of Joseph Smith. Is it an authentic ancient name of the period? Ancient documents available only several decades after the Prophet Joseph’s death reveal that a Jewish woman who lived at Elephantine in

Upper Egypt, near Aswan, during the fifth century BC also bore the name. This Sariah was a member of a Jewish colony. The mention of this Sariah was discovered in the Elephantine Papyri discovered in about 1903 (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 2, number 2, 196). The name probably means “Jehovah is prince” or “Jehovah is my prince,” derived from the Hebrew root for *sar*, meaning “prince” and *jah*, a derivative of Jehovah.

“my elder brothers, who were Laman, Lemuel, and Sam” It is of interest to note that in the Egyptian culture the two eldest sons were often given names that were similar to each other. These are referred to as “pendant names.” Examples include Qabil and Habil, Harut and Marut. Laman and Lemuel might qualify to be “pendant names.”

Hugh Nibley has written: “Whether or not Nehi and Nehri are in any way related to the name Nephi (there are other Egyptian names that come nearer) remains to be investigated. But no philologist will refuse to acknowledge the possible identity of the Book of Mormon Korihor with the Egyptian Kherihor, and none may deny, philologist or not, a close resemblance between Sam and Sam (the brother of Nephi)” (*Lehi in the Desert*, 20-21). For commentary on the derivation of the name Sam, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

“he traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea” Along the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba, there are two distinct mountain ranges that parallel one another. One of the two is, of course, “nearer the Red Sea” on the west side of the other. This shoreline range of mountains begins about forty miles south of the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba and continues for another forty miles to where it ends about twenty miles north of the southern end of the Gulf. When this shoreline range was visualized in 1995 by George Potter and Richard Wellington, they reasoned that the valley of Lemuel (see verse 8) had to be in this range and be next to a canyon that opens upon the Red Sea. After all, the text in these verses makes it clear that while Lehi “traveled in the wilderness in the borders [mountains] which were nearer the Red Sea,” they camped in a valley (Lemuel) that was in the borders (mountains) (George D. Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, [Cedar Fort: Springville, Utah] 5).

If one were writing a book in the nineteenth century about a group of people escaping from Jerusalem, one would surely have them escape southwest to Egypt since all such flights into exile in the Bible follow that route (1 Kings 11:26-40; Jeremiah 43:1-7; Genesis 12:10; 46:1-7). Escaping southeast to Arabia would be quite unexpected. Today, however, there is a growing body of evidence, only made available long after Joseph Smith’s day, for extensive contacts between Arabia and Jerusalem in antiquity (Yigal Shiloh, “South Arabian Inscriptions from the City of David, Jerusalem,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 119/1 [1987]: 9-18). We know that the Lord was leading Lehi and his family to a promised land in the New World, not into exile.

6 And it came to pass that when he had traveled three days in the wilderness, he pitched his tent in a valley by the side of a river of water.

verse 6 Having arrived at the shores of the Red Sea, Lehi and his party decided to continue on for another three days, after which they established camp “in a valley by the side of a river of water.” They will live in this camp for months and perhaps years.

The expression “river of water” might seem to be redundant, since we are used to thinking of rivers as consisting only of water. In the Middle East, however, most rivers do not contain water, but rather are wadis which are washes that contain water only following a rain storm. Thus it is entirely appropriate and even necessary to use the phrase “river of water.”

There are a few factors that are pertinent about the area in which Lehi and his family are making their camp. First, this area, also known as Midian, was rather heavily populated in antiquity (M. C. A. MacDonald, “Along the Red Sea,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack Sasson et al. [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1995], 2:1350). Hence it may be incorrect to think that the family was completely isolated in this region. Second, this verse makes it clear that they camped about three days’ journey south or southeast of the point at which they initially reached the Red Sea. They would have first seen the Red Sea at what is now modern Aqaba. Thus their camp must be a distance of between forty-five and seventy-five miles, depending on their speed and endurance, particularly the speed and endurance of their camels. Third, the camp lay next to a “river of water” that “emptied into the Red Sea” (verse 8). Lehi described this stream as “continually running” (verse 9). Fourth, the evident impressive character of the valley where they located their camp led Lehi to term the valley “firm and steadfast, and immovable” (verse 10).

Thus, we do have a few clues about the camping place. The most astonishing is the claim that there was a “continually running” stream of water in that part of Arabia. After all, students of geography believe that Arabia has been largely a desert for thousands of years and that water flows only after heavy rains. At the time the Book of Mormon was first published, the claim that a river ran in arid northwestern Arabia could not be checked. Western explorers did not venture into this remote area until well after 1830. The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Agriculture and Water, with the assistance of the U.S. Geological Service, spent forty-four years surveying the kingdom’s water resources. Their study consisted of seismic readings, surface and aerial surveys, and even land satellite photo analysis. They concluded that “Saudi Arabia may be the world’s largest country without any perennial rivers or streams” (*Water Atlas of Saudi Arabia*, XV). But there is an unforeseen surprise in the mountains south of Aqaba, a surprise that Joseph Smith could not have known about.

In 1952 Hugh Nibley pointed out that the camp had to lie near “the Gulf of Aqaba at a point not far above the Straits of Tiran” where Lehi, “perhaps from the sides of Mt.

Musafa or Mt. Mendisha,” beheld that the stream of water ran into the Red Sea (*Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites*, 85). In 1976 Lynn and Hope Hilton visited the area and proposed that the likely location of the camp was at the oasis Al-Bad in Wadi al-lfal, about seventy-five miles south and east of Aqaba. Although any running water at the oasis was seasonal, flowing only after heavy seasonal rains, there were springs. Besides, the distant hills were impressive to behold. Thus, the Al-Bad oasis seemed to be a good fit with Nephi’s narrative.

More recently George D. Potter and Richard Wellington have described an exciting new candidate in Arabia for the river of Laman and the valley of Lemuel (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 8, Number 1, 54-63). In May of 1995 Potter, Wellington, and some friends were searching for one of the Arabian candidates for Mount Sinai when they made an unexpected discovery. (Their friends had rejected the popular belief that Mount Sinai is found in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. Instead, they believed the Apostle Paul was correct when he wrote that Mount Sinai was located in Arabia—Galatians 4:25.) Traveling near the eastern coast of the Gulf of Aqaba, they stopped at the oasis town of al-Bada’a, the town known anciently as Midian, the hometown of Moses’s father-in-law, Jethro, the high priest of Midian. From here they were directed to Maqna, a small isolated village twenty miles west of al-Bada’a on the Gulf of Aqaba. According to local tradition, Maqna had been the first camp of Moses after the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba. They then wandered north along the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba. Rounding the base of a cliff, they came upon a magnificent narrow canyon which opened onto the sea in a palm-lined cove. This was the wadi Tayyib al-Isim (“Valley of the Good Name”). They decided to walk up the spectacular wadi or canyon. After three and three-quarter miles it opened into a beautiful oasis upper valley with several wells and three large groves of date palm trees. A stream started in the canyon near its upper end and ran down the wadi virtually all the way to the sea. From the vegetation in the valley and the erosion on the rocks, it appeared that the small desert river flowed continually night and day, year after year. The steep canyon walls would have afforded Lehi and his family enough shade to make the summer heat tolerable. The valley might have offered security to Lehi’s family as it was off the main route southward.

Lehi and his family would have come into this valley from its upper end and not from the coast. Note that this verse did not say that Lehi found the river and the valley. Rather he “pitched his tent in a valley by the side of” the river. Perhaps they were even shown the camp site by friendly local inhabitants. They maybe even paid something to stay there. Or, perhaps they simply discovered an uninhabited valley, just as it exists today.

Potter and Wellington have written an exciting description of this purported valley of Lemuel (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, 32-34):

The grandeur of the valley is difficult to describe in words or even portray in photographs. It is a narrow gorge cut through a massive granite mountain. It consists of three sections which we will refer to as the upper valley, the canyon of granite, and the lower canyon.

The upper valley constitutes an oasis that lies at the south end of a twelve-mile long wadi—known locally as Wadi Tayyib al-Ism—that leads down from the north. The upper valley site is like a pleasant jewel, spread out over approximately one square mile with several hundred palm trees and twelve wells that local residents call the Waters of Moses.

The upper valley ends as the long, descending wadi veers west and runs against the eastern granite cliffs of the shoreline mountains. But rather than forming the usual impassable barrier, the coastal mountains have been breached by a narrow canyon. This deep fracture in the granite mountain border that provides a passage to the sea, we call the canyon of granite. Tim Sedor, a colleague in the exploration effort, has surveyed the length of this section of the Wadi Tayyib al-Ism to the Gulf of Aqaba; he concludes that it is approximately three and three-quarter miles.

Flash floods are a winter-time danger in this part of Arabia. If the family of Lehi and Sariah had camped here in the hot summer months, they could have stayed in the shade of the canyon. During the rainy winter months, however, campers would wisely move out of the canyon up the much wider oasis that the upper valley offers. Here, just outside the canyon in the upper valley, can be found the remains of ancient encampments which date to the Iron Age (early second to mid-first millennium BC). A number of channels are cut in the floor of the upper valley, probably cut by flash floods. However, next to the ancient camp site we found a piece of smooth rounded quartz. This was clear evidence that the stream once flowed as high up the wadi as the highest campsite.

We found old pottery shards throughout the campsite, an area of about one acre. Could these stone structures have been the remains of Lehi's camp? We have no way of determining this. However, we found that a team of international archaeologists led by Michael Ingraham visited the ruins in the upper valley. They classified the site as an 'encampment,' and dated some of the pottery shards to Lehi's time.

The final section of our valley of Lemuel is the lower canyon and the beach. The granite canyon opens out into a flat gravel floor just a few feet above sea level. This level area at the mouth of the canyon is about three-eighths of a mile long. This is the most impressive section of the canyon. Here the height of the canyon walls rises over two thousand feet straight up from the canyon floor. The lower canyon provides an important clue that wadi Tayyib al-Ism is the valley of Lemuel. Though the valley of Lemuel carried a stream to the sea, when Lehi first came into the valley he could not see from his camp that the river empties into the sea; at least that is implied by 1 Nephi 2:6, 9. Our candidate for the valley is less than four miles long, yet its towering walls

permit seeing the Red Sea only during the last 375 feet as one descends to the coast. The beautiful palm-laden beach cove that one finally encounters is a spectacular scene.

Brother Potter has re-visited this site several times at various times of the year and has always found the river flowing, in fact the volume of water in the river seems rather constant throughout the year. The spring which feeds the river comes from an underground reservoir system. The pattern of rock erosion in the canyon suggests that a substantial river has flowed in that location for a very long time.

Since their initial discovery of wadi Tayyib al-Isim in 1995, Potter and Wellington have explored the entire Arabian shoreline of the Gulf of Aqaba. They have found no other streams in a wadi near the Gulf of Aqaba, and nothing they have learned subsequent to 1995 has given them any reason to change their opinion. Brother Potter concludes his article: "Are we witnesses of the river Laman and the valley of Lemuel? In my view, the characteristics of the site are compelling evidence that this is so."

verses 5-6 I was deeply moved by the account of George Potter's and Richard Wellington's attempt to retrace Lehi's trail from the modern city of Aqaba to the valley of Lemuel—wadi Tayyib al-Isim (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, 27-28). When they first discovered the wadi Tayyib al-Isim, three years prior, they had traveled through al Bada'a and Maqna and then come back north to Tayyib al-Isim. This "loop" route was about 122 miles from Aqaba, far too long for laden camels to have traveled in three days. They reasoned that Lehi would have reached the valley more directly along a shoreline trail. They expected the effort to find the proposed site of the valley of Lemuel along a direct trail from the north to be difficult, as the shoreline mountains are a maze of wadis that turn in all directions. What concerned them the most was that the distance from Aqaba to Tayyib al-Isim was nearly seventy-five miles on the map, and camels have a maximum three-day range of approximately seventy-five miles. Thus the trail to the valley of Lemuel had to be nearly straight. I will let Potter and Wellington tell their own inspiring story:

Confidently we headed south along the shoreline [from Aqaba] into Arabia. Nephi wrote that they [had come] "by" the mountains that were "near" the Red Sea (1 Nephi 2:5). About five miles to our left were the mountains of the Hijaz range, the mountains by the Red Sea. To our right were the waters of the Gulf of Aqaba of the Red Sea. After twenty-five miles we came to the town of Haql, the site of a caravan stop during ancient times. From Haql the ancient trail headed east into the mountains, and then south to al-Bada'a. We had traveled this route and knew it took over 122 miles [from Aqaba] to reach wadi Tayyib al-Isim. Lehi could not have used the caravan route to al-Bada'a and then to the valley from there, as a laden camel cannot travel 122 miles in three days.

We decided to continue following Nephi's initial instructions and maintained our course down the shoreline. Fifteen miles south of Haql, we came to the shoreline mountains, which extended into the sea and blocked our passage. To our left was a

wadi that led into the mountains. It was the only valley leading into the mountains that we had passed since leaving Haql. If this were Lehi's trail, then he had no choice but to enter this wadi. We checked Nephi's next instructions: "And he traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea (1 Nephi 2:5, italics added)." We knew these were the mountains "nearer" the sea and Nephi said they went "in" them.

We entered the wadi and followed east for six miles and then south for three more. It's bed was good for camels. The wadi finally ended at a rise that opened into another wadi that led south. It was this wadi that really impressed us. It ran straight through the mountains. None of us had seen such a wadi in Midian. It was long and straight and had no obvious exits. As Timothy put it, "if Lehi were a bowling ball, he would have just kept rolling down this wadi until the ball came to its end." In other words if Lehi entered this wadi, he would have followed it to its natural end. We headed down the wadi noting as we went that its foliage was typical for Midian—practically none! Here and there we saw an occasional acacia tree barely hanging on to life. Certainly there were no signs of water, let alone a river! Our trail odometer read seventy miles, and the wadi had the same arid landscape. We were beginning to think we would find nothing in the seventy-five mile range that camels could travel in three days. Just then the wadi turned due west and headed directly toward the tallest shoreline mountains. Three miles later, having used only Nephi's directions, we were inside the great granite canyon we had discovered three years earlier. Stepping outside our truck, we were standing next to its river of continually flowing water. For the past twenty-two miles we had actually been driving down the upper section of wadi Tayyib al-Isma, the valley of Lemuel.

7 And it came to pass that he built an altar of stones, and made an offering unto the Lord, and gave thanks unto the Lord our God.

verse 7 "he built an altar of stones" The expression "altar of stones," as opposed to the more common English form "stone altar," is standard Hebrew construction. Other similar examples from the Book of Mormon text include: "plates of brass," "rod of iron," "land of promise," "skin of blackness," and "yoke of iron."

"made an offering unto the Lord" By what authority did Lehi make this offering? The power to officiate over the offering of sacrifices in that day was held by the tribe of Levi, and so far as we know no one in Lehi's traveling party was of the tribe of Levi and held that specific priesthood. Lehi was a descendant of Joseph rather than Levi and Aaron. Because he was a prophet, he held the Melchizedek priesthood by which authority he made this offering.

Religious life in ancient Israel derived much of its meaning from the offering of sacrifices. This was true for Lehi and Sariah and their family members. How do we know? Because at critical moments during their first months away from their Jerusalem

home they offered sacrifices. Their acts of devotion are consistent with the Mosaic law and its deep influence in the lives of believers. There will be two occasions in addition to that one described in this verse when Lehi offered sacrifices. In this verse, obviously, it is on the occasion of the family's arriving at their first campsite. The other two instances will be when the sons of Lehi return from Jerusalem with the plates of brass (1 Nephi 5:9), and when the sons return with the family of Ishmael (1 Nephi 7:22). In each instance we will learn that Nephi specifically ties these offerings to expressions of thanksgiving. It is interesting to note that such offerings of thanksgiving were the so-called peace offerings that are mandated in the law of Moses (see Leviticus 3:1-17; 7:11-21; 22:29-30). According to Psalm 107, a person was to "sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving" for safety in journeying (verse 22), whether on water or through the desert (see verses 4-6, 19-30). Jonah, for example, having been delivered from the fish that had swallowed him, prayed to the Lord, saying, "I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving" (Jonah 2:9). Joseph Smith could not have known which type of sacrifices were appropriate on which occasions, but Lehi knew.

Burnt offerings, on the other hand, present an entirely different matter, and Nephi will mention them in 1 Nephi 5:9 and 7:22. They are for atonement rather than thanksgiving (see Leviticus 1:2-4). This type of offering presumes that someone has sinned and that therefore the relationship between God and his people has been ruptured, requiring restoration. Let us examine the two instances of Lehi's offering burnt offerings. On one occasion, Lehi will offer such sacrifices after the return of his sons from Jerusalem with the plates of brass in hand (1 Nephi 5:9). Had there been sin on this journey? The answer is yes. We will learn that the older two brothers had beaten the younger two, drawing the attention of an angel (1 Nephi 3:28-30). There was also the matter of the unforeseen death of Laban. Even though Nephi knew through the Spirit of God that the Lord had commanded him to kill Laban and thus justified Laban's death, Lehi was evidently unwilling to take any chances that the relationship between God and his family had not been securely reconciled, so he offered burnt offerings—exactly the right sacrifice for the occasion. On the other occasion Lehi will offer burnt offerings after the sons return from Jerusalem with the family of Ishmael in tow (1 Nephi 7:22). Had there been sin? Again, the answer is yes. The older sons had sought to bind Nephi and leave him in the desert to die (1 Nephi 7:6-16). Even though they had repented and sought Nephi's forgiveness (1 Nephi 7:20-21), Lehi evidently still felt the need to offer burnt offerings for atonement (S. Kent Brown in FARMS Insights, volume 21, 2001, 2-3).

In building this altar of stones, Lehi appears to have followed the pattern set by other ancient prophets and leaders: Noah built an altar after surviving the Flood (Genesis 8:20); Abraham built altars in several places where he had important spiritual experiences (Genesis 12:7-8; 13:18; 22:9); and Moses, Joshua, David, and Elijah, among others, also built altars (Exodus 17:15; 24:4; Joshua 8:30; 2 Samuel 24:18; 1

Kings 18:30-32). According to the law of Moses, an altar made of stones was to be made of unhewn stones (Exodus 20:25; Deuteronomy 27:5).

8 And it came to pass that he called the name of the river, Laman, and it emptied into the Red Sea; and the valley was in the borders near the mouth thereof.

verse 8 The small river in the present-day wadi Tayyib al-Isim flows under a gravel bed for the last three-eighths of a mile as it approaches the Gulf of Aqaba. The reason the river does not reach the Red Sea today is that the volume of water flowing in the river has been reduced to the point where it no longer can reach the Red Sea. Additionally, the elevation of the floor of the canyon is not the same as it was at the time of Lehi. According to geologists, where the river ends today was below the surface of the Red Sea in ancient times.

9 And when my father saw that the waters of the river emptied into the fountain of the Red Sea, he spake unto Laman, saying: O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness!

verse 9 The use of the term *fountain* in this verse is consistent with ancient Near Eastern language patterns. A fountain is a body or source of water, such as a spring, well, pool, reservoir, or sea.

10 And he also spake unto Lemuel: O that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord!

verses 9-10 Brother Hugh Nibley has reported on an ancient form of desert poetry known as *qasida*. These two verses provide a good example of *qasida*. A biblical scholar Alfred Bloch has distinguished four types or purposes of this poetry: (1) utterances to accompany any rhythmical work; (2) verses for instruction or information; (3) elegies, specializing in sage reflections on the meaning of life; and (4) recited on a journey to make the experience more pleasant and edifying. Lehi's *qasida* in these two verses conforms neatly to any of the last three of these types (*Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 91).

Brother Nibley also wrote:

One of the most revealing things about Lehi is the nature of his great eloquence. It must not be judged by modern or western standards, as people are prone to judge the Book of Mormon as literature. In this lesson we take the case of a bit of poetry recited extempore by Lehi to his two sons to illustrate certain peculiarities of the Oriental idiom and especially to serve as a test-case in which a number of very strange and exacting conditions are most rigorously observed in the Book of Mormon account. Those are the conditions under which ancient desert poetry was composed. Some things that appear at first glance to be most damning to the Book of Mormon, such as the famous passage in 2 Nephi 1:14 about no traveler returning from the grave, turn out on closer inspection

to provide striking confirmation of its correctness (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 265-75; see also *Lehi in the Desert*, 84-92).

verses 7-10 To a westerner it may seem strange to name a river after one son and its valley after another. We usually give both the same name—for example, Mississippi River and Mississippi Valley. Lehi’s naming of the Lemuel Valley and the River Laman, however, is appropriately Hebrew in its style (Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 65-66). The ancient Hebrews frequently formed analogies between things in nature and human qualities. If only Laman could be more like this river, continually running toward the source of all righteousness.

There was a custom of a newcomer’s naming a place and its geographical features. By what right do these people rename streams and valleys to suit themselves? But the immemorial custom of the desert, to be sure. Such actions seem odd in light of the fact that people lived in this part of Arabia and therefore the valley where the family camped probably had already received a name. It was Hugh Nibley who first drew attention to this custom, and he also pointed out what was obvious, that the names conferred by Lehi did not stick (*Lehi in the Desert*, 75-76). Charles Doughty, an Englishman who traveled in Arabia during the nineteenth century, observed that “every desert stead” had received a name. In fact, many had two or more names. Why? Because landmarks and important places received names from both local residents and from traveling caravanners. These names were never the same because the places in question meant different things to these individuals, depending on the function and importance of the landmarks or depending on an event that occurred there. He observed that one cannot predict which name will stick to a locale, that of the local people or that of the caravanners who visited places again and again (*Travels in Arabia Deserta*, 1:88). For another instance of naming a valley after only being there a short while, see Mosiah 24:20.

Professor W. Kent Brown of Brigham Young University notes that “in a desert clime all arable land and all water resources have claimants” (“Case for Lehi’s Bondage,” 206. Nibley made a similar point; see *Lehi in the Desert*, 66). How might Lehi have acquired the right to camp in the valley that was likely controlled by a local tribe? There are a few possible reasons:

1. Lehi had evidently been a wealthy man and, though he left his gold and silver in Jerusalem, his family probably carried among their provisions some items that could be exchanged for temporary camping privileges.

2. Perhaps Lehi’s group appeared small and sufficiently non-threatening that the locals required no payment of them. The hosts may even have pointed out to Lehi where he could find water and a campsite out of their way in the side canyon whose lower reaches they did not use themselves (Nephi did not write that his family “found” a river, but only that they pitched their tent next to it; see 1 Nephi 2:6). This latter possibility is enhanced when we note that Lehi apparently brought no sheep or goats

with him into the wilderness. This would imply Lehi had to acquire animals for his sacrifices from the local people.

3. Perhaps there were no inhabitants in this valley. That is true today. If the area had been empty of people except for nomadic Bedouins, then Lehi was in no way beholden to locals.

verse 10 Another construction which might well have seemed unusual to Joseph Smith, as he was translating, was Lehi's referring to a valley as "firm and steadfast and immovable." Westerners would be more likely to think of a mountain as having those qualities of stability. Again, Brother Hugh Nibley assures us that such a use is typically middle eastern (*Ibid.*, 223-24).

Being "firm and steadfast and immovable" is arriving at that state of faith and conviction which enables the saint to undergo tribulation, temptation, and persecution while remaining resolute and unwavering in their spiritual convictions.

11 Now this he spake because of the stiffneckedness of Laman and Lemuel; for behold they did murmur in many things against their father, because he was a visionary man, and had led them out of the land of Jerusalem, to leave the land of their inheritance, and their gold, and their silver, and their precious things, to perish in the wilderness. And this they said he had done because of the foolish imaginations of his heart.

verse 11 This verse contains the first appearance of the interesting word "murmur" in the Book of Mormon. The verb *murmur* is uncommonly used in scripture. In both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon, *murmur* is used primarily for the exoduses—the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and the exodus of Lehi's family from Jerusalem. Forms of the Hebrew root *lwn* (translated "to murmur") in the King James Bible Old Testament occur eighteen times. All but one of them are connected with the exodus from Egypt. In the Book of Mormon, it appears thirty-three times; of these, nineteen describe events in the Old World wilderness.

"because he was a visionary man" It is interesting that the original text of the Book of Mormon rendered this phrase "because that he was a visionary man." This latter form is actually better Hebrew (see Genesis 2:3).

"land of Jerusalem" Many critics of the Book of Mormon have claimed that the book's use of the term "land of Jerusalem" was a major error and proof that the book was false. They have especially criticized the use of this phrase in reference to the place where Christ would be born. They point out that this phrase was not used in the Bible. Therefore, the critics have concluded it was an example of Joseph Smith's ignorance and evidence that he had tried to perpetrate a fraud. The phrase "land of Jerusalem" has now been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls in a text that links the phrase to the Jerusalem of Lehi's time (Gordon C. Thomasson, *FARMS Update* in *Insights* [March 1994], 2). This phrase was definitely not in current use in Joseph Smith's day,

but, unknown to him, it was an accurate usage for the day in which he claimed the book was written. Thus, despite the critics' best efforts, Joseph's supposed "error" becomes an evidence of the Book of Mormon's authenticity (see also the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:4).

12 And thus Laman and Lemuel, being the eldest, did murmur against their father. And they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them.

13 Neither did they believe that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed according to the words of the prophets. And they were like unto the Jews who were at Jerusalem, who sought to take away the life of my father.

verse 13 Our natural bias leads us to be judgmental with Laman and Lemuel. We are inclined to label them as stubborn and rebellious and disobedient and unrighteous. They were, after all, reluctant to follow the counsel of their prophet father. Perhaps we should be a bit more sympathetic with them. This one-way trip into the wilderness was a most significant commitment for them. In Jerusalem their father was wealthy in material goods. They were likely to inherit a significant fortune at their father's death. By leaving their home and traveling into the unknown wilderness they were abandoning this inheritance.

"Neither did they believe that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed according to the words of the prophets" There may have been, at least in part, a historical precedent for Laman and Lemuel's reluctance to believe that Jerusalem could be destroyed. In 701 BC at the time of king Hezekiah, Jerusalem was besieged by Assyria led by Sennacherib. On the very night before they were to be attacked by Assyrian forces, a mysterious illness epidemic swept through the Assyrian army, and it is alleged that 185,000 of them died (see the supplemental article, *Historical Setting for the Book of Isaiah*). Sennacherib departed quickly back to Nineveh, never to return. In the years that followed, this event would be recounted until "later generations could ascribe this deliverance to nothing less than a supernatural intervention, second only to the one which had secured the freedom of the Israelites from the Egyptian captivity" (Roth, *The History of the Jews*, 42).

Regarding this event Professor Benjamin Mazar wrote:

Embellished by legendary accretions, it strengthened the popular view of the impregnability of the city, and the ultimate sanctity and inviolability of mount Zion and the Temple. This confidence remained intact through subsequent generations down to the last years of the monarchy, until the day that the city walls were breached, the defending forces overwhelmed, and the city itself destroyed by the armies of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (*Mountain of the Lord*, 57).

Read this verse carefully. Did Laman and Lemuel actually seek to take the life of their father? The point is not quite clear, as the verse is somewhat ambiguous.

The term “Jew” in the Book of Mormon is used to refer to either a descendant of Judah, the son of Jacob, or to an inhabitant of the kingdom of Judah. Obviously, Lehi and his family were not Jews by the former definition (1 Nephi 5:14 makes it clear that Lehi was a descendant of Judah’s brother Joseph) but did qualify by the latter.

14 And it came to pass that my father did speak unto them in the valley of Lemuel, with power, being filled with the Spirit, until their frames did shake before him. And he did confound them, that they durst not utter against him; wherefore, they did as he commanded them.

verse 14 On this and several subsequent occasions, Laman and Lemuel are cowed or subdued by someone manifesting the power of the Holy Ghost (see also 1 Nephi 3:29; 16:39; 17:47-48; 17:53-55; 1 Nephi 18:11-15). Each time, however, the change of heart was short lived. How universally typical of those who, like Laman and Lemuel, are spiritually “past feeling” (1 Nephi 17:45)!

15 And my father dwelt in a tent.

verse 15 In addition to this verse, Nephi will inform us on two additional occasions that his father Lehi lived in a tent (1 Nephi 9:1; 10:16). Why this repeated emphasis? Perhaps it is to emphasize the humility of this good man who had left behind his considerable worldly possessions, and who now, uncomplaining, he was living in a wilderness, in a tent.

Hugh Nibley has added insight to this verse:

To an Arab, “my father dwelt in a tent” says everything. . . . So with the announcement that his “father dwelt in a tent,” Nephi serves notice that he had assumed the desert way of life, as perforce he must for his journey. Any easterner would appreciate the significance and importance of the statement, which to us seems almost trivial. . . . It is most significant how Nephi speaks of his father’s tent; it is the official center of all administration and authority. First, the dogged insistence of Nephi on telling us again and again that “my father dwelt in a tent” (1 Nephi 2:15; 9:1; 10:16; 16:6). So what? we ask, but to an Oriental that statement says everything. Since time immemorial the whole population of the Near East have been either tent-dwellers or house-dwellers, the people of the bait ash-sha’r or the bait at-tin, “houses of hair or houses of clay.” It was Harmer who first pointed out that one and the same person may well alternate between the one way of life and the other, and he cites the case of Laban in Genesis 31, where “one is surprised to find both parties so suddenly equipped with tents for their accommodation in traveling,” though they had all along been living in houses. Not only has it been the custom for herdsmen and traders to spend part of the year in tents and part in houses, but “persons of distinction” in the East have always enjoyed spending part of the year in tents for the pure pleasure of a complete change. It is clear from 1 Nephi 3:1; 4:38; 5:7; 7:5, 21-22; 15:1; 16:19 that Lehi’s tent is the

headquarters for all activities, all discussion, and decisions (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 243).

16 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers.

verse 16 “exceedingly young” It has been speculated that Nephi was probably born about 615 BC. Thus, he might have been fourteen to sixteen years old when the Book of Mormon story began.

“mysteries of God” For a discussion of the two definitions of the concept of the “mysteries of God” see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1. In this particular verse, a specific meaning may have been intended by Nephi. We have discussed previously the heavenly councils to which Israelite prophets are invited in vision (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:5). The decrees of these councils were private and secret, indeed mysteries known only to the prophets (see Amos 3:7). Here Nephi expresses his desire to receive a personal confirmation of the truth of Lehi’s words. He wanted to know for himself the truth of those decrees Lehi had received in the heavenly council—the “mysteries” of God (John W. Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 24-25).

“and behold he did visit me” This is a provocative statement, but we really don’t know whether the Lord visited Nephi in person or whether he simply touched Nephi’s spiritual understanding by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

17 And I spake unto Sam, making known unto him the things which the Lord had manifested unto me by his Holy Spirit. And it came to pass that he believed in my words.

verse 17 Sam was one of the older brothers in scripture who believed on the testimony of his younger brother. Can you think of any others in all of the standard works of the church? How about Hyrum Smith, Joseph’s brother, and Moses’s elder brother Aaron?

18 But, behold, Laman and Lemuel would not hearken unto my words; and being grieved because of the hardness of their hearts I cried unto the Lord for them.

verse 18 The expression “hardness of their hearts” is used some nineteen times in the four standard works, and eighteen of these are found in the Book of Mormon. It is likely an expression of Egyptian origin. In Egyptian culture it was believed that the dead were received by Osiris, the god of the underworld. Osiris would judge a man by weighing his heart. If his heart was found to be hard or heavy with sin, then the judgment was unfavorable. Conversely, a light hearted or righteous individual would

receive a favorable verdict. See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

19 And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart.

20 And 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.

verse 20 “a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands” We certainly do have the concept firmly in mind that the Book of Mormon land, the so-called “promised land,” was in the western hemisphere, but what part of the western hemisphere is the land “choice above all other lands”? North America? Central America? South America? It would be illogical to exclude any of these three. For a discussion of the issue of the physical location of the Book of Mormon story, see the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Geography*. “Promised lands” are given only to chosen or covenant people (see the commentary on the concept of being chosen in 1 Nephi 1:20).

21 And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

verse 21 “they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” This expression means to be cut off from the influence of the Spirit.

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

23 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.

verse 23 “curse them even with a sore curse” This curse which will eventually fall upon the Lamanite people is their eventually being denied the priesthood. They will also have a mark placed upon them to identify them as bearers of the curse. This mark would be a “skin of blackness” (see also 2 Nephi 5:21).

It is helpful to keep the “they’s” in this verse straight. The first two “they’s” refer to the unrighteous Lamanites. The third “they” has reference to the Nephites, the seed of Nephi.

Most often God’s cursings—his censuring of wickedness—take three different forms. They may result in the destruction of life (2 Nephi 5:25; Ether 11:6), forced social differentiation (2 Nephi 5:21-23; Alma 3:6-10), or loss of personal property (Helaman 13:30-36; cf. Mormon 1:17-18; Ether 14:1). Cursings and blessings often have to do

with a people inhabiting a promised land (2 Nephi 1:7; Deuteronomy 27:11-28; cf. Abraham 2:6). The curse of Adam (Moroni 8:8) is the state of spiritual death that befell Adam and Eve after their transgression. This curse was imposed upon their posterity (Alma 12:22). Yet, we know that because of the Savior's atonement this curse has been overcome for all mankind.

24 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.

verse 24 The "theys" in this verse are a bit problematic. It is likely that both "theys" refer to the Lamanites. Another possibility is that both "theys" refer to some of the Nephites who rebel against the Lord.

A "scourge" is a cause of affliction or a means of inflicting punishment or suffering. Thus, throughout the Book of Mormon, we will read how the pugnacious Lamanites will serve as a scourge or a constant reminder, even an ever-present warning to the Nephites.

"the ways of remembrance" The Hebrew verb *zakhor* (to remember) carries a wider range of meaning than usually attributed to the verb *remember* in English. It seems to mean far more than the mere mental recall of information, though of course that is part of its meaning. This verb occurs in the Old Testament over two hundred times and means "to be attentive, to consider, to keep divine commandments, or to act. . . . Indeed, to remember involves turning to God, or repenting, or acting in accordance with divine injunctions. . . . Conversely, the antonym of the verb to remember in Hebrew—to forget—does not merely describe the passing of a thought from the mind, but involves a failure to act, or a failure to do or keep something. Hence, failing to remember God and his commandments is the equivalent of apostasy" (Louis C. Midgley, "O Man, Remember, and Perish Not," a FARMS reprint, March 1990). For examples of other uses of the verb to remember in the Book of Mormon see Mosiah 2:41; 4:30; 13:29-30; Alma 37:35; Moroni 4:3. "Remembrance," then, involves active participation. It means recalling not simply with the mind but also with the heart, mind, and actions. It means keeping the covenants which God has made with his people.

1 Nephi Chapter 3

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 3-5 Lehi's sons return to Jerusalem for the brass plates of Laban.

1 Nephi 3:7 I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.

Chapters 3-5 are notable for the account of the obtaining of the brass plates of Laban.

1 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, returned from speaking with the Lord, to the tent of my father.

2 And it came to pass that he spake unto me, saying: Behold I have dreamed a dream, in the which the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brethren shall return to Jerusalem.

3 For behold, Laban hath the record of the Jews and also a genealogy of my forefathers, and they are engraven upon plates of brass.

verse 3 In what sense is the record engraved upon the brass plates a “record of the Jews”? Actually a similar label is applied to the brass plates in other verses in 1 Nephi (see 1 Nephi 5:6, 12). Don't we usually regard the brass plates as a record of the tribe of Joseph and his descendants, or more broadly the record of the ten northern tribes of Israel (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:16)? The term “Jew” has various definitions. See a discussion of this matter in the commentary for 2 Nephi 25:1. In this verse the broadest definition seems applicable—that is, the term is applied to the entire house of Israel.

4 Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brothers should go unto the house of Laban, and seek the records, and bring them down hither into the wilderness.

verses 1-4 Lehi and his family did not possess their own copy of the scriptures, and Lehi could not allow his children to grow up without them. In those days their scriptures were some of the books we would today call the Old Testament. They could not go into the wilderness without the scriptures. They had no choice. Nephi and his brothers had to go back. The two older brothers protested. We usually suppose that the essence of their protest was their fear of Laban, but undoubtedly the distance and the difficult terrain involved in the journey had some bearing on their reluctance. The distance between Jerusalem and the Red Sea is two hundred miles. A reasonable pace for a group of people on camels would be twenty to thirty miles a day. So the

journey was likely at least seven or eight days. Add to that the three days they traveled after reaching the Red Sea, and the round trip is over five hundred miles and at least three weeks in duration! In addition, the brothers had no clue as to how they were going to obtain the plates. From our comfortable vantage points, we are probably a bit hasty for criticizing Laman and Lemuel for being hesitant and apprehensive. Keep in mind that soon after his sons return from this first assignment, Lehi will command them to return to Jerusalem yet again!

Who was Laban, and what was his relationship to the family of Lehi? We do know that he was of the same lineage as Lehi—a descendant of Joseph (1 Nephi 5:16). Perhaps he was a relative. It has also been suggested that he might have been the member of the family responsible for keeping the genealogical records.

5 And now, behold thy brothers murmur, saying it is a hard thing which I have required of them; but behold I have not required it of them, but it is a commandment of the Lord.

6 Therefore go, my son, and thou shalt be favored of the Lord, because thou hast not murmured.

7 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.

verse 7 Nephi's expression of faith, in view of these demanding assignments, is all the more impressive: "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them" (see also 1 Nephi 17:3). New meaning is added to this enthusiastic statement of faith by Nephi in light of the details of the principle of faith discussed in the articles on faith in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapters 9, *Revealed Faith*, 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*, and 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

This is a verse with which we're all familiar. It has become an important part of our culture. Most of us have learned to quote it. It increases our understanding and love for Nephi! A question may be asked about Nephi's statement in this verse: Is this a pronouncement of church doctrine or simply an expression of Nephi's enthusiastic faith? One might well argue it is not a statement of doctrine, at least it is not a complete elaboration of a doctrine. It is plausible that a person or people might diligently work to fulfill a commandment of the Lord, and yet be thwarted in the attempt. The complete doctrine has been pronounced on this matter by the Lord himself through the prophet Joseph Smith. It is found in D&C 124:49. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that when I give a commandment to any of the sons of men to do a work unto my name, and those sons of men go with all their might and with all they have to perform that work, and cease not

their diligence, and their enemies come upon them and hinder them from performing that work, behold, it behooveth me to require that work no more at the hands of those sons of men, but to accept of their offerings.”

Confusion and frustration may result when a church member fails to recognize an “incomplete doctrine” such as is contained in Nephi’s statement. There are other such “incomplete doctrines” in the Church . For example: “Keep the Word of Wisdom, and you will enjoy good health.” “Pay your tithing, and you will become prosperous.” “Train up a child in the way he should go, and later in life he will not depart from it” (see 2 Nephi 4:5). While these statements all contain some general truth, they should not be regarded as binding doctrines. Each of us traveling through this mortal experience will see exceptions to these statements.

Lest the reader take any semblance of a negative connotation from this verse’s commentary, it should be emphasized that there can be no question that obedience enables and empowers the obedient. When an individual is on the Lord’s errand, he might well expect that the Lord will provide nourishment, strength, and means whereby the errand will be accomplished. If the individual exerts his best effort and still fails to complete his errand, then his obligation is fulfilled.

8 And it came to pass that when my father had heard these words he was exceedingly glad, for he knew that I had been blessed of the Lord.

9 And I, Nephi, and my brethren took our journey in the wilderness, with our tents, to go up to the land of Jerusalem.

verse 9 “up to the land of Jerusalem” Keep in mind that the up’s and down’s in Hebrew scripture do not refer to north and south as we would tend to use them today. Rather they refer to ascending or descending in elevation. Jerusalem is located in the tops of the mountains, and in approaching it from any direction one must ascend or go up.

10 And it came to pass that when we had gone up to the land of Jerusalem, I and my brethren did consult one with another.

11 And we cast lots—who of us should go in unto the house of Laban. And it came to pass that the lot fell upon Laman; and Laman went in unto the house of Laban, and he talked with him as he sat in his house.

verses 10-11 The practice of “casting of lots” is referred to some twenty four times in the Book of Mormon alone. It is also found throughout the Old and New Testaments. It is a typical Semitic or Near Eastern custom. The casting of lots was done by casting stones onto the ground or drawing a stone or another object from a receptacle. There was a feeling that the will of the Lord would be manifest through the decision of the lot. Casting lots was a method of ascertaining the divine will widely employed in pagan, Jewish, and to some extent in Christian antiquity. Hence, today, to

know God's will for oneself is to know what God intends—to know what one's appointed "lot" is. Thus we may use the expression "accepting one's *lot* in life." On one memorable occasion in the New Testament, the quorum of twelve cast lots to learn who should fill a vacancy in the quorum of twelve apostles (Acts 1:26).

12 And he desired of Laban the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, which contained the genealogy of my father.

13 And behold, it came to pass that Laban was angry, and thrust him out from his presence; and he would not that he should have the records. Wherefore, he said unto him: Behold thou art a robber, and I will slay thee.

14 But Laman fled out of his presence, and told the things which Laban had done, unto us. And we began to be exceedingly sorrowful, and my brethren were about to return unto my father in the wilderness.

15 But behold I said unto them that: As the Lord liveth, and as we live, we will not go down unto our father in the wilderness until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord hath commanded us.

verse 15 "As the Lord liveth, and as we live" These words denote that Nephi was swearing a solemn oath that he would not return to his father Lehi without accomplishing that thing for which they had come. It thus became incumbent upon Nephi to obtain the plates or lay down his life in the attempt. In that day, such an oath was considered binding by both the righteous and the wicked (see Alma 44:8). Making this oath was a dramatic act since Nephi knew that his life was in danger in trying to wrest the plates from Laban. For additional comments on the ancient practice of oath taking, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 4:32-33.

16 Wherefore, let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; therefore let us go down to the land of our father's inheritance, for behold he left gold and silver, and all manner of riches. And all this he hath done because of the commandments of the Lord.

verse 16 "let us go down to the land of our father's inheritance" The land of inheritance is not to be confused with the land of Jerusalem first mentioned in 1 Nephi 3:9. From the text of 1 Nephi as a whole, two things are obvious about the land of Jerusalem region: First, the city of Jerusalem is obviously within the boundaries of the land of Jerusalem, and second, the land of Jerusalem refers to a different region than Lehi's land of inheritance. It is difficult to be certain whether or not Lehi's land of inheritance is located within the land of Jerusalem. These observations are corroborated by three features of Nephi's text: (1) Nephi and his brothers return from the valley of Lemuel "up" to the land of Jerusalem (1 Nephi 3:9). (2) They then go "down" to the land of inheritance to collect Lehi's gold and silver (1 Nephi 3:16, 22). (3) Finally, Nephi and his brothers return back up again to Jerusalem (1 Nephi 3:23). It is

important to remember that in the idiom of Nephi, one always went up to come to Jerusalem, and one always went down when exiting Jerusalem. This is also the Hebrew idiom employed in the Bible and probably relates to the relative elevation of Jerusalem above all of the surrounding lands. It should be clear, then, that when Nephi and his brothers go down to the land of inheritance, they are in fact leaving the region of Jerusalem. The land of Jerusalem is clearly not the same as the land of inheritance. See the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the Time of Lehi*.

17 For he knew that Jerusalem must be destroyed, because of the wickedness of the people.

18 For behold, they have rejected the words of the prophets. Wherefore, if my father should dwell in the land after he hath been commanded to flee out of the land, behold, he would also perish. Wherefore, it must needs be that he flee out of the land.

19 And behold, it is wisdom in God that we should obtain these records, that we may preserve unto our children the language of our fathers;

verse 19 These records were vital to the Lehites, not only to preserve their spiritual legacy, but also to maintain their language and literacy.

20 And also that we may preserve unto them the words which have been spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets, which have been delivered unto them by the Spirit and power of God, since the world began, even down unto this present time.

verses 17-20 These verses imply that the record on the brass plates would have perished if Nephi had not recovered it.

21 And it came to pass that after this manner of language did I persuade my brethren, that they might be faithful in keeping the commandments of God.

22 And it came to pass that we went down to the land of our inheritance, and we did gather together our gold, and our silver, and our precious things.

23 And after we had gathered these things together, we went up again unto the house of Laban.

verses 22-23 Again, note the “downs” and the “ups” in these verses (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 3:9). The implication is that Lehi’s family home was located outside the city of Jerusalem, perhaps some few miles. One verse of scripture does suggest that Lehi’s home, his land of inheritance might be located within the land of Jerusalem. 1 Nephi 1:4 indicates that Lehi lives “at Jerusalem.” It is also possible that Lehi had two homes, one in the city of Jerusalem and one in the “land of his inheritance.” Whether or not this latter is in the land of Jerusalem is simply not known.

24 And it came to pass that we went in unto Laban, and desired him that he would give unto us the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, for which we would give unto him our gold, and our silver, and all our precious things.

25 And it came to pass that when Laban saw our property, and that it was exceedingly great, he did lust after it, insomuch that he thrust us out, and sent his servants to slay us, that he might obtain our property.

26 And it came to pass that we did flee before the servants of Laban, and we were obliged to leave behind our property, and it fell into the hands of Laban.

27 And it came to pass that we fled into the wilderness, and the servants of Laban did not overtake us, and we hid ourselves in the cavity of a rock.

verse 27 “we hid ourselves in the cavity of a rock” No matter which direction one travels from Jerusalem, one encounters terrain with many caves. In fact, the area is pock-marked with literally hundreds of caves. This fact of the brothers’ hiding in a cave is perfectly appropriate for the area around Jerusalem.

The discovery of one particular cave has engendered some interest among some members of the Church, though presently, most scholars feel that this cave is unrelated to the Book of Mormon story. This cave is located about twenty five miles southwest of Jerusalem. It consists of three rooms. In the back of one of the rooms were found inscriptions engraved onto the walls. One of these inscriptions might be translated, in essence, “Deliver us, O’ Lord.” Another has the Lord speaking in first person, “I, Jehovah, have forgiven you of your sins.” Also portrayed in the engravings were three sailing ships. The writings implied that they might have been written by a prophet since only a prophet would dare write the sacred name of Jehovah. The writings have been dated approximately 600 BC, or about the time of the Babylonian captivity. The implication that whoever was in the cave and made these engravings was probably hiding and trying to escape the Babylonian captivity. They were planning their escape from Jerusalem, and may have been thinking about escaping by boat. At least one in the party believed himself or herself to be a prophet of God. The area where the cave was located had been known for centuries as Lehi or Beit Lehi, or Beit Lei. The word Lehi or Lei means cheek bone or jaw. This cave is located in the same area where Samson slew the thousand Philistines with the jaw bone of an ass. In the Bible the area is referred to as Ramon Lehi or hill of Lehi. Some have wanted to speculate that perhaps father Lehi even lived in this area. Further, some have even suggested that perhaps it was in that cave, or one just like it, in which Nephi and his brothers took refuge when they were being pursued by Laban’s servants. It seems probable that Nephi and his brothers would have been familiar with many of the caves in the area around Jerusalem since it was the place of their rearing. Today, it seems unlikely that this cave or this area had anything to do with father Lehi or the story of the Book of Mormon.

Also, the terminology “cavity of a rock” is appropriate Hebrew terminology. In Hebrew, one would never say “cave.” It seems likely that Joseph Smith, writing in his own words, would have referred to the hiding place as a cave. Similarly, Joseph would have been more likely to refer to Laban’s scriptural record as “brass plates” rather than the more Hebraically appropriate “plates of brass” (see the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*).

28 And it came to pass that Laman was angry with me, and also with my father; and also was Lemuel, for he hearkened unto the words of Laman. Wherefore Laman and Lemuel did speak many hard words unto us, their younger brothers, and they did smite us even with a rod.

verse 28 “Laman and Lemuel did speak many hard words unto us, their younger brothers” Even though there has been no mention of him by name thus far during this trip to Jerusalem, Sam has also been present with Nephi, Laman, and Lemuel (see 1 Nephi 4:28).

“they did smite us even with a rod” Hugh Nibley has added insight to this passage:

Is it any wonder that Laman and Lemuel worked off their pent-up frustration by beating their youngest brother with a stick when they were once hiding in a cave? Every free man in the East carries a stick, the immemorial badge of independence and of authority, and every man asserts his authority over his inferiors by his stick, “which shows that the holder is a man of position, superior to the workman or day-labourers. The government officials, superior officers, tax-gatherers, and schoolmasters use this short rod to threaten—or if necessary to beat—their inferiors, whoever they may be.” The usage is very ancient. “A blow for a slave” is the ancient maxim in Ahikar, and the proper designation of an underling is abida-l’asa, “stick servant.” This is exactly the sense in which Laman and Lemuel intended their little lesson to Nephi, for when the angel turned the tables he said to them, “Why do ye smite your younger brother with a rod? Know ye not that the Lord hath chosen him to be a ruler over you?” (1 Nephi 3:29) (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 249, see also 246-47. See also Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 67-71).

29 And it came to pass as they smote us with a rod, behold, an angel of the Lord came and stood before them, and he spake unto them, saying: Why do ye smite your younger brother with a rod? Know ye not that the Lord hath chosen him to be a ruler over you, and this because of your iniquities? Behold ye shall go up to Jerusalem again, and the Lord will deliver Laban into your hands.

30 And after the angel had spoken unto us, he departed.

31 And after the angel had departed, Laman and Lemuel again began to murmur, saying: How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands?

Behold, he is a mighty man, and he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty; then why not us?

verse 31 It didn't take long following the visit of the angel for Laman and Lemuel to start murmuring again.

“he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty” The Book of Mormon consistently agrees with the usage of numbers in the Old Testament, as illustrated in the following three items:

1. Avoidance of complex numeric forms. Biblical Hebrew used cardinals (one, two, three), ordinals (first, second, third), multiplicatives (double, sevenfold), and fractions (half, third, tenth) but avoids complex numeric forms using prefixes such as mono-, bi-, di-, uni-, tri-, multi-, and poly-.

2. The number without the noun. Often in biblical Hebrew, an expected noun does not follow a number. For instance, Genesis 45:22 states that Joseph “gave three hundred of silver” to Benjamin, without stating that the three hundred probably refers to pieces of silver. In order to fix what would have been an awkward omission in English, the King James translators supplied the word pieces but italicized it to show that it is not part of the original text. Other biblical examples of the number without the noun include “ten weight of gold” (Genesis 24:22; the KJV adds shekels to its translation: “ten shekels weight of gold”); “he measured six of barley” (Ruth 3:15; the KJV adds measures: “he measures six measures of barley”); and “a captain of fifty with his fifty” (2 Kings 1:9).

This particular verse is an example, in the Book of Mormon, of this Hebrew usage. The number fifty, used twice in this passage, is not followed by a noun. Does fifty refer to men, warriors, princes, commanders of armies? The context does not make this certain. Other Book of Mormon examples include “my little band of two thousand and sixty fought most desperately” (Alma 57:19); “Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word” (2 Nephi 11:3); “And it came to pass that there were two hundred, out of my two thousand and sixty” (Alma 57:25).

3. Joining two or more numbers with the conjunction “and.” It is common in biblical Hebrew to join two or more numbers with the conjunction and; for instance, “thirty and two kings” (1 Kings 20:1) rather than “thirty-two kings.” Examples in the Book of Mormon include “an army of forty and two thousand” (Mormon 2:9); “three hundred and twenty years” (Omni 1:5); and “being sixty and three years old” (Mosiah 17:6).

1 Nephi Chapter 4

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 4:13 It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.

1 And it came to pass that I spake unto my brethren, saying: Let us go up again unto Jerusalem, and let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; for behold he is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty, yea, or even than his tens of thousands?

verse 1 Hugh Nibley has suggested that Laban was likely a high-ranking military commander in Jerusalem. The phrase “Laban and his fifty” might well have referred to a fifty-man permanent garrison in Jerusalem which Laban commanded. He also might well have commanded “tens of thousands” when he was in the field of battle (*Lehi in the Desert*, 97-98).

2 Therefore let us go up; let us be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground, and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea.

verse 2 Nephi is trying to encourage his older brothers. Notice what analogy he uses—that of Moses’s miraculous leading of the Israelites through the Red Sea on dry ground. In Hebrew history and culture, the story of the Israelite’s exodus from Egypt and of Moses’s parting the Red Sea stood at the very center. All of the Old Testament prophets utilized this story as the most important sign that God had truly called the Israelites to be his elect people. Nephi’s use of this story to try to convince his brothers is thus perfectly appropriate. Lehi’s family was reared in a culture where the mighty acts of God in the exodus were commemorated not only in frequent retellings of the story but in ritual form at Passover.

Also, these verses confirm the literal veracity of the Red Sea story, since they serve as an independent scriptural witness. Most sectarian scholars today would doubt the miraculous literalness and historicity of the story. The story of the Egyptian exodus is mentioned thirteen additional times in the Book of Mormon (e.g., 1 Nephi 17:23-27, Mosiah 7:19, Alma 36:28, and Helaman 8:11). It served as an important motif in Nephi’s time, and we might well have expected him to use it in his writings. We should even be surprised if he did *not* use it! In very Hebraic fashion, the Nephites knew that one of their primary responsibilities before God was to “remember,” to never forget his

glorious and mighty acts on their behalf. It is natural that they should think of their deliverance from doomed Jerusalem as a second exodus, although it is sadly ironic that Jerusalem, the promised land the Israelites had struggled so hard to obtain, had become at the time of Lehi analogous to the land of Egypt at the time of the Exodus.

As the story of Lehi's exodus from Jerusalem develops, we may notice that there are several parallels with the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. These include:

1. The Lord guided both groups in the wilderness (1 Nephi 16:10; 17:13). In both cases, he utilized visionary prophets under whose leadership people left lands that were under divine condemnation and journeyed to lands of "promise."

2. Both groups were miraculously provided food or manna (1 Nephi 16:23, 31).

3. Both were led to a promised land.

4. Both groups carried with them sacred scripture—the Israelites had Moses's Pentateuch, and Lehi's family will acquire the plates of brass.

5. Laman and Lemuel were fickle in observing the counsel of their inspired leaders just as were the recalcitrant Israelites. In both accounts, rebellious members of the group "murmured" because of their hunger, lamented being taken from their previous home to perish in the wilderness, declared that they would rather have died than to have embarked on their present journey, and expressed a desire to return, instead, to the oppressive or dangerous lands from which God had delivered them.

6. Both Lehi (and Nephi) and Moses were instructed on a mountain (1 Nephi 16:30; 17:7; 18:3).

7. Moses built a tabernacle with divine instruction and Nephi built a ship and a temple, also with divine help (1 Nephi 17:8; 18:2; 2 Nephi 5:16).

8. In both, a metallic object (the Liahona for the Lehitites, the brazen serpent for the Israelites) played a major role, and we are told that to "look" upon it in a proper attitude was to "live."

9. In both accounts, the group's rebellious members drew divine wrath down upon themselves and their fellows when they engaged in wild and inappropriate partying, forgetting the Lord who had delivered them (see Terrence L. Szink, "Nephi and the Exodus," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. Sorenson and Thorne, 38-51).

Brother Szink concluded: Such a large body of parallels cannot be accounted for by coincidence. This particular verse (see also 1 Nephi 17:23-44) suggests that Nephi purposefully wrote his account in a way that would reflect the Exodus. His intention was to prove that God loved and cared for the Nephites just as he did the children of Israel during the Exodus from Egypt."

3 Now behold ye know that this is true; and ye also know that an angel hath spoken unto you; wherefore can ye doubt? Let us go up; the Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptians.

verse 3 Nephi refers, of course, to the angel's rebuke of Laman and Lemuel in the previous chapter (1 Nephi 3:29-31).

It is interesting that Nephi already has the impression that Laban will have to be destroyed before the plates can be obtained.

4 Now when I had spoken these words, they were yet wroth, and did still continue to murmur; nevertheless they did follow me up until we came without the walls of Jerusalem.

verse 4 **“they were yet wroth”** *Wroth* means, of course, angry or incensed.

“without the walls of Jerusalem” Just outside Jerusalem's walls

5 And it was by night; and I caused that they should hide themselves without the walls. And after they had hid themselves, I, Nephi, crept into the city and went forth towards the house of Laban.

verses 6-18 These verses describe the slaying of Laban by Nephi. While this episode has generated considerable controversy, it is clear that Nephi was simply responding to the command of God communicated through the Spirit. Those who in their own lives are obedient to gospel principles and enjoy real communication with the Spirit have no trouble in accepting this fact.

The prophet Joseph Smith gave helpful counsel: “We cannot keep all the commandments of God without first knowing them; and we cannot expect to know all or more than we now know unless we comply with or keep those we have already received. That which is wrong under one circumstance may be, and often is, right under another. God said, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ At another time he said, ‘Thou shalt utterly destroy.’ This is the principle upon which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof until long after the events transpire” (*HC*, 5:135).

Today we must not live polygamy. One hundred years ago, however, if a man was called to live the law of polygamy and he did not, he was not keeping all the commandments and honoring his priesthood. At one time in the world's history among the Lord's chosen people, a male child had to be circumcised. Today it is not required. At one time the Lord's people were not allowed to walk more than two thousand cubits

on the Sabbath day. Today we sometimes have to walk farther than that just to get to the parking lot!

Some have become involved in lengthy logical arguments in order to defend Nephi for his slaying of Laban. For example the argument has been proffered that “the ends justify the means.” Is this sound doctrine? Do favorable ends always justify the means used to attain them? In another place in the Book of Mormon, we are taught that it is better for a man to sacrifice his own life rather than to take the life of even his enemy (Alma 26:32). While in the case of Nephi and Laban the Lord knew that the ends justified the means, a favorable end does not always justify indiscriminate means. Nephi needs no defending by us or by anyone else. He simply did what God commanded him to do.

In commanding Nephi to kill Laban, the Lord was acting according to his own law—the law of retaliation. By this law the Lord destroys nations of the wicked (1 Nephi 17:37-38). Many examples are found in the scriptures: the Canaanites were driven and defeated by the Israelites under Joshua; the northern kingdom of Israel was captured by the Assyrians; and the southern kingdom of Judah will soon be destroyed by Babylon. Laban was wicked. He had offended the Lord three times (see verse 11). The spiritual welfare of a new nation about to be conceived was at stake. The Lord commanded that he be destroyed.

6 And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do.

7 Nevertheless I went forth, and as I came near unto the house of Laban I beheld a man, and he had fallen to the earth before me, for he was drunken with wine.

8 And when I came to him I found that it was Laban.

9 And I beheld his sword, and I drew it forth from the sheath thereof; and the hilt thereof was of pure gold, and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine, and I saw that the blade thereof was of the most precious steel.

verse 9 Did steel exist in Palestine in 600 BC? It did indeed! See the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:18.

It is interesting to compare Nephi’s description of Laban’s sword with a description of swords from the same period found in one of the Dead Sea scrolls: “The swords shall be of purified iron, refined in a crucible and whitened like a mirror, work of a skillful craftsman; and it will have shapes of an ear of wheat, of pure gold, encrusted in it on both sides. And it will have two straight channels right to the tip, two on each side. The length of the sword: one cubit and a half [two to two and one half feet]. And its width four fingers. . . . The hilt of the sword will be of select horn, craft work, with a pattern in many colors: gold, silver and precious stones.” We are not told the length of

Laban's sword. William J. Adams, in his discussion of an unusually long sword of the period found near Jericho suggested that Nephi would have had an easier time decapitating Laban with his sword if it were longer than the usual short swords known from the ancient Near East (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 6, number 1, 73- 75).

10 And it came to pass that I was constrained by the Spirit that I should kill Laban; but I said in my heart: Never at any time have I shed the blood of man. And I shrunk and would that I might not slay him.

verse 10 Nephi was constrained by the Spirit. This means that he was powerfully urged; compelled. To “shed the blood of man,” of course, is to take his life.

“**I shrunk and would that I might not slay him**” Nephi obviously hesitated to kill Laban. It is interesting to note that we have evidence that Moses was similarly hesitant when constrained to kill the Egyptian overseer who had abused the Hebrew slave (see the discussion for verse 13).

11 And the Spirit said unto me again: Behold the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands. Yea, and I also knew that he had sought to take away mine own life; yea, and he would not hearken unto the commandments of the Lord; and he also had taken away our property.

12 And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me again: Slay him, for the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands;

verse 12 “**the Spirit said unto me again: Slay him**” It would seem that the Spirit is impatient with Nephi's reluctance, and he demands outright, “Slay him.”

13 Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.

verse 13 Compare this verse with Alma's warning to Korihor given 500 years later: “Behold, it is better that thy soul should be lost than that thou shouldst be the means of bringing many souls down to destruction” (Alma 30:47).

The principle of sacrificing one for the good of all, of course, runs sharply contrary to American jurisprudence. But there is a suggestion in the scriptures that this principle is found in Hebrew tradition. In John 11:50 Caiaphas says, “It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” In a recent article, David Aus demonstrated that this principle prevailed in certain cases under biblical law around 600 BC (“The Death of One for All in John 11:45-54 in Light of Judaic Traditions” in *Barabbas and Esther and Other Studies in the Judaic Illumination*

of *Earliest Christianity* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992], 29-63). A pivotal precedent was found by the ancients in 2 Samuel 20. It recounts how King David had sought the life of Sheba, a rebel guilty of treason. When Sheba took refuge in the city of Abel, Joab, the leader of David's army, demanded that Sheba be released to him or he would destroy the city. The people of Abel beheaded Sheba instead, and Joab retreated. This episode became an important legal precedent justifying the killing of one person in order to preserve an entire group. Even more striking is another Old Testament case, one preserved more fully only in oral Jewish traditions, involved Jehoiakim, the king of Judah. He rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar at the very time of Lehi and Nephi. In response, Nebuchadnezzar went to Antioch and demanded that the great Jewish council surrender Jehoiakim or the nation would be destroyed. Jehoiakim protested, "Can ye sacrifice one life for another?" Unmoved, the council replied, "Thus did your ancestors do to Sheba the son of Bichri." Based on this legal ruling, Jehoiakim was released to Nebuchadnezzar, who took him to Babylon (see 2 Chronicles 36:6) where presumably he was executed. Zedekiah became king less than four months later. At the time the Book of Mormon account begins (see 1 Nephi 1:4), Nephi was probably keenly aware of how the "one for many" principle was used to justify Jehoiakim's death. Clearly, the cases of Laban and Koriath fit within this tradition.

John W. Welch has compared Nephi's killing of Laban with Moses's slaying of the Egyptian who had stricken a Hebrew slave (see John W. Welch, "Legal Perspectives on the Slaying of Laban," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 [1992]: 119-41; John W. Welch and Heidi Harkness Parker, "Better Than One Man Perish," *FARMS Update, Insights* [June 1998]: 2; reprinted in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. Welch and Thorne, 17-19; and in Fred Essig and Dan Fuller's, "Nephi's Slaying of Laban: A Legal Perspective" [Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1981]).

As noted above, there is evidence that Moses, like Nephi, was hesitant to kill the Egyptian overseer when constrained to do so by the Spirit until he had a divine revelation on the matter. According to *'Abot de Rabbi Nathan* 20, thought to have been written in the second century AD but not available in English until the twentieth century, Moses summoned a court of ministering angels and asked them if he should kill the Egyptian, to which the angels responded, "Kill him." The same story is told in Midrash Rabbah Exodus 1:29, which adds that, before calling on the angels for counsel, Moses perceived that no righteous persons would descend from the Egyptian man (also mentioned in Zohar Exodus 12b). A similar story is found in an early Jewish text, Tosephta-Targum (V. 1) 2 on 1 Samuel 17:43, which says that just before he slew Goliath, David "lifted up his eyes to heaven and saw angels deliberating on Goliath the Philistine."

14 And now, when I, Nephi, had heard these words, I remembered the words of the Lord which he spake unto me in the wilderness, saying that: Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise.

verse 14 This is the first mention in the Book of Mormon text of a promise or covenant of the Lord which will be repeated many times. It is part of the so-called “promise–curse” of the Book of Mormon: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land. . . . And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 9:13). This covenant is fundamental to the relationship between God and the Book of Mormon peoples and will be discussed further in this commentary (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 1:20 and the introductory commentary for Alma 43).

15 Yea, and I also thought that they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save they should have the law.

verse 15 We will read often in the Book of Mormon text that the righteous peoples in the book believed in and observed the “law”—the law of Moses. They could not have kept the law “save they should have the law” with them as recorded in the scriptural record.

There is a conspicuous paucity of information about the law of Moses and the people’s living of it in the Book of Mormon. It has been suggested that the editor Mormon himself is responsible for this, since he was a Christian and was little interested in the ancient ways after they were fulfilled by Christ’s atonement and ministry.

16 And I also knew that the law was engraven upon the plates of brass.

17 And again, I knew that the Lord had delivered Laban into my hands for this cause—that I might obtain the records according to his commandments.

18 Therefore I did obey the voice of the Spirit, and took Laban by the hair of the head, and I smote off his head with his own sword.

19 And after I had smitten off his head with his own sword, I took the garments of Laban and put them upon mine own body; yea, even every whit; and I did gird on his armor about my loins.

verse 19 As to the question of Nephi’s justification in killing Laban, I frankly have grown a bit weary of all of the complex legalistic explanations and paradigms that have been proffered to try to justify Nephi’s act. For me, the essence of the explanation is that the Lord can, and does, terminate a mortal life if and when he chooses in order to accomplish his purposes. Nephi was simply his agent. There are plenty of instances—already mentioned above—of the Lord’s “allowing” (even decreeing) the punishment

and death of people because of their apostasy—the Israelites and the Canaanites, the Assyrians and the northern ten tribes, the Babylonians and the Jews, etc.

One author (Ben McGuire, “Nephi & Goliath” in *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture*, volume 18, number 1, 2009, 16-31) has seen a parallel between the accounts of Nephi’s killing Laban and of David’s slaying of Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Brother McGuire defends the idea that Nephi himself was aware of this parallel as he wrote his account. Brother McGuire has proposed that recognition of this parallel helps us today to better appreciate the necessity and the high and noble purpose behind Nephi’s taking the life of Laban. Both accounts make the elimination of the antagonist a necessary and a noble action. David’s killing of Goliath saved Israel, and Nephi’s beheading of Laban rescued the future descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples from spiritual ignorance and inevitable spiritual deterioration.

20 And after I had done this, I went forth unto the treasury of Laban. And as I went forth towards the treasury of Laban, behold, I saw the servant of Laban who had the keys of the treasury. And I commanded him in the voice of Laban, that he should go with me into the treasury.

verse 20 It seems likely that Nephi may have had some divine assistance which enabled him to speak with the “voice of Laban.”

21 And he supposed me to be his master, Laban, for he beheld the garments and also the sword girded about my loins.

22 And he spake unto me concerning the elders of the Jews, he knowing that his master, Laban, had been out by night among them.

verse 22 The “elders of the Jews” (see also verse 27) likely refers to those entrusted with governmental affairs among the Jews rather than to a priesthood office (cf. Matthew 15:2; Acts 4:5; 25:15).

23 And I spake unto him as if it had been Laban.

24 And I also spake unto him that I should carry the engravings, which were upon the plates of brass, to my elder brethren, who were without the walls.

verses 24 Notice in this verse how young Nephi almost blows his cover when he slips and says he is going to carry the plates of brass “to my elder brethren, who were without the walls.” He must have held his breath when he realized his mistake. Fortunately, as we learn in verse 26, Zoram thought he was speaking of “the brethren of the church.”

25 And I also bade him that he should follow me.

26 And he, supposing that I spake of the brethren of the church, and that I was truly that Laban whom I had slain, wherefore he did follow me.

27 And he spake unto me many times concerning the elders of the Jews, as I went forth unto my brethren, who were without the walls.

verses 26-27 “the elders of the Jews” See the commentary for verse 22.

“the brethren of the church” Who are these “brethren of the church”? Was there a church in 600 BC? There has usually been a church, in some form, whenever the priesthood has been on the earth. The organizations have varied according to the circumstances, but there has always been a “kingdom of God” on the earth in every dispensation. And it has always been called a church. There was a church in Isaiah’s day, and in David’s day. And in each time period, the church has had a government.

In 600 BC Laban belonged to the church. What was Lehi’s status in the church? He had left the church. Isaiah left the church in his day, and Amos and Hosea and many of the prophets left the church in their day. The churches had apostatized, but the church structure continued. It continued right on until even the time of Christ. Therefore at the time of Lehi there was a church organization.

28 And it came to pass that when Laman saw me he was exceedingly frightened, and also Lemuel and Sam. And they fled from before my presence; for they supposed it was Laban, and that he had slain me and had sought to take away their lives also.

29 And it came to pass that I called after them, and they did hear me; wherefore they did cease to flee from my presence.

30 And it came to pass that when the servant of Laban beheld my brethren he began to tremble, and was about to flee from before me and return to the city of Jerusalem.

31 And now I, Nephi, being a man large in stature, and also having received much strength of the Lord, therefore I did seize upon the servant of Laban, and held him, that he should not flee.

verse 31 “I, Nephi, being a man large in stature” It would seem that Nephi’s experience with Laban was a defining moment that marked the transition between his childhood and manhood. In 1 Nephi 2:16, we read that Nephi was “exceedingly young,” but now he defines himself as “being a man large in stature.”

32 And it came to pass that I spake with him, that if he would hearken unto my words, as the Lord liveth, and as I live, even so that if he would hearken unto our words, we would spare his life.

33 And I spake unto him, even with an oath, that he need not fear; that he should be a free man like unto us if he would go down in the wilderness with us.

verses 32-33 “as the Lord liveth and as I live” Again, Nephi is taking an oath! The taking of an oath was regarded so seriously that Nephi knew that Zoram would take comfort from Nephi’s swearing that he would not harm him. The oath was an important part of the cult life of the Hebrew community. Perjury and the violation of an oath were serious matters, which could not go unpunished. Oaths were validated by the invocation of the Lord, the God of heaven and earth. Oath taking was often accompanied by symbolic acts. The gesture of the oath was to raise the hand toward heaven. The later Jewish custom of taking hold of the scriptures or phylacteries in a judicial oath furnished the model for the present-day procedure of swearing on the Bible (see also the note on oath taking in the commentary for 1 Nephi 3:15).

Zoram did indeed take courage because he knew that the oath was binding upon Nephi. In Nephi’s day, if you performed an oath, you meant what you said! If a person took an oath, especially if he swore before God and pledged his life, everyone knew that his word was binding. Zoram also made an oath (see verse 37). Could Joseph Smith have known the extent to which oaths were used in Old Testament times? If he wrote the book himself, as some critics claim, wasn’t he clever to include oath-taking in the Book of Mormon story?

In commenting on the nearly miraculous effect Nephi’s oath had on Zoram, Hugh Nibley wrote:

What astonishes the western reader is the miraculous effect of Nephi’s oath on Zoram, who upon hearing a few conventional words promptly becomes tractable, while as for the brothers, as soon as Zoram “made an oath unto us that he would tarry with us from that time forth . . . our fears did cease concerning him” (1 Nephi 4:35, 37).

The reactions of both parties make sense when one realizes that the oath is the one thing that is most sacred and inviolable among the desert people and their descendants: “Hardly will an Arab break this oath, even if his life be in jeopardy,” for “there is nothing stronger, and nothing more sacred than the oath among the nomads,” and even the city Arabs, if it be exacted under special conditions. “The taking of an oath is a holy thing with the Bedouins,” says one authority. “Wo to him who swears falsely; his social standing will be damaged and his reputation ruined. No one will receive his testimony, even if it is true, and he must also pay a money fine.”

But not every oath will do. To be most binding and solemn an oath should be by the life of something, even if it be but a blade of grass. The only oath more awful than that “by my life” or (less commonly) “by the life of my head” is the wa hayat Allah, “by the life of God” or “as the Lord liveth,” the exact Arabic equivalent of the ancient Hebrew hai Elohim. Today it is glibly employed by the city riffraff, but anciently it was an awful

thing, as it still is among the desert people. "I confirmed my answer in the Bedouin wise," says Doughty. "By his life . . . he said, . . . 'Well, swear by the life of Ullah' (God)! . . . I answered . . . and thus even the nomads use, in a greater occasion, but they say, by the life of thee, in a little matter." Among both Arabs and Jews, says Rosenblatt, "an oath without God's name is no oath," while "in both Jewish and Mohammedan sources oaths by 'the life of God' are frequent."

So we see that the only way that Nephi could possibly have pacified the struggling Zoram in an instant was to utter the one oath that no man would dream of breaking, the most solemn of all oaths to the Semite: "As the Lord liveth, and as I live" (1 Nephi 4:32) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, part 4, 128-29).

34 And I also spake unto him, saying: Surely the Lord hath commanded us to do this thing; and shall we not be diligent in keeping the commandments of the Lord? Therefore, if thou wilt go down into the wilderness to my father thou shalt have place with us.

35 And it came to pass that Zoram did take courage at the words which I spake. Now Zoram was the name of the servant; and he promised that he would go down into the wilderness unto our father. Yea, and he also made an oath unto us that he would tarry with us from that time forth.

36 Now we were desirous that he should tarry with us for this cause, that the Jews might not know concerning our flight into the wilderness, lest they should pursue us and destroy us.

37 And it came to pass that when Zoram had made an oath unto us, our fears did cease concerning him.

38 And it came to pass that we took the plates of brass and the servant of Laban, and departed into the wilderness, and journeyed unto the tent of our father.

1 Nephi Chapter 5

1 And it came to pass that after we had come down into the wilderness unto our father, behold, he was filled with joy, and also my mother, Sariah, was exceedingly glad, for she truly had mourned because of us.

2 For she had supposed that we had perished in the wilderness; and she also had complained against my father, telling him that he was a visionary man; saying: Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness.

3 And after this manner of language had my mother complained against my father.

verses 1-3 These are poignant verses! Sariah had despaired for her son's safety. She was probably beside herself. It was as if the Lord were stretching her to the brink of her faith. It was one thing to leave a comfortable lifestyle, but quite another to have her most precious blessing torn from her. Children were the focus of life for women in ancient Israel (see Psalm 127:3; 128:3). Only in their roles as mothers did Israelite women receive honor and authority. More specifically, being a mother of sons created a woman's greatest source of joy and comfort. Sons were seen as a particular blessing not only because they could defend the family in the face of opposition, but because they promised a continuation of the family name. The loss of a son would have been almost insurmountably devastating to a mother like Sariah. When her sons failed to return, Sariah feared, giving evidence that her present faith, though admirably strong, was not yet strong enough to continue the difficult journey, let alone to establish a God-fearing family in a new land.

Even a great lady with the noble character of Sariah can become low and begin to murmur. Turn also to 1 Nephi 16:20. This latter verse is even more surprising. Even the great prophet Lehi murmured! Even after all the visions and the spiritual favors he had enjoyed, he murmured against the Lord! Sariah murmured. Lehi murmured. All the boys but one murmured, and he was the one keeping the record! It is human to become discouraged in difficult circumstances!

4 And it had come to pass that my father spake unto her, saying: I know that I am a visionary man; for if I had not seen the things of God in a vision I should not have known the goodness of God, but had tarried at Jerusalem, and had perished with my brethren.

5 But behold, I have obtained a land of promise, in the which things I do rejoice; yea, and I know that the Lord will deliver my sons out of the hands of Laban, and bring them down again unto us in the wilderness.

verses 4-5 Note Lehi's verb usage here—"but had tarried at Jerusalem, and *had perished* with my brethren" and "behold I *have obtained* a land of promise" (italics mine). Hebrew prophets often used the past tense to describe events yet in the future which had been seen in prophecy. This has been called the "prophetic perfect" verb tense and is typical of Hebrew writing. At this time Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed, and no one had as yet perished. Also he was thousands of miles and many years away from reaching his land of promise. However, he had seen a vision, read the heavenly book, and the events which he envisioned were already present for him. He was indeed a "visionary man." For other examples of the "prophetic perfect" verb usage, see 2 Nephi 31:8, spoken in 559-545 BC and Mosiah 15:12, spoken in 148 BC.

6 And after this manner of language did my father, Lehi, comfort my mother, Sariah, concerning us, while we journeyed in the wilderness up to the land of Jerusalem, to obtain the record of the Jews.

7 And when we had returned to the tent of my father, behold their joy was full, and my mother was comforted.

verses 4-7 Lehi responded to Sariah's criticism with comforting words. He had been promised that his sons would return, and he firmly believed the promise.

How old do you suppose Lehi was when he and his family left Jerusalem? It is not known, of course, but it has been estimated that he was about forty or fifty years old. This estimate is based on the fact that Lehi and Sariah had four sons of marriageable age—Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi—when the family departed Jerusalem.

8 And she spake, saying: Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them. And after this manner of language did she speak.

verse 8 What if Nephi and his brethren had not returned safely? Do you suppose that Sariah's faith might have been fatally injured by the tragic circumstances? Some readers might even tend to be critical of her and say something like: "She should have been more faithful! After all, was she not the wife of a prophet, and had she not already agreed to leave her home and travel into the wilderness? Had she not heard in great detail about her husband's vision and call from the Lord?" Sariah was much like the rest of us. Her faith was still growing and developing. A person with perfect faith is not shaken by any number of difficult trials here in mortality. He or she simply accepts the experiences which life has to offer and thanks God for the experience. But who among us is perfect? And which of us doesn't wax and wane a little in our faith? Sariah is obviously human, and perhaps we can identify with her more easily because she is!

“Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness” Camille Fronk has asked some interesting questions about Nephi’s account of his mother Sariah in these verses (“Desert Epiphany: Sariah & the Women in 1 Nephi,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 9, number 2, 5-15): “Why would Nephi choose to record this incident to focus our attention on his mother—an incident that clearly manifests her murmuring against Lehi? Why not choose an experience that more obviously showed her spiritual strength?” Dr. Fronk sees this episode as one in which Sariah gained a vital increment in her testimony of her husband’s mission. Sister Fronk concludes: “To establish Lehi and his family in a new land where they would inspire and instruct later generations to come unto Christ, God needed more than a father and a son (as successor) to possess a testimony tried in the fire of affliction. God also needed a matriarch, weathered by her own trials of faith and armed with her own unwavering witness, to stand steadfast with her prophet-husband” (*Ibid.*). The reader should take note of the fact that there is no indication that Sariah ever murmured again!

9 And it came to pass that they did rejoice exceedingly, and did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings unto the Lord; and they gave thanks unto the God of Israel.

verse 9 See the discussion of sacrifices in the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:7. The offering of sacrifices and burnt offerings unto the Lord was a distinctly Hebrew custom and a part of the law of Moses. Were Lehi and his family Hebrews? They were. What is a Hebrew? The name Hebrew derives from the son of Shem, whose name was Eber, and is synonymous with Israelite. It is an unimportant, but interesting, fact that the word Hebrew is found in only one verse in the Book of Mormon, Mormon 9:33. In that verse, it is found three times.

The word Israel is pronounced *Yisrael* in Hebrew. The name combines two roots sara (persevere, persist) and el (god), and it literally means “let God prevail.” The term Israel, as found in the Book of Mormon, has three main contexts:

1. It can refer to a descendant of the man Israel—Jacob, the son of Isaac. As the blood of Israel, these people are often identified as a member of one of the tribes of Israel (Numbers 2). The Jews are the most identifiable remnant of Israel’s lineage on the earth today. Most references to Israel in the Book of Mormon relate to this particular meaning—they refer to the lineage or house of Israel.

2. It may refer to the land where the Israelites live. The land Israel is the territory in biblical times variously called the land of Canaan, Israel, Judah/Judea, Palestine, or the Holy Land. It is now mostly encompassed in the modern State of Israel.

3. It may refer to a covenant people whose obedience empowers them to prevail together with God in righteousness. Covenant Israel includes those who are true believers of the Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of lineage or geographical location. Nephi will be taught that those who do not harden their hearts against Jesus Christ will

eventually be numbered among the covenant people of Israel. Anyone, Jew or Gentile, who comes unto Christ will be eventually adopted into the house of Israel. However, those of the lineage of Israel who do not repent, follow the Lord, and honor their covenants will be cut off from the house of Israel. Covenant Israelites are the true heirs to the great promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

10 And after they had given thanks unto the God of Israel, my father, Lehi, took the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, and he did search them from the beginning.

verse 10 Notice that Lehi did not just read the scriptures, but rather he searched them! Mere reading of the scripture has some value, but how much more do we derive from pondering, digging, inquiring, and in fact “feast[ing] upon the words of Christ” (2 Nephi 32:3)?

11 And he beheld that they did contain the five books of Moses, which gave an account of the creation of the world, and also of Adam and Eve, who were our first parents;

12 And also a record of the Jews from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah;

13 And also the prophecies of the holy prophets, from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah; and also many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah.

verse 13 “many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah” Were the writings of the prophet Jeremiah recorded on the plates of brass? Since the prophet Jeremiah was a contemporary of Lehi, it is improbable that his complete writings were contained on the plates of brass. Some critics of the Book of Mormon have pointed to this as an error of Joseph Smith’s. Notice, however, that the verse does not say that Jeremiah’s writings were on the plates of brass. Perhaps Nephi intended to say that some of Jeremiah’s own writings and prophecies had been recorded on the plates of brass. Or perhaps Nephi is here referring to the fact that Jeremiah, in his preaching and warning of Judah, reiterated pertinent prophecies made by previous prophets.

14 And it came to pass that my father, Lehi, also found upon the plates of brass a genealogy of his fathers; wherefore he knew that he was a descendant of Joseph; yea, even that Joseph who was the son of Jacob, who was sold into Egypt, and who was preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he might preserve his father, Jacob, and all his household from perishing with famine.

verse 14 When the plates of Laban are returned to Lehi, the great prophet is in ecstasy over them. He learns his genealogy. Lehi is a descendant of Joseph (through Manasseh—see also Alma 10:3).

Ancient Joseph was, in his day, a “savior” of his father and his father’s household or family. The covenant blessings which he received from his father Jacob accorded Joseph’s posterity the future role of being a “savior” of the house of Israel. It would be Joseph’s seed to whom the other tribes would look for temporal and spiritual salvation (Genesis 37:5-10). Joseph’s seed would spread abroad to the Americas (Genesis 49:22). Joseph’s seed would write another testament of Christ—the Book of Mormon (Ezekiel 37:16-20; 2 Nephi 3:12). Through Joseph’s seed would arise a namesake prophet, Joseph Smith, who would become an “ensign” for the gathering of Israel in the latter days (JST, Genesis 50:30-33; 2 Nephi 3:6-8, 9-11, 16; D&C 113:6). Joseph’s seed would bestow the ordinances of the Lord’s temple upon redeemed Israel prior to the Savior’s advent (D&C 133:30-35).

The latter-day work of the seed of Joseph would be directed by the descendants of Joseph’s younger son Ephraim who received the birthright blessing from his grandfather Jacob (Genesis 48:17-20). In one sense, the line of prophets introduced into the Americas by Lehi and Ishmael (see 1 Nephi 7) were forerunners for the latter-day restoration.

verses 11-14 The “five books of Moses” presumably correspond to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy in our modern Bible. Today some biblical scholars question the authorship of these books. Because of verse 11, we should not.

The “account of the creation of the world” contained in the Bible and in the plates of brass was revealed directly to Moses and recorded by him. The historical portions of the book of Genesis, however, were likely obtained from the writings of Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and perhaps the sons of Jacob.

We have reason to believe that the record contained on the plates of brass was a more complete record than we have available to us today in the Old Testament. What is that reason? Read carefully 1 Nephi 13:23. Some of the specific additional insights contained on the brass plates included: an inference that Abraham knew and prophesied of the advent of Jesus Christ (Helaman 8:17), prophecies of father Jacob concerning the Nephite branch of his descendants (Alma 46:24-26), prophecies of ancient Joseph in Egypt regarding Moses’s delivering of Israel and of Joseph Smith (2 Nephi 3), and prophecies by otherwise unknown ancient prophets such as Zenos, Zenock, and Neum (1 Nephi 19:10-17; Jacob 5 and 6; Alma 33:3-17; 34:7; Helaman 8:19-20; 15:11; 3 Nephi 10:16).

Several years later in the Book of Mormon story, after the arrival of Lehi’s family in the western hemisphere, Lehi will lecture his son Jacob on the Fall of man, Adam and

Eve, the Garden of Eden, and the Atonement (2 Nephi 2:17- 27). Undoubtedly Lehi obtained the insights evidenced in this lecture from the brass plates.

15 And they were also led out of captivity and out of the land of Egypt, by that same God who had preserved them.

16 And thus my father, Lehi, did discover the genealogy of his fathers. And Laban also was a descendant of Joseph, wherefore he and his fathers had kept the records.

verse 16 Here we learn that, like Lehi, Laban was also a descendant of Joseph, the son of father Jacob. Joseph, of course, had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Laban and his paternal ancestors had kept the “record,” the brass plates. It is logical to speculate that the record had been kept in the birthright sub-tribe of the larger tribe of Joseph—that of Ephraim. We may thus further speculate that Laban was descended from Joseph through Ephraim.

Just how, in 600 BC, did Lehi, a descendant of Joseph through Manasseh, and Laban, a descendant of Joseph probably through Ephraim, happen to be in Jerusalem? Let us review briefly the history of ancient Israel and then speculate as to how that might have happened. After the death of Solomon in about 931 BC, civil war divided Israel into (1) the Kingdom of Israel, consisting of the northern ten tribes under the rebel leader Jeroboam, with its center in Samaria, and (2) Judah, comprised of the two southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) under Solomon’s son Rehoboam with its center in Jerusalem. For the next 210 years, the two existed separately as enemies.

Between 732 and 722 BC, the Assyrian army crushed the northern kingdom and carried away some 27,290 of its educated aristocracy and anyone with any leadership ability back to Assyria. The area formerly inhabited by the Kingdom of Israel was subsequently populated by some Assyrian colonists who intermarried with the many remaining Israelites. The offspring of these mixed Assyrian/Israelitish people came to be called Samaritans, and their land Samaria.

Sidney Sperry wrote: “The forebears of Laban may have fled to Jerusalem to prevent the sacred records from falling into alien hands. Lehi’s grandfather or great-grandfather may have left his northern home for Jerusalem in order to prevent his children from intermarrying and making religious compromises with the pagan foreigners who came into the land.” Brother Sperry then went on to speculate about the two centuries between the division and the fall of the northern kingdom: “The brass plates may well have been the official scripture of the Ten Tribes. It is probable that some prophets wrote on these plates whose writings may not have been recorded on the records kept in Judah. Were Zenos, Zenock, Neum, and Ezias (1 Nephi 19:10; Helaman 8:20) among them? They were all Hebrew prophets known to the Nephites, but their names do not appear in our current Old Testament. It is also possible that the writings of some prophets in Judah were not placed on the brass plates during the

period under consideration, but of this we have no way of knowing” (*Answers to Book of Mormon Questions*, 43-44). Thus the suggestion is made that the brass plates had their origin in the northern Kingdom of Israel, rather than in Judah to the south. For further evidence of this, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 19:13.

Were the brass plates in the possession of Laban the only complete copy of the scriptural record of the northern tribe? We don’t know the answer to this question, but it seems likely that there were other copies in circulation, perhaps on scrolls of paper or other materials, of the books contained on the brass plates of Laban. There may also have been other complete copies on metal plates, but these were likely possessed by only a select few who had the requisite cultural standing and financial resources. Even Lehi, with all his wealth and spiritual inclination, did not possess the complete record on metal plates.

17 And now when my father saw all these things, he was filled with the Spirit, and began to prophesy concerning his seed—

18 That these plates of brass should go forth unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people who were of his seed.

verse 18 In what sense will the “plates of brass . . . go forth unto all nations”? Perhaps in the future the brass plates will be brought forth and be made available for the righteous to study. Or perhaps this prophecy refers to those teachings from the brass plates contained in the Book of Mormon, and it is really the Book of Mormon that will “go forth unto all nations.”

19 Wherefore, he said that these plates of brass should never perish; neither should they be dimmed any more by time. And he prophesied many things concerning his seed.

verse 19 The phrase “dimmed any more by time” suggests that Laban had neglected the brass plates. To dim is to make less bright; to tarnish or sully. Such would never again be the case.

20 And it came to pass that thus far I and my father had kept the commandments wherewith the Lord had commanded us.

21 And we had obtained the records which the Lord had commanded us, and searched them and found that they were desirable; yea, even of great worth unto us, insomuch that we could preserve the commandments of the Lord unto our children.

22 Wherefore, it was wisdom in the Lord that we should carry them with us, as we journeyed in the wilderness towards the land of promise.

verses 21-22 The brass plates were preserved for the descendants of Lehi just as the Book of Mormon has been preserved for the people of our day.

1 Nephi Chapter 6

1 And now I, Nephi, do not give the genealogy of my fathers in this part of my record; neither at any time shall I give it after upon these plates which I am writing; for it is given in the record which has been kept by my father; wherefore, I do not write it in this work.

2 For it sufficeth me to say that we are descendants of Joseph.

3 And it mattereth not to me that I am particular to give a full account of all the things of my father, for they cannot be written upon these plates, for I desire the room that I may write of the things of God.

verses 1-3 “These plates” are, of course, the small plates of Nephi. If you need a review of the large and small plates of Nephi and the plates of Mormon, see the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

The **“record which has been kept by my father [Lehi]”** was obviously Lehi’s personal journal. As has been mentioned previously, it may have been kept on material other than metal plates such as parchment. Certainly the materials included on this record would have been entered onto the large plates of Nephi by Nephi himself, who was the creator and engraver for the first part of the large plates of Nephi. When Mormon later abridged the large plates of Nephi, he would have found the genealogy of Lehi on that record. If he did choose to include that genealogy in his abridgement of the large plates of Nephi, then he would have entered it onto his record on the plates of Mormon. It would have then been found in the book of Lehi which was the first part of the record on the plates of Mormon. If it was in fact found there, then Martin Harris lost it when the 116 pages of manuscript were taken from him.

verse 3 “it mattereth not to me that I am particular to give a full account of all the things of my father” This phrase means in essence, “I don’t feel it is necessary to give a full account here on the small plates of Nephi of all of the secular things on my father’s record.” Nephi’s implication is that the space is limited on the small plates of Nephi, and writings on the small plates are to emphasize spiritual things or “the things of God.”

4 For the fulness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved.

verse 4 “God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” These titles for Jehovah have their origins in the Abrahamic covenant. For a summary of this covenant, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8. Also included in these titles are Jehovah’s acts as deliverer of the Hebrew slaves (Alma 29:11; 36:2) and his redemptive role as Savior (1 Nephi 19:10).

5 Wherefore, the things which are pleasing unto the world I do not write, but the things which are pleasing unto God and unto those who are not of the world.

6 Wherefore, I shall give commandment unto my seed, that they shall not occupy these plates with things which are not of worth unto the children of men.

verse 6 Nephi commits himself to pass on to the future keepers of the small plates of Nephi the “commandment” that the writings on “these plates” should contain only spiritually edifying ideas.

1 Nephi Chapter 7

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 7 Lehi's sons return to Jerusalem for Ishmael and his family.

Chapter 7 provides us with the account of the family of Ishmael's joining Lehi and his family in the wilderness.

verses 1-5 Here Lehi receives another revelation: the sons must go back to the land of Jerusalem once again, this time to obtain future brides for the sons of Lehi.

It is a fair question to ask why another family would be willing to abandon their home and all they had known to join these refugees in the wilderness. The only plausible answer is that Ishmael believed the words of the Lord that Jerusalem would soon be destroyed by the Babylonian armies who already occupied the city. Also, Nephi and his brothers had quite a story to tell about how an angel appeared to them and how the Lord had miraculously made it possible to secure the brass plates from Laban. The text of the Book of Mormon itself says, "The Lord did soften the heart of Ishmael, and also his household, insomuch that they took their journey with us down into the wilderness" (1 Nephi 7:5).

1 And now I would that ye might know, that after my father, Lehi, had made an end of prophesying concerning his seed, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto him again, saying that it was not meet for him, Lehi, that he should take his family into the wilderness alone; but that his sons should take daughters to wife, that they might raise up seed unto the Lord in the land of promise.

verse 1 Lehi's "**prophesying concerning his seed**" began in 1 Nephi 5:17. The adjective "meet" here means suitable, proper, or advisable.

2 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded him that I, Nephi, and my brethren, should again return unto the land of Jerusalem, and bring down Ishmael and his family into the wilderness.

verse 2 "return unto the land of Jerusalem" We have commented previously on the difference between the "land of Jerusalem" and the "city of Jerusalem" (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:4). To reiterate: it is likely that the "land" is the area surrounding the city. This pattern will hold throughout the remainder of the Book of Mormon after the group arrives in the western hemisphere. For example, "land of Nephi" and "city of Nephi."

"bring down Ishmael . . . into the wilderness" Again, the implication here is that the wilderness was lower in elevation—"down"—from the "land of Jerusalem."

In the Church, it has long been held that Ishmael's ancestry went back to Joseph through Joseph's birthright son Ephraim. This tradition is based on a discourse delivered by an apostle, Elder Erastus Snow, in the Logan tabernacle in Logan, Utah, on May 6, 1882. He said, "The Prophet Joseph informed us that the record of Lehi was contained on the 116 pages that were first translated and subsequently stolen, and of which an abridgment is given us in the first Book of Nephi [1 Nephi chapters 1 through 8], which is the record of Nephi individually, he himself being of the lineage of Manasseh; but that Ishmael was of the lineage of Ephraim, and that his sons [had] married into Lehi's family, and Lehi's sons married Ishmael's daughters" (*JD*, 23:184).

3 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did again, with my brethren, go forth into the wilderness to go up to Jerusalem.

verse 3 Notice that this time the brothers did not murmur. They were returning to Jerusalem for prospective wives!

4 And it came to pass that we went up unto the house of Ishmael, and we did gain favor in the sight of Ishmael, insomuch that we did speak unto him the words of the Lord.

5 And it came to pass that the Lord did soften the heart of Ishmael, and also his household, insomuch that they took their journey with us down into the wilderness to the tent of our father.

6 And it came to pass that as we journeyed in the wilderness, behold Laman and Lemuel, and two of the daughters of Ishmael, and the two sons of Ishmael and their families, did rebel against us; yea, against me, Nephi, and Sam, and their father, Ishmael, and his wife, and his three other daughters.

verse 6 This verse and the above quote by Elder Erastus Snow have caused some to speculate that Lehi's family and that of Ishmael might have already had a relationship either by prior marriage or by plans for marriage. This might explain Lehi's seeming nonchalance about instructing his sons to bring Ishmael's family down into the wilderness. It seems likely that Lehi had some older daughters who had already married Ishmael's sons. Perhaps Lehi and Ishmael had previously contracted with each other to have their children marry. Both were of the tribe of Joseph, and their families were nearly compatible in the number of matched pairs for marriage. When we include Laban's servant Zoram, there is a perfect numerical match of marriageable people.

7 And it came to pass in the which rebellion, they were desirous to return unto the land of Jerusalem.

8 And now I, Nephi, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, therefore I spake unto them, saying, yea, even unto Laman and unto Lemuel: Behold ye are mine elder brethren, and how is it that ye are so hard in your hearts, and so blind

in your minds, that ye have need that I, your younger brother, should speak unto you, yea, and set an example for you?

verse 8 “I, Nephi, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

9 How is it that ye have not hearkened unto the word of the Lord?

10 How is it that ye have forgotten that ye have seen an angel of the Lord?

verse 10 When did Laman and Lemuel see an angel? They were rebuked by an angel as they smote their younger brothers with a rod in the “cavity of a rock” (1 Nephi 3:27-30).

11 Yea, and how is it that ye have forgotten what great things the Lord hath done for us, in delivering us out of the hands of Laban, and also that we should obtain the record?

12 Yea, and how is it that ye have forgotten that the Lord is able to do all things according to his will, for the children of men, if it so be that they exercise faith in him? Wherefore, let us be faithful to him.

13 And if it so be that we are faithful to him, we shall obtain the land of promise; and ye shall know at some future period that the word of the Lord shall be fulfilled concerning the destruction of Jerusalem; for all things which the Lord hath spoken concerning the destruction of Jerusalem must be fulfilled.

verse 13 “ye shall know at some future period that the word of the Lord shall be fulfilled concerning the destruction of Jerusalem” The final destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon occurred in 586 BC, and revelation concerning that event is recorded in 2 Nephi 6:8 (also 2 Nephi 25:10).

14 For behold, the Spirit of the Lord ceaseth soon to strive with them; for behold, they have rejected the prophets, and Jeremiah have they cast into prison. And they have sought to take away the life of my father, insomuch that they have driven him out of the land.

verse 14 “the Spirit of the Lord ceaseth soon to strive with them” Nephi refers here to the Jews in Jerusalem.

“they have rejected the prophets” “Jeremiah have they cast into prison” “they have sought to take away the life of my father” Nephi implies that the actions taken against Jeremiah and the other prophets and the threats on Lehi’s life were all a part of the same rebellious mind set in Jerusalem.

“Jeremiah have they cast into prison” Brother Randall P. Spackman regards this verse as one of the most important clues for dating the time of Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem. The most notable incident of Jeremiah’s being cast into prison occurred within a year or two of Babylon’s captivity of Jerusalem (see Jeremiah 37:11 to 38:6).

This would have occurred about 588 or 587 BC. Zedekiah was king of Jerusalem for about ten years from 597 BC until the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC. Jeremiah was probably imprisoned in the last year or two of Zedekiah's reign. After Jeremiah was imprisoned, Zedekiah sought him out to see if Jeremiah had a message from the Lord for Zedekiah. Jeremiah did indeed have a message. It was that the king of Babylon was about to capture and destroy Jerusalem! This was an unacceptable message, and because of it Jeremiah was remanded to prison where he was "sunk in the mire." If Nephi was referring to this episode of Jeremiah's imprisonment, then Lehi and his family could not have exited Jerusalem until after Jeremiah was imprisoned in 588 or 587 BC. There were perhaps other incidents of Jeremiah's being cast into prison well-known to Lehi's family, since Lehi and Jeremiah were contemporary prophets. Perhaps it is to one of these other incidents that Nephi is referring. We still cannot be certain as to exactly when Lehi and his family left Jerusalem. It could have been any time between 597 BC and 586 BC.

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

verse 15 Why didn't Laman and Lemuel and the other members of their rebellious group abandon Lehi's family and return to Jerusalem? Apparently at this point in time they were irresolute, uncertain, and ambivalent in their disbelief. They probably half believed Nephi's warnings (cf. verses 19 and 20 in this chapter).

The phrase "**if ye have choice**" doesn't question whether or not they had their agency. Certainly they had that. Rather the phrase seems to mean, "if it is your choice."

16 And it came to pass that when I, Nephi, had spoken these words unto my brethren, they were angry with me. And it came to pass that they did lay their hands upon me, for behold, they were exceedingly wroth, and they did bind me with cords, for they sought to take away my life, that they might leave me in the wilderness to be devoured by wild beasts.

verse 16 How like human nature! If Laman and Lemuel and the other rebellious members of the traveling party had made the decision to return to Jerusalem, they probably would have done so and not bothered to become angry with Nephi. It appears, however, they were afraid to disregard Nephi's warning. They thus wanted to return to Jerusalem but were frightened to do so. Thus, frustrated by their dilemma and ambivalent feelings, they took out their frustrations on Nephi.

"that they might leave me in the wilderness to be devoured by wild beasts" Were there wild beasts in Arabia? We should remember the origin of the word

“wilderness.” Its old English form was *wilddeoren*, meaning “of wild beast.” The Greek Agatharkides wrote of Midian, “The country is full of wild camels, as well as of flocks of deer, gazelles, sheep, mules, and oxen.” As a result he also noted that the game “attracts numerous lions, wolves, and panthers” (Burton, *Gold-Mines of Midian*, 108). Nephi’s concern for his life was real. The last lion in Arabia was killed in Midian in 1926.

17 But it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, according to my faith which is in thee, wilt thou deliver me from the hands of my brethren; yea, even give me strength that I may burst these bands with which I am bound.

18 And it came to pass that when I had said these words, behold, the bands were loosed from off my hands and feet, and I stood before my brethren, and I spake unto them again.

19 And it came to pass that they were angry with me again, and sought to lay hands upon me; but behold, one of the daughters of Ishmael, yea, and also her mother, and one of the sons of Ishmael, did plead with my brethren, insomuch that they did soften their hearts; and they did cease striving to take away my life.

verse 19 “one of the daughters of Ishmael” I am asking you to speculate, of course, but do you suppose that it was this daughter of Ishmael that Nephi eventually married (see 1 Nephi 16:7)? And what about those two daughters of Ishmael that sided with Laman and Lemuel (verse 6)? Might they have been the two that married the two rebellious brothers?

20 And it came to pass that they were sorrowful, because of their wickedness, insomuch that they did bow down before me, and did plead with me that I would forgive them of the thing that they had done against me.

21 And it came to pass that I did frankly forgive them all that they had done, and I did exhort them that they would pray unto the Lord their God for forgiveness. And it came to pass that they did so. And after they had done praying unto the Lord we did again travel on our journey towards the tent of our father.

verse 21 “I did frankly forgive them all that they had done” This simple phrase speaks powerfully of the magnanimous nature of Nephi’s character.

22 And it came to pass that we did come down unto the tent of our father. And after I and my brethren and all the house of Ishmael had come down unto the tent of my father, they did give thanks unto the Lord their God; and they did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings unto him.

verse 22 At this point in time, the traveling party consisted of at least eighteen people. These were Lehi, Sariah, Laman, Lemuel, Sam, Nephi, Zoram, Ishmael, his wife, five daughters, and two sons with their wives. There may also have been children from two married sons of Ishmael. It is interesting to ponder why two married sons of

Ishmael would have opted to come into the wilderness with their wives. Could it have been family loyalty? Or perhaps they were touched by the Spirit and believed that Jerusalem was about to be destroyed.

Again, we see the custom of offering appropriate sacrifices to the Lord in appropriate circumstances. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:7.

1 Nephi Chapter 8

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 8 Lehi's vision of the tree of life

This chapter contains Nephi's record of his father's vision of the dark and dreary wilderness or waste, the tree of life and its precious fruit, the rod of iron and the path through the darkness, and the great and spacious building to which some apostatized. This is Lehi's so-called "vision of the tree of life."

Trees were among the favorite objects of biblical imagery and symbolism. Trees usually represent people. Comparing the characteristics of trees to the human experience was a familiar teaching approach among the Jewish sages for centuries. The following is an example from the most known and used part of the Mishnah (volumes of rabbinic writings). One rabbi used to say, "One whose wisdom is greater than his deeds what is he like? A tree whose branches are many and its roots few. And the wind comes and roots it up and overturns it on its face. . . . But one whose deeds exceed his wisdom what is he like? A tree whose branches are few and its roots many; so that even if all the winds that are in the world come and blow upon it they stir it not from its place" (*Pirke Aboth*, III:22, 92-93). From Jesus and his disciples came many examples of trees as object lessons. Bad trees produce ill will, negativism, criticism, accusation, cynicism, and all kind of destructive thinking and sinful behavior. Good trees produce good fruit. Joseph Smith was a good tree. The Book of Mormon is a good tree. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a good tree. Jesus Christ himself is the best tree of all—the Tree of Life. You can know the trees; that is, you can know the hearts and souls of people perfectly by their fruit, that is, by what comes out of them in the form of thoughts, words, feelings, and actions. In a sense, we seldom speak or act truly impulsively. We say and do what we are.

The issues addressed in Lehi's vision of the tree of life are so fundamental and important in this mortal phase that the reader may wish to give careful thought to Lehi's vision. The interested reader may find it helpful to read two articles in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The Natural Self and the Spiritual Self* and chapter 6, *The Gospel and the Two Natures of Man* before commencing a study of this chapter.

Later on, Nephi desired to witness the things his father had seen. In response to his desire, we will read that Nephi was "caught away" to "an exceedingly high mountain" (1 Nephi 11:1), where he was shown an impressive vision. Nephi saw what had been revealed to his father, and he was also shown the interpretation of several of the major symbols of the vision, which he later recorded (1 Nephi 11-15). We will make use of Nephi's account of this same vision in our discussion of chapter 8.

The most important symbol in Lehi's vision is the tree. It represents the love of God the Father, particularly the love of God as manifest in the gift of his Son. Therefore the tree is actually a symbol or "type" of Jesus Christ himself. Toward him men press forward on the strait and narrow path. He is the way (John 14:6). Only he can make it possible for us to obtain eternal life. An expanded meaning of the symbol of the tree, then, is eternal life in the presence of the Father.

Lehi's vision basically consists of the scene of the tree of life and the efforts of some people to obtain its fruits. Nephi's vision, to be discussed later in chapters 11-15, consists of much more.

1 And it came to pass that we had gathered together all manner of seeds of every kind, both of grain of every kind, and also of the seeds of fruit of every kind.

verse 1 This is an interesting informational verse, though it seems a bit out of context here. It has become apparent, especially to interested scholars, that the Book of Mormon peoples depended on well-developed agriculture. More than sixty passages refer to agriculture in the Book of Mormon, most of them incidental to historical accounts but some of them allegorical. It would seem most likely that this gathering together of seeds was in preparation for their eventual departure from the valley of Lemuel. These could have been gathered together while the family was still in Jerusalem. Or, some of them could have been obtained from the valley of Lemuel. The seeds available today in the wadi Tayyib al-Isim, the valley of Lemuel, include a few varieties of grain and dates. There are stories of Arabs' surviving for long periods of time on dates and water.

In spite of eight years in the wilderness, time during which many seeds may lose their ability to germinate, the seeds brought from Jerusalem "did grow exceedingly" when cultivated in the promised land (1 Nephi 18:24). The Jaredites also carried seeds to the promised land along with domestic and wild animals, including flocks, fowl, fish, and honey-bees (Ether 1:41; 2:1-3).

Several specific cultivated plants are mentioned in the Book of Mormon. The Nephite civilization had corn, wheat, barley, neas, and sheum (see Mosiah 9:9 and its commentary). In the Bible, the word *corn* typically refers to a cereal grain of some type, such as wheat or barley (e.g., Isaiah 28:28). However, the corn mentioned in Mosiah 9:9 was probably maize (called corn in the United States) because wheat and barley are mentioned separately in the same verse. Indeed, maize was among the most important staple foods of ancient American civilizations and was found throughout the Americas at the time of European contact. The single reference to neas and sheum in Mosiah 9:9 provides no additional information about these plants other than their agricultural importance. Olives are mentioned several times prior to the allegory of the olive tree in Jacob 5 but never in a context of cultivation in the New World. After the allegory of the olive tree, there is no further reference to the olive in the Book of Mormon. Grape is not specifically mentioned, although there are several references to wine. King Noah

planted vineyards and built wine-presses. Indeed, people cultivated grapes in both the Old and new Worlds prior to European contact.

No fiber-producing plants are specifically mentioned. Linen, which is derived from flax (a plant of Old World origin), is mentioned on several occasions in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 10:5; Alma 1:29; Ether 9:17). Cotton is a domesticated native of both the Old and New Worlds, but there is no reference to it in the Book of Mormon.

Agriculture includes animal husbandry. For a discussion of animals in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary on 1 Nephi 18:25. While it is clear that the Jaredites brought domesticated animals with them from the Old World to the Americas (Ether 1:41; 2:1-3), there is no indication that Lehi's group carried such animals on their voyage. In fact, there are evidences that they did not do so. For example, during their time in the wilderness, Lehi's group hunted wild animals for meat, and they were unable to obtain food when the bow of Nephi was broken, suggesting that they had no domestic animals with them that they could use for food. Yet, we will learn that upon their arrival in the promised land, they will discover domestic animals, including "the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat" (see 1 Nephi 18:25 and its commentary).

2 And it came to pass that while my father tarried in the wilderness he spake unto us, saying: Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision.

verse 2 "while my father tarried in the wilderness" All of the events in this chapter occurred while Lehi and his extended family were camped in the valley of Lemuel. Nephi will now take a long quote of his father Lehi from the record of Lehi (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:17). This quotation of his father will extend through verse 28.

3 And behold, because of the thing which I have seen, I have reason to rejoice in the Lord because of Nephi and also of Sam; for I have reason to suppose that they, and also many of their seed, will be saved.

verse 3 Keep in mind that the speaker or first person in these verses is Lehi, not Nephi.

"saved" The most common interpretation of this word, when used in the Book of Mormon, is *exalted*.

4 But behold, Laman and Lemuel, I fear exceedingly because of you; for behold, methought I saw in my dream, a dark and dreary wilderness.

verse 4 The **"dark and dreary wilderness"** (or "dark and dreary waste" in verse 7) seems to be symbolic of the fallen state of man in the lone and dreary world.

“Methought” is the preterite tense of *methinks*. It means “it seemed to me; I thought.”

5 And it came to pass that I saw a man, and he was dressed in a white robe; and he came and stood before me.

6 And it came to pass that he spake unto me, and bade me follow him.

verses 5-6 The **“man . . . dressed in a white robe”** is Lehi’s guide, a heavenly messenger or angel. Some have suggested that this messenger might have been the Holy Ghost (James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 30th edition, 32; Sidney B. Sperry, *Answers to Gospel Doctrine Questions*, 27-30) or even Jesus Christ.

7 And it came to pass that as I followed him I beheld myself that I was in a dark and dreary waste.

verse 7 Again, the **“dark and dreary waste”** seems to be symbolic of the fallen state of man in the lone and dreary world.

The geography of Lehi’s vision is more at home in Arabia than it is in western New York. The scenes in Lehi’s dream alternate between long, lonely stretches of desert crossed at night and regions of dense population (see verses 21, 24, 27, 30, 33). Lehi also wrote of deep canyons, known as wadis, that were almost impossible to traverse (compare “a great and a terrible gulf” in 1 Nephi 12:18 and “an awful gulf” in 1 Nephi 15:28). After rains, the seasonal streams in the wadis fill with mud and debris (called “filthy water” in 1 Nephi 12:16 and “filthiness” in 1 Nephi 15:26-27).

In contrast, Lehi described occasional green fields next to the desert graced not only by abundant water (there were already extensive irrigation works in south Arabia that supported a larger population than the one living there now) but also by lush vegetation represented by the tree full of delicious fruit (see 1 Nephi 8:9-13). He saw heavily traveled paths leading to the green areas (see verses 20-21) as well as “forbidden paths” and “strange roads” of the surrounding desert where the unwary would become “lost” (verses 23, 28, 32). Further, Lehi’s mention of “a mist of darkness” (verse 23) reminds one of the heavy mists and fogs that blanket the coasts of Arabia (especially during the monsoon season) including the place where the family most likely emerged from the desert.

The dream is also true to other cultural and geographical dimensions of the family’s world. For example, Lehi’s dream began in “a dark and dreary wilderness” wherein Lehi and a guide walked “in darkness” for “many hours” (1 Nephi 8:4, 8). Plainly, they were walking at night, the preferred time for traveling through the hot desert. Further, when Lehi reached the tree that grew in “a large and spacious field,” which field is different from the wilderness, he partook of the fruit of the tree and then looked for his family, apparently expecting to see them (see verses 9, 12-14). This sort of detail meshes with the custom of family travel in the Near East, with the father going

as a vanguard to look for danger and for food while the mother and younger children follow. When there are other adult members in a clan or family, the males form a rear guard, as did Laman and Lemuel in this set of scenes (verses 17-18). Hence, in the dream Lehi was evidently not alone with the guide as they traveled. His family members were following him, but at a safe distance as custom required.

The dream of Lehi teems with people. Lehi saw multitudes (1 Nephi 8:21-22, 24, 26-27, 30-31). Where did all these people come from? Was not Arabia basically an empty place? The answer is yes and no. There are vast regions where no human inhabitant lives. The problem in those areas, of course, is a lack of water. But anciently both the northwest and southwest sections of the Arabian Peninsula supported large populations.

The “great and spacious building” of Lehi’s dream appeared unusual enough to his eye that he called it “strange” (1 Nephi 8:33). Why would Lehi, who had possibly traveled a good deal during his life, call a building strange? And does the word *strange* fit with the fact that the building soared into “the air, high above the earth” (1 Nephi 8:26)? Evidently, Lehi’s descriptions of this building point to architecture unfamiliar to him. Furthermore, his words prophetically anticipate architecture that he and his party would see in south Arabia. Recent studies have shown that the so-called skyscraper architecture of modern Yemen has been common since at least the eighth century BC and is apparently unique in the ancient world. In this light, it seems evident that Lehi was seeing the architecture of ancient south Arabia in his dream. For contemporary buildings there “stood as it were in the air,” rising to five or six stories in height.

Could Joseph Smith have known that any of these architectural features existed in the days of Lehi and Sariah? The answer has to be no. Dr. S. Kent Brown has found that no classic source about ancient Arabia was available to Joseph Smith (*Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch [FARMS], 69-76).

8 And after I had traveled for the space of many hours in darkness, I began to pray unto the Lord that he would have mercy on me, according to the multitude of his tender mercies.

verse 8 Lehi grew weary of the dreary darkness of man’s fallen state, and he prayed for light.

“have mercy on me, according to the multitude of his tender mercies” This interesting phrase is not unique to this verse of scripture. It is also found in Psalm 106:45; Isaiah 63:7; Lamentations 3:32; and Ether 6:12.

9 And it came to pass after I had prayed unto the Lord I beheld a large and spacious field.

verse 9 The “**large and spacious field**” is the world (see Matthew 13:38; 1 Nephi 8:20).

10 And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.

verse 10 “I beheld a tree” It is interesting to note that a tree of life is a part of the cultural symbolism of several Near Eastern cultures including Hebrew, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian (C. Wilfred Griggs, “The Tree of Life in Ancient Cultures” *Ensign*, June 1988, 26-31). In a similar vision had by Lehi’s son Nephi, we will read that the tree of life is associated the waters of life (1 Nephi 11:25). This is reminiscent of an ancient Jewish tradition that “the tree of life is planted near the source of the water of life” (Bernard Chapira, “Legendes Bibliques,” *Revue des etudes juives* 69 [1919]: 105 n. 4). Also the tree of life and its connection with the waters of life also occur in ancient Egyptian religion and literature (Edmund Hermsen, *Lebensbaumsymbolik im alten Agypten* [Cologne: Brill, 1981], 3).

In 1941, in Izapa, in southern Mexico a carved stone slab was discovered which dates to about 200 to 300 BC. It is an apparent depiction of the tree of life. It is referred to as Stela 5 and is one of 164 sculptures discovered at Izapa, an ancient temple center located near the Pacific coast. Some Book of Mormon researchers have become interested in trying to associate this stela with Lehi’s vision of the tree of life, and Stela 5 has even been called the “Lehi stone” in some LDS circles. The stone portrays a complicated scene of humans and supernatural beings seated or standing around a magnificent fruit tree. Although the stela may represent a tree of life, there is no written inscription accompanying the carved scene, and thus positive interpretation of the other images is impossible. It would seem that archaeological science is a long way from making any truly confirmed association between Stela 5 and Lehi’s vision of the tree of life.

11 And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen.

verse 11 The words “**white**” and “**whiteness**” might be interpreted as “full of eternal glory, and instilling everlasting joy.”

12 And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit.

verses 12 To partake of the fruit of the tree is to accept Christ and his gospel and thus ultimately enjoy the greatest of all the gifts of God—eternal life in his presence.

13 And as I cast my eyes round about, that perhaps I might discover my family also, I beheld a river of water; and it ran along, and it was near the tree of which I was partaking the fruit.

verse 13 We will later learn that Lehi was so distracted with concerns over his family that he did not notice the filthiness of the water in the river (1 Nephi 12:16; 15:27). This river of filthy water represents filthiness or the depths of hell or “an awful gulf which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God” (1 Nephi 15:28).

A similar “gulf” existed in the spirit world before the resurrection of Jesus which separated the righteous in paradise from the wicked in prison. Figuratively this river seems to represent the distance in spiritual progress and receptivity that separated the righteous from the wicked. It is symbolic of the hopeless and desperate situation of those who have given themselves over to influences of the world.

14 And I looked to behold from whence it came; and I saw the head thereof a little way off; and at the head thereof I beheld your mother Sariah, and Sam, and Nephi; and they stood as if they knew not whither they should go.

verse 14 One of the definitions of the word *whence* in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language is “from what source.” The word *from* just prior to *whence* is thus redundant. The “head” of the river is the point of its beginning.

15 And it came to pass that I beckoned unto them; and I also did say unto them with a loud voice that they should come unto me, and partake of the fruit, which was desirable above all other fruit.

16 And it came to pass that they did come unto me and partake of the fruit also.

17 And it came to pass that I was desirous that Laman and Lemuel should come and partake of the fruit also; wherefore, I cast mine eyes towards the head of the river, that perhaps I might see them.

18 And it came to pass that I saw them, but they would not come unto me and partake of the fruit.

19 And I beheld a rod of iron, and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood.

verse 19 The “rod of iron” represents the word of God or the gospel of Jesus Christ. An expanded meaning is that Christ and his gospel are the only means by which we can attain the presence of the Father—our exaltation. The location of the rod of iron in Lehi’s vision is pertinent since it extended along the bank of the river of filthiness. One had to maintain a firm hold on the rod of iron to keep from losing one’s way and slipping into the river, particularly since mists of darkness tended to impair vision along the path (see verse 23).

20 And I also beheld a strait and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron, even to the tree by which I stood; and it also led by the head of the fountain, unto a large and spacious field, as if it had been a world.

verse 20 The word “**strait**” does not mean *straight*. Rather it means narrow, restricted, rigorous, difficult, and exacting. He who walks the path must do so carefully with his eyes fixed upon the Lord and his anointed servants.

While some may object to the use of the word *strait* here rather than straight, there is significant justification for its use as discussed in the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

“the head of the fountain” A “fountain” is a spring or a river, and its “head” is the place where it begins or emerges from the ground. The fountain mentioned here has been thought by some to be the “fountain of living waters” which will be mentioned in 1 Nephi 11:25. It seems more likely, however, that it is instead the river of filthy water (see 1 Nephi 8:32; 1 Nephi 12:16).

Here we are given to understand that the “strait and narrow path” led from the world (the large and spacious field) past the head of the river, to the tree.

“as if it had been a world” This phrase simply emphasizes that the symbol of the large and spacious field represents, as stated previously, the world.

verses 21-23 In these verses which follow, Lehi describes people who are responsive to the light of Christ within them, and they even set out to seek for their eternal purpose and destiny. However, the path is rigorous, and they are eventually distracted and turned away by the extraneous and unnecessary things which the world offers in abundance. These things include seeking for wealth, power, fame, and the unrighteous satisfaction of sexual appetites.

21 And I saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree by which I stood.

22 And it came to pass that they did come forth, and commence in the path which led to the tree.

23 And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceedingly great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost.

verse 23 The “**mist of darkness**” represents things of the world or the temptations of the world.

verses 24-28 This second group of people accept the gospel but eventually they are “ashamed” or dissuaded by the taunts and scorn of worldly people. They are

deceived by those offering counsel based upon wisdom, intellectualism, philosophies, and opinions of the world.

24 And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.

25 And after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed.

26 And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building; and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth.

verse 26 The “**great and spacious building**” represents the world and the wisdom thereof and the vain imaginations and pride of the children of men.

27 And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit.

28 And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.

29 And now I, Nephi, do not speak all the words of my father.

verse 29 Nephi indicates some type of gap in his description of his father’s vision. We do not know what was omitted here. The following verse suggests that Nephi found it expedient to do some redacting and summarizing of Lehi’s account.

30 But, to be short in writing, behold, he saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree.

verse 30 Apparently these people remained steadfast and inherited eternal life.

verses 31-33 These people never did grab hold of the rod nor did they seek for the tree of life. They became lost while “feeling their way” toward the great and spacious building. They sought for the pleasures of the world and the approval of the worldly wise. Once they achieve worldly status, they are inclined to scoff and mock those who are trying to live a simple, godly, and spiritual life.

31 And he also saw other multitudes feeling their way towards that great and spacious building.

verse 31 “feeling their way” One point of some interest, but of little importance, is that the original Book of Mormon manuscript rendered this phrase, “pressing their way.” Apparently an error was made as the original manuscript was read and copied to create the printers manuscript. Dr. Royal Skousen has observed that the original manuscript version is wholly consistent in representing people as pressing, and not feeling, their way.

32 And it came to pass that many were drowned in the depths of the fountain; and many were lost from his view, wandering in strange roads.

verse 32 “many were drowned in the depths of the fountain” This “fountain” is obviously the river of filthiness, worldliness, referred to in 1 Nephi 8:13-14.

33 And great was the multitude that did enter into that strange building. And after they did enter into that building they did point the finger of scorn at me and those that were partaking of the fruit also; but we heeded them not.

34 These are the words of my father: For as many as heeded them, had fallen away.

verse 34 “Them” does not refer to “the words of my father,” rather it refers to the taunts of the inhabitants of the great and spacious building. Those who have accepted the gospel but heed the ridicule of the worldly wise are likely to be led away from the gospel.

35 And Laman and Lemuel partook not of the fruit, said my father.

36 And it came to pass after my father had spoken all the words of his dream or vision, which were many, he said unto us, because of these things which he saw in a vision, he exceedingly feared for Laman and Lemuel; yea, he feared lest they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord.

37 And he did exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and not cast them off; yea, my father did preach unto them.

verse 37 This verse is all the more meaningful if we keep in mind that under ancient Israelite law the father had enormous legal power, to the point of disinheriting or even putting to death a rebellious child (Welch, John W., *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure* [Salt Lake City and Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University: Bookcraft, 1989], 66). Thus, Lehi’s restraint here is real evidence of the tender and loving feeling he had for his wayward sons.

38 And after he had preached unto them, and also prophesied unto them of many things, he bade them to keep the commandments of the Lord; and he did cease speaking unto them.

1 Nephi Chapter 9

This chapter is the “editorial comment” by Nephi which forms the bridge between Nephi’s record of his father’s writings and his own writings. In a sense, this entire chapter is a *colophon*, as described in the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1-3. Chapters 1 through 8 of 1 Nephi are Nephi’s record and abridgement of his father’s writings, while Nephi’s own writings begin in chapter 10.

verses 1-5 In these verses the phrase “these plates” refers to the small plates of Nephi. The “other plates” which do contain a “full account of my people” are the large plates of Nephi. See the supplemental article entitled, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

1 And all these things did my father see, and hear, and speak, as he dwelt in a tent, in the valley of Lemuel, and also a great many more things, which cannot be written upon these plates.

2 And now, as I have spoken concerning these plates, behold they are not the plates upon which I make a full account of the history of my people; for the plates upon which I make a full account of my people I have given the name of Nephi; wherefore, they are called the plates of Nephi, after mine own name; and these plates also are called the plates of Nephi.

verse 2 Both the large plates of Nephi and the small plates of Nephi were originally known only as “the plates of Nephi.” Please recall that the adjective “large” refers to the number of plates (or number of “pages”) in the set and not to the size of the individual plates.

3 Nevertheless, I have received a commandment of the Lord that I should make these plates, for the special purpose that there should be an account engraven of the ministry of my people.

verse 3 “These plates” are the small plates of Nephi. We will read about the Lord’s formally commanding Nephi to make and begin keeping this record in 2 Nephi 5.

4 Upon the other plates should be engraven an account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions of my people; wherefore these plates are for the more part of the ministry; and the other plates are for the more part of the reign of the kings and the wars and contentions of my people.

verse 4 “these plates are for the more part of the ministry” The expression “more part” is used in the scriptures to mean the *majority* or *most*. Here, the expression

“for the more part of” mean *mostly for*. The small plates of Nephi were intended to focus on the spiritual aspects of the Book of Mormon story.

“the other plates are for the more part of the reign of the kings and the wars and contentions of my people” “The other plates” are the large plates of Nephi. They will focus on more secular historical issues.

5 Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not.

verse 5 We know that the Lord’s “purpose” in commanding Nephi to make the small plates of Nephi related to the fact that the translation of the initial part of the plates of Mormon (the book of Lehi) will be lost by Martin Harris in June of 1828. See the supplemental article, *A Brief History of the Translation of the Book of Mormon*.

6 But the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words. And thus it is. Amen.

verse 6 When Nephi concludes a major section of his writings, he uses the wording, “And thus it is. Amen.” See also 1 Nephi 14:30 and 1 Nephi 22:31. Dr. Hugh Nibley suggested that this expression may have Egyptian origins (*Lehi in the Desert*, 18).

1 Nephi Chapter 10

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 10:19 He that diligently seeketh shall find and the mysteries of God shall be opened unto him.

Chapters 10 and 11 of 1 Nephi plus a few other references in the Book of Mormon (see the commentary for Mosiah 15:5-7) contain important specific prophetic revelations concerning Jesus. Those Book of Mormon peoples who believed these teachings and looked forward in faith to Christ's coming were literally Christians. Thus their record, the Book of Mormon, is indeed "Another Testament of Jesus Christ."

1 And now I, Nephi, proceed to give an account upon these plates of my proceedings, and my reign and ministry; wherefore, to proceed with mine account, I must speak somewhat of the things of my father, and also of my brethren.

verse 1 As previously stated, chapter 10 begins the actual account of Nephi. Up to now Nephi has been summarizing the record of his father Lehi. Chapter 9 was simply Nephi's editorial comment placed between the record of his father Lehi and his own record.

Actually most of chapter 10 includes more of Nephi's recollections of what his father Lehi prophesied and taught. In this chapter and in several of the remaining chapters in the books of 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi, Nephi will continue to use his father's record for source material and will even quote from it on occasion. Nephi's brother Jacob will also quote from his father's record.

2 For behold, it came to pass after my father had made an end of speaking the words of his dream, and also of exhorting them to all diligence, he spake unto them concerning the Jews—

verse 2 The "thems" in this verse obviously refer to Nephi's brothers.

3 That after they should be destroyed, even that great city Jerusalem, and many be carried away captive into Babylon, according to the own due time of the Lord, they should return again, yea, even be brought back out of captivity; and after they should be brought back out of captivity they should possess again the land of their inheritance.

verse 3 "the own due time of the Lord" The meaning of the concept of "the Lord's own due time" is intuitively clear. We would define it as "when the Lord sees fit." This particular rendering of that expression, however, seems a bit unusual. The phrase

“own due time” seems to fit more smoothly with modifiers other than “the,” such as “mine own due time” (2 Nephi 27:21; 3 Nephi 20:29), “my own due time” (Ether 3:24), and “his own due time” (Enos 1:16; 3 Nephi 5:25; Mormon 5:12; Ether 3:27). This same expression—“the own due time”—is also found in 1 Nephi 14:26 and 2 Nephi 27:10 but is found in no other places in the four standard works.

The destruction of the Jews prophesied in this verse is one of the major “scatterings” of Israel, while the “return again” represents one of the significant “gatherings.” For a summary of the concepts of scattering and gathering of Israel, see the introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 20.

In the Book of Mormon, much attention is given to the fate of the kingdom of Judah and the Jews. This is likely because the pattern of the scattering and gathering of the Jews forms a paradigm or model of scattering and gathering which will apply to the entire house of Israel. Lehi prophesies here of the return of the Jews to Jerusalem following their captivity. In 538 BC, just less than fifty years following the Babylonian captivity of Jerusalem in 586 BC, Cyrus the Persian captured Babylon and allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem (see Isaiah 44:28; 45:1).

4 Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world.

verse 4 There are actually several references in the Book of Mormon that contain prophecies or historical statements stating that Jesus will be born “six hundred years” from the time Lehi left Jerusalem. See also 1 Nephi 19:8, 2 Nephi 25:19, and 3 Nephi 1:1, 13. Is this time span “six hundred years” intended to be general and approximate or literal and specific? Some are comfortable with the idea that an approximate time period is intended.

Those who have insisted on a literal interpretation have done some agonizing over the issue since it is difficult to make the numbers add up exactly. Consider for example the following: Biblical scholars date the first year of the reign of Zedekiah to about 597 BC. If this is indeed the year that Lehi’s family left Jerusalem, then Jesus would have had to be born in about AD 3. This latter date is not satisfactory since biblical scholars have dated the death of Herod the Great at 4 BC. The Savior must have been born before Herod’s death since Herod played a major role in the story of the Christ child’s early life. If Lehi and his family left Jerusalem some years after 597 BC, which is probable (see the supplemental article *Jerusalem at the Time of Lehi*), then the mathematical problem is even more difficult.

Randall P. Spackman in his helpful article “Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” (a FARMS reprint) has provided us with a compelling solution of the problem. The principal time-keeping system throughout the Middle East in the sixth century BC was a twelve-moon *lunar*

calendar. By this calendar a year lasted 354.367 days. The principle of the *solar* calendar was also understood in which a year lasted 365.24 days, but the twelve-moon lunar calendar continued in use as the principal Babylonian, Egyptian, and Jewish religious calendar throughout ancient history. These religious calendars appear to have been based on direct observation of the moon by the priests to determine the times of religious festivals. “The priests also recognized that the solar year . . . was about eleven days longer than the twelve-moon calendar. For purposes of seasonal or agricultural rituals, the priests probably added or intercalated a 13th moon every two or three years. This was not an exact process in the time of Lehi, but it was an ancient one. Accurate intercalation schedules for adding the 13th moon were not worked out in Babylonia until the fifth century BC. In Lehi’s day, a 13th moon was added to the year when it became clear that the religious festivals were starting to occur too early in the agricultural or seasonal cycle” (Spackman, 15).

Brother Spackman believes it unlikely that Lehi and his people ever tried to intercalate their calendar. Thus their year was slightly over 354 days long. Brother Spackman also makes a compelling argument for the fact that Lehi and his family probably left Jerusalem in January 587 BC according to our present-day Gregorian calendar. Lehi would probably have begun his 600-year count on the first new moon day that followed his departure. The date of that new moon was January 19, 587 BC. He apparently began the count as he camped in the wilderness. Lehi’s righteous posterity kept this year count and were taught expressly to look forward to the birth of the Savior in 600 years by this lunar calendar. After 600 years or 7,200 moons, the 601st year of Lehi’s prophetic period would have begun with the new moon of March 8, 5 BC. In the “commencement” of this long-awaited year, the sign of the Messiah’s birth was seen in the heavens and he was born at Bethlehem probably in the spring of 5 BC.

“a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews” Jesus is the “prophet,” indeed the Prophet of prophets. Lehi is actually quoting scripture here. He is quoting Moses’s prophecy of the Savior’s birth (Deuteronomy 18:15- 19). Obviously the term “Lord God” refers to God the Father or Elohim. Most scriptures that speak of God or the Lord do not necessarily refer specifically to the Father or the Son because it usually doesn’t make much difference which God is intended. Critics of the Book of Mormon have suggested that the book speaks of only one God—that it is trinitarian in nature. While Jesus is certainly the central character, a careful reading of the text indicates that God the Father is referred to as well.

5 And he also spake concerning the prophets, how great a number had testified of these things, concerning this Messiah, of whom he had spoken, or this Redeemer of the world.

verse 5 “he also spake” Lehi also spake.

The very purpose and calling of those prophets who lived before the meridian of time was to prophesy of Jesus Christ. Those who have lived since the meridian of time have existed and will exist to testify of him. Nephi's brother Jacob will later write, "None of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ" (Jacob 7:11).

6 Wherefore, all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer.

verse 6 "All mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer." This is a doctrine that is taught repeatedly in the Book of Mormon. For a discussion of the doctrines of the fall of man and the atonement, see chapter 2 in volume 2 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine, Consequences of the Savior's Atonement*. See also the commentary for Mosiah 15:19.

verses 7-10 The four following verses contain an exceedingly explicit and specific prophecy by Lehi concerning John the Baptist. The Baptist is even quoted some six hundred years before he was even born! How could this be? Read on!

7 And he spake also concerning a prophet who should come before the Messiah, to prepare the way of the Lord—

8 Yea, even he should go forth and cry in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; for there standeth one among you whom ye know not; and he is mightier than I, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. And much spake my father concerning this thing.

verse 8 "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight" The use of the word *straight* (rather than strait) in this verse is appropriate and related to the word straight in Isaiah 40:3. See the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

9 And my father said he should baptize in Bethabara, beyond Jordan; and he also said he should baptize with water; even that he should baptize the Messiah with water.

verse 9 "he should baptize in Bethabara, beyond Jordan" "Beyond Jordan" (Greek Perea) is the name of a region on the east bank of the Jordan River. Bethabara is the place, within Perea, where John baptized. In Hebrew, Bethabara or Beth-avara means "house of the ford" or "place of crossing." Bethabara is near the natural fording place east of Jericho entering Perea. At such an important juncture along a major east-west travel route, John could have taught people traveling from the regions of Judea, Perea, Galilee, Decapolis, and Phoenicia.

verses 8-9 “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight”

Doubtless Lehi (or Nephi) borrowed this phrase from the writings of Isaiah on the plates of brass (Isaiah 40:3). The expression “prepare ye the way of the Lord” is a commission to prepare for the coming of the Lord by crying repentance and gathering a people sufficiently prepared by covenant and ordinance to receive him (Malachi 3:1; JST Luke 3:4-10; D&C 84:28).

“and make his paths straight” This phrase means “prepare the way of the Lord,” or prepare for the second coming by making the saints’ path back to God’s presence level or smooth.

In their Doctrine and Covenants commentary, Smith and Sjodahl explain:

Eastern potentates, when traveling from one part of the kingdom to another, would proclaim their coming and order their subjects to prepare the way for them, by building roads where there were none; if necessary by leveling hills and filling up depressions, and straightening out the winding paths. . . . To prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight is to acknowledge his sovereignty and to make all necessary preparations for his reception. He will not come to reign until all necessary preparations for his coming have been made. Joseph Smith said, “Hear this, O earth! The Lord will not come to reign over the righteous in this world . . . until everything for the Bridegroom is ready (*HC*, 5:291)” (174).

This preparation includes removing all obstacles out of the way so that others can be obedient to the laws and ordinances of the gospel (see also D&C 33:10; 65:1; 45:2). The book of Isaiah renders this same phrase “make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” The desert symbolizes the world of sin. The highway here is the “way of holiness” (Isaiah 19:199-25; 35:8).

“there standeth one among you . . . whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose” “he should baptize in Bethabara, beyond Jordan” The phrasing of Lehi’s prophecy seems to be borrowed from the New Testament, especially John 1:26-29 which states, “there standeth one among you . . . whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose” (see also Matthew 3:3,11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16; and Acts 13:25). Obviously Lehi and Nephi did not have access to any New Testament writings except by revelation. How do we explain, then, the identical wording? There are at least three reasonable explanations.

1. Maybe Joseph Smith, in the process of translation, perceived the meaning of Lehi’s prophecy and used the King James Bible to put words to it? There is no historical evidence that Joseph ever actually physically employed the King James Bible in the process of the Book of Mormon translation. But Joseph Smith might have been sufficiently familiar with these phrases in the New Testament that they were in his mind, and he used them to express the ideas he was perceiving.

2. Conceivably Lehi (or Nephi) was simply given by direct revelation the words of John the Baptist and the apostle John.

3. Perhaps Lehi, John the Baptist, and John the apostle were all quoting an earlier prophet whose writings are lost to us today. This seems the most likely possibility.

10 And after he had baptized the Messiah with water, he should behold and bear record that he had baptized the Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world.

verse 10 “bear record” The phrase “bear/beareth record” occurs thirty-two times in the Book of Mormon and seven times in the King James Version of the New Testament, where it is used to translate the Greek work *martureo*, meaning to give evidence, testify, or be a witness (e.g., John 8:14).

“the Lamb of God” It is interesting to note that this specific phrase is found thirty-five times in the Book of Mormon and thirty-eight times in all the standard works. The vision of Nephi (1 Nephi 11-15) contains twenty-eight of the thirty-five Book of Mormon examples of this phrase. It is found once in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 88:106) and not at all in the Old Testament. The only two examples of this phrase in the New Testament are found in the gospel of John (John 1:29, 36). Do you suppose it is simply a coincidence that the two ancient characters who are mostly responsible for the scriptural use of this phrase are brought together in Nephi’s vision, the apostle John and Nephi? Many of the things Nephi saw in his vision are the very things the apostle John will also see and write about (1 Nephi 14:24).

“who should take away the sins of the world” This phrase in the original manuscript reads *sin*, in the singular, and not *sins*. Elsewhere in the original Book of Mormon, in fifteen other instances, the text speaks of the Savior as taking away the sins (plural) of mankind. But in the two places where it speaks of the atonement in connection with John’s baptism of Jesus (here and in 2 Nephi 31:4), it uses the singular sin—precisely as does John the Baptist himself in the New Testament (see John 1:29). This observation has been referred to as evidence of an “astonishing consistency” of the original text by Dr. Royal Skousen, a BYU professor of linguistics and English language (see the report “Restoring the Original Test of the Book of Mormon,” *Insights* 24/4 [2004]).

11 And it came to pass after my father had spoken these words he spake unto my brethren concerning the gospel which should be preached among the Jews, and also concerning the dwindling of the Jews in unbelief. And after they had slain the Messiah, who should come, and after he had been slain he should rise from the dead, and should make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles.

verse 11 The “gospel” is a term that may be understood in two contexts. In its broader sense, the gospel embraces all truth including the verities of science,

philosophy, and the arts. Usually, however, we speak of the gospel in its scriptural or saving sense. In this context the gospel is the proclamation that Christ is the way, and one must obey those principles and laws which he taught, and which he typified, in order to live with God eternally. The scriptural definition of the gospel is found in 3 Nephi 27:13-21.

“And after they had slain the Messiah” Let us never become guilty of allowing ourselves to believe or preach the unqualified half truth, that “the Jews crucified our Savior.” Keep in mind that most of Jesus’s adherents during his mortal ministry were Jews. The vast majority of Jews in Jerusalem did not even know that Jesus was being crucified, and they likely would have dealt with him in a more gentle way if it had been up to them. Christ’s crucifixion was engineered by a relative few of the Jewish leaders, largely Pharisees and Sadducees, whose positions of power and influence were threatened by Jesus.

“unto the Gentiles” The word “Gentiles” is used here for the first time in the text of the Book of Mormon. Gentile is a word used to translate the Hebrew *Goyim*, literally meaning “the nations.” The use of this word in various contexts often results in confusion, because different meanings have been applied to it over the history of the world. Let us summarize the evolution of this word. All inhabitants of the earth (at least those in the family of Adam) descended from the three sons of Noah. Those sons were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The descendants of Shem were the “Shemites” or Hebrews. Through this lineage came the prophets Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The descendants of Ham are the black races or “Hamites.” Before the Flood, Ham had married Egyptus, a descendant of Cain. Thus the descendants of this union were the “Canaanites” (Genesis 9:25). The descendants of Japheth were called “Gentiles” (Genesis 10:1-5). These were all of those who have not descended from either Shem or Ham.

In the days of Abraham, the meaning changed to include all those not descended from him. Gentiles, by this definition, would include all those not descended through the patriarchal line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Arabs and other races of Semitic (“Shem-itic”) origin would not be counted as Gentiles. In the days of Jacob or Israel and throughout the history of ancient Palestine or Israel, the meaning changed again to become all those not descended from Jacob or Israel—all those outside the “house of Israel.”

Another definition of Gentile was used by father Lehi and his descendants and therefore finds application throughout the Book of Mormon. After the Kingdom of Israel with its ten tribes of Israel were carried away captive by Assyria between 732 and 722 BC, those of the Kingdom of Judah came to call themselves “Jews” and designated all others as “Gentiles.” Lehi was brought up in the land of Jerusalem with this definition. Thus, it is not surprising to find, in the Book of Mormon, the following: (1) the phrase “Jew and Gentile” which implies all mankind; (2) a description of the United States as a “Gentile Nation” (1 Nephi 13; 3 Nephi 21); and (3) the promise that the Book of Mormon

would come forth “by way of the Gentile” (title page of Book of Mormon) even though the prophet Joseph Smith was of the tribe of Joseph through Ephraim. Thus all of scattered Israel, except for the Jews, are referred to in the Book of Mormon as Gentiles.

The meaning of the term Gentile that is most applicable today is that of a Gentile being all those outside the house of Israel, that is, those not descended from Jacob and his twelve sons. By this definition Joseph Smith would not be a Gentile since he is descended from the house of Israel.

By any definition, the membership of the Church today consists of people of whose lineage is both Jew and Gentile. However, all people who accept the gospel, regardless of descent, are “adopted” into the house of Israel. Those who fail to accept the gospel, regardless of their lineage, lose any preferential status into which they may have been born. It is because of this principle of adoption that the custom has developed in the Church today of referring to members of the Church as “Israelites” and to all non-members as “Gentiles.”

“should make himself manifest by the Holy Ghost unto the Gentiles”

During Jesus’s mortal ministry, he delivered the gospel message preferentially in person to the twelve tribes of Israel and not to those outside the house of Israel. Some years after Christ’s death and resurrection, the apostle Peter was inspired to begin preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Thus the Gentiles did not hear his voice directly. Rather, they heard the word from his disciples and it was “manifest by the Holy Ghost” unto them. Following Christ’s resurrection he will teach the Book of Mormon people during a personal visit to them. He will teach that he intends to appear personally only to Israelites and not to the Gentiles. Thus he will “make himself manifest by the Holy Ghost unto the Gentiles,” but he will not manifest himself personally to them (see 3 Nephi 15:23 and its commentary).

12 Yea, even my father spake much concerning the Gentiles, and also concerning the house of Israel, that they should be compared like unto an olive-tree, whose branches should be broken off and should be scattered upon all the face of the earth.

verse 12 “they should be compared like unto an olive-tree” It is difficult to know when the practice of comparing the house of Israel metaphorically to an olive tree began. Genesis 49:22 (“Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall”) suggests that Moses may even have suggested the comparison. The Old Testament prophet Zenos, whose writings are contained on the plates of brass but not in the Bible, certainly used this comparison extensively. See Jacob’s quotations of Zenos’s prophecies in Jacob 5. It is likely that father Lehi was familiar with Zenos’s allegory of the olive tree as he had studied the brass plates. Both Isaiah (Isaiah 5) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 12:10) compared the house of Israel to the

Lord's vineyard. At any rate, the idea of comparing the house of Israel with an olive tree does not seem to have originated with the prophet Lehi.

“whose branches should be broken off” This expression refers to the scattering of Israel.

The word branch (or branches) is used with four different meanings in the Book of Mormon:

1. It may be used, as it is here in this verse, to refer to groups of people, most often to Israelites who are scattered or separated from their Israelite kinsmen. With this meaning, the branch is part of the metaphor of the olive tree. These scattered branches will be gathered and grafted back into the olive tree in the latter days (see verse 14 and 1 Nephi 15:12-16). For other instances in which the word branch is used with this meaning, see 1 Nephi 19:24, 2 Nephi 3:5, Alma 26:36, and Jacob 5.

2. A branch may be a cutting with negative or undesirable characteristics. Isaiah referred to the time when the king of Babylon would be “cast out of [his] grave like an abominable branch” (2 Nephi 24:19).

3. Branch may be used as a title for Christ. The Savior is a branch or descendant of the house of Israel through the Davidic line (2 Nephi 21:5; cf. Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-17).

4. Branch may refer to posterity. Malachi warned that the wicked, at the Lord's second coming, would be left with “neither root nor branch” (3 Nephi 25:1).

13 Wherefore, he said it must needs be that we should be led with one accord into the land of promise, unto the fulfilling of the word of the Lord, that we should be scattered upon all the face of the earth.

verse 13 The departure of Lehi and his family from Jerusalem and their sojourn to the land of promise was a significant part of the scattering of Israel. Most of those Israelites scattered at the same time, however, were taken captive in Babylon. Generally, when a lineage rejects Christ and his gospel, they are in danger of being “scattered” or dispersed into the world. Here, we see another purpose of scattering. It is for the preservation of a lineage.

14 And after the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again; or, in fine, after the Gentiles had received the fulness of the Gospel, the natural branches of the olive-tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer.

verse 14 The expression “in fine” means in conclusion or in summary.

“in fine, after the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again” This refers to the latter-day gathering of Israel in this present dispensation.

“after the Gentiles had received the fulness of the Gospel” During the time of Christ’s mortal ministry, the gospel went first to the house of Israel and then to the Gentiles. In this final dispensation, that order is reversed. The gospel will be received first by a “Gentile nation” who will then take the gospel to the world and begin to gather or “graft in” the house of Israel.

There are a few references in the Book of Mormon—direct or indirect—to this Gentile nation which is thought to be the United States of America (see, for example 1 Nephi 13:15, 30; 22:7; Ether 2:12). In the Church, we have come to refer to this nation as the “great Gentile nation,” a phrase probably initially coined by Elder B. H. Roberts (see *Conference Report*, October 1922, 14-21) but later used by Presidents Spencer W. Kimball (*Conference Report*, October 1959, 57-62) and Ezra Taft Benson (October 1961, 69-75). The specific phrase “great Gentile nation” is not found in the Book of Mormon or in any scripture. The most direct reference in the Book of Mormon to this nation is found in 1 Nephi 22:7 where it is referred to as “a mighty nation among the Gentiles.” It should be noted that those citizens of the great Gentile nation who receive the gospel are most often of the blood of Israel (see more discussion on this topic in the commentary for 1 Nephi 15:13).

The “natural branches of the olive tree” are those individuals who belong to the house of Israel by blood descent. These will be taught the gospel by the “Gentile” missionaries. Again, the Gentile missionaries are usually Israel by blood descent. They are “Gentiles” only in that they live in the great Gentile nation and are not Jews.

15 And after this manner of language did my father prophesy and speak unto my brethren, and also many more things which I do not write in this book; for I have written as many of them as were expedient for me in mine other book.

verse 15 “this book” This is, of course, Nephi’s reference to the small plates of Nephi. “Mine other book” is the large plates of Nephi.

One of the definitions of *expedient* in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language is, “Useful; profitable.”

16 And all these things, of which I have spoken, were done as my father dwelt in a tent, in the valley of Lemuel.

17 And it came to pass after I, Nephi, having heard all the words of my father, concerning the things which he saw in a vision, and also the things which he spake by the power of the Holy Ghost, which power he received by faith on the Son of God—and the Son of God was the Messiah who should come—I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well in times of old as in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men.

verse 17 “by the power of the Holy Ghost, which power he received by faith on the Son of God” Obedience to the commandments of the Lord has profound effects on the obedient individual, including a closer connection to the Spirit of God and a gradually increasing testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. The expression “faith on the Son of God” is synonymous with obedience to the commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“as well in times of old” It is false doctrine that the Holy Ghost was manifest for the first time following the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact, such manifestations have been known from the very beginning of man. Even the gift of the Holy Ghost has been bestowed whenever there has been a legal Melchizedek priesthood administrator of the kingdom of God on earth (Moses 5:58). For a discussion of this issue see “Is having one’s calling and election made sure the same as receiving the Second Comforter?” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*.

18 For he is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and the way is prepared for all men from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him.

verse 18 The concept explained in this verse is a rich and vital one. We are governed by God’s law. That law is absolute, completely reliable, unvarying, and its consequences are inescapable. For every action there is an identical result. These results follow without respect to person. It has always been thus, in Adam’s day just as in ours and in the eternities to come. Thus, “the course of the Lord is one eternal round” (see the following verse).

“from the foundation of the world” The period here referred to as the “foundation of the world” is that period in the premortal existence when preparations were made for the great mortal experience of the family of Adam and the plan of redemption by which members of that family might eventually return to their celestial home. This expression will be used on several occasions in the Book of Mormon (see 2 Nephi 9:18; Mosiah 15:19 18:13; Alma 12:25, 30; 13:3, 5; 18:39; 22:13; 42:26; Helaman 5:47; Ether 3:14). The term *foundation* will also be used as a direct reference to Jesus Christ. Jacob and Helaman will teach that as the “stone” or “rock” upon which faith must be built, Christ is the “only sure foundation” of everyone’s hope for redemption, even for the Jews, though they would reject him during his mortal ministry (Jacob 4:15-17; Helaman 5:12).

19 For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round.

verse 19 “mysteries of God” For a discussion of the concept of the “mysteries of God” see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1. He who has faith in Christ and seeks to know the things of God will be granted that privilege by the power of the Holy Ghost. This promise holds true in all ages because “the course of the Lord is one eternal round” (see the commentary for verse 18).

20 Therefore remember, O man, for all thy doings thou shalt be brought into judgment.

verse 20 As explained in the commentary for verse 18 above, the eternal law which binds and governs us is absolute. Our actions or “doings” in mortality will determine our course for eternity.

21 Wherefore, if ye have sought to do wickedly in the days of your probation, then ye are found unclean before the judgment-seat of God; and no unclean thing can dwell with God; wherefore, ye must be cast off forever.

verse 21 “no unclean thing can dwell with God” For added insight into this phrase, see the discussion on concept of justification in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

It should be noted that this verse states two seemingly incompatible inevitabilities. First, “no unclean thing can dwell with God,” and second, that the unclean will be brought before God at his judgment seat. Actually the unclean cannot dwell with God in that they cannot live in his presence permanently, but all, even the unclean, will be admitted into his presence temporarily to be judged of him (see also 2 Nephi 9:38).

“ye must be cast off forever” To be “cast off” means to suffer spiritual death or to be cast out of the Lord’s presence.

Generally, the Book of Mormon does not teach the complete doctrine of our post-mortal lives. There is no mention of the three degrees of glory in the Book of Mormon. Rather, it teaches only the extremes: accept and live the gospel in this life, and receive eternal life in God’s presence, or reject the gospel and be cast out to live with Satan and his angels. There is no mention of spirit prison or the opportunity to repent after mortality. For a discussion of this problem, see “Post-Mortal Life and the Book of Mormon” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13, *The Spirit World*.

22 And the Holy Ghost giveth authority that I should speak these things, and deny them not.

verse 22 One of the roles of the Holy Ghost is to be the witness or testator. He witnesses to man through personal revelation the validity and importance of eternal truths. When a man speaks these truths with the assistance and influence of the Holy Ghost, he has the authority and power from God to do so.

1 Nephi Chapter 11

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 11-15 Nephi's vision of the tree of life and the future of the world.

1 Nephi 11:16-17 Knowest thou the condescension of God?

At this point, please review the commentary on the Vision of the Tree of Life in 1 Nephi chapter 8. Sometime after recording his father's vision of the tree of life, Nephi desired to witness for himself the things his father had seen. In response to his desire, we will read in 1 Nephi 11:1 that he was "caught away" to "an exceedingly high mountain," where he was shown an impressive vision (1Nephi 11-15). Nephi saw what had been revealed to his father, and he was also shown the interpretation of several of the major symbols of the vision, which he later recorded.

Nephi's vision consisted of much more than the scene of the tree of life and the efforts of some to obtain its fruits. It contained also an expanded prophecy of the future, the coming of Christ and his atoning mission, the future of Lehi's descendants, the restoration of the gospel in the last days, and the ongoing struggle between the forces of righteousness and evil.

1 For it came to pass after I had desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat pondering in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain, which I never had before seen, and upon which I never had before set my foot.

verse 1 "as I sat pondering in mine heart" Which of us has not had our lives enriched by the thoughts and inspiration we have received as we have sat pondering in our hearts? As we study the scriptures, it is vital that we take time to meditate and ponder the things of the Spirit. These moments of not being distracted by other things seem to provide an opportunity for the Spirit of God to contact us. Consider an example from the life of President Joseph F. Smith: "On the third of October, in the year nineteen hundred and eighteen, I sat in my room pondering over the scriptures; And reflecting upon the great atoning sacrifice that was made by the Son of God. . . . *As I pondered over these things which are written, the eyes of my understanding were opened* (D&C 138:1-2, 11, italics added)." President Smith then had a great vision of the spirit world and the Savior's visit there which is available to us today in D&C 138.

"I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain" Was Nephi's being "caught away" into (or onto) a mountain a literal or a figurative phenomenon? It may well have been literal. Certainly the Spirit of the Lord has that capability. Prophets before Nephi had gone to high mountains to communicate

with the heavens—Moses (Exodus 24:12-13; Deuteronomy 10:1) and the brother of Jared (Ether 3:1), for example.

2 And the Spirit said unto me: Behold, what desirest thou?

verse 2 Nephi's vision was conducted by "the Spirit." For conjecture as to the identity of this individual, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:11.

3 And I said: I desire to behold the things which my father saw.

4 And the Spirit said unto me: Believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken?

verse 4 Doesn't this question seem a little peculiar? Why did the Spirit ask him specifically about the tree? Why did he not ask about other items in Lehi's vision such as the building or the river or the rod of iron? The answer is simple. Nephi was not being asked here whether or not he believed his father had had a vision. He was being questioned regarding his faith in Jesus Christ. The tree is a symbol or "type" of Christ. This explains the Spirit's response in verse 6.

5 And I said: Yea, thou knowest that I believe all the words of my father.

6 And when I had spoken these words, the Spirit cried with a loud voice, saying: Hosanna to the Lord, the most high God; for he is God over all the earth, yea, even above all. And blessed art thou, Nephi, because thou believest in the Son of the most high God; wherefore, thou shalt behold the things which thou hast desired.

verse 6 The Spirit rejoices over Nephi's faith in Christ, not simply over the fact that Nephi believed that Lehi had seen a tree.

The word "Hosanna" is usually translated "save us, we beseech thee" and its use is usually associated with the hope and expectation of the coming of Christ.

7 And behold this thing shall be given unto thee for a sign, that after thou hast beheld the tree which bore the fruit which thy father tasted, thou shalt also behold a man descending out of heaven, and him shall ye witness; and after ye have witnessed him ye shall bear record that it is the Son of God.

verse 7 The Spirit here begins to explain that the tree is a symbol or sign or "type" of Jesus Christ. The reference here is to the eventual appearance of Jesus Christ to the Book of Mormon people (see 1 Nephi 12:6).

8 And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me: Look! And I looked and beheld a tree; and it was like unto the tree which my father had seen; and the beauty thereof was far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty; and the whiteness thereof did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow.

verse 8 Knowing the typology of the tree, it is now easy to understand Nephi's description of it. "Whiteness," of course, is symbolic of purity.

9 And it came to pass after I had seen the tree, I said unto the Spirit: I behold thou hast shown unto me the tree which is precious above all.

10 And he said unto me: What desirest thou?

11 And I said unto him: To know the interpretation thereof—for I spake unto him as a man speaketh; for I beheld that he was in the form of a man; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another.

verse 11 "To know the interpretation thereof" Nephi wishes to know the meaning of the tree that his father had seen and that he himself now sees. We might expect "the Spirit" to answer Nephi's question directly, but, as you will see, "the Spirit's" response will be quite surprising. Even though Nephi asks for the interpretation of the symbol of the tree, we will learn that the angel guide will not mention the tree at all. Rather, he will show Nephi a vision of Mary and the Christ child.

"the Spirit of the Lord" This phrase is used over forty times in the Book of Mormon. In most every case it refers to the Holy Ghost. But, what about here? Who is it that is speaking with Nephi here? Couldn't this expression also be used to refer to Jesus Christ? After all, in 600 BC Jesus had no mortal body, rather he existed as a spirit. If Jesus had visited Nephi, he would have had to visit Nephi in a body of spirit. Hence, this expression could refer to a visit from Jesus Christ himself. On a few occasions, Nephi said, in effect, "I have seen my Redeemer" (e.g., 2 Nephi 11:2). Was he referring to an actual visit from the Savior? Might Nephi's angel guide have been the Holy Ghost himself?

Which is it then? Does the phrase "the Spirit of the Lord" here refer to Jesus Christ or to the Holy Ghost? What have we been taught by authority? Actually both meanings have been espoused by general authorities of the Church in the past. The fact is that we do not know the truth of this. If it is the Holy Ghost, then this is the only instance in scripture when the Holy Ghost has been seen by man.

Some feel that the Holy Ghost was seen in the form of a dove at the time of Jesus's baptism. This is apparently not correct (see the commentary for verse 27).

12 And it came to pass that he said unto me: Look! And I looked as if to look upon him, and I saw him not; for he had gone from before my presence.

13 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the great city of Jerusalem, and also other cities. And I beheld the city of Nazareth; and in the city of Nazareth I beheld a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white.

verse 13 "a virgin . . . exceedingly fair and white" Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *fair* as, "Pleasing to the eye; handsome or

beautiful.” A comment on Mary by Elder Bruce R. McConkie is interesting to ponder: “Can we speak too highly of her whom the Lord has blessed above all women? There was only one Christ, and there is only one Mary. Each was noble and great in the pre-existence, and each was foreordained to the ministry he or she performed. We cannot but think that the Father would choose the greatest female spirit to be the mother of his Son, even as he chose the male spirit like unto him to be the Savior” (*The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 1:326-27, note 4).

14 And it came to pass that I saw the heavens open; and an angel came down and stood before me; and he said unto me: Nephi, what beholdest thou?

verse 14 Apparently there is a change in Nephi’s guide at this point. An angel whose identity is not given or even hinted at now appears to conduct Nephi through the rest of his vision experience.

15 And I said unto him: A virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins.

16 And he said unto me: Knowest thou the condescension of God?

verse 16 We should not pass by this verse without asking ourselves this same important question. Do we have a true appreciation for the sacred concept of the “condescension of God”? To “condescend” means to descend from the privileges of higher rank or dignity to a lower level when it is not required to do so, and particularly for the benefit of someone else. Hence, condescension, in this context, is a manifestation of love.

The concept of the “condescension of God” has two general applications—the condescension of the Father and the condescension of the Son. Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: “The condescension of God (meaning the Father) consists in the fact that though he is an exalted, perfected, glorified personage, he became the personal and literal father of a mortal offspring born of mortal woman” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd edition, 155). The Father was willing to condescend in this way because of his love for us, so that we can obtain eternal life.

The condescension of the Son refers to the fact that Jesus, the God of this earth, voluntarily and knowingly came to this earth to submit himself to unparalleled indignity and suffering.

A superficial reading of the Gospels would lead one to think that Jesus was very popular during his ministry, but what of this popularity? Were his disciples solidly dedicated and ready to stick by him and follow him even in hard times? It is true that the crowd was intrigued by his miracles and doubtless wondered if he could be the Messiah. Maybe they even hoped that he might be. But a certain fickleness invariably betrayed itself. For example, after being miraculously fed near Capernaum, many of the same disciples again grew hungry and sought out Jesus for more food. Jesus then preached to them a plain sermon in which he chastised them for worrying so much

about their stomachs and taught them that they should look instead to *him* as the “bread of life.” He refused to feed them, and many of the disappointed “disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” Jesus sadly turned to his apostles and asked, “Will ye also go away?” (John 6:66-69). During his short ministry, Jesus was to be roundly rejected by most everyone, save a few intimate family and friends. At the very outset of his ministry he was rejected by those of his home town, Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30), but that was only the beginning. He was later to be rejected, not only by the Jewish crowd in general, but even by some in his own family (John 7:5), some of the disciples of John the Baptist (Mark 2:18), and even some of his own apostles (John 16:31-32). The Jewish hierarchy, of course, not only rejected him, but even sought to kill him on more than one occasion (John 7:1; 10:39; 11:47-53).

How did Jesus perceive this almost universal rejection? Was he affected and upset by it? Was he emotionally involved? We tend to objectify his experience: Was He not, after all, God of the earth? Had He not a godly perspective? He knew in advance what the outcome of his ministry would be. It must have been no surprise to Him. He had the big picture. He did not depend on man for his happiness. He wasn't likely as emotionally torn as, for example, a rejected missionary, who lacks his perspective, might be today. Or, was he? We tend to overlook the fact that in a profound sense, Jesus was human. He experienced the extremes of joy and sorrow in a sensitive and empathetic way that likely exceeded that of which we are capable (John 11:33-35). During his final week on earth, he paused as he approached Jerusalem, considered its rejection of him, and wept over the city (Luke 19:41-44). Consider what emotion he might have experienced at his last supper. Here was his final meeting with his apostles on the night before his crucifixion. He had taught them of his coming death. They were his most intimate and valued friends. It was only they, among mortals, to whom he could look for solace in this hour of his extremity. He might well have anticipated receiving sympathy and understanding and comfort from them. What did he instead encounter? As he entered the room, some of them were arguing as to which of them would be the greatest in the earthly kingdom of God once it was established! They were completely ignorant of the gravity of the situation and the plight of their Master. They were like children bickering among themselves, oblivious to the problem at hand.

Jesus would later prophesy on the same occasion that all of his disciples would flee from him that very night (Matthew 26:31). He realized that he was obviously going to have to go through his ordeal alone, save for the companionship of the Spirit.

Then consider also the ultimate and final rejection. As Christ hung on the cross, he heard the taunts of those watching: “Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matthew 27:40). “He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God” (Luke 23:35). As he looked down, he saw only one apostle, his mother, and a few

women disciples. Here was the God of the earth, the Son of the very Father. He had come to earth to offer, to any who would believe, everything that he and his Father possessed. Yet most all had deserted him. Then finally the cruelest stroke of all—difficult even to imagine and especially difficult to recount. By the eternal, yet awful, plan of justice and law, it was required that even the protective Spirit of the Father be withdrawn from him. In this extreme moment, the only comfort that remained to him was torn away, leaving him in hell, bereft of any support. “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34.) Jesus would later recall this experience as he tried to comfort Joseph Smith and others held captive in Liberty jail, “And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?” (D&C 122:7-8.)

To each reader of this commentary, I would ask: Knowest *thou* the condescension of God?

17 And I said unto him: I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things.

verses 18-21 In the following four verses, the messenger shows Nephi the condescension of God, rather than simply telling him about it.

18 And he said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh.

verse 18 It is interesting to note that when this verse was first recorded in the first edition of the Book of Mormon, it read: “And he said unto me, behold the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of God after the manner of the flesh.” Our present edition of the Book of Mormon renders it “mother of the Son of God.” Joseph Smith himself made this change in 1837, seven years after the Book of Mormon was first published. Why the change? Obviously the present rendering clarifies the meaning of the verse.

Did Joseph have a full comprehension of the nature of the godhead when he translated the Book of Mormon in 1829, or was he still learning? Were the explicit differences between the Father and the Son perfectly clear in his mind at that time, or not? These questions have been offensive and felt to have a negative connotation by some in the Church. They would answer, “Of course Joseph understood clearly the

nature of the godhood. This was made clear to him even as early as the first vision experience in the sacred grove in 1820.” Others are not offended by the questions and feel that Joseph did not learn all of the answers at first. They feel that Joseph was tutored throughout his ministry and was always learning. He was not, for example, completely schooled in all aspects of the gospel as he translated the Book of Mormon. He would continue to receive additional revelations and insights throughout his life time, and he would continue to learn even to the time of his death. “After all,” they would contend, “Joseph did not give us the explicit revelation on the nature of the godhead until April of 1843” (D&C 130:22-23). At any rate, these questions have resulted in lively discussions.

“after the manner of the flesh” *Flesh* is a word used with three principle meanings in the Book of Mormon:

1. the physical mortal body (2 Nephi 9:7-8; Mosiah 7:27);
2. mankind in mortality (1 Nephi 10:6; 2 Nephi 2:21; Jacob 2:21); and
3. tendencies and temptations associated with the physical, fallen body and man’s so-called *natural* tendencies (1 Nephi 2:22-23; 2 Nephi 2:28-29; 10:24).

Verse 21 below will inform us that the Son of God is the Son of the Eternal Father. Here in verse 18 we learn that Jesus was conceived “after the manner of the flesh.” These verses contain more literal information about the relationship of God the Father and the mortal Jesus Christ than all of the Old and New Testament scriptures combined. Of course, our knowledge of the physical conception in Mary’s womb of the Christ is incomplete. We do know that as Mary conceived the Christ child, the Holy Ghost was in some way involved (see Alma 7:10).

President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which he performed his mission in the flesh was sired by that same holy being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was he begotten by the Holy Ghost. He is the son of the Eternal Father!” (*Come Unto Christ*, 4).

19 And it came to pass that I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look!

verse 19 “she was carried away in the Spirit” Mary was apparently transported to the presence of God where she would conceive a child.

20 And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms.

21 And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?

verse 21 Here the angel dramatically concludes his teaching of Nephi about the deeper significance of the tree. While Nephi is looking at Mary and the Christ child, the angel asks in effect, “Now, Nephi, do you finally understand the significance of the tree which your father saw?”

Again Joseph altered this verse after the publication of the 1830 edition. In that original edition the verse read: “Behold the Lamb of God, yea, the Eternal Father” (see the commentary for verse 18 above).

22 And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things.

verse 22 The term “**sheddeth itself abroad**” means “is extended to all men.”

Nephi has come to realize the meaning of the tree of life. And what exactly is that meaning? Many have felt that in looking at the vision of the virgin mother and her child, Nephi concentrated mainly on the child and came to realize that the tree is actually a symbol or “type” of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the very personification of the “love of God” or the “love of the Father.” He is a manifestation, indeed the greatest manifestation, of the Father’s love for us. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16-17). Additionally, Jesus’s laying down his life for us is the ultimate manifestation of his love for us, the consummate evidence of his charity.

Other Book of Mormon scholars have come to a different conclusion as to what meaning Nephi saw in the tree of life. They feel that somehow the meaning of the tree lies in the image that Nephi saw of both mother Mary and her child. They have concluded that Nephi may have concentrated mostly on the virgin Mary, and that in some ways the virgin Mary is an integral part of the meaning of the tree. Even the language used to describe her echoes the vocabulary previously used for the tree. Just as she was “exceedingly fair and white,” “most beautiful and fair above all other virgins,” so was the tree’s beauty “far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty; and the whiteness thereof did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow.” Significantly, though, it is only when she appears with a baby and is identified as “the mother of the Son of God” that Nephi grasps the tree’s meaning.

Why would Nephi, whether consciously or unconsciously, see a connection between a tree and the image of a virginal mother and her divine child? The ancient Near Eastern religious world is very foreign to us, as it was to Joseph Smith. Nephi’s vision appears to reflect a meaning of the “sacred tree” that is unique to the ancient Near East, and that, indeed, can only be fully appreciated when the ancient Canaanite and Israelite associations of that tree are borne in mind. For a much more complete presentation of the analysis and evidence on this subject, see Daniel C. Peterson’s, “Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8-23,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient Word: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah:

FARMS, 1998), 191-243. A greatly condensed version of the same article is Daniel C. Peterson's, "Nephi and His Asherah," in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 15-25, 80-81.

A feminine divine being, generally called by some form of the name *Asherah*, seems to have been known and worshipped not only among the Canaanites but among the Israelites. Her veneration can be documented over a period extending from the conquest of Canaan in the second millennium before Christ to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, the time of Lehi's departure with his family from the Old World. Belief in Asherah seems, in fact, to have been a conservative position in ancient Israel. It was a later criticism of her that appears to have been a religious innovation. In fact, an image or symbol of Asherah stood in Solomon's temple at Jerusalem for nearly two-thirds of its existence, until the reforms of King Josiah (who reigned from roughly 639 to 609 BC). This means that her presence in the temple extended into the lifetime of Lehi and perhaps even into the lifetime of Lehi's son Nephi. Since that time, though, she has been fiercely suppressed. In the text of the Bible as we now read it, although hints of the goddess remain, little survives that would enable us to form an accurate or detailed understanding of her character or nature. Greater understanding has only begun to come through relatively recent archaeological discoveries, including but not limited to the immensely important Canaanite texts from ancient Ugarit, in Syria.

What was the symbol of Asherah that stood in the temple at Jerusalem? Asherah was associated with trees. The tenth-century cultic stand from Ta'anach, near Megiddo, for instance, features two representations of Asherah, first in human form and then as a sacred tree. She is the tree. Israelite goddess figurines that represent her typically feature upper bodies that are unmistakably anthropomorphic and female while their lower bodies are simple columns, very possibly representing tree trunks. Asherah "is a tree goddess, and as such is associated with the oak, the tamarisk, the date palm, the sycamore, and many other species. This association led to her identification with sacred trees or the tree of life" (Steve A. Wiggins, "The Myth of Asherah: Lion Lady and Serpent Goddess," *Ugarit-Forschungen: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Altertumskunde Syrien-Palastinas* 23 [1991]: 383). The rabbinic authors of the Jewish Mishna (second-third century AD) explain the Asherah as a tree that was worshipped (see John Day, "Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105/3 [1986], 397-98, 401-04).

She seems to have been represented by a carved, wooden image, perhaps some kind of pole. Very probably it symbolized a tree, and it may itself have been a stylized tree. It was not uncommon in the ancient Near East for a god or goddess to be essentially equated with his or her symbol, and Asherah seems to have been no exception: Asherah was both goddess and cult symbol. She was the "tree."

The menorah, the seven-branched candelabra that stood for centuries in the temple of Jerusalem, supplies an interesting parallel to all of this: Leon Yarden

maintains that the menorah represents a stylized almond tree. He points to the notably radiant whiteness of the almond tree at certain points in its life cycle. Yarden also argues that the archaic Greek name of the almond (*amygdale*, reflected in its contemporary botanical designation as *Amygdalis communis*), almost certainly not a natively Greek word, is most likely derived from the Hebrew *em gedullah*, meaning “Great Mother” (*The Tree of Light: A Study of the Menorah, the Seven-Branched Lampstand* [Uppsala, Sweden: Skriv Service AB, 1972], 44-47, 103-6).

Among the Hebrews, Asherah seems to have been known as a divine maternal *dea nutrix*, a nourishing or nurturing and loving goddess. Paradoxically, though, it appears that she may also have been considered a virgin. The Punic western goddess Tanit, whom Saul Olyan has identified with Israelite-Canaanite Asherah, the consort of the chief god El, the mother and wet nurse to the gods, was depicted as a virgin and symbolized by a tree (*Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988], 56-61, 65-67).

Although Asherah remains imperfectly understood, and although we cannot be certain of all the details, it should be apparent by now why Nephi, an Israelite living at the end of the seventh and the beginning of the sixth century before Christ, might have recognized an answer to his question about a marvelous tree in the otherwise unexplained image of a virginal mother and her divine child. His perception seems to derive from precisely the pre-exilic Palestinian culture into which, the Book of Mormon tells us, Nephi had been born. This is obviously a culture very foreign to ours, and to that of Joseph Smith.

23 And he spake unto me, saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul.

24 And after he had said these words, he said unto me: Look! And I looked, and I beheld the Son of God going forth among the children of men; and I saw many fall down at his feet and worship him.

25 And it came to pass that I beheld that the rod of iron, which my father had seen, was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; which waters are a representation of the love of God; and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God.

verse 25 Here we learn that the “fountain of living waters” is another type or symbol of Christ, just as is the “tree of life.” Metaphorically, the fountain is the source of all righteousness, Jesus Christ. This symbolism is found in Old and New Testament scriptures. For example, see Jeremiah 2:13; John 4:14; and Revelation 22:1-2. The fountain of living waters is not mentioned in Lehi’s vision of the tree of life in 1 Nephi 8. In contrast, in *Lehi’s* vision, the “fountain” (1 Nephi 8:20; 8:32) likely refers to the river of filthy water and not to the “fountain of living waters” (see 1 Nephi 12:16).

verses 26-33 The condescension of God, referred to in these verses, is a sacred and profound concept which we should know and hold dear. It is discussed above in the commentary for verse 16.

26 And the angel said unto me again: Look and behold the condescension of God!

verse 26 It is apparent that this verse has reference to Jesus Christ, whereas verse 16 apparently had reference to both the Father and the Son.

27 And I looked and beheld the Redeemer of the world, of whom my father had spoken; and I also beheld the prophet who should prepare the way before him. And the Lamb of God went forth and was baptized of him; and after he was baptized, I beheld the heavens open, and the Holy Ghost come down out of heaven and abide upon him in the form of a dove.

verses 26-27 “form of a dove” What exactly is meant when it is said that the Holy Ghost descended in the form of a dove? Did the spirit body of the Holy Ghost confine itself to a dove or even the form of a dove? Joseph Smith taught, that as the Holy Ghost descended, probably unseen by any eye, a dove was caused to descend upon Jesus as a heavenly sign that the Holy Ghost was present. Joseph taught: “The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in association with the sign of a dove. The Holy Ghost is a personage, and is in the form of a personage. It does not confine itself to the form of the dove, but his presence may be accompanied by the sign of the dove. The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a dove; but the sign of a dove was given to John to signify the truth of the deed, as the dove is an emblem or token of truth and innocence” (*HC*, 5:261).

28 And I beheld that he went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory; and the multitudes were gathered together to hear him; and I beheld that they cast him out from among them.

29 And I also beheld twelve others following him. And it came to pass that they were carried away in the Spirit from before my face, and I saw them not.

verse 29 The “**twelve others following him**” refers to the twelve apostles called in Palestine and headed by Peter, James, and John.

As soon as Nephi viewed them, the scene changed again.

30 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me again, saying: Look! And I looked, and I beheld the heavens open again, and I saw angels descending upon the children of men; and they did minister unto them.

verse 30 “angels descending upon the children of men” This phrase apparently has reference to the principle of “ministry or ministering of angels” which is discussed by Mormon in Moroni 7:27-38. Essentially, the concept is that if the kingdom of God is on the earth and the people exercise sufficient faith, then angels will minister unto them. Bruce R. McConkie taught: “So unvarying is this principle that it stands forth as the conclusive test of the divinity of any organization on earth. If angels minister to a people, they are the Lord’s people, and his kingdom is with them. If angels do not minister unto them, they are not the Lord’s people, and his kingdom is not with them” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 503).

31 And he spake unto me again, saying: Look! And I looked, and I beheld the Lamb of God going forth among the children of men. And I beheld multitudes of people who were sick, and who were afflicted with all manner of diseases, and with devils and unclean spirits; and the angel spake and showed all these things unto me. And they were healed by the power of the Lamb of God; and the devils and the unclean spirits were cast out.

32 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me again, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record.

verse 32 Here is another verse that Joseph changed from its original form in the first edition of the Book of Mormon. It was originally printed: “And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me again saying, Look. And I looked, and I beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people. Yea, the everlasting God was judged of the world. And I saw and bear record.” Our current edition says “the Son of the everlasting God.” Joseph was continually learning more about the nature of the godhead. He saw a way to make this verse more clear.

33 And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world.

verse 33 If Nephi saw this event in vision almost six hundred years before the birth of Christ, then it is obvious that Jesus had a foreknowledge of it during his mortal ministry. He was obviously fully aware of his eventual fate. He knew that he would die on a cross!

34 And after he was slain I saw the multitudes of the earth, that they were gathered together to fight against the apostles of the Lamb; for thus were the twelve called by the angel of the Lord.

verse 34 Nephi saw the time following the crucifixion of Jesus, when the saints, and particularly their leaders, were persecuted and martyred.

35 And the multitude of the earth was gathered together; and I beheld that they were in a large and spacious building, like unto the building which my father saw. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: Behold the world and the wisdom thereof; yea, behold the house of Israel hath gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

verse 35 “the multitude of the earth” These people are representative of those who espouse the wisdom of the world or materialism, as opposed to those who are inclined to respond to the Spirit of the Lord. The continuous and age-old struggle between these two orientations and the people who espouse them is the large part of the story of this mortal phase of our existence.

“the house of Israel hath gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb” Among the worldly wise, vain, and proud will be found some who are of the blood of Israel.

36 And it came to pass that I saw and bear record, that the great and spacious building was the pride of the world; and it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

verse 36 This symbolic fall is a foreshadowing of the destruction of all peoples that fight against the twelve apostles and the gospel just prior to the Millennium at the Lord's second coming.

The sin of pride will be often mentioned in the Book of Mormon. For a discussion of this vastly important sin, see the discussion of “Pride” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The Natural Self and the Spiritual Self*.

1 Nephi Chapter 12

verses 1-3 In these verses Nephi is given a preview of the hostile relationship that will exist among the different factions of the people, particularly the Nephites and Lamanites. It is difficult to be certain about what specific time period is being seen here in vision. Presumably Nephi is seeing Book of Mormon peoples during the time period covered by the Book of Mormon.

1 And it came to pass that the angel said unto me: Look, and behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren. And I looked and beheld the land of promise; and I beheld multitudes of people, yea, even as it were in number as many as the sand of the sea.

verse 1 “as many as the sand of the sea” This is an interesting, obviously hyperbolic, expression denoting many. As with all expressions of hyperbole it is not meant to be taken literally. There are numerous references in which similar expressions are found (Genesis 22:17; 32:12; Joshua 11:4; Judges 7:12; 1 Samuel 13:5; 2 Samuel 17:11; and 1 Kings 4:20). The expressions “sand,” “sands,” and “sands of the sea” are also found when the intended meaning is great *weight* (Job 6:3; Proverbs 27:3) or great size (1 Kings 4:29).

2 And it came to pass that I beheld multitudes gathered together to battle, one against the other; and I beheld wars, and rumors of wars, and great slaughters with the sword among my people.

3 And it came to pass that I beheld many generations pass away, after the manner of wars and contentions in the land; and I beheld many cities, yea, even that I did not number them.

verse 3 “I beheld many generations pass away” The terms *generation* or *generations* are common in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. In the Bible they are translations of the Hebrew root *dor*, meaning “circle,” or “assembly,” as in a “circle of contemporary people.” These terms then refer to a group of people living during the same period of time and, by extension, the period of time itself. These terms are used in a few different senses in the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon:

1. The period between the birth of parents and the birth of their children. Adult contemporaries of the parents are considered part of the parents’ generation; their children belong to the next generation. The phrase “from generation to generation” (2 Nephi 8:8; 25:16; Moroni 10:28) simply means “from parents to children.” The phrase “unto the third and fourth generation” (Mosiah 13:13) indicates that the actions of parents can have a serious effect on their descendants.

2. The period of time during which all of a group of contemporaries live and die. This seems to be the sense of the term in 4 Nephi 1:14, 18-22, where most of the first generation after Christ had died by the year AD 110, and most of the second had died by AD 200. Book of Mormon prophets and the Savior prophesied that the fourth generation from the coming of the Christ (that is, within four hundred years) would turn from righteousness and would be destroyed (1 Nephi 12:11-12; 2 Nephi 26:9; Alma 45:10-12; Helaman 13:5-10; 3 Nephi 27:32).

3. A designation or characterization of a specific group of people at a given time, such as “blessed are this people in this generation” (Alma 27:12), a “wicked and perverse generation” (Alma 9:8; 10:17, 25; Helaman 13:29), and “unto future generations” (Alma 24:14; 37:18-19; 3 Nephi 26:2).

4 And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many cities that they were sunk; and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof.

verse 4 In this verse Nephi is shown the great destruction that occurred on the western hemisphere at the time of the Savior’s crucifixion. This destruction is a foreshadowing or type of the destruction that will be wrought upon the wicked at the time of Jesus’s second coming.

5 And it came to pass after I saw these things, I saw the vapor of darkness, that it passed from off the face of the earth; and behold, I saw multitudes who had not fallen because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord.

6 And I saw the heavens open, and the Lamb of God descending out of heaven; and he came down and showed himself unto them.

verses 5-6 Here, of course, Nephi sees Jesus’s visit to the western hemisphere after his crucifixion and resurrection. He appears to those who survived the great destructive phenomena which occurred at his crucifixion. Presumably these were generally the more righteous among the inhabitants of Book of Mormon lands in that day.

7 And I also saw and bear record that the Holy Ghost fell upon twelve others; and they were ordained of God, and chosen.

verse 7 The “twelve others” are the twelve disciples or apostles chosen on the western hemisphere.

“they were ordained of God, and chosen” See the discussion of the interesting word *chosen* in the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

8 And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the twelve disciples of the Lamb, who are chosen to minister unto thy seed.

9 And he said unto me: Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb? Behold they are they who shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, the twelve ministers of thy seed shall be judged of them; for ye are of the house of Israel.

verse 9 “Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb?” The angel had just mentioned the twelve apostles in the two verses that precede this one.

The “twelve apostles of the Lamb” spoken of here in verse 9 are Christ’s twelve apostles in Jerusalem. The verse makes explicit the significance of these twelve. They will play an important role in the eternal scheme of things! The verse helps us to sense the true greatness of those twelve men. They shall judge all Israel (see also D&C 29:12; Matthew 19:28)! For further discussion of this concept, see the commentary for Mormon 3:18.

The “twelve disciples of the Lamb” in verse 8 and the “twelve ministers of thy seed” in verse 9 are the twelve Nephite disciples or apostles who will be called by Jesus in the western hemisphere. This verse teaches that they are presided over by the original twelve called in Palestine, yet they are apostles in the complete sense of the word (Moroni 2:2). In an analogous way, might we assume that the apostles in this final dispensation are presided over by the original twelve as well?

Brother Kevin L. Barney has discovered an interesting syntactic or writing device utilized by the authors of the Old Testament Hebrew which is called *enallage*, which is Greek for “interchange.” In this pattern of writing, the author intentionally shifts from singular to plural forms for rhetorical effect and emphasis. In this pattern a divine being or prophet directly addresses an individual using the singular, “thou.” He then makes a third-person reference to that individual’s posterity, “thy seed.” Finally, he directly addresses the individual and his posterity together in the second-person plural, “ye.” If the reader cares to take a moment, it is easy to identify that pattern in this particular verse (see also Genesis 17:9-10; 2 Nephi 1:31-32; 2 Nephi 3:1-2). For further discussion of this interesting form of Hebrew poetry, see the supplemental article, *Enallage in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon*.

10 And these twelve ministers whom thou beholdest shall judge thy seed. And, behold, they are righteous forever; for because of their faith in the Lamb of God their garments are made white in his blood.

verse 10 This verse refers to the twelve Nephite apostles. See 3 Nephi 27:27. They shall assist in judging the tribe of Joseph.

“their garments are made white in his blood” “They” and “their” in this verse seem to refer to the twelve Nephite disciples or apostles. The figurative phrase here—“their garments are made white in his blood”—refers to the principles of justification and sanctification. See the commentary for 3 Nephi 19:13-14. In other words, they are justified and sanctified through the influence of the atonement of Christ. For a more complete discussion of the principles of justification and sanctification see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

11 And the angel said unto me: Look! And I looked, and beheld three generations pass away in righteousness; and their garments were white even like unto the Lamb of God. And the angel said unto me: These are made white in the blood of the Lamb, because of their faith in him.

12 And I, Nephi, also saw many of the fourth generation who passed away in righteousness.

verses 11-12 Following Christ’s appearance in the western hemisphere there were several years of general righteousness among the people. This was the “golden age” of the Nephites which lasted until AD 200—“three generations.” During this idyllic period, men “did deal justly one with another” and “there were not rich and poor, bond and free” (4 Nephi 1:2-3). This period has been referred to as the Nephite “mini-millennium.”

13 And it came to pass that I saw the multitudes of the earth gathered together.

verse 13 “I saw the multitudes of the earth gathered together” Nephi is seeing different factions of Book of Mormon peoples gather together to do battle. The expression “multitudes of the earth” simply refers to the peoples of the Book of Mormon world. The Book of Mormon story took place in a limited geographical location and involved a specific population of people. It certainly did not involve all the peoples of the earth or even all the peoples of a hemisphere or continent.

14 And the angel said unto me: Behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren.

verse 14 Throughout the remainder of this chapter, Nephi’s “seed” are not his literal descendants but rather those descendants of the families of Lehi, Ishmael, and Zoram who chose to identify themselves, nominally at least, with Jesus Christ and his gospel during the years AD 200 to AD 421. Similarly the “seed of thy brethren” are not the literal descendants of Laman and Lemuel, but rather the descendants of those who rejected the gospel during the same period.

15 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the people of my seed gathered together in multitudes against the seed of my brethren; and they were gathered together to battle.

verses 16-18 In these verses, the scene suddenly changes, and Nephi's angel guide provides an interpretation of part of the vision of the tree of life experienced by both Nephi and his father Lehi.

16 And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the fountain of filthy water which thy father saw; yea, even the river of which he spake; and the depths thereof are the depths of hell.

verse 16 "hell" This is the first mention of the word "hell" in the Book of Mormon. It will be found fifty-eight more times in the Book of Mormon text. What is hell? In Mormonism, is hell a place or a state of mind? It certainly is both. Specific meanings of hell include: (1) the spirit prison. This is the most common meaning. (2) "outer darkness" or the eternal abode of Satan and his adherents. (3) Infrequently, the term may be used to refer to the telestial kingdom. (4) Also hell is the state of mind—the pain caused by sin—the sorrow, anguish, torment, and anxieties when one is not right with God. Each time the word "hell" is used in the scriptures, you should try to decide which of these few meanings is intended.

Consider for a moment the following question: Does the state of mind referred to as hell in the previous paragraph exist in the terrestrial or telestial kingdoms? Probably not. Those in the telestial kingdom for example are happy and fulfilled to be there, they are where they belong. They would be unhappy and uncomfortable anywhere else. In section 19 of the Doctrine and Covenants the expressions "eternal punishment" and "endless punishment" are mentioned and then explained. We are taught in D&C 19 that we do not believe in a punishment, or "hell," that goes on forever and that the terms "eternal or endless punishment" refer to *God's* punishment, not punishment without an end (D&C 19; James E. Talmage, *Vitality of Mormonism*, 264-65).

17 And the mists of darkness are the temptations of the devil, which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men, and leadeth them away into broad roads, that they perish and are lost.

verse 17 "which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men" See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

"broad roads" This phrase is used to form a contrast with the "strait and narrow path." While the latter expression implies a path that is narrow, rigorous, and demanding to negotiate (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 8:20), the "broad roads" can and will be traveled by multitudes of the spiritually careless.

18 And the large and spacious building, which thy father saw, is vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men. And a great and a terrible gulf divideth them; yea, even the word of the justice of the Eternal God, and the Messiah who is the Lamb of God, of whom the Holy Ghost beareth record, from the beginning of the world until this time, and from this time henceforth and forever.

verse 18 “a great and a terrible gulf” Nephi is shown a great gulf which separates those in the great and spacious building—those who are caught up in worldliness—from those successfully pursuing the tree of life. An analogous gulf existed in the spirit world before Christ’s resurrection. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 15:28-29. Does such a gulf exist in mortality? It certainly does, and one need only to understand the concept of justification to know the gulf which separates the sinner from exaltation. Again, for a review of this important concept, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

“even the word of the justice of the Eternal God” One point of some interest is that the original manuscript rendered this phrase “even the sword of the justice of the eternal God.” Oliver Cowdery misread *sword* as *word* when he was copying the original manuscript into the printer’s manuscript, yet neither he nor subsequent editors noticed that the Book of Mormon nowhere else refers to the “word of the justice of God.” But in several instances the phrase “the sword” of the justice of God is found (see Alma 26:19; 60:29, Helaman 13:5, 3 Nephi 20:20; 29:4, and Ether 8:23). Dr. Royal Skousen has referred to phenomena like this as “inconsistent wrinkles” in the Book of Mormon text.

verses 19-20 The scene changes again, and Nephi sees in vision the final destruction of the Nephite people by the Lamanites in about AD 385 near the hill Cumorah (Mormon 6).

19 And while the angel spake these words, I beheld and saw that the seed of my brethren did contend against my seed, according to the word of the angel; and because of the pride of my seed, and the temptations of the devil, I beheld that the seed of my brethren did overpower the people of my seed.

20 And it came to pass that I beheld, and saw the people of the seed of my brethren that they had overcome my seed; and they went forth in multitudes upon the face of the land.

verse 20 “and they went forth in multitudes upon the face of the land” The subject of Book of Mormon geography and how the people of the Book of Mormon might coincide with contemporary scientific archeological findings is discussed in the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Geography*. We will also make reference to various specific points of this subject in the commentary as we go. Some students of

Book of Mormon geography feel that the apostate Lamanite culture, following the destruction of the Nephites, coincides with the Mayan culture of Central America. The “classic” Mayan period was from about AD 200 to AD 900. This classic Mayan period is so named by virtue of the quality and quantity of buildings and monuments that have been found dating from this time period. The “post-classic” and “pre-classic” periods, as contrasted with the “classic period,” are characterized by a lesser quality and quantity of constructed remnants which have been discovered. It would not be surprising to one day learn that they remnant of the Lamanites may have joined with the Mayans but did not constitute the principle founders of that group.

21 And I saw them gathered together in multitudes; and I saw wars and rumors of wars among them; and in wars and rumors of wars I saw many generations pass away.

22 And the angel said unto me: Behold these shall dwindle in unbelief.

23 And it came to pass that I beheld, after they had dwindled in unbelief they became a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations.

verse 23 “dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people” *Loathsome* means disgusting; hateful; abhorred; detestable.

Be careful lest you associate skin color with righteousness or unrighteousness. In the Book of Mormon story, a dark skin was neither good nor evil, but the dark skin was designated, doubtless arbitrarily, to be the *sign* of the curse. The curse itself was separation of the cursed people from the priesthood of God. For a more complete discussion of the “mark” placed on the unrighteous Lamanites, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:20-21.

1 Nephi Chapter 13

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 13-14 Nephi's vision of the Great and Abominable Church

1 Nephi 13:12-13 The vision of Columbus and the Pilgrims.

1 Nephi 13:28-29 Plain and precious things taken away from the Bible

1 Nephi 13:37 How beautiful upon the mountains shall they be—those who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at the last day.

1 Nephi 13:40-41 Modern-day revelations to restore plain and precious things

Chapters 13 and 14 of 1 Nephi both deal in part with an often misunderstood concept—the great and abominable church of the devil. For this introductory discussion I have drawn from a paper by Stephen E. Robinson, “Early Christianity and 1 Nephi 13-14” published in *The Book of Mormon, First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*, 177-91.

In these two chapters, Nephi describes the vision in which he sees the future of the world and its kingdoms. Nephi's vision is the type of revelation known in biblical literature as apocalyptic (prophetic revelation, especially concerning a cataclysm in which the forces of good triumph over the forces of evil), and it is represented in the New Testament most fully by John's book of Revelation. The revelations of Nephi and of John have more in common, however, than merely the apocalyptic form. For one thing, Nephi's vision foretells of John's vision (Nephi 14:19-28). The two are complementary, centering in part on the same characters and themes: the Lamb and his church, the apostasy, the great and abominable church of the devil, and the restoration of the gospel in the latter days.

The word *great* is an adjective of size rather than of quality. It thus informs us of the large size of the abominable entity. Secondary meanings might refer to great wealth or power. The term *abominable* is used in the Old Testament to describe what God hates, what cannot fail to arouse his wrath. In the book of Daniel, for example, the abomination of desolation is that thing so hateful to God that its presence in the temple causes the divine presence to depart, leaving the sanctuary desolate. The term is usually associated with idolatrous worship or gross sexual immorality.

The word *church* had a slightly broader meaning anciently than it does now. It referred anciently to an assembly, congregation, or association of people who bonded together and shared the same loyalties. Thus, the term was not necessarily restricted to religious associations. In fact, in Athens the Greeks used the term to denote the legislative assembly of government. The Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, is formed from the root *-klesia*, meaning “to call” and the prefix *ek-*, meaning “out.” Thus it originally referred to those citizens who were called out or summoned to public

meetings. It was thus an ideal word to represent the body of individuals whom God “calls out” of the world through the Holy Ghost.

When we put all this together, we find that the term great and abominable church means an immense assembly or association, likely a religious association, of people bound together by their loyalty to that which God hates. Most likely, this “church” is involved specifically in sexual immorality, false worship, or both. While the book of Revelation does not use the exact phrase great and abominable church, both John the Revelator and Nephi use a number of similar phrases to describe it. They both call it the “Mother of Harlots and Abominations,” “mother of abominations,” and “the whore that sitteth upon many waters” (Revelation 17:1; 1 Nephi 14:10-11).

Whenever the kingdom of God has been placed on the earth, “the devil always sets up his kingdom at the very same time in opposition to God” (*TPJS*, 365). “And since the kingdom of God or true church has been on earth from age to age, so also has the kingdom of the devil or the church of the devil” (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 340). In setting up his church, Satan has always imitated the kingdom of God in order to deceive people. We might always expect to find in Satan’s church an organization similar to that of God’s kingdom, priestcraft rather than priesthood, and the teaching of untruths mingled with scripture.

The major characteristics of the great and abominable church described in 1 Nephi 13 and 14 may be listed as follows:

1. It persecutes, tortures, and slays the saints of God (1 Nephi 13:5).
2. It seeks wealth and luxury (1 Nephi 13:7-8).
3. It is characterized by sexual immorality (1 Nephi 13:7).
4. It has removed plain and precious things from the scriptures (1 Nephi 13:28-29).
5. It has “dominion over all the earth, among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people” (1 Nephi 14:11).
6. Its fate is to be consumed by a world war. This will occur when the nations which it has incited against the saints war among themselves until the great and abominable church itself is destroyed (see 1 Nephi 22:13-14).

These same characteristics are also attributed to the whore (Babylon) in the Revelation of John:

1. She is drunk with the blood of the Saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus and of the prophets (17:6; 18:24).
2. She is characterized by the enjoyment of great wealth and luxury (17:4; 18:3, 11-16).
3. She is characterized by sexual immorality (17:1, 2, 5).
4. She has dominion over all nations (17:15, 18; 18:3, 23-24).
5. Her fate is to be consumed by the very kings who have made war on the Lamb under the influence of her deceptions (17:14-16; 18:23).

It should be noted that one characteristic not common to both prophetic descriptions is Nephi's statement that the great and abominable church held back important parts of the canon of scripture. But because John's record is one of the very scriptures to which Nephi refers (14:20-23), this omission in John's account is not surprising.

Some confusion is caused regarding the concept of the great and abominable church by what seems to be a contradiction between chapter 13 and chapter 14. In 1 Nephi 13, the "great and abominable church" is one specific church among many. Nephi's description of it as "most abominable above all other churches" (verses 5, 26) does not make sense otherwise. Also, in chapter 13, it has a specific historical description: It was formed among the Gentiles after the Jews transmitted the Bible in its purity to the Gentiles (verse 26). It is also the specific historical agent responsible for removing plain and precious truths from the scriptural record. To this may be added the information provided by the Doctrine and Covenants 86:1-3, which teaches that the "great and abominable church" did its work after the apostles had "fallen asleep"—that is, after the end of the first century AD. Clearly, "great and abominable" here refers to one specific church among many others that are not "great and abominable."

In contrast, 1 Nephi 14:10 describes the devil's church as consisting of all those organizations not associated with the Church of Jesus Christ: "Behold there are save two churches only [that is, Zion and Babylon]; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil."

How can this be? Is the "great and abominable" one church or many? The answer is that the term is used in two different ways in chapters 13 and 14. In chapter 13, the "great and abominable church" refers to a specific historical entity, whereas in chapter 14 the term is used simply in a generic or universal or typological sense. An example of another such term used in the same way, with much the same meaning, is *Babylon*. Babylon is an ancient Mesopotamian city. Babylon is also a more general expression which signifies a spiritual category of people—the carnal world, and its values and lifestyle which include mockery of the kingdom of God.

Another similar expression is *Zion*. Zion is a specific city to be founded before the Lord's second coming. It is also a spiritual category of people—the pure in heart. As spiritual categories, Babylon is the antithesis of Zion. Zion is wherever the pure in heart dwell, and Babylon is wherever the wicked live. Anyone who fights against Zion can be put into the category of Babylon.

Apocalyptic literature is also dualistic. Because it deals with archetypes, it boils everything down to opposing principles: love and hate, good and evil, light and dark. There are not gray areas in apocalyptic scripture. At the very least, everything can be reduced to the opposing categories of "A" and "not-A" ("They who are not for me are against me, saith our God"—2 Nephi 10:16). In the realm of religion, there are only two categories; religion that will save and religion that will not. The former is the church of

the Lamb, and the latter—no matter how well intentioned—is a counterfeit. Thus, even a “good” church must still be part of the devil’s kingdom in the sense used in 1 Nephi 14 (“there are save two churches only”). Again, by the construct of 1 Nephi 14, there is only one true church, and all other churches are part of the entity known as the “great and abominable church.” However, all of the churches that are part of the “great and abominable” entity in 1 Nephi 14, cannot be called the “great and abominable church” in the sense used in 1 Nephi 13, for their intentions are good and honorable, and quite often such churches teach people enough truth that they can then recognize the true church when they meet it. These churches do not slay the saints of God, they do not seek to control civil governments, nor do they pursue wealth, luxury, and sexual immorality. Such churches may belong to the kingdom of the devil in the apocalyptic sense, when there are only two categories, “A” and “not-A,” but they cannot be called the great and abominable church in the historical sense—the description is just not accurate.

In 1 Nephi 13:5, 8, and 26 the reference to the “great and abominable church” implies the specific historical entity. In 1 Nephi 14:10, the more general meaning is apparently intended.

What, then, is the specific historical entity referred to in 1 Nephi 13? Before we consider what it is, let us consider what it is not. Well-intentioned churches do not qualify as the “great and abominable church” described in 1 Nephi 13. They do not slay the saints of God, and they do not seek to control civil governments. Nor do they pursue wealth, luxury, and sexual immorality.

Some have suggested that the great and abominable church is Judaism in the first century AD. After all, Jewish leaders persecuted the Church and spilled the blood of the Saints. They even crucified the Messiah. It was this kind of argument—that the Jews were the antichrist—that led directly to the Holocaust in the 20th century and that still fans the bigoted insanity of some present-day groups. Judaism cannot be the great and abominable church. Nephi makes clear that the scriptures were complete when they came forth from the mouth of a Jew, but that the great and abominable church, which had its formation among the Gentiles, excised some of their most plain and precious parts (1 Nephi 13:24-26).

Some have suggested that the Roman Catholic Church might be the great and abominable church of Nephi 13. This also is untenable. Catholicism did not yet exist when the crimes described by Nephi were being committed. Constantine did not formally organize the state church until AD 313. Furthermore, the early Catholic Church can hardly be accused of immorality. It had, in fact, gone to the extremes of asceticism. And during much of the period, members of the Catholic Church were not in a position to persecute anyone, as they were being thrown to the lions themselves. The Catholic Church of the fourth century was the result of apostasy, not its cause.

As an aside, the word *apostasy* is a most interesting one. It is derived from the Greek word *apostasía* which means literally standing apart. Most commonly, however, apostasy is taken to mean “rebellion” or “revolution.” It conveys the sense of an internal takeover by factions hostile to the intentions of the previous leaders. A similar meaning is conveyed by the word *mutiny*, which implies that unauthorized crew commandeers a ship and take it where it is not supposed to go. Because early Christians often thought of the Church as a ship, it seems “mutiny” conveys exactly the right sense of what Paul and others meant by the term “apostasy.” Webster’s Dictionary defines *apostasy* in a somewhat different way when it says, “An abandoning of what one has believed in.” Although the word *apostasy* is not found in the text, the Book of Mormon has much to say about the nature, causes, and effects of apostasy. Indeed, the stories of two of its great civilizations, the Jaredites and the Nephites, end in massive, and fatal, national apostasies. The Book of Mormon teaches that apostasy occurs in at least two ways: (1) Drifting or falling away; losing one’s zeal for or commitment to the gospel; losing one’s way, often in almost imperceptible degrees. The phrase “dwindle in unbelief” is used to represent such a process. (2) Knowingly and openly rebelling. Indeed, those who sin knowingly, “in open rebellion,” are especially condemned, and are frequently the most bitter of apostates, far more so than those whose apostasy stems from backsliding parents or inherited false traditions. A primary cause of both types of apostasy is giving in to one’s carnal or natural self. For a discussion of this carnal or natural tendency within each of us, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and the “Spiritual Self.”*

What then is the historical great and abominable church that existed in the second century AD? This “church” 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. Brother Stephen E. Robinson wrote of this time:

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; but 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. That different entity can accurately be described as hellenized Christianity (“Nephi’s Great and Abominable Church,” in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 7, number 1, 1998, 32-39).

Brother Robinson, after thoughtfully analyzing the possibilities, concludes that the historical great and abominable church was the earliest apostate Christian church, the Greek Christian church. In about 330 BC Alexander the Great and his Greek culture conquered the known world, and the world became “hellenized,” or imbued with Greek culture. The Greek influence pervaded the biblical world, and it persisted until after the time of Christ’s mortal ministry. It was not even altered by the Roman political

domination that existed at the time of Jesus. Following the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, his apostles carried the gospel message into the world. Thus, Jewish Christianity and Greek culture met head-on. Greek culture prevailed, and Jewish Christianity was revised to make it more attractive and appealing to a Greek audience. Primary prejudices of the Greek world were the absolute nature of God (i.e., he cannot be bound or limited by anything) and the impossibility of anything material or physical being eternal. In order to satisfy the Gentiles steeped in Greek philosophy, Christianity had to throw out the doctrine of an anthropomorphic (“in the shape of man”) God and the resurrection of the dead, or at least reinterpret them drastically. Some Greek Christians at Corinth had already reinterpreted the doctrine of resurrection, and Paul responded in 1 Corinthians 15:12: “Now, if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is not resurrection of the dead?” Thus resulted the original and earliest apostate church. This church (let us call it “hellenized Christianity”) had in its possession all the Jewish scriptures and were in a perfect position to alter them. It taught the philosophies of men mingled with scripture. It dethroned God in the church and replaced him with man by denying the principle of revelation and turning instead to human intellect. As the product of human agency, its creeds were an abomination to the Lord, for they were idolatry: men worshiping their own creations, not so much of their own hands, but of their own minds.

The hellenization of Christianity is a phenomenon that has long been recognized by scholars of Christian history, but it is one which Latter-day Saints know better as the Great Apostasy. Hellenization means imposing Greek culture on the native cultures of the East. The result was a synthesis of East and West, with the elements of the Greek West predominating, creating a melting-pot, popular culture that was virtually worldwide. But in the realm of religion, synthesis means compromise, and when one speaks of the gospel, compromise with the popular culture of the world means apostasy from the truth.

While the Orthodox Christians in the first and second centuries AD adopted Greek philosophy, there may have been other specific bit players in this period of apostasy. Some Jewish Christians couldn't let go of the law of Moses and eventually gave up Christ instead. The Gnostics wallowed in the mysteries and in unspeakable practices on the one hand, or in neurotic asceticism on the other. And all of them together forced the true church of Jesus Christ into the wilderness.

The specific historical entity that qualifies to be the great and abominable church of 1 Nephi 13, then, has been named. What of the typological entity of 1 Nephi 14? Does it exist today? Today, the great and abominable church of the devil is, as Bruce R. McConkie describes it, “the world; it is all the carnality and evil to which fallen man is heir, it is every unholy and wicked practice; it is every false religion, every supposed system of salvation which does not actually save and exalt man in the highest heaven of the celestial world. It is every church except the true church, whether parading under a

Christian or a pagan banner” (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:552). It is especially anyone who makes war against the saints.

In a later chapter, Nephi will teach that the day would come when the great and abominable church will be destroyed (see 1 Nephi 22:13-14). This is likely to come just prior to the Savior’s second coming. Does this mean that people who are members of churches other than The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are wicked and are marked for destruction? Certainly not. While the whole of all the world’s churches may form part of the entity spoken of as the great and abominable church, there are doubtless many within those churches with whom the Lord is pleased individually. Elder James E. Talmage taught: “I do not understand that when the Lord states that those churches shall be overthrown—I mean the church of the devil, using his expression as he says—I do not understand that all members of those churches are to meet destruction, physically or otherwise. He is speaking there of the church collectively, and he is not pleased with it; but individually he may be well pleased with many of his sons and daughters who have been born under an environment that has led them into those churches which are not of God. . . . But the Lord is not pleased with those churches that have been constructed by men and then labeled with his name. He is not pleased with those doctrines that are being taught as being his doctrines when they are only the effusion of men’s brains, undirected by inspiration and utterly lacking in revelation” (*CR*, October 1928, 120-21).

1 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld many nations and kingdoms.

2 And the angel said unto me: What beholdest thou? And I said: I behold many nations and kingdoms.

3 And he said unto me: These are the nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles.

verses 1-3 The “nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles” are multiple and likely refer to the Middle East, Asia Minor, Europe, and all of the Mediterranean area. We will learn later that the promised land, the Americas, will also be inhabited by Gentiles and be referred to as a great Gentile nation.

4 And it came to pass that I saw among the nations of the Gentiles the formation of a great church.

verse 4 “a great church” Here is the first reference to the specific historical entity which later will be called the “great and abominable church.” This may well be the Greek Christian Church of the second and third centuries AD. Keep in mind that the adjective “great” refers to size and not quality.

5 And the angel said unto me: Behold the formation of a church which is most abominable above all other churches, which slayeth the saints of God, yea, and

tortureth them and bindeth them down, and yoketh them with a yoke of iron, and bringeth them down into captivity.

6 And it came to pass that I beheld this great and abominable church; and I saw the devil that he was the founder of it.

7 And I also saw gold, and silver, and silks, and scarlets, and fine-twined linen, and all manner of precious clothing; and I saw many harlots.

8 And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the gold, and the silver, and the silks, and the scarlets, and the fine-twined linen, and the precious clothing, and the harlots, are the desires of this great and abominable church.

9 And also for the praise of the world do they destroy the saints of God, and bring them down into captivity.

verses 5-9 These verses outline the major characteristics of the great and abominable entity. They include immorality and materialism. This “church,” headed by Satan, captures, tortures, and even slays the saints of God. It seeks for worldly popularity and approval.

10 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld many waters; and they divided the Gentiles from the seed of my brethren.

verse 10 Here Nephi suddenly changes the subject from the great and abominable entity to the future of the Nephites and Lamanites on the western hemisphere. The great and abominable entity—located in nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles with its center in Europe described in verses 1-3 of this chapter—is separated from his own eventual descendants by the great oceans.

11 And it came to pass that the angel said unto me: Behold the wrath of God is upon the seed of thy brethren.

verse 11 Nephi sees the spiritual decline of the Nephite and Lamanite nations.

“wrath of God” This expression is used several times in chapters 13 and 14 of 1 Nephi. Its meaning is self evident. It has been defined, perhaps somewhat euphemistically as “divine justice.” The word “wrath” is usually thought to mean fierce anger leading to vengeance, actually just punishment, as a consequence of that anger.

This is first time the word “wrath” is used in the Book of Mormon. The suggestion has often been made by anti-Mormons that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon, that he himself was the author. Here is a brief summary of a simple word study done in comparing the Book of Mormon with the Doctrine and Covenants:

There are several unique terms used in the Book of Mormon that are not found once in the Doctrine and Covenants. These include “wrath” (42 times), “consecrate” (instead of “ordain” 8 times), “restoration” (instead of resurrection 19 times), “of my proceedings” (15 times), “more part” or “more history part” (28 times), “Holy One of Israel” (39 times), “clouds of darkness” (10 times).

Also there are some expressions found in the Doctrine and Covenants that are not found once in the Book of Mormon: “wheat and tares” (11 times), “the Seventy” (14 times), “keys of the kingdom” (50 times), “and lo,” or “lo” (36 times), and “even so, amen” (49 times).

12 And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land.

verse 12 Who was this man “wrought upon” by the Spirit of God? Elder Orson Pratt identified this man as Christopher Columbus in a footnote in the 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon. Critics of the Book of Mormon have tended to dismiss this passage as a cheap and easy instance of prophecy after the fact, composed centuries after Columbus’s death—but postdated, as it were, in order to create a seemingly impressive and self-validating prediction by an ancient prophetic writer. At the very most, some have observed, a “prophecy” of Columbus hardly constitutes evidence for the antiquity or inspiration of the Book of Mormon.

On a surface level, such critics seem to be right. It would have taken little talent in the late 1820s for someone to prophesy the discovery of America nearly three and a half centuries earlier. But the description of Columbus provided by this verse nonetheless remains a remarkable demonstration of the revelatory accuracy of the Book of Mormon. It is only with the growth of Columbus scholarship in recent years, and particularly with the translation and publication of Columbus’s *Libro de las Profecias* in 1991, that English-speaking readers have been fully able to see how remarkably the admiral’s own self-understanding parallels the portrait of him given in the Book of Mormon. The Columbus revealed in recent scholarship is quite different from the gold-driven secular adventurer celebrated in the textbooks and holidays most of us grew up with.

We now understand, for example, that the primary motivation for Columbus’s explorations was not financial gain but the spread of Christianity. He was zealously committed to the cause of taking the gospel, as he understood it, to all the world. He felt himself guided by the Holy Spirit, and a good case can indeed be made that his first transoceanic voyage, in particular, was miraculously well executed.

Columbus was a serious and close student of the Bible. Among his very favorite passages of scriptures was John 10:16: “And other sheep I have that are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.” This verse provided significant support for his image of himself as a bearer of the gospel to the New World. And, though he was unfamiliar with the writings of Nephi, Columbus was convinced that his role had been predicted by ancient prophets. “The Lord purposed,” he wrote to Ferdinand and Isabella, “that there should

be something clearly miraculous in this matter of the voyage to the Indies. . . . I spent seven years here in your royal court discussing this subject with the leading persons in all the learned arts, and their conclusion was that it was vain. That was the end, and they give it up. But afterwards it all turned out just as our Redeemer Jesus Christ had said, and as he had spoken earlier by the mouth of his holy prophets” (Delno C. West and August Kling, *The “Libro de las profecias” of Christopher Columbus* [Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991], 107). “For the execution of the journey to the Indies,” he said, “I was not aided by intelligence, by mathematics or by maps. It was simply the fulfillment of what Isaiah had prophesied” (*Ibid.*, 111). Referring to his first crossing of the Atlantic, Columbus declared:

With a hand that could be felt, the Lord opened my mind to the fact that it would be possible to sail from here to the Indies, and he opened my will to desire to accomplish the project. This was the fire that burned within me. . . . Who can doubt that this fire was not merely mine, but also of the Holy Spirit who encouraged me with a radiance of marvelous illumination from his sacred Holy Scriptures, by a most clear and powerful testimony . . . urging me to press forward? Continually, without a moment’s hesitation, the Scriptures urge me to press forward with great haste (*Ibid.*, 105).

Additional scholarship has come to agree with the Book of Mormon’s assessment of Columbus (see especially Pauline Watts, “Prophecy and Discovery: On the spiritual Origins of Christopher Columbus’s ‘Enterprise of the Indies,’” *American Historical Review* [February 1985]: 73-102). In a book entitled *Columbus, Don Quixote of the Seas*, the author Jacob Wasserman quotes directly from the writings of Christopher Columbus: “From my first youth onward, I was a seaman, and have so continued until this day. . . . The Lord was well disposed to my desire, and he bestowed upon me courage and understanding. . . . Our Lord with provident hand unlocked my mind, sent me upon seas, 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?” (18). President Spencer W. Kimball testified, “I’m sure that [God] inspired a little boy, Christopher Columbus, to stand on the quays in Genoa, Italy, and yearn for the sea. He was filled with the desire to sail the seas, and he fulfilled a great prophecy made long, long ago, that this land, chosen above all other lands, should be discovered. And so, when he was mature, opportunity was granted to him to brave the unknown seas, to find this land . . . and to open the door, as it were” (*Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*. Edited by Edward I. Kimball, [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft], 1982, 427). George Q. Cannon taught, “Columbus was inspired to penetrate the ocean and discover this Western continent, for the set time for its discovery had come, and the consequences which God desired to follow its discovery have taken place—a free government has been established on it. The men who established that government were inspired of God. . . . We believe it was a preparatory work for the establishment of the kingdom of God” (*JD*, 14:55).

The recent publication of *Columbus's Book of Prophecies* in English translation, much too late for Joseph Smith to have used it, now permits us a window into the great admiral's soul. And what we find there is strikingly reminiscent of prominent themes in the Book of Mormon. Columbus was fascinated, for instance, by such subjects as the recovery of the Holy Land and the rebuilding of the ancient Jewish temple in Jerusalem. One of his favorite scriptures, in this regard, was Isaiah 2:2 (cf. 2 Nephi 12:2): "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it." He was also, as mentioned, deeply committed to the notion that the gospel had to be preached to the ends of the earth and the inhabitants thereof brought to Christ before the end of the world. For much of this, as careful readers of the Book of Mormon might have guessed, Columbus's favorite author was the prophet Isaiah. Indeed, it was in that prophet's book that Columbus thought he could see himself and his voyages divinely foretold. Among the passages that caught his attention was Isaiah 55:5: "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee."

Columbus seems to have regarded this as a prophecy of his own mission, along with Isaiah 42:1-4 ("Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him. . . . and the isles shall wait for his law"), which students of the Book of Mormon will have no difficulty connecting with the prophet Jacob's remarks at 2 Nephi 10:20-22.

"Our Lord," Columbus said in AD 1500, "made me the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth, of which he spoke in the Book of Revelation by St. John, after having spoken of it by the mouth of Isaiah; and he showed me the place where to find it" (Cited in Kay Brigham, *Christopher Columbus: His Life and Discovery in the Light of His Prophecies* [Barcelona: CLIE, 1990], 50, or 57 n.).

Without question, Columbus's first voyage to America is one of the most significant events of the history of humanity. His expedition brought two worlds into permanent contact with each other, the Old World of Europe and Asia, and the New World of the Americas, and it set in motion a chain of events that would transform both worlds forever. Among other things, Columbus's encounter with the Americas opened the door to a flood of exploration, colonization, missionary work, and fortune-seeking. Latter-day Saints honor Columbus for being a forerunner to the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in these latter days. He laid the foundation for the establishment of a nation that would "be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, that [the Book of Mormon and the fulness of the gospel] might come forth" (3 Nephi 21:4).

The "promised land" is the Americas.

13 And it came to pass that I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters.

verse 13 Perhaps this verse is a reference to the early European colonists or Pilgrims who fled their countries in Europe and the British Isles to America to escape religious persecution.

14 And it came to pass that I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles upon the land of promise; and I beheld the wrath of God, that it was upon the seed of my brethren; and they were scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten.

verse 14 Undoubtedly this is a reference to the scattering and suppression of remnants of Book of Mormon peoples—perhaps some among the Native Americans, by the early American settlers. Another possible historical correlation with this “scattering and smiting” is the conquest of Mexico by the Spanish in AD 1519 and the three-hundred-year Spanish Colonial Period that followed.

15 And I beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon the Gentiles, and they did prosper and obtain the land for their inheritance; and I beheld that they were white, and exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain.

verse 15 This verse likely refers to the “Gentiles” who founded and inhabited the great Gentile nation, the United States of America. See a discussion of the great Gentile nation in the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:14 and 1 Nephi 15:13. The Spirit of the Lord was indeed “upon [these] Gentiles” as they established their independence from other nations, wrote their constitution, and established their free form of government. As we have discussed previously, many of these “Gentiles” were descendants of the house of Israel, especially of the tribe of Joseph through Ephraim.

Again, a word of caution seems appropriate. This verse seems to communicate the doctrinally unsound concept that white skin is inherently more desirable than dark skin. For a discussion of the “mark” placed upon the unrighteous peoples in Book-of-Mormon history see the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:20-21.

verses 16-19 These verses likely have reference to the Revolutionary War fought by the colonies against their “mother,” England. The Book of Mormon, thus, leaves little doubt that God took sides in the Revolutionary War, and that he aided the American colonists in their fight against Great Britain, the home of the “mother Gentiles.”

16 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles who had gone forth out of captivity did humble themselves before the Lord; and the power of the Lord was with them.

verse 16 “the Gentiles who had gone forth out of captivity” This phrase refers to the early American settlers (see verse 13).

17 And I beheld that their mother Gentiles were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them.

verse 17 “mother Gentiles” These are those European countries from which colonists immigrated to the Americas, and which subsequently, and unsuccessfully, “gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against” those colonists. England, France, Spain, and Portugal all waged unsuccessful wars against colonists in the New World.

18 And I beheld that the power of God was with them, and also that the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle.

19 And I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles that had gone out of captivity were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations.

20 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that they did prosper in the land; and I beheld a book, and it was carried forth among them.

verse 20 What book did Nephi behold? Likely he saw the Bible as it is known today.

21 And the angel said unto me: Knowest thou the meaning of the book?

22 And I said unto him: I know not.

23 And he said: Behold it proceedeth out of the mouth of a Jew. And I, Nephi, beheld it; and he said unto me: The book that thou beholdest is a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; and it also containeth many of the prophecies of the holy prophets; and it is a record like unto the engravings which are upon the plates of brass, save there are not so many; nevertheless, they contain the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; wherefore, they are of great worth unto the Gentiles.

verse 23 “Behold it proceedeth out of the mouth of a Jew.” Who is this Jew? In about 445 BC, following the exile of Judah in Babylon and some 150 years after the exodus of Lehi from Jerusalem, a Jewish priest and scribe named Ezra collected together all of the authentic sacred writings extant in his day. He edited and correlated the various manuscripts. After his work was complete, he gathered the people together, read the record to them, expounded it for seven days, and then submitted it to them for their acceptance (Nehemiah 8:1-18; 9:3). This was the beginning of the Old Testament. The canon was later completed by the addition of the writings of those prophets who lived during and after the exile in Babylon. The New

Testament, of course, came forth from the mouth of Jesus the Jew and also out of the mouth of other prophet Jews.

“the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel”

Of all God’s spirit children, one group distinguished itself, during the conflicts incident to the war in heaven, by its exceeding faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This group was called and foreordained to participate in a great work on earth among the children of men. These were born into this world through the literal lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or Israel; thus they are “of the house of Israel.” Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: “Israel is an eternal people. She came into being as a chosen and separate congregation before the foundations of the earth were laid; she was a distinct and a peculiar people in the pre-existence, even as she is in this sphere. Her numbers were known before their mortal birth, and the very land surface of the earth was ‘divided to the nations [for] their inheritance . . . according to the number of the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 32:8)’” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 510-11).

“it is a record like unto the engravings which are upon the plates of brass, save there are not so many” The Old Testament of the Bible contains fewer writings than the brass plates of Laban. The writings of several qualified prophets, which would undoubtedly be of value to us today, are not found in the Bible. These include the writings of Zenock, Neum, and Zenos (1 Nephi 19:10), the writings of Ezias (Helaman 8:20), the Book of the Covenant (mentioned in Exodus 24:7, 2 Chronicles 34:30, and 2 Kings 23:2), the Book of the Wars of the Lord (mentioned in Numbers 21:14), the Book of Jasher (referred to in Joshua 10:13, and 2 Samuel 1:18), and the Book of the Acts of Solomon (mentioned in 1 Kings 11:41). The writings of Nathan (2 Samuel 7:2), Gad (1 Samuel 22:5, 2 Samuel 24:11), Ahijah (1 Kings 11:29; 14:2), and Iddo (2 Chronicles 13:22) are unavailable in the Bible, and they were all qualified prophets. Also missing from the Bible are The Sayings of the Seers (2 Chronicles 33:19), the Book of Jehu (2 Chronicles 20:34), the Prophecies of Enoch (Jude 1:14), and a second book by Isaiah known as the Acts of Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:22).

verses 24-32 Here Nephi explains how the “great apostasy” from early Christianity would occur. These verses seem to identify three stages in this process (for further discussion see “The Plain and Precious Parts,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992], 37-40):

1. The Gentiles would take “away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious” (verse 26). This might have been accomplished simply by altering the meaning of the things taught by the Lord without necessarily changing the words themselves.

2. The Gentiles would also take away “many covenants of the Lord” (verse 26). This step also could have been accomplished without deleting any words from the Bible.

The knowledge and benefits of the covenants of God would then be lost simply by neglecting the performance of ordinances, priesthood functions, or individual covenants.

3. Finally, “many plain and precious things” were “taken away from the book” (verse 28). In other words the scriptures were actually altered. This was probably a natural consequence of (1) and (2). It is likely that the removal of “many plain and precious things” was less the altering of those materials included in the Bible and more the elimination of other works that might well have been included in the canon.

24 And the angel of the Lord said unto me: Thou hast beheld that the book proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew; and when it proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew it contained the fulness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record; and they bear record according to the truth which is in the Lamb of God.

verse 24 “the book proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew” This reference to “the book” Nephi is shown is to both the Bible (Old and New Testaments), with which modern readers are familiar (verses 20, 29, and 30), and to the early scriptural records from which the Bible would be compiled (verses 24-28). The book (biblical source records) would suffer omissions at the hand of the great and abominable church “after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (first and second century), and the resulting book (the Bible that Nephi saw centuries later among the Gentiles) would reflect those omissions.

25 Wherefore, these things go forth from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles, according to the truth which is in God.

verses 24-25 Apparently the Jews did not alter the scriptures in such a way as to prevent their use by the early apostles in teaching the gospel in its purity. We will learn in verse 28 that many “plain and precious things” have been removed from the Bible. This did not occur at the hand of the Jews. Rather, the scriptures came forth from them “in purity unto the Gentiles.” Keep in mind that the Gentiles are everyone except the Jews.

As an aside, it is worth noting that the Book of Mormon does not contradict or undermine the Bible on any given common point. Rather, the Book of Mormon confirms the Bible’s basic historicity and doctrinal correctness. Clearly these two sacred volumes are not competitors for the truths of salvation but joint witnesses of it.

26 And after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles, thou seest the formation of that great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away.

verse 26 Not only is our Bible incomplete, as is argued in the commentary for 1 Nephi 13:23, but those books we do have in our present Bible may have been altered by the great and abominable church and perhaps other special-interest groups, so that the gospel teachings they contain are missing “many parts which are plain and most precious” and “many covenants of the Lord.” Thus, the deletions are extensive.

What are some examples of missing “plain and most precious” parts? To mention just a few, what about the identity of Jesus Christ as Jehovah in the Old Testament, a clear description of the ordinances of salvation (baptism, confirmation, sealings, and eternal marriage), the age of accountability, the premortal existence of man, the typology or symbolisms contained in the Law of Moses, a specific description of the nature and function of the Melchizedek priesthood, and a more precise elaboration of the doctrines of the Fall and the Atonement.

“and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away” As mentioned, another part of the apostasy from early Christianity which Nephi prophesies is the taking away of ordinances, priesthood functions, and individual covenants.

27 And all this have they done that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men.

verse 27 This verse suggests that the alterations and omissions which have occurred in the scriptures were not all simply accidents of translation and transmission caused by unintentional human error. Rather, some were purposeful and intentional changes made with evil intent. All the changes and omissions have made the Bible difficult to understand, thus disputations and various interpretations have resulted. The importance of these changes should perhaps be emphasized. This alteration was extensive, deliberate, and done by someone who had access to very early, even first generation, manuscripts. It was indeed an “inside job.” Joseph Smith said, “There are many things in the Bible which do not, as they now stand, accord with the revelations of the Holy Ghost to me” (*TPJS*, 310).

“that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

28 Wherefore, thou seest that after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God.

verse 28 “there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book” It is generally held by knowledgeable LDS scholars that our present Bible has suffered more from what has not been included in it, than it has by scribal alterations and errors. Dr. Hugh Nibley has taught that one of the most important restorations of these missing “plain and precious things” has been the books of Moses and Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price.

Hugh Nibley also commented:

As many things were taken away from the Old Testament as from the New Testament. R. H. Charles who was the principal editor of the Book of Enoch [an apocryphal record] for many years, says that nearly all writers of the New Testament were familiar with it [the Book of Enoch]. He discovered that there were no less than one hundred twenty-eight quotations in the New Testament from the Book of Enoch. But the world didn't have any Book of Enoch. What had happened to it? It is quoted as a genuine production of Enoch by Jude in the New Testament and as scripture by Barnabas, one of the seven apostolic fathers. And with the early fathers and apologists it had all the weight of a canonical book. It was scripture as far as the early church was concerned. It was included in the Bible and belonged there, but there is not a trace of it there now. But when the men of the schools became the leaders of the church, accommodating to the contemporary philosophy, there were many things in Enoch that they did not like. Charles [the editor of the Book of Enoch being spoken of here] himself doesn't like them; he puts it as tastefully as possible here. He says, "But our book contained much of a questionable character." This was the fourth century, of course. That was the time when the University of Alexandria won a complete victory over everything. That's the Athanasian Creed. The Book of Enoch fell into discredit. Under the ban of such authorities as Hilary, Jerome, and Augustine, it gradually became lost. Notice that they banned it. They would not allow people to use the Book of Enoch, and they were the authorities. It was Hilary who made more decisions than anybody else. He said that if a thing isn't found in the scripture, you can be sure that it never happened. Unless a thing is mentioned in the Bible, it didn't happen. Now that is absolute dependence on the infallibility of the scriptures (*Teachings of the Pearl of Great Price*, a FARMS publication, lecture one).

29 And after these plain and precious things were taken away it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles; and after it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles, yea, even across the many waters which thou hast seen with the Gentiles which have gone forth out of captivity, thou seest—because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book, which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God—because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them.

verse 29 "unto all nations of the Gentiles" These are evidently the nations of Europe.

"across the many waters" Apparently this refers to the western hemisphere and to the European immigrants in the Americas "which have gone forth out of captivity."

“which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God” The reasons why our current Bible is often interpreted with different meanings have already been described. There have obviously been serious difficulties in precisely defining the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ when the Bible is used as the primary resource. There is a distressing ambiguity and lack of “plainness” in our Bible as regards some points of doctrine. As a result, a dangerous apostate concept has grown up and flourished among some students of the scriptures. These students have come to believe that the scriptures were not intended by God to provide plain and simple and absolute explanations. Rather they were meant to be merely “ambiguous catalysts” to stimulate our thinking about spiritual things in a general way. They feel each individual reading the scriptures should seek his own individual interpretations. Too much concreteness or clear explanation might restrict an individual’s ability to perceive his own personal and intimate interpretations.

Carried to its extreme, this ridiculous concept of scripture may be easily made to sound illogical and even ludicrous. According to the “ambiguous catalyst” theory, for example, an individual who desires to study the scripture would need no prior preparation. He would require no knowledge of the historical or geographic or linguistic aspects of the world. Nor would he need to know anything about the writings of the ancient prophets. He would not even have to study what other authorities have had to say about certain scriptures. For him a study and interpretation of the scripture is a purely individual endeavor. If he should come to a verse of scripture, written by the prophet Isaiah, for example, that makes no sense to him at all and means little more than a “word salad,” that’s perfectly all right. He shouldn’t be concerned. If the Lord wanted to reveal any meaning to him from that group of unintelligible words, then he would.

Perhaps it’s unfair to state this philosophy of scripture in its extreme in order to expose its faults, since there can be no denying that individual revelation is often received in response to reading scripture. It seems to me, though, that it behooves each of us who would study the standard works to prepare ourselves as best we can. The Book of Mormon is not a divination tool. Learning something of the life and historical setting of the prophet Isaiah, for example, can be invaluable in understanding his writings. It may also be helpful to read the commentary of those scholars who have made a study of the life and times and language of Isaiah.

Another reason the “ambiguous catalyst” theory is potentially hazardous is that the unprepared individual may never become emotionally attached to the scriptures since he will always regard the study of them as more of an exercise in abstraction. They cease to become words written by a real feeling and thinking human being that he knows and loves.

I cannot refrain from recounting an instructive anecdote told by Robert J. Matthews. His account illustrates an important flaw in the apostate view of scripture I have referred to above as the “ambiguous catalyst” perspective.

In March 1978, a prominent Lutheran minister participated in a symposium on the Brigham Young University campus. He had accepted the task of comparing the Savior’s sermon in 3 Nephi with the Sermon on the Mount found in the book of Matthew. By the tools and procedures of textual criticism, he discovered several interesting differences between these two sermons. He gave an astute and perceptive analysis. He said that compared to the New Testament, 3 Nephi is much clearer, the Savior’s teachings are more precise; they are stronger, bolder, and offer considerably more information than can be gained from the New Testament. He found also that the personality of Jesus is more commanding in 3 Nephi than in the New Testament. He noted that in the New Testament Jesus speaks as a teacher, but in 3 Nephi he speaks as a God.

As I listened, I thought it was remarkable that he had recognized these things, and I supposed that he was speaking with favor toward the Nephite account. However, as he continued, he tried to discredit the Book of Mormon by saying that new religions and cults always have an insatiable thirst for answers and for knowledge, whereas spiritual maturity brings a more ascetic view. He preferred the New Testament to 3 Nephi because it was not so definitive and allowed him more choice of interpretation. He acknowledged that the New Testament was less clear, and less dramatic, but felt that was the beauty of it. It did not seem to occur to him that the New Testament had suffered at the hands of copyists, translators, and textual critics and so was now only a shadow of its former self (“Jesus the Savior in 3 Nephi” in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9-30, This is My Gospel*, 34-5).

It is heartening to learn in verse 29 that God intended for his scriptures to be easily understood by those who study them.

30 Nevertheless, thou beholdest that the Gentiles who have gone forth out of captivity, and have been lifted up by the power of God above all other nations, upon the face of the land which is choice above all other lands, which is the land that the Lord God hath covenanted with thy father that his seed should have for the land of their inheritance; wherefore, thou seest that the Lord God will not suffer that the Gentiles will utterly destroy the mixture of thy seed, which are among thy brethren.

31 Neither will he suffer that the Gentiles shall destroy the seed of thy brethren.

verses 30-31 Here is another reference to the western hemisphere as a covenant land. Even though the Gentiles will scatter and abuse the descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples, the Lord will never allow those peoples to become extinct.

32 Neither will the Lord God suffer that the Gentiles shall forever remain in that awful state of blindness, which thou beholdest they are in, because of the plain and most precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back by that abominable church, whose formation thou hast seen.

verse 32 Here is an allusion to the restoration of the gospel and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and other modern-day scripture. Without this restoration, those “Gentiles” who will be inspired to come to this land, which is choice above all other lands, will remain in an “awful state of blindness.”

33 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.

verse 33 In this verse the Gentiles are those who will be inspired to come to this choice land and thus escape spiritual captivity, eventually to receive the restored gospel. The “remnant of the house of Israel” refers to the descendants of the Nephite/Lamanite people who will inhabit this land. The Lord’s allowing the Gentiles to overpower the remnant of the house of Israel as the Gentiles become established in this land is part of the great judgment brought by the Lord on the heads of the descendants of Lehi. The Lord will be merciful unto the “Gentiles” in the great Gentile nation by (1) visiting the native American Israelites with his judgment, thus allowing the Gentiles to smite them, and by (2) restoring the gospel among those Gentiles.

34 And it came to pass that the angel of the Lord spake unto me, saying: Behold, saith the Lamb of God, after I have visited the remnant of the house of Israel—and this remnant of whom I speak is the seed of thy father—wherefore, after I have visited them in judgment, and smitten them by the hand of the Gentiles, and after the Gentiles do stumble exceedingly, because of the most plain and precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back by that abominable church, which is the mother of harlots, saith the Lamb—I will be merciful unto the Gentiles in that day, insomuch that I will bring forth unto them, in mine own power, much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious, saith the Lamb.

verse 34 “Behold, saith the Lamb of God” The prophecy contain in this verse is uttered by the “Lamb of God” who is, of course, Jehovah or Jesus Christ. Critics of the Book of Mormon may well consider this phrase, written nearly six hundred years before Christ, to be anachronistic. Hugh Nibley has written: “At the end of the last century scholars were mystified to find that a demotic [ancient Egyptian] prophecy datable to the time of Bochoris (718-712 BC), in which coming destructions were predicted with the promise of a Messiah to follow, was put into the mouth of ‘the Lamb.’ Greek sources inform us that this prophecy enjoyed very great circulation in ancient times. The strange wording of Lehi’s great prophecy, uttered by ‘the Lamb’ (1 Nephi 13:34), is thus seen to be no anachronism, taking from Hellenistic or Christian times, as

was once maintained” (*Lehi in the Desert*, 18). We may, of course, defend Nephi’s use of the term “Lamb of God” in another way as well. We will later (Jacob 4:4) learn that “all the holy prophets,” beginning with Adam, have known of the coming Christ and his atoning sacrifice.

The reader is reminded to keep in mind that many of the immigrating “Gentiles” that will inhabit this great Gentile nation carry the blood of Israel. Many of our generation, in our patriarchal blessings for example, have been told that they have descended from ancient Joseph through his son Ephraim. Thus an individual may be Israelite by birth but a “Gentile” by culture.

35 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.

verse 35 This verse has reference to the Book of Mormon. The prophet writers of the Book of Mormon “shall write many things which [the Lord] shall minister unto them,” and these writings shall be recorded on plates which shall be “hid up” for a time before coming forth to the Gentiles.

36 And in them shall be written my gospel, saith the Lamb, and my rock and my salvation.

verse 36 “my rock” When the word *rock* is used symbolically in the scriptures, the most common meanings include (1) the Lord himself (Deuteronomy 32:13; Psalm 71:3; 1 Corinthians 10:4; 2 Nephi 9:45), (2) revelation (Matthew 16:18; TPJS, 274), or (3) the gospel itself (D&C 11:24). The latter meaning seems most likely to apply here.

37 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.

verse 37 “Zion” This is the first time *Zion* has been mentioned in the Book of Mormon text. Let us briefly review the concept of Zion. Literally, Zion is the kingdom of God upon the earth, a society that governs itself by celestial principles. Figuratively, Zion is that glorious city or land which will be established in the latter days some time prior to the Lord’s second coming. It will serve as a place of gathering and refuge to those who accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church members who establish and live in Zion will be sanctified. They will live and be governed by the principles of the celestial law. Zion will be the abode of Jesus as he administers the government of the

earth during the Millennium. It will not be a secret place, rather all will know of it, even those who do not dwell there. Zion is described in scripture as “Fair as the sun, clear as the moon, and . . . terrible unto all nations; [such] that the kingdoms of this world [will be] constrained to acknowledge that the kingdom of Zion is in very deed the kingdom of our God and his Christ” (D&C 105:31-32).

In the latter days, two places will be called the center places of Zion. The first is the city of Jerusalem itself which will be restored to its holy position of grandeur and beauty. It will serve as a gathering place for the tribe of Judah. The second is the New Jerusalem to be built upon the western hemisphere with its center in Jackson County, Missouri. To Zion on the western hemisphere will gather the rest of Israel and those Gentiles without the house of Israel who accept the gospel and are “adopted” into the house of Israel.

Zion is not limited just to the city of Jerusalem and Jackson County, Missouri. In the latter days, wherever there are saints of God who have embraced the restored gospel, there is Zion.

Zion may also be something other than a place. Zion may also be an attitude of acceptance of the gospel, a spirit of obedience, a purity of heart. Just as the title Babylon may refer in a specific way to an ancient city or in a general way to the evil which exists in the world, so may the word Zion represent either a city or label used to describe all that is truly righteous, wholesome, and in tune with the Spirit of the Lord and his eternal plan.

Those who assist in the cause of Zion in the latter days (“at that day”) will be exalted (“saved”). For a more complete discussion of the concept of Zion, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 27, *Zion*.

“whoso shall publish peace” To “publish peace [and] tidings of great joy,” of course is to preach the gospel. Isaiah saw the missionaries of the latter days and praised them in somewhat peculiar terms. He said that they will have “beautiful [feet] upon the mountains” (Isaiah 52:7). This verse is a partial quotation of Isaiah 52:7. This same idea and wording will be used elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 12:21; 15:15-18; 3 Nephi 20:40). The prophet Abinadi will provide a more precise definition of those who “publish peace” in Mosiah 15:15. They are all the prophets since the world began who have prophesied of the coming of the Lord.

38 And it came to pass that I beheld the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the book of the Lamb of God, which had proceeded forth from the mouth of the Jew, that it came forth from the Gentiles unto the remnant of the seed of my brethren.

verse 38 “the book of the Lamb of God” Again, this is the Bible. The white settlers of the Americas early on made the Bible available to the native American Indians.

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

verse 39 What are the “other books” which Nephi sees? It seems likely that they are “latter-day” scriptural records such as the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. A valid function of these scriptures is to bear witness of the truth of the Bible—“the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

40 And the angel spake unto me, saying: These last records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them; and shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved.

verse 40 Here the Bible is referred to in the plural as “the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” This plural reference could refer to the books of the Bible or the many spiritual truths contained therein. The other latter-day standard works are referred to as “these last records.” Not only will the more modern day scriptures bear witness of the Bible, but they will also restore many truths which have been lost from the Bible.

“**the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father**” The 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon rendered this phrase “the Lamb of God is the Eternal Father.” See the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:18 and 1 Nephi 11:21.

“**saved**” Again, it is not inappropriate to interpret this word as meaning *exalted*. However, we know that no individual will be saved in *any* kingdom of glory, including the terrestrial and telestial, lest they “come unto” Christ.

41 And they must come according to the words which shall be established by the mouth of the Lamb; and the words of the Lamb shall be made known in the records of thy seed, as well as in the records of the twelve apostles of the Lamb; wherefore they both shall be established in one; for there is one God and one Shepherd over all the earth.

verse 41 The Book of Mormon and the Bible must be used together as complementary records. Together they describe the way in which all men must come unto the Lord to be saved.

42 And the time cometh that he shall manifest himself unto all nations, both unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles; and after he has manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles, then he shall manifest himself unto the Gentiles and also unto the Jews, and the last shall be first, and the first shall be last.

verse 42 There is a timetable established for the dissemination of the gospel. This verse summarizes that timetable. At the time of Christ's mortal ministry, the gospel was preached to the house of Israel, or to "the Jews" (Matthew 15:24). Some years later the apostles took the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10-11). This sequence is, in a way, reversed in this final dispensation. In 1830 the Church was first established among people of a "great Gentile nation." As has been often stressed, most of those designated as Gentiles in the Book of Mormon are actually members of the house of Israel by lineal descent. They are "Gentiles" largely in that they are not Jews and they are citizens of the great Gentile nation. From its establishment among these "Gentiles," the gospel will then be taken to the house of Israel, including the Jews. Thus "the last [the Gentiles] shall be first [to receive the gospel in this final dispensation], and the first [those of the house of Israel] shall be last [to hear the gospel in this final dispensation]."

There is yet another phase of this back-and-forth pattern. In the latter days the gospel will be restored to the Gentile-Israelites, mostly of the tribe of Joseph through Ephraim, in the great Gentile nation. The period after the restoration is referred to as the "times of the Gentiles." During this period the Gentile missionaries—actually missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—will carry the gospel to the nations of the world and will gather Israel to the stakes of Zion. Those gathered will include both Israelites by blood and non-Israelites. The latter, after accepting the gospel, will be assimilated into the house of Israel by adoption. They thus become the Lord's people.

Just prior to the Millennium there will be a major apostasy of the Gentiles. This will include inhabitants of the great Gentile nation who have not accepted the gospel and probably some "Gentiles" who have joined the Church but who have not lived up fully to their covenants. After the Lord's second coming, the "times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled," and the gospel will be "taken from the Gentiles" and given back to its original stewards, the house of Israel. This prophesied change of stewardship is more symbolic than practically significant, since all who accept the gospel and endure in it are covenant Israelites in every sense of the word, though they might have previously been classified as Gentiles by virtue of their citizenship in the great Gentile nation. Their allegiance to Christ's gospel is the sole determinant of whether or not they are Israelites by covenant. Their blood lineage matters little if they reject the gospel. At the beginning of the Millennium, all Gentile governments will end, the day of the Israelite will begin, and Jesus Christ will reign personally upon the earth.

1 Nephi Chapter 14

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 14:10 There are save two churches only—the church of the Lamb of God and the church of the devil.

1 And it shall come to pass, that if the Gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day that he shall manifest himself unto them in word, and also in power, in very deed, unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks—

2 And harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God, they shall be numbered among the seed of thy father; yea, they shall be numbered among the house of Israel; and they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land forever; they shall be no more brought down into captivity; and the house of Israel shall no more be confounded.

verses 1-2 Here is a great promise to those inhabitants of the great Gentile nation in this final dispensation. Those who accept the gospel will be restored to their rightful place as a covenant people in the house of Israel if they are of the blood of Israel. This will include not only those remnants of Book of Mormon peoples who still exist, but also those immigrants who have entered the great Gentile nation who are also, by blood, of the house of Israel. Those who accept the gospel who are not of the house of Israel by blood will also be admitted into the covenant house of Israel by adoption. They will then in every sense become part of the covenant people (see the commentary on the concepts of covenant making and a covenant people in the introductory commentary for Alma 43; see also the commentary for 2 Nephi 30:1-2).

“stumbling blocks” The gospel message itself is replete with stumbling blocks for those who are unrepentant and lack the Spirit. Paul said: “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). It is probably not this type of stumbling block being referred to here, however. Rather, this verse seems to refer to the stumbling blocks of ignorance which were removed by restoration of the gospel.

“they shall be numbered among the seed of thy father” This phrase, which is explained in the phrase that follows it in the text, simply means that they shall be numbered among the house of Israel.

Let us not fall into the trap of believing that all of the native American Indian peoples are descendants of the house of Israel. They more likely have complex heterogeneous origins. For a discussion of this issue, see the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Myths*.

“they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land forever” Does this mean that the Americas will continue to be a promised land for the house of Israel during the Millennium? And what about the time after the world is celestialized?

“they shall be no more brought down into captivity” This is a promise with far reaching implications. The Nephite land of promise was and is a covenant land. If those who inhabit it remain faithful to the gospel, they will never again be captured and live in servitude.

“the house of Israel shall no more be confounded” The word “confounded” here means scattered. Scattering occurs only because of apostasy—gathering only with repentance. “Confounded” may also mean mixed or mingled in with a group so that the original form or identity cannot be distinguished.

3 And that great pit, which hath been digged for them by that great and abominable church, which was founded by the devil and his children, that he might lead away the souls of men down to hell—yea, that great pit which hath been digged for the destruction of men shall be filled by those who digged it, unto their utter destruction, saith the Lamb of God; not the destruction of the soul, save it be the casting of it into that hell which hath no end.

verse 3 “yea, that great pit which hath been digged for the destruction of men shall be filled by those who digged it” This poignant phrase speaks, figuratively of course, for itself and is worth memorizing and pondering! The great and abominable entity here might well be either the specific “church among churches” described in 1 Nephi 13 or the more generic or universal application of the term used more commonly in this chapter (see the commentary for verses 9-17 below).

“utter destruction” This expression is necessarily somewhat figurative or hyperbolic since our doctrine contains no provision for the annihilation of any intelligence and its spirit. This fact is explained in the phrase which completes this verse.

“not the destruction of the soul” See the commentary for 1 Nephi 15:35. The word “soul” here means spirit of man. The spirit of man cannot be destroyed (*TPJS*, 352-54).

“that hell which hath no end” The only hell we are aware of that literally has no end is outer darkness, where Satan and his angels will live forever. The spirit prison is also a “hell.” This latter definition of *hell* is more applicable here in this verse and in the following verse.

Is the world of spirits really a “hell which hath no end”? In general the Book of Mormon speaks of the life hereafter in simplistic terms—either endless exaltation or endless perdition. The Book of Mormon does not contain the concept of “multiple heavens” or the three degrees of salvation. For a discussion of the incomplete doctrine of the post-mortal world contained in the Book of Mormon, see “Post-Mortal Life and the

Book of Mormon” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13, *The Spirit World*.

4 For behold, this is according to the captivity of the devil, and also according to the justice of God, upon all those who will work wickedness and abomination before him.

verse 4 “according to the captivity of the devil” Though Satan delights in the eventual spiritual death of those who reject the gospel of Jesus Christ, he actually had no role in creating that captivity. Generally, he tend also give him too much credit for causing that captivity. It is man himself to incessantly gives in to his natural self and refuses to instead deny himself and obey the Lord’s commands. He is responsible for his own eventual captivity.

“according to the justice of God” Whatever fate befalls a man for eternity, we can be assured that it will be consummately fair and just, as it is “according to the justice of God.” See a discussion of the law of justice in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 12, *The Law of Justice*.

5 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, Nephi, saying: Thou hast beheld that if the Gentiles repent it shall be well with them; and thou also knowest concerning the covenants of the Lord unto the house of Israel; and thou also hast heard that whoso repenteth not must perish.

verse 5 “the covenants of the Lord unto the house of Israel” These covenants are reviewed in the commentary for verse 8 of this chapter.

6 Therefore, wo be unto the Gentiles if it so be that they harden their hearts against the Lamb of God.

7 For the time cometh, saith the Lamb of God, that I will work a great and a marvelous work among the children of men; a work which shall be everlasting, either on the one hand or on the other—either to the convincing of them unto peace and life eternal, or unto the deliverance of them to the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds unto their being brought down into captivity, and also into destruction, both temporally and spiritually, according to the captivity of the devil, of which I have spoken.

verse 7 “a great and marvelous work among the children of men” This phrase has its origin in Isaiah 29:13-14 and, of course, has reference to the restoration of the gospel in the latter days. The wording of Isaiah 29:13-14 is also used in 2 Nephi 27:25-26.

This verse makes it clear that the gospel will not only be a blessing to those who accept it, but a witness against those who reject it.

“destruction, both temporally and spiritually” The word “temporally” is placed here in apposition to the word “spiritually” and implies a destruction of that part of man which is not spiritual—his body. Our doctrine does not actually include any type of figurative eternal destruction of the body since all will be resurrected and live forever in an eternally enduring body. What type of temporal destruction, then, is spoken of here? Perhaps this could be a reference to the great destructive cleansing of the earth prior to the Lord’s second coming. Or, perhaps this phrase simply refers to the erosive effect of sinful living on the body.

verses 5-7 Those who “perish,” those who are delivered “to the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds,” those who are “brought down into captivity,” and those subject to “destruction” do not necessarily suffer eternal destruction and live with Satan as sons of perdition. Rather they all die a spiritual death and fail to return to God’s presence in the celestial kingdom. See the discussion of the phrase, “that hell which hath no end” in the commentary for verse 3 of this chapter. See also the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

8 And it came to pass that when the angel had spoken these words, he said unto me: Rememberest thou the covenants of the Father unto the house of Israel? I said unto him, Yea.

verse 8 “the covenants of the Father unto the house of Israel” Let us review these covenants. These covenants, as a group, are often referred to as the Abrahamic covenant as it was first made between father Abraham and the Lord. The Abrahamic covenant may be said to consist of five main provisions—five main promises of the Lord to those of Abraham’s seed who “hearken to my voice”—to those who obey the Lord’s commands. Abraham received from the Lord the gospel, baptism, the higher priesthood, and the ordinance of celestial marriage. He agreed to abide by the gospel law and honor his priesthood, or, as the Lord told Abraham elsewhere, “Walk before me, and be thou perfect” (Genesis 17:1). The Lord in turn made eternally binding promises to Abraham. They include:

1. Abraham would be blessed to become the “father of many nations” (Genesis 17:19), and his posterity would be exceedingly numerous—even “as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is upon the seashore (Genesis 17:2; 22:17-18; Abraham 2:9). Abraham’s seed would grow and continue forever.

2. Abraham and his posterity were blessed with certain lands as an eternal inheritance (Abraham 2:6; cf. Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 15:9-14). Initially this included the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8) extending from the Nile River to the Euphrates (Genesis 15:18).

3. Abraham and his descendants would be blessed to have a right to the priesthood and enjoy its blessings (Abraham 1:18; 2:11).

4. Abraham's posterity would prove to be a blessing to all families of the earth (Genesis 12:3; Abraham 2:9-11). They would do this by bearing the priesthood and by having the right and responsibility to preach the gospel to all the world.

5. Thus will every individual and every family have the opportunity, through the posterity of Abraham, to enjoy the blessings of the gospel, which eventually include the "blessings of salvation, even of life eternal"—the blessing of salvation and exaltation (Abraham 2:9-11).

These covenants were renewed with Isaac (Genesis 26:1-4, 24) and again with Jacob (Genesis 28; 35:9-13; 48:3-4). The restoration of the fulness of the gospel through the prophet Joseph Smith is in fact the restoration of the Abrahamic covenant. Through this restoration God has renewed for the Latter-day Saints all he promised to the former-day Saints, including his covenants and his gospel, a "mighty nation among the Gentiles," and that in this dispensation of the fulness of times the Father will "make bare his arm in the eyes of the nations." That is, he will demonstrate his power to gather his children throughout the earth.

verses 9-17 The phrases "the whore of all the earth . . . the great mother of abominations . . . the mother of harlots" in these verses refer to the generic or universal definition of the "great and abominable church" as spoken of in the introductory discussion for 1 Nephi 13 above. Certainly an application of these verses to this final dispensation is likely.

9 And it came to pass that he said unto me: Look, and behold that great and abominable church, which is the mother of abominations, whose founder is the devil.

10 And he said unto me: Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth.

verse 10 Again, see the introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 13.

Individual orientation to the Church of the Lamb or to the great and abominable church is not by blood lineage or by being a "member of record," but by loyalty. Just as there are Latter-day Saints who belong to the great and abominable church because of their loyalty to their natural, material self, so are there members of other churches who belong to the Lamb because of their loyalty to him and his principles. Membership is based more on who has your heart than who has your records. Hence, it is unwise and inaccurate to point to any particular church or political system as the great and abominable church.

11 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the whore of all the earth, and she sat upon many waters; and she had dominion over all the earth, among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people.

verse 11 “the whore of all the earth . . . sat upon many waters” This expression seems to have originated in Jeremiah 51:13. It is alternatively translated, “dwelt beside many waters.” Jeremiah seemed to have in mind the city of Babylon, the symbol of all wickedness, which was located beside the Tigris River. In the context of this verse, however, it seems appropriate to interpret it as implying that the influences of the “great whore”—the great and abominable church—is located in all countries throughout the world.

12 And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few, because of the wickedness and abominations of the whore who sat upon many waters; nevertheless, I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth; and their dominions upon the face of the earth were small, because of the wickedness of the great whore whom I saw.

13 And it came to pass that I beheld that the great mother of abominations did gather together multitudes upon the face of all the earth, among all the nations of the Gentiles, to fight against the Lamb of God.

verse 13 “to fight against the Lamb of God” This war is likely not one that will be fought with bombs and artillery, but rather it will be a battle for the hearts of men using testimony and witnessing versus persecution and propaganda.

14 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory.

verse 14 “and they were armed with righteousness” “They” refers to both the “saints of the church of the Lamb” and also to “the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth.” Because they are “armed” with the gospel and the priesthood, they will withstand the great propaganda wars and physical destructions of the latter days prior to the Lord’s second coming.

“with the power of God in great glory” The Lord’s people are also armed with God’s power. This could refer to the priesthood or also to the power provided all members of the Lord’s Church as they keep their temple covenants. See the “Endowment of Power” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 18, *The Temple*.

15 And it came to pass that I beheld that the wrath of God was poured out upon that great and abominable church, insomuch that there were wars and rumors of wars among all the nations and kindreds of the earth.

16 And as there began to be wars and rumors of wars among all the nations which belonged to the mother of abominations, the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold, the wrath of God is upon the mother of harlots; and behold, thou seest all these things—

verses 15-16 These two verses clearly state that the time will come when the wrath of God will be poured out upon the great and abominable entity in the form of “wars and rumors of wars.” Those people who are a part of the great and abominable church—those whose lives and purposes are consumed with worldliness—will begin to make war on one another. And this war will be, in a way, a manifestation of God’s wrath or judgment upon them.

An interesting question might here be raised for your consideration: Would God ever start a war? Did God, for example, inspire the Assyrians to attack and carry off captive the ten tribes of Israel in the Kingdom of Israel between 732 and 722 BC? Did the Lord encourage the Babylonians to overcome the rebellious Israelites in Judah in 587 BC? Some might argue that certainly the Lord would never start something as inherently evil as a war. After all, Moroni 7:12 states, “Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil.” The Lord may not start a war, but he might decide not to intervene when men on the earth commence an attack on one another motivated by their materialistic and selfish desires. Another might argue the contrary view: Of course the Lord had Assyria capture the northern tribes, and obviously it was his will that Babylon punish the people of Judah. From our limited mortal perspective, who are we to judge the Lord’s actions in this regard?

17 And when the day cometh that the wrath of God is poured out upon the mother of harlots, which is the great and abominable church of all the earth, whose founder is the devil, then, at that day, the work of the Father shall commence, in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants, which he hath made to his people who are of the house of Israel.

verse 17 “then, at that day, the work of the Father shall commence” The “work of the Father” is the missionary effort of the latter-day Church of Jesus Christ—the gathering of Israel. This work commenced and has continued during a time of great conflict including the Civil War in the United States and two major world wars. The final defeat of the great and abominable church will not occur until the great final cleansing of the earth just prior to the Lord’s second coming. While the Lord’s missionary work and gathering has commenced prior to the great final cleansing of the earth, following this great destruction it will greatly accelerate in speed and efficiency as it continues into the Millennium (see also 2 Nephi 30:7-15; 3 Nephi 21:24-28).

“in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants, which he hath made to his people who are of the house of Israel” For a review of those covenants see the commentary for verse 8 of this chapter.

18 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, saying: Look!

19 And I looked and beheld a man, and he was dressed in a white robe.

verse 19 It is apparent from subsequent verses in chapter 14 (20-22, 27) that the “man . . . in a white robe” is John the Revelator. Here, some six hundred years before Christ, Nephi sees John and his writings—centuries before they were written! Sectarian scholars of the Bible generally accept the rule that there is no such thing as true prophecy—a prophet cannot actually see beyond his own historical horizon. They would have difficulty in accepting this verse. We, in the Church, do gratefully accept the literal reality of prophecy.

20 And the angel said unto me: Behold one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

21 Behold, he shall see and write the remainder of these things; yea, and also many things which have been.

verse 21 Here the angel is telling Nephi that John the Revelator will also see and write about the things Nephi will yet see in his vision and also many of those things Nephi has already seen.

22 And he shall also write concerning the end of the world.

23 Wherefore, the things which he shall write are just and true; and behold they are written in the book which thou beheld proceeding out of the mouth of the Jew; and at the time they proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, or, at the time the book proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, the things which were written were plain and pure, and most precious and easy to the understanding of all men.

verse 23 John’s writings will be found in the Bible.

“easy to the understanding of all men” It is humbling to consider the fact that the angel considered the writings of John the Revelator to be “easy” to understand. How many of us even plan to one day make a serious attempt to understand the book of Revelation?

24 And behold, the things which this apostle of the Lamb shall write are many things which thou hast seen; and behold, the remainder shalt thou see.

25 But the things which thou shalt see hereafter thou shalt not write; for the Lord God hath ordained the apostle of the Lamb of God that he should write them.

verses 24-25 John’s calling was to write those things which Nephi had already seen and recorded and those things which Nephi would yet see in vision and write into

his record. Nephi would also see things of which he was asked not to write. John would also write of these latter things.

26 And also others who have been, to them hath he shown all things, and they have written them; and they are sealed up to come forth in their purity, according to the truth which is in the Lamb, in the own due time of the Lord, unto the house of Israel.

verse 26 “also others who have been, to them hath he shown all things”

Nephi is a member of the elect fellowship of those who have seen the panoramic vision of the earth from its beginning to its end. Others in this fellowship include Adam, Enoch, Noah, the brother of Jared, Abraham, Moses, and Joseph Smith. Apparently there are many wonderful features and aspects of this vision that have been written but never made available for mankind. At some future date when man is prepared to receive them, perhaps during the Millennium, these will be published. We know that one such account was Moroni's abridgment of the vision of the brother of Jared which was contained on the plates of Mormon, but that part of the plates of Mormon was sealed and could not be translated by Joseph Smith.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote of additional scripture yet to be sent forth to earth by the Lord:

We have not received, by any means, all of the word of the Lord. I think we have received most of the word of the Lord that is required until the second coming. The Lord has given all that people in the world have the spiritual capacity to receive at this time. There is going to be another great dispensation—that is, another great period of enlightenment—when he comes. At that time he will reveal all things, such as the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon. But he will not reveal the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon now, or let us publish it to the world because what it contains is so far beyond the spiritual capacity of men that it would drive people away from the truth rather than lead them to the truth. Actually, it is an act of mercy for the Lord to limit, to a particular people, the amount of revelation they receive.

We are now in a glorious dispensation in which we have received substantially all of the revelations we are able to bear; it is true, however, that if we were able to unite and have faith, we would get more. That is one of the things that was involved in 1978 when President Kimball received the revelation that the gospel and all of its blessings (the priesthood and the ordinances of the house of the Lord) were now to go to those of every race and kindred and tongue without any reservation except that people live in righteousness and be worthy to receive what is offered to them. That new revelation came in large measure because the prophet of God and those associated with him united in faith and in prayer and in desire, and sought for an answer from the Lord. There are added revelations we could receive, and I hope we will receive, as we manage to get in tune with the Spirit. But the great reservoir of revelation for our

dispensation—meaning the things that we need to know to govern our conduct in order to gain an eternal life—these things have already been given. And there will not be great added reservoirs of substantive revelation that will come before the second coming because of the wickedness of the world. Some of that wickedness spills over and prevails among the Latter-day Saints. But eventually, there will be a day of great added revelation (*Sperry Symposium Classics, The Doctrine and Covenants*, 44).

27 And I, Nephi, heard and bear record, that the name of the apostle of the Lamb was John, according to the word of the angel.

28 And behold, I, Nephi, am forbidden that I should write the remainder of the things which I saw and heard; wherefore the things which I have written sufficeth me; and I have written but a small part of the things which I saw.

29 And I bear record that I saw the things which my father saw, and the angel of the Lord did make them known unto me.

30 And now I make an end of speaking concerning the things which I saw while I was carried away in the spirit; and if all the things which I saw are not written, the things which I have written are true. And thus it is. Amen.

1 Nephi Chapter 15

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 15:23-24 Laman and Lemuel's question to Nephi: What meaneth the rod of iron?

1 Nephi 15:34 Nephi's teaching that no unclean thing can enter the kingdom of God.

1 And it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had been carried away in the spirit, and seen all these things, I returned to the tent of my father.

2 And it came to pass that I beheld my brethren, and they were disputing one with another concerning the things which my father had spoken unto them.

3 For he truly spake many great things unto them, which were hard to be understood, save a man should inquire of the Lord; and they being hard in their hearts, therefore they did not look unto the Lord as they ought.

verse 3 We are here reminded of the profound truth that the intellect of a man by itself, however gifted and trained that man may be, cannot perceive and comprehend spiritual truths. When we are dealing with the things of the Spirit, we cannot weigh and evaluate and judge and handle them in a laboratory, unless we are speaking of a spiritual laboratory. These truths can only be understood through the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14). The Holy Spirit favors a man with this blessing—that of being able to understand spiritual truths—only when he is receptive to the promptings of the Spirit. A man is receptive only when he is humble, prayerful, and obedient. It is likely that Nephi's brothers were not lacking in intelligence and logic. But they obviously did not qualify for the Spirit's promptings.

4 And now I, Nephi, was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts, and also, because of the things which I had seen, and knew they must unavoidably come to pass because of the great wickedness of the children of men.

verse 4 “**hardness of their hearts**” See the discussion of this phrase in the commentaries for 1 Nephi 2:18 and Alma 10:6.

5 And it came to pass that I was overcome because of my afflictions, for I considered that mine afflictions were great above all, because of the destruction of my people, for I had beheld their fall.

verses 4-5 “**I, Nephi, was grieved**” “**I was overcome because of my afflictions**” “**I considered that mine afflictions were great above all**” We have learned from other prophets that the experience of having a vision is physically enervating (Moses 1:10, JS-H 1:20). These verses suggest that Nephi's vision had the

same effect on him. He was obviously shaken emotionally to have been a witness to the eventual apostasy, destruction, and scattering of his people.

6 And it came to pass that after I had received strength I spake unto my brethren, desiring to know of them the cause of their disputations.

7 And they said: Behold, we cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken concerning the natural branches of the olive-tree, and also concerning the Gentiles.

verse 7 For a review of the concepts of the “natural branches of the olive-tree” and the “Gentiles” see the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:14.

8 And I said unto them: Have ye inquired of the Lord?

9 And they said unto me: We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us.

verse 9 Here the brothers seem to be stating their expectations of the Lord, i.e. “The Lord would never make such things known to us.” They do not believe in personal revelation. They do not believe that Nephi could receive actual communication from the Lord. After all, Nephi is not a prophet. He is no better than they.

10 Behold, I said unto them: How is it that ye do not keep the commandments of the Lord? How is it that ye will perish, because of the hardness of your hearts?

verse 10 This verse is a prelude to the following verse. In what sense will the brothers “perish”? See the commentary for verses 5-7 of 1 Nephi 14.

11 Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said?—If ye will not harden your hearts, and ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you.

verse 11 Nephi quotes a scripture to his brothers. But where is this scripture? We do know of a scripture containing the same concept. It is a New Testament scripture, James 1:5: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” Obviously the book of James was not available to Nephi. Both James and Nephi might have been quoting an ancient scripture which is not available to us today in our Old Testament. It is likely this scripture was found on the brass plates of Laban.

Nephi avers that personal and literal revelation is, in fact, available to common man, not just to prophets, if only man will obey the commandments and ask in faith. The brothers, of course, will not obey. Consequently they will be spiritually blighted as a result.

It is clear, in the Book of Mormon, that revelation and prophecy are not exclusively the privileges of the prophets. Because the book is compiled largely by Nephite prophets, we get only a few examples of revelation to common individuals. We will read of the missionary Ammon's watching helplessly as thousands of his converts, turned pacifist, suffer death rather than retaliate or defend themselves (Alma 24). He proposes a migration to Nephite-held Zarahemla, but they are reluctant. "And Ammon said: I will go and inquire of the Lord, and if he say unto us, go down unto our brethren, will ye go?" They agreed. "And it came to pass that Ammon went and inquired of the Lord, and he said unto him: Get this people out of this land" (Alma 27:7, 11-12).

The concept of personal revelation is practically lost in the world today. The religious world acknowledges revelation mainly in written form—the Bible—and in God's managing of major events in the earth's history. The idea that any sincere individual might receive actual individually-tailored communication from God is foreign to virtually all theological circles today. We know that revelation is not confined to prophets and concerns itself with more than the exegesis or explanation of all existence and matters of ultimate concern to all mankind. It is the prerogative of each of us. Questions that prompt divine replies may arise from anyone and may concern themselves with matters that are quotidian, banal, and mundane. For example, while still in the wilderness on their way to the promised land, Nephi and his brothers will lose their weapons and their people will suffer hunger and discouragement. Lehi will "inquire of the Lord" where to hunt, and he will be directed (see 1 Nephi 16:24-31). Later in the record, on two occasions, military plans will be influenced by divine revelation (see Alma 16:5-6; 42:23). The true nature of revelation is that it represents an egalitarian access to truths that range from the sublime to the mundane, from principles of salvation to advice on prime hunting grounds. Personal revelation is the key to spiritual survival, both for the individual and for the nation.

verses 12-20 These verses deal with the scattering and gathering of Israel. A few simple yet essential facts need to be kept in mind as we study about these two concepts—the scattering and gathering.

1. Israel was scattered because they rejected Christ and his gospel, and they will not be gathered again until they accept him.

2. One cannot fully accept Christ without joining his Church and thus accepting citizenship in his kingdom—being gathered to his kingdom.

3. The Israelites will be gathered to the lands of their inheritance—their lands of promise. The western hemisphere, the Americas, have been promised to the tribe of Joseph, while the land of Palestine has been promised for the tribe of Judah.

For more discussion on the scattering and gathering, see the commentary for 1 Nephi chapters 20-22.

12 Behold, I say unto you, that the house of Israel was compared unto an olive-tree, by the Spirit of the Lord which was in our father; and behold are we not broken off from the house of Israel, and are we not a branch of the house of Israel?

verse 12 As explained in 1 Nephi 10:12, in the olive-tree analogy, the tree is the house of Israel and the breaking off of branches signifies the scattering of Israel. Thus, Lehi's family's journey to the western hemisphere is one aspect of the scattering of Israel. This verse implies that the olive-tree analogy originated with the prophet Lehi. This is obviously not the case as is discussed in the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:12.

13 And now, the thing which our father meaneth concerning the grafting in of the natural branches through the fulness of the Gentiles, is, that in the latter days, when our seed shall have dwindled in unbelief, yea, for the space of many years, and many generations after the Messiah shall be manifested in body unto the children of men, then shall the fulness of the gospel of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles, and from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed—

verse 13 “the fulness of the Gentiles” This statement refers to a period of time. This same time period is also known, particularly in the Doctrine and Covenants, as the “times (or days) of the Gentiles.” This is the period of time beginning with the restoration of the gospel through Joseph Smith in which the fulness of the gospel is taken to “Gentile” nations. Actually, any nation that does not have prophets at its head, revelation as its constitution, and the Messiah as its king, is a Gentile nation. Hence all nations of the earth are Gentile nations. The “times of the Gentiles” are the last or latter days. This period culminates or is fulfilled at or near the second coming of the Lord, after the Gentiles have had a full opportunity to receive the gospel. Gospel preaching will then be directed principally to the Jews.

In another sense, the “times of the Gentiles” began in the days of Paul, when he turned from preaching to the Jews and offered the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46-47). In Paul's day the gospel was preached first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. In the latter days the gospel goes first to the Gentiles and then to the Jews (1 Nephi 13:42). As has already been pointed out, this is an application of that well known principle “the last shall be first, and the first shall be last” (see 1 Nephi 13:42).

“grafting in of the natural branches through the fulness of the Gentiles” This signifies the gathering of those of actual Israelite blood descent (“the natural branches”) by those missionaries from the great Gentile nation who have received the gospel. For additional discussion of the phrase “great Gentile nation” see the commentary on 1 Nephi 10:14.

The work of gathering in the latter days will begin as the everlasting gospel is restored to a particular servant of the Lord, Joseph Smith, Jr. He will be living in and is a representative of the great Gentile nation, the United States of America. Then

missionaries from this great Gentile nation, under the direction of Joseph Smith, will take the gospel to the house of Israel—to those of the actual blood of Israel—including the Lamanites and the Jews.

Are these missionaries really “Gentiles?” Obviously, many of these missionary “Gentiles” are really descendants of the house of Israel. They are “Gentiles” only in a cultural sense since they belong to this great Gentile nation. They will receive the gospel and take it to those of the house of Israel, including to those who are a “remnant of our seed,” obviously a reference to those who are descended from Lehi, Ishmael, and Zoram (see also 1 Nephi 22:7).

The “great Gentile nation” will be established in the latter days by the inspiration of the Lord, but its establishment will, of necessity, be a compromise by the Lord. It will not be a truly righteous nation. There will be a separation, by constitutional mandate, of church and state. It will be this way because it must. The world would not tolerate or allow the founding of a truly righteous nation to receive the gospel. Modern revelation regarding this great Gentile nation suggests that the Lord allows this nation to exist as a mechanism for the restoration and promulgation of his gospel, but he does so almost grudgingly. There will exist here much apostasy. The Lord will allow the “tares” to grow among the “wheat” (see JST, Matthew 13:22-29). And what of the eventual fate of this nation? It is sealed up to its eventual destruction after the work of the Lord’s gathering of Israel has progressed to a satisfactory state.

14 And at that day shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then shall they know and come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved.

verse 14 This knowledge that they, “the remnant of our seed,” are natural descendants of the house of Israel is to be restored to Lehi’s descendants. This restoration will, of course, come through the Book of Mormon.

“Saved” here means *exalted*.

15 And then at that day will they not rejoice and give praise unto their everlasting God, their rock and their salvation? Yea, at that day, will they not receive the strength and nourishment from the true vine? Yea, will they not come unto the true fold of God?

verse 15 “at that day” This refers to the day when Lehi’s seed comes to a knowledge of the gospel and to a knowledge of their own true identity as blood members of the house of Israel. This will occur in the final dispensation just prior to the Millennium.

“their rock and their salvation” The most common symbolic meaning of the word “rock” is the gospel of Jesus Christ. For additional meanings see the commentary for 1 Nephi 13:36. These additional meanings include (1) the Lord himself (Deuteronomy 32:13; Psalm 71:3; 1 Corinthians 10:4; 2 Nephi 9:45), and (2) revelation (Matthew 16:18; TPJS, 274). It is the Lord who is being referred to here as “their rock.”

“true vine” Figuratively speaking, the “true vine” is Jesus Christ.

Viticulture is the science of the production and study of grapes. A grape plant, or grapevine, in growing season, consists of a vertical trunk, supported by an underground root system. The trunk is covered with bark and is the permanent part of the grape plant or grapevine. The trunk serves to provide water and nutrients to the rest of the plant. From the trunk there arise horizontal arms, cordons, or branches which are the semi-permanent parts of the plant. These give rise to the shoots which are the fruit-bearing parts of the plants. These branches are often pruned if they become unproductive. In coming to understand the Savior’s being the “true vine,” John 15:1 is useful. It reads: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.” It would seem most appropriate to compare the Savior to the life-giving trunk of the grapevine. This is the permanent and fixed part of the plant which provides life-giving water and nutrition to the remainder of the plant.

Husbandman is an archaic word which means *farmer*. Another archaic word is *vinedresser*. Today, we may refer to him as the *vineyard keeper*.

“true fold of God” A fold is an enclosure for sheep. Figuratively the “true fold of God” is the Church of Jesus Christ.

The “true olive-tree” spoken of in the following verse is also symbolic of the Church and its Head, the Savior himself.

16 Behold, I say unto you, Yea; they shall be remembered again among the house of Israel; they shall be grafted in, being a natural branch of the olive-tree, into the true olive-tree.

verse 16 “They” refers to Lehi’s descendants. They are a “natural” branch in that they are blood Israel.

17 And this is what our father meaneth; and he meaneth that it will not come to pass until after they are scattered by the Gentiles; and he meaneth that it shall come by way of the Gentiles, that the Lord may show his power unto the Gentiles, for the very cause that he shall be rejected of the Jews, or of the house of Israel.

verse 17 **“it will not come to pass until after they are scattered by the Gentiles”** Lehi’s descendants will not realize their true identity and be grafted in to the Church of Christ until after they have been scattered by the Gentiles. For a discussion of this scattering see the commentary for 1 Nephi 13:14.

”that the Lord may show his power unto the Gentiles” Here Nephi gives the reason why the Lord “will show his power unto the Gentiles” and why the gospel will be restored in the latter days through the Gentiles in the great Gentile nation. It is because he has been and will be rejected by the Jews and the rest of the house of Israel.

18 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.

verse 18 “In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” Here reference is made to one tenet of the Abrahamic covenant. For a summary of the other features of this covenant, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8.

19 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, spake much unto them concerning these things; yea, I spake unto them concerning the restoration of the Jews in the latter days.

verse 19 “I, Nephi, spake much unto them” Keep in mind that Nephi is speaking to his rebellious brothers—see verse 6 above.

“I spake unto them concerning the restoration of the Jews in the latter days” This might be a good time to read, for the first time, the important introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 20, particularly the paragraph on the temporal gathering of Israel.

20 And I did rehearse unto them the words of Isaiah, who spake concerning the restoration of the Jews, or of the house of Israel; and after they were restored they should no more be confounded, neither should they be scattered again. And it came to pass that I did speak many words unto my brethren, that they were pacified and did humble themselves before the Lord.

verse 20 “Isaiah, who spake concerning the restoration of the Jews, or of the house of Israel” Isaiah did indeed prophesy of the restoration of the house of Israel, particularly in Isaiah chapters 2 and 11. A detailed commentary will be provided of these chapters—see the commentary for 2 Nephi 12 and 21 respectively.

21 And it came to pass that they did speak unto me again, saying: What meaneth this thing which our father saw in a dream? What meaneth the tree which he saw?

22 And I said unto them: It was a representation of the tree of life.

verse 22 As stated previously (introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 8), the “tree of life” is the tree of eternal life and is symbolic of Jesus Christ. Its fruits symbolize the

saving principles of the gospel. All must partake of this fruit if they are to obtain eternal life.

The title “tree of life” is first encountered in scripture in the creation story. It stood in the midst of the Garden of Eden, and its fruit contained the power of everlasting life (Genesis 2:9; 3:22-24). A question that is sometimes asked: “Is the tree of life in the Garden of Eden the same tree as that in Lehi’s and Nephi’s visions of the tree of life?”

Perhaps Adam and Eve were allowed and even commanded to partake of the tree of life in the garden prior to their transgression. It is possible that it was simply a nutritional necessity. Perhaps their regularly partaking of that tree had the essential physical effect of perpetuating their peculiar eternal state in the Garden. Perhaps that was the way they maintained their eternal physical condition.

This, of course, would make the tree of life in the Garden unrelated to the “tree of life” in 1 Nephi 8 and in 1 Nephi 11-15 except that they would share in the symbolism that they both were the mechanisms for producing something of eternal duration. If, in fact, it is true that the Eden tree is simply a nutritional necessity that enabled Adam and Eve to maintain their status quo in the Garden, then continued access to the tree of life in the Garden might simply have allowed them to maintain their Edenic conditions (not subject to death, unable to procreate). Perhaps their being cast out of the Garden and being denied access to the tree of life were the factors that caused them to begin to deteriorate in a “mortal” way—in other words to become mortal.

23 And they said unto me: What meaneth the rod of iron which our father saw, that led to the tree?

24 And I said unto them that it was the word of God; and 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.

verse 24 “fiery darts of the adversary” These are the temptations of the Devil. This colorful metaphor is extended in D&C 27:17 where we read that one may be protected from these by the “shield of faith.”

verses 23-24 Here, Nephi asserts unambiguously that the “word of God” is a “rod.” Latter-day Saint scholars Hugh Nibley and John A. Tvedtnes have shown how a rod came to be commonly identified with the word of God in the ancient Near East (Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd edition, ed. John W. Welch, 311-28; John A. Tvedtnes, “Rod and Sword as the Word of God,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 [1996]: 148-55).

Further support for the antiquity of Nephi’s imagery has been reported by Matthew L. Bowen (FARMS Update, no. 175, vol. 25, 2005: 2-3). Brother Bowen points out that the comparison may involve a word play with the Egyptian term for “word” and “rod.” Although we obviously have the Book of Mormon text only in translation and do

not know the original wording of the text, we can use our knowledge of the languages that the Nephite writers said they used—Hebrew and Egyptian (see 1 Nephi 1:2; Mormon 9:32-33). The Egyptian word *mdw* means not only “a staff or rod” but also “to speak” a “word.” The Egyptian word *mdw*, probably pronounced *mateh* in Lehi’s day, was common in the Egyptian dialect of that time and would have sounded very much like a common Hebrew word for rod or staff, *matteh*. An indication of Nephi’s awareness of the play on words is his use of the expression in these two verses “hold fast unto” the “word of God,” since one can physically hold fast to a rod but not to a word (compare Helaman 3:29). Another indication of Nephi’s awareness of this word interplay is found in 1 Nephi 17:26, 29: “And ye know that by his word the waters of the Red Sea were divided. . . . And ye also know that Moses, by his *word* . . . smote the rock, and there came forth water” (italics added).

25 Wherefore, I, Nephi, did exhort them to give heed unto the word of the Lord; yea, I did exhort them with all the energies of my soul, and with all the faculty which I possessed, that they would give heed to the word of God and remember to keep his commandments always in all things.

verse 25 To “give heed,” of course, is to pay attention; to observe; to notice; to obey.

26 And they said unto me: What meaneth the river of water which our father saw?

27 And I said unto them that the water which my father saw was filthiness; and so much was his mind swallowed up in other things that he beheld not the filthiness of the water.

verse 27 As father Lehi witnessed the vision of the tree of life, he did see and comment upon the river of water, but he failed to notice that the river flowed with filthy water. The river and its “filthiness” represents the gulf which separates the righteous from the wicked.

28 And I said unto them that it was an awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God.

29 And I said unto them that it was a representation of that awful hell, which the angel said unto me was prepared for the wicked.

verses 28-29 “an awful gulf” Nephi points out that in mortality the river of filthiness separates the proud and worldly in the large and spacious building from the tree of life and from the saints of God. The symbolism of this awful gulf likely has application to both our mortal life and to the post mortal phase of our existence.

Some have taken this symbolism to be referable to the great gulf in the spirit world (see also 1 Nephi 12:18). From the time of Adam to the time of Christ’s mortal

ministry, there existed no link in the spirit world between paradise and prison—between the righteous and the wicked. People who had chosen to live according to the things of the world as opposed to ways of the spirit were doomed, in the spirit prison, to live without gospel light for centuries.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus as related in the book of Luke is often taken as a depiction of this great gulf (Luke 16:19-26). The rich man, finding himself in hell, saw Lazarus some distance away in “Abraham’s bosom” (paradise). He pled with father Abraham to send Lazarus, “that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.” In commenting on this parable, Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught that these two men “knew each other in mortality, so they remember their former acquaintanceship. But no longer are they accessible to each other so that one might minister to the needs of the other. Christ [had] not bridged the gulf between the prison and the palace, and there [was] as yet no communion between the righteous in paradise and the wicked in hell” (*The Mortal Messiah*, 3:263).

Jesus Christ bridged the gulf between paradise and prison when he visited the spirit world between the time of his death and resurrection. We are taught by President Joseph F. Smith in D&C 138:20-37 that Jesus did not actually go personally among the spirits in prison, but rather he preached the gospel to the righteous in paradise and then organized them to travel as missionaries to the spirits in prison.

Prior to the bridging of this great gulf between wicked and righteous, the saints in paradise had nowhere to preach the gospel. It was during this period that the Lord chose to utilize some of these righteous saints as translated beings. Their mortal lives were prolonged, and their bodies were raised to a terrestrial level. They were then given assignments that allowed them to continue their labors among the children of men (for additional discussion of the phenomenon of translation, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 17, *Doctrine of Translation*). Enoch and his city were an example.

Joseph Smith taught of translated beings: “Their place of habitation is that of the terrestrial order, and a place prepared for such characters he held in reserve to be ministering angels unto many planets” (*TPJS*, 170-71, 191). After Jesus bridged the gulf in the world of spirits, this practice changed. Now the obligation of the righteous is to die, go to the spirit world, and continue to preach the gospel there (Bruce R. McConkie, “Jesus Christ and Him Crucified,” 1976 *Brigham Young University Devotional Speeches of the Year*, 401; *The Millennial Messiah*, 284-85).

Does an analogous gulf exist in *mortality*? It certainly does, and Nephi refers to it in the following verse.

Prior to Jesus’s atoning sacrifice and resurrection no one could cross either gulf. The atonement of Jesus Christ has made it possible for both to be crossed.

30 And I said unto them that our father also saw that the justice of God did also divide the wicked from the righteous; and the brightness thereof was like unto the brightness of a flaming fire, which ascendeth up unto God forever and ever, and hath no end.

verse 30 “the justice of God did also divide the wicked from the righteous”

To understand how an “awful gulf” divides the wicked from the righteous in mortality, as well as in the post mortal world, one needs only to understand the concept of the law of justice. For a review of this important concept, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 12, *The Law of Justice*. In mortality the law of justice divides the righteous from the wicked. Strictly speaking, the only completely righteous individual, standing alone on his side of the gulf, is the Savior himself. In a more practical sense, there is a clearly definable difference or “gulf” between those individuals earnestly striving for righteousness and those caught up in the snares of the world.

The “**brightness of a flaming fire**” apparently refers to the glory of those residing in paradise in the spirit world.

31 And they said unto me: Doth this thing mean the torment of the body in the days of probation, or doth it mean the final state of the soul after the death of the temporal body, or doth it speak of the things which are temporal?

32 And it came to pass that I said unto them that it was a representation of things both temporal and spiritual; for the day should come that they must be judged of their works, yea, even the works which were done by the temporal body in their days of probation.

verses 31-32 Nephi’s brothers ask him whether the symbols spoken of, namely the “river of water” and the “awful gulf” which separate the righteous from the wicked, pertain to the mortal world (“the days of probation” and “things which are temporal”) or to the world to come (“the final state of the soul after the death of the temporal body”). Nephi answers that it applies to both.

“they must be judged of their works” “They” refers to all mankind.

33 Wherefore, if they should die in their wickedness they must be cast off also, as to the things which are spiritual, which are pertaining to righteousness; wherefore, they must be brought to stand before God, to be judged of their works; and if their works have been filthiness they must needs be filthy; and if they be filthy it must needs be that they cannot dwell in the kingdom of God; if so, the kingdom of God must be filthy also.

verse 33 Usually the phrase *kingdom of God* is used to refer to the Lord’s earthly kingdom. Here, however, the context makes it obvious that in a broad sense there are two kingdoms of God, one on earth and the other in heaven. The phrase kingdom of heaven uniformly refers to God’s celestial heaven.

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

verses 33-34 As we read about the law of justice (see the reference above) we learn that for every violation of the Lord's law a penalty must be paid. Also, for every obedience to the law there is a reward. A man is "justified" when all penalties are paid. He is then "reconciled to God" or brought into perfect harmony with God to the point where he can be exalted. The following statement is absolute and must be understood to be absolute: No man can be exalted in the celestial kingdom without being justified.

35 And there is a place prepared, yea, even that awful hell of which I have spoken, and the devil is the preparator of it; wherefore the final state of the souls of men is to dwell in the kingdom of God, or to be cast out because of that justice of which I have spoken.

verse 35 "the preparator of it" A "preparator" is one who prepares. Today we would prefer the word *preparer*. Dr. Royal Skousen has, however, observed that the original manuscript for this phrase reads "proprietor of it" and suggests that when the printer's manuscript copy was made from the original, this word was mis-copied.

"souls" The most precise definition of a *soul* is the combination of the body and the spirit of man (Abraham 5:7; D&C 88:15-16). However, here, and in several other places in the Book of Mormon, the word "soul" is used as meaning the spirit. See also Mosiah 14:10; Alma 36:15; 40:7, 11-14, 18, 21, 23; and 42:16. The same meaning also pertains elsewhere in the scriptures (D&C 101:37; Abraham 3:23).

"the final state of the souls of men is to dwell in the kingdom of God, or to be cast out" As has been stated previously, the Book of Mormon speaks of the life hereafter in simplistic terms—either exaltation or perdition. It does not contain the concept of "multiple heavens" or the three degrees of salvation. See "Post-Mortal Life and the Book of Mormon" in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13, *The Spirit World*.

36 Wherefore, the wicked are rejected from the righteous, and also from that tree of life, whose fruit is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits; yea, and it is the greatest of all the gifts of God. And thus I spake unto my brethren. Amen.

verse 36 The **"greatest of all the gifts of God"** is exaltation in the celestial kingdom (D&C 14:7).

1 Nephi Chapter 16

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 16 Lehi and his family find the Liahona and depart the valley of Lemuel.

In chapter 16 Lehi and his family depart the valley of Lemuel.

verses 1-6 These six verses might better have been included as the last six verses of chapter 15. In 1 Nephi chapters 8 through 15, we find visions, prophecies, and admonishments. Chapter 16 begins the second phase of their journey from the valley of Lemuel to the ocean.

1 And now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had made an end of speaking to my brethren, behold they said unto me: Thou hast declared unto us hard things, more than we are able to bear.

2 And it came to pass that I said unto them that I knew that I had spoken hard things against the wicked, according to the truth; and the righteous have I justified, and testified that they should be lifted up at the last day; wherefore, the guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center.

verses 1-2 The admonishments of Nephi were perceived as “hard things” by Laman and Lemuel since they were condemned by them. It would seem that the expression “more than we are able to bear” does not reflect the brothers’ resentment (see verse 5) so much as it does their despair over their sinfulness. Indeed, “it cutteth them to the very center.”

“the righteous have I justified” To be *justified* is to be entirely free of sin and qualified to enter the kingdom of God after this life. Obviously Nephi does not do the judging or justifying, but here he pronounces that the righteous will eventually be justified.

3 And now my brethren, if ye were righteous and were willing to hearken to the truth, and give heed unto it, that ye might walk uprightly before God, then ye would not murmur because of the truth, and say: Thou speakest hard things against us.

verse 3 Simply stated, the best way to obtain a spiritual witness of a true principle is to live it.

4 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did exhort my brethren, with all diligence, to keep the commandments of the Lord.

5 And it came to pass that they did humble themselves before the Lord; insomuch that I had joy and great hopes of them, that they would walk in the paths of righteousness.

6 Now, all these things were said and done as my father dwelt in a tent in the valley which he called Lemuel.

7 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, took one of the daughters of Ishmael to wife; and also, my brethren took of the daughters of Ishmael to wife; and also Zoram took the eldest daughter of Ishmael to wife.

8 And thus my father had fulfilled all the commandments of the Lord which had been given unto him. And also, I, Nephi, had been blessed of the Lord exceedingly.

verses 7-8 “And thus my father had fulfilled all the commandments of the Lord” This phrase implies that father Lehi had been commanded by the Lord to arrange marriages for his sons. Under ancient Israelite law, it was the father’s duty to arrange marriages for his children, and it was the children’s duty to accept the father’s arrangements. Recall that Lehi selected the family whose daughters his sons would marry.

“I, Nephi, had been blessed of the Lord exceedingly” It’s fun to read between the lines as you read scripture. For example, in these verses the men in the traveling company have divided up the girls among themselves and have taken them to wife. Note particularly Nephi’s statement, “I Nephi have been blessed of the Lord exceedingly.” Nephi is probably not talking about just generic blessings here. He is likely saying that when a woman was chosen for each man, he got the loveliest of the group! He was “blessed of the Lord exceedingly.”

9 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord spake unto my father by night, and commanded him that on the morrow he should take his journey into the wilderness.

verse 9 The marriages between the families of Lehi and Ishmael marked the end of the long encampment in the valley of Lemuel. The next phase of the journey would be more difficult. They would traverse country that was more arid and dangerous. Food and water would be scarce, and a vigil would have to be maintained for robbers. As we read the following narrative account written by Nephi of the family’s journey in the wilderness, it is appropriate to keep in mind that this account was translated by Joseph Smith from the small plates of Nephi. The account was actually written by Nephi perhaps as many as thirty years after the fact. Thus it seems unlikely that Nephi could have given us a precise chronological account, and more likely that he is simply reporting the important highlights of the journey.

10 And it came to pass that as my father arose in the morning, and went forth to the tent door, to his great astonishment he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness.

verse 10 This device is referred to in the text of the Book of Mormon as “the ball,” “the compass” (1 Nephi 18:21), and “the director” (2 Nephi 5:12; Mosiah 1:16). It is not given the name “Liahona” until Alma 37:38. Though many meanings have been suggested for the term Liahona, Dr. Nibley’s favorite is “God is our Guide” (“The Liahona’s Cousin,” a FARMS reprint).

Some interesting insight on how the extended family of Lehi used the Liahona is obtained from the account of Alma the younger’s delivering the Liahona to his son Helaman (Alma 37:38-47). The Liahona was a gift of God that worked solely by the power of God. It functioned only in response to the faith and diligence of those who followed it.

Alma taught that the Liahona seemed a “temporal” thing of “small means,” and apparently it was regarded as such by Lehi’s people. They seemed to take it for granted and almost ignored it altogether. It is apparent that it was not regarded by Lehi’s people as a new and unfamiliar type of object. They seemed to regard it as unremarkable and ordinary. Dr. Hugh Nibley has pointed out why this might have been so. He has reported evidence that the tradition in Hebrew culture of “divining with arrows” is well established. Hebrews believed that for many types of decisions, including such things as finding their way through uncharted territory, the Lord’s influence would intervene if they used arrows in a type of divining ritual (“The Liahona’s Cousin,” a FARMS reprint).

Evidently, then, to Lehi’s group the Liahona seemed just another device with which they could seek the Lord’s will through the use of arrows—just another way to “cast lots” as it were. Apparently they often did not take it seriously and were careless in giving heed to its advice. Alma later taught Helaman that this carelessness and disobedience of those in Lehi’s party contributed to their having to wander eight years in the wilderness: “They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey; therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions” (Alma 37:40-41). Alma would also teach that the Liahona was a type or symbol of Christ (Alma 37:44-45) in that Lehi’s party had but to follow its words and directions to be led to the Promised Land. Similarly, if we follow the words of Christ, we will be led to a much better promised land.

“a round ball of curious workmanship” One definition of the word *curious* in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language is, “wrought with care and art; elegant; neat; finished; rare; singular.” It is natural to try to visualize in one’s mind

the appearance of this device. It is not possible, of course, to be certain of its appearance, or its size, because we only have this cursory description. Apparently the round ball of brass did not have a complete spherical shell and was at least in part hollow since the pointer spindles were “within the ball.” There was obviously some type of gap or window in the shell that allowed visualization of the spindles or pointers.

Robert L. Bunker has provided us with a helpful article on the Liahona in which he speculates as to its appearance. Under the section titled *Illustrations*, see “Liahona” and “Spindles of Liahona.” He also suggests a plausible reason why the Liahona had to have “two spindles” or pointers (“The Design of the Liahona and the Purpose of the Second Spindle,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 3, [Fall 1994] 1-11). A “spindle,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) is an object used in spinning: “a slender rounded rod . . . tapering towards each end.” “Such a spindle-shaped pointer is often encountered in magnetic compasses where some type of marking designates one end as north. The spindle in the Liahona used to designate direction would also have required differentiation between ends, either by color, texture, or shape. While use of the spindle shape is aesthetically pleasing and appropriately functional, there are sound engineering reasons for its selection: The symmetry inherently provides mechanical balance along its major and minor axes, a requirement for both compasses and the Liahona” (Bunker, 3).

Why were there two spindles? In his article, Brother Bunker reminds us that the Liahona functioned appropriately only part of the time “according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give” (1 Nephi 16:28). But even when it wasn’t functioning, its directional spindle would always be pointing in some specific direction. It is clear then that the Liahona not only had to provide directional information, but also had to indicate whether or not that information could be relied upon—whether or not its users were exercising sufficient faith (1 Nephi 18:12, 21). One of the pointers provided directional information. Again, since a single pointer is always pointing in a specific direction, it seems likely that the role of the second pointer was to provide the information as to whether or not the directional information from the first pointer was reliable. Brother Bunker speculates: “If an observer viewed the pointers and saw only a single pointer, then they were both aligned in the same direction, one on top of the other, and the director was providing correct information. Lehi’s party could then follow the indicated direction with confidence that it was the Lord’s instruction. If, on the other hand, the two pointers were cross-ways to each other—forming an “X,” then the pointing information was not reliable. No other information was required of the Liahona, so no more than two pointers were needed. But the requirements demand a minimum of two.” See the illustration of the spindles. Brother Bunker points out that this technique is used in modern engineering and is called “voting.” When the decision of a computer system, for example, is critical, two independent systems will be asked to make an independent

analysis. If the decision of both systems (the “votes”) are the same, then a correct decision is assumed. If the answers are different, then an error is assumed.

Brother Hugh Nibley has written:

A . . . study by an Arabic scholar has called attention to the long-forgotten custom of the ancient Arabs and Hebrews of consulting two headless arrows whenever they were about to undertake a journey; the usual thing was to consult the things at a special shrine, though it was common also to take such divination arrows along on the trip in a special container. The message of the arrows, which were mere sticks without heads or feathers, was conveyed by their pointing and especially by the inscriptions that were on them, giving detailed directions as to the journey (*Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 244-45).

11 And it came to pass that we did gather together whatsoever things we should carry into the wilderness, and all the remainder of our provisions which the Lord had given unto us; and we did take seed of every kind that we might carry into the wilderness.

verse 11 This verse marks the beginning of what has been referred to as the “Desert Journal.” It will include 1 Nephi 16:11-17, 33; 17:1-6. It is possibly a journal kept by Nephi himself, but it more likely is Nephi’s quoting of his father’s writings from the record of Lehi (see 1 Nephi 19:1-2). The reader will recall that Nephi did not even start the small plates of Nephi, the record from which we are now reading, until about 570 BC, some thirty years after the group left Jerusalem. It is likely that Lehi’s “Desert Journal” proved very useful in filling out Nephi’s memory of hazy or forgotten details.

“we did take seed of every kind” It is safe to assume that Nephi’s party did not have access to every kind of seed, rather they took those seeds which were available to them. These likely came from both the land of Jerusalem and from the valley of Lemuel. They would surely have included dates (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 8:1). Along with the camel, the Arabs consider the date to be one of God’s greatest gifts to them. Without the camel, travel across the desert would have been impossible. Without the date, one of the few foodstuffs that do not perish in the heat of the desert, those making long desert journeys would have little to eat.

12 And it came to pass that we did take our tents and depart into the wilderness, across the river Laman.

verse 12 As they broke camp and set out for the wilderness, Lehi knew they were headed for a promised land and that it would be over water. It is therefore quite possible that when Lehi left the valley of Lemuel, he had a good idea of where they were headed—to one of the South Arabian ports. Also, it is likely that he knew, camped in the valley of Lemuel, that he was less than twenty miles from the Frankincense Trail which could lead him down the full length of western Arabia to those ports. See the illustration of the map of the Frankincense Trail.

When Lehi and his family departed the valley of Lemuel, they would have descended the wadi Tayyib al-lsm to the shore of the Red Sea, crossed the small river Laman and traveled south along the narrow coastal plain to the site of modern Maqna. From there they would have turned east and traveled twenty miles to the ancient town of Midian (modern al Bada'a). Here in Midian they would have picked up the Frankincense Trail.

The Frankincense Trail, in the days of Lehi, was the one trail that existed from the Mediterranean Sea to southern Arabia (Thesiger, *Arabian Sands*, 208-9). If one were traveling up the Frankincense Trail from southern Arabia, one would encounter a major division in the trail about 250 miles below the valley of Lemuel at a place now called Dedan or Ula. One branch, the main branch, continued on north-northeast to pass east of the Dead Sea to modern-day Amman, Jordan and Damascus, Syria. The other branch, the Egyptian or Gaza branch, turned more toward the west to run near the Gulf of Aqaba, through the modern-day town of Aqaba on the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, and thence north to the town of Gaza on the Mediterranean. It is this latter branch of the Frankincense Trail that Lehi's family would have traveled after leaving the town of Midian.

At the time three major ports existed in southern Arabia (see Frankincense Trail map): Aden (Eden), Cana (Qana), and Moscha (in Dhofar). The merchant ships of these three ports virtually monopolized trade with India and the Far East until the first centuries BC–AD. Aden and Cana were the ports of the Sheban empire (the kingdom of Sheba) and were known to the people of Palestine in Lehi's time (Ezekiel 27:23). It is almost certain that Lehi also knew of the ocean-going ships of the Indian Ocean which called at these three ports. His contemporaries, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, had knowledge of the Frankincense Trail and the merchant ships which sailed the Indian Ocean (Ezekiel 27:20, 22). The Liahona eventually will point Lehi and his family to Moscha on the Indian Ocean. Today, the ruins of what is thought to be Moscha are found at the inlet of Khor Rori in the southern part of the Sultanate of Oman. From Moscha in the area known as Dhofar, ships loaded with the precious frankincense embarked into the Indian Ocean. We will have more to say about Khor Rori later.

It is peculiar that many in the Church have the idea that Lehi and his family traveled from the valley of Lemuel to the Arabian coast secretly, avoiding trails and shunning contact with other people. The only practical way to have made the journey was to follow the Frankincense Trail, and doing so was reasonably safe. It is true that small bands of outlaws occasionally preyed on small groups of travelers, but the tribes who lived along the trail were mostly a source of security for those traveling the trail rather than a source for fear. It was apparently the habit, in those days, for the traders who used the trails to pay protection money called *khawah* to the tribes through whose territory they were traveling. Thus, the tribes regarded the travelers as their customers, and had a genuine interest in their safety (Keohane, *Bedouin, Nomads of the Desert*,

10, 11). The tribute money they collected from the travelers was their main source of income. For this reason, the tribes that ruled trade routes went to great efforts to protect their trails and to organize small parties into larger groups for travel between villages. Tribute-paying travelers were welcomed so long as they obeyed the terms of passage: staying to the authorized trails through the Arab's lands, paying tribute, and not robbing the locals. The desert trails could be viewed as toll roads that crossed the private property of the tribes. The tribes fiercely protected their lands and guarded their wells. Lehi would have understood that in order to travel through Arabia he would need the protection of an authorized trail, for he would not have been allowed free access to wells or provisions of the local tribe. If Lehi did not pay khawah or if he strayed from the authorized trails, he and his family would have quickly found themselves at the mercy of the local tribes. In the years Lehi was in Arabia, his party would have passed through the lands of at least a dozen tribes and many more sub-tribes. It is incomprehensible that Lehi with many men, woman, and children in his party could have traveled undetected through Arabia.

Another technique for staying safe on the journey through the desert was to combine into larger groups. Apparently, in Lehi's day, when a smaller group wished to make a long journey, they would wait at a caravanserai or village, making their intentions known, until enough people could band together to make a sizable traveling party. Only then would they set out, the large size of the group providing the deterrent to would-be bandits. The caravan was thus a small army traveling across the desert, a veritable town on the move, bristling with weapons. To think that Lehi would have been so foolish as to try to wander across Arabia alone, trespassing lands and without permission simply ignores the realities of travel in that period.

Besides money for tributes, Lehi would have needed funds for acquiring provisions, and probably for replacing camels that became lame or died on the trail. We know Lehi did not take his gold and silver into the wilderness. Randolph Linehan, an attorney specializing in international commerce, and one who practiced law in Arabia, speculates on how Lehi acquired the funds necessary to purchase passage through Arabia:

Lehi was wealthy. He had taught not just his oldest sons, but his younger ones as well, reading, writing, and the trade languages: Egyptian, Canaanite script, and Judahite Hebrew. . . . The idea that nobles would hire themselves out as slaves or workers on their journey south makes little sense. Anyone who could read in their period of time already had a talent which would be similar to an M.D. traveling abroad today (personal communication between Linehan and George Potter, reported in *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 64).

Linehan finds it reasonable to assume that in the commercial centers located along the Frankincense Trail, Lehi and his older sons could have exchanged their highly valued personal services for tribute and provisions. This might, to some degree, explain

why it took Lehi eight years to cross Arabia, and is consistent with the history of the Arab world where educated people would migrate from city to city seeking positions as scholars, political and commercial aids, or judges. Undoubtedly the well-educated Lehi could have offered an array of needed skills to the courts of sheikh's along the Frankincense Trail.

One might well ask, "If they traveled along a trail why did they need the Liahona to show them the way?" Couldn't they have simply walked along the road? The Frankincense Trail was not a road in the sense that we are used to. There was no clearly delineated trail along which to walk. It is not really possible to speak of a single trail. At times this trail was only a few yards wide when it traversed mountain passes. At others, it was several miles across. In places the trail split into two or more branches that, at a point farther on, would reunite into one main road. Until late antiquity, the trail ran along the east side of the mountain range in western Arabia rather than along the west or coastal side. The Frankincense Trail was simply a general course that would take one to the next caravan "halt" and source of water. Lehi would have needed a guide, and for those times that the family was traveling alone, the Liahona was capable of taking a guide's place. The trip down the Frankincense Trail was no jaunt down a well-marked highway.

13 And it came to pass that we traveled for the space of four days, nearly a south-southeast direction, and we did pitch our tents again; and we did call the name of the place Shazer.

verse 13 **"we traveled . . . nearly a south-southeast direction"** This is the direction of the Frankincense Trail. The Frankincense Trail took its name from the product that was primarily transported along it, frankincense, a sweet smelling sap of the frankincense tree. The southern Arabians became wealthy on the sale of this aromatic, highly prized by the ancients. It was used in perfume, in medicine, in embalming, and in religious worship. At the time of Lehi, the main place where frankincense grew naturally was southern Arabia, with the most highly prized "silver" frankincense coming from Dhofar. The Persian Emperor Darius (521-486 BC) received one thousand Babylonian talents in weight, nearly twenty-five tons, of frankincense annually as a "voluntary tribute" from the Arabs (W. W. Muller, "Weihrauch," suppl. 15, col. 708, lines 40-58; Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh*, 60). Herodotus in the fifth century BC recorded that two and a half tons of frankincense were burned annually in the temple of Bel Al Babylon (Hawley, *Oman and Its Renaissance*, 245). This was obviously only a tiny fraction of the total produce of the area at that time. Vast amounts were also used in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Greece. An estimated three thousand tons of frankincense were sent to Greece and Rome each year at the peak of the incense trade in the second century AD. Huge caravans must have left regularly from Dhofar

carrying frankincense to Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean, and still more was taken on board ships to Yemen.

“and we did call the name of the place Shazer” The text implies that it was the Lehites themselves who named this place “Shazer.” Regarding the name Shazer, Hugh Nibley wrote, “The name is intriguing. The combination *shajer* is quite common in Palestinian place names; it is a collective meaning ‘trees.’ And many Arabs (especially in Egypt) pronounce it shazher” (*Old Testament and Related Studies*, 78-79). Nigel Groom, in his *Dictionary of Arabic Topography and Place Names*, uses a number of variations of the same place name, Shajir being one of them, identical to Nibley’s “Shajer.” Groom’s definition of Shajir is: “A valley or area abounding with trees and shrubs.” So it appears highly likely that the family had named the place Shazer because it was a valley with many trees.

Armed with the knowledge that this cultivated valley was within one hundred miles south-southeast of the valley of Lemuel (“we traveled for the space of four days”), George Potter and Richard Wellington set out to find a likely candidate for the place called Shazer. It took them two years and three field trips. Finally, in the summer of 2000, the whereabouts of Shazer became apparent. Nephi recorded that their first halting place after leaving the valley of Lemuel was a place of trees where they stopped to hunt. In their research in the spring of 2000, Wellington had learned, from studying the ancient trade routes in Arabia, that the first rest stop traveling south from Midian (modern al-Bada’a) was a place called Al-Aghra’. In other writings he found a description of a fertile valley with an oasis over fifteen miles long which was south-southeast from the valley of Lemuel at about the appropriate distance. This was found in the wadi Agharr. Noticing the similarity of the spelling of these two places, Al-Aghra’ and Agharr, Wellington recalled that on a previous field trip he had been told by the Police General at al-Bada’a that the best hunting in the entire area was in the mountains of Agharr. From al Bada’a Potter and Wellington headed sixty miles south-southeast to the wadi Agharr. To their right was the Red Sea glittering in the bright noon light; to their left the mountains of the Hijaz towering over them. Straight ahead they soon came to a place where the wide plain on which they were traveling was constricted by a low mountain chain that ran at right angles to their path. These were the Agharr mountains. The trail led to a gap in the mountains. Passing through the gap they entered an oasis that ran as far as the eye could see both to their left and to their right. This was a narrow valley, perhaps one hundred yards across, bounded on each side by high walls stretching up a few hundred feet. “Shazer” was certainly an apt description for this location—a valley with trees, set amid the barren landscape of Midian. They felt they had found Shazer.

After the family departed from Shazer, it seems likely that they turned east and ascended a mountain range described in the commentary for verse 15. After the following verse, Nephi’s account will not mention the Red Sea again.

14 And it came to pass that we did take our bows and our arrows, and go forth into the wilderness to slay food for our families; and after we had slain food for our families we did return again to our families in the wilderness, to the place of Shazer. And we did go forth again in the wilderness, following the same direction, keeping in the most fertile parts of the wilderness, which were in the borders near the Red Sea.

verse 13 “we did take our bows and our arrows, and go forth into the wilderness to slay food for our families” Potter and Wellington, on a later expedition, returned to wadi Agharr (Shazer) and drove up into the mountains in the area they thought the men of Lehi’s party would have gone to hunt. They spoke with Bedouins who lived in the upper end of the wadi Agharr who told them that Ibex lived in the mountains, and they still hunted them there. It may have been these very animals that Lehi and his sons went out to hunt. Here at wadi Agharr was a site that probably had the best hunting along the entire Frankincense Trail. It is the first place travelers would have been allowed to stop and pitch tents south of Midian, and as the Book of Mormon states, it is a four days’ journey from the valley of Lemuel.

“in the borders near the Red Sea” Here Nephi informs us that after leaving Shazer, the group traveled “in the borders near the Red Sea.” We have discussed previously that it is likely that the word *borders* refers to mountains (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:5), particularly the Hijaz mountains which are a range of mountains that runs along the northwestern shoreline of Arabia, dividing the interior desert valleys from the shoreline plain. Thus the term “borders” for this mountain range is most appropriate. The group traveled up in the mountains for much of the journey through northwest Arabia which happens to be the route followed by the Frankincense Trail. See, again, the map of the Frankincense Trail.

The phrase “in the most fertile parts of the wilderness” also makes a mountainous location more likely. It is pertinent that Nephi uses the phrase “in the borders” only in the initial phase of the journey. Subsequently he drops the word “borders.” This is consistent with the mountainous terrain through which the Frankincense Trail runs for the 500 or so miles from the valley of Lemuel toward the southern coast of Arabia. From then on, the trail through Arabia was on the plains well east of the mountains.

“keeping in the most fertile parts of the wilderness, which were in the borders near the Red Sea” Nephi tells us here that while they are traveling in the mountains, there are areas of fertility and cultivation and that the Frankincense Trail passed through them. From Shazer, the group continued on the Gaza branch of the Frankincense Trail to the ancient oasis town of Dedan. Here it joined the main branch of the trail which continued either north or south.

There is another interesting concept that supports the veracity of the Book of Mormon. In ancient times there was a 215 mile-long section of the Frankincense Trail which incorporated twelve frankincense halt (oasis) settlements toward the south between Dedan and modern-day Medina. This section was known in pre-Islam times as the Qura 'Arabiyyah, or the "Arab Villages" (Groom, *Dictionary of Arabic Topography and Placenames*, s.v. "Qura 'Arabiyyah"). These villages with their cultivated lands were linked together by the Frankincense Trail. These cultivated lands stood out from the surrounding vast and barren desert like a string of pearls. They are located in valleys surrounded by mountains, thus Nephi's reference to fertile parts in the "borders" or "mountains" is in harmony with the geography of this section of the trail.

Even more interesting is the name applied to all the Qura Arabiyyah villages by the prophet Mohammed. He referred to them as the Muhajirun, which means the "fertile pieces or parts of land." Muhajirun is the plural form of Hajar which means simply "farm." In other words, when Nephi referred to the "most fertile parts," he appears to have been using the actual place-name for the area in which they were traveling, the Muhajirun.

It is noteworthy that Nephi's record does not mention the family murmuring while they traveled in the most fertile parts of the land. If they had traveled anywhere else in the northwest part of Arabia, other than the unique and narrow strip of rich farmland that is found along the main Frankincense Trail, we can be sure that the impatient Laman and Lemuel would have vented strong complaints. Why would anyone want to wander off the trail, since just a few miles on either side was harsh waterless desert? Lehi and his family would have had to travel this route.

15 And it came to pass that we did travel for the space of many days, slaying food by the way, with our bows and our arrows and our stones and our slings.

verse 15 "slaying food by the way, with our bows and our arrows and our stones and our slings" Brother Hugh Nibley wrote of these weapons:

[Nephi] explicitly tells us that the hunting weapons he used were "bows . . . arrows . . . stones, and . . . slings" (1 Nephi 16:15). That is another evidence for the Book of Mormon, for [Moritz] Mainzer found that those were indeed the hunting weapons of the early Hebrews, who never used the classic hunting weapons of their neighbors, the sword, lance, javelin, and club. . . . According to the ancient Arab writers, the only bow-wood obtainable in all Arabia was the nab wood that grew only . . . in the very region where, if we follow the Book of Mormon, the broken bow incident occurred. How many factors must be correctly conceived and correlated to make the apparently simple story of Nephi's bow ring true! The high mountain near the Red Sea at a considerable journey down the coast, the game on the peaks, hunting with a bow and sling, the finding of bow-wood viewed as something of a miracle by the party—what

are the chances of reproducing such a situation by mere guesswork? (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 231-32).

verses 14-15 The traveling party were truly nomadic hunters. On occasion they would establish a base camp and launch hunting expeditions from it. Also they would hunt food “along the way.”

Joseph Smith’s only known statement about the geography of Arabia and the route of Lehi’s family shows no knowledge of the mountain chain pattern, the major trade route, or the economy and trading practices in Arabia. He simply said that the party traveled from “the Red Sea to the great Southern Ocean” (*TPJS*, 267), a rather simple statement when compared to Nephi’s complex narrative.

The length of the party’s journey from Jerusalem to the ocean was at least 2,100 miles. From Jerusalem to Nahom (see verse 34) was about 1,400 miles. The first 250 or so miles brought them to the first camp, their valley of Lemuel. The remaining 1,150 or so miles lay between the first camp and Nahom. There remained approximately 700 miles to traverse to their Bountiful, where they would build their ship.

The time it took to travel from the first camp to Nahom was likely less than one year. How do we know that? The answer comes from Nephi’s placement of details in his narrative. We start with observations about the marriages that took place in the camp before everyone departed (see 1 Nephi 16:7). While we cannot be entirely certain how long after the marriages the party left the camp, we would expect that one or more of the new brides became pregnant within the first months of marriage. Thus, they may have been pregnant when they set out from the camp. So we should expect a report of childbirths. And we find it. What may be significant is that Nephi noted the first births of children only as he finished his record of later events at Nahom, not before (see 1 Nephi 17:1). We naturally conclude that the women gave birth to their first children at Nahom and that the journey from the camp to Nahom took a year or less, the length of the new brides’ pregnancies.

16 And we did follow the directions of the ball, which led us in the more fertile parts of the wilderness.

verse 16 “the more fertile parts of the wilderness” After leaving the “*most* fertile parts,” Nephi here reports that the family hunted with bows as they traveled in the “*more* fertile parts of the wilderness.” *Most* has now become *more*. The implication here is that this part of the journey was through lands which were not as fertile as the “most fertile parts.”

The Qura Arabiyyah (see the commentary for verse 14), the fertile pieces or parts, ended south of Medina, and from that point the trail changes in nature. The trail moved away from the mountains and onto the Arabia shelf. The trail south from Medina headed inland. In order to skirt the lava fields it stayed in the desert, the entire course being approximately three hundred fifty miles to Bishah. See again the map, the

Frankincense Trail. South of Medina the oases with cultivation were farther apart. After Medina the oases were at Turbah, Bishah, Tathlith, Ranyah, and Najran, five oases over a distance of more than seven hundred fifty miles. Now, rather than an oasis every night, they were many days or weeks apart.

17 And after we had traveled for the space of many days, we did pitch our tents for the space of a time, that we might again rest ourselves and obtain food for our families.

verse 17 The trail and its spurs kept to the main wells and grasslands where caravanners could obtain food and water for their animals and themselves. The course of the Frankincense Trail can be explained in one word—water—the most precious commodity of all to the desert traveler. Lynn Hilton notes, “The history of Arabia is written in water, not ink” (*In Search of Lehi’s Trail—Part One*, 36). The great oases of western Arabia, Tabuk, Hijra (Madain Saleh), Dedan (Ula), Medina, Mecca, and Najran are all found on the Frankincense Trail or a branch of it. See the map of the Frankincense Trail. The eastern side of the coastal mountains forms an underground seal, trapping large pools of water in aquifers. The inland underground reservoirs, called the Basalt Aquifers, run almost the entire length of the northern and central parts of the trail, providing dependable wells and springs along its course. Indeed, the course of the Frankincense Trail was not a fluke. It was there because it offered the traveler the best chance of surviving a crossing of the great deserts. It had a reliable water supply. Because of the need for water, Lehi had no option but to travel on a proven trail.

As previously mentioned, some believe that Lehi tiptoed through the desert of Arabia undetected by the local inhabitants. After all, were the family not fugitives from justice since Nephi had killed Laban? It is simply not possible that they could have avoided everyone on the trail, as every few days the family would have needed water and when they did, they would have had to deal with the owners of the wells in order to obtain it. To attempt to steal it would have been a punishable crime. Some might argue that the Liahona could have directed Lehi through the desert without a trail. Even so, the party needed to rejoin the trail at the wells. They had no other choice. The need to find water in the desert made it relatively easy for the tribes to control passage through their lands. Even if a party attempted an unauthorized passage through the land, they would eventually need to stop for water at the precious few wells.

Although wells were still found at regular intervals along the southern Frankincense Trail, they were more widely spaced and no longer were the large sweet water wells like those found on the northern part of the trail. The wells in the south were small deep wells with dark polluted water. The commercial caravans that utilized the Frankincense Trail consisted of hundreds and even thousands of camels in one caravan. For hundreds of years prior to Lehi’s journey, caravan after caravan stopped

at the same watering holes. The stench from the dung and urine, and the accompanying swarms of flies must have been revolting. If the family ran short of water, Lehi would have instituted rationing. Even worse, if their water ran out, they would have been forced to stoop to previously unthinkable depths. In such a time of crisis, Lehi would have resorted to the technique used by the Bedouins in emergencies, where they will either kill an old camel or thrust a stick down a camel's throat to make it vomit water (Musil, *Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins*, 368). If the camel has been watered within a day or two, the liquid is tolerably drinkable but if it has not drunk for some time the liquid will be foul to the taste. Could the family have been forced by circumstances to sink to depths of drinking this liquid in order to survive?

Other adversities the family would surely have encountered on the trail would have been sandstorms, despair and loneliness, overwhelming swarms of flies, and other pests including the camel or sun spider. This four-inch long creature is a flesh-eating parasite that normally satisfies itself by hiding in the fur of camels and dining at will, yet at times they are rumored to enter tents in the night and feed on human flesh.

The Frankincense Trail also provided the other important elements needed to survive the trip through the desert: food and fresh camels. At the caravanserais, or camps along the trail, the traveler could also share news and companionship with other travelers as well as inquire about the trail ahead. It is apparent that Lehi's party met people who knew and used this trail because some in Lehi's group threatened to return home from Nahom, even though they were by then approximately fourteen hundred miles south of Jerusalem, and even though twice between the first camp and Nahom they had faced the terrifying prospect of starvation (see verses 17-32, 39).

As we might expect, the terrain through which the trail ran differed from place to place. In the south, where inhabitants harvested and packed the incense, the trail ran from populated area to populated area where cultivation was extensive because of irrigation works, extant even in those early times. Father north, past Nahom, the trail passed through a vast, sparsely settled area. It was evidently in this area that the party of Lehi came to rely heavily on their compass to lead them to the "fertile parts of the wilderness" where they could find fodder for their animals and food for themselves (see verses 14, 16).

What attitudes in other peoples might Lehi and his family have encountered on their journey from the valley of Lemuel to Bountiful? Historically the people of Arabia have been divided into two groups: the town dwellers, or settled Arabs, and the Bedouin, the desert dwellers who subsist by herding goats and sheep. Since the fodder is so sparse, the Bedouins live a nomadic life, moving from one range to another. In the towns, we may assume that Lehi would have been treated with respect, given his noble status and education. The Bedouins, on the other hand, might have presented to the family of Lehi a mixed possibility of experiences. Some Bedouins were notorious robbers. On the other hand, the Bedouin was obligated by their "law of the desert," and

much of the time, the family was probably treated to a form of hospitality called the Bond of Salt. This tradition seemed to originate as a system of mutual support by which the Bedouin attempted to deal with the difficult physical circumstances of their world. To this day the Bedouin code of hospitality requires that when a stranger comes to one's tent, the guests must be shown generous hospitality for three days. Thus, the host's tents became a restaurant and a hotel for the traveler. In return the Bedouin receives news from the outside world, and his guest today may be his host tomorrow.

verses 18-32 These verses contain the well-known broken bow incident. What is the likely site of the broken bow incident?

The mountains in this part of Arabia, south from the site of Medina, are called the Asir, which means "difficult" because of the impact of the terrain on travel. It is the only place in Arabia where the camel is replaced by the donkey as the chief pack animal. The Frankincense Trail is inland from these mountains to avoid the difficult mountains and the lava fields. It is likely that Lehi would have followed this more inland trail. Lehi left the most fertile parts with no further mention of being in or by the "borders." The "trail" here is simply a vast expanse of gravel or sand with perhaps a week to the next oasis, and virtually no landmarks. It is easy to understand why the family would need either a guide or the Liahona in order not to get lost in this wilderness. Camels leave few tracks in the gravel, and the tracks they leave in the sand are blown away when the first winds come. The word *trail* is used loosely to describe a route which is basically "any way that gets you from one oasis to the next." It would have been somewhere in country like this that the family stopped to rest and hunt (see the previous verse).

Lehi didn't pass through Arabia in one winter traveling season. The journey took a total of eight years. It is impossible to travel in Arabia during the hot months of May through October, and Lehi would have stopped for the summer to rest. With the arrival of the hellish summer, travel would have been very dangerous and the trade business along the frankincense route would have ground to a halt. By late spring, the temperatures along the trail are consistently over 120 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade, which made the caravan business in Arabia a mostly seasonal activity. The most likely reason Lehi stopped was that he had no choice. He was probably faced with the onslaught of the summer. Waiting out the hot season provided them with an opportunity to hunt and rest from a journey through difficult terrain.

As a candidate for the specific site for the broken bow incident, Potter and Wellington (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, 95-106) have suggested the site of the oasis called Bishah. See the map of the Frankincense Trail. They proffer the following arguments in favor of their suggestion: (1) Bishah is the closest trail oasis to the mountains, and thus a logical place to leave the trail to find a refuge from the heat. From the Frankincense Trail in Bishah, the high wadis of the Asir are no more than sixty-five miles distant, and the summer temperatures are relatively pleasant, for the most part remaining about

eighty to ninety degrees Fahrenheit. (2) Bishah's general location is deep into southern Arabia, but still a considerable distance from Yemen where Nephi recorded that they turned east. After they left the camp where Nephi broke his bow, he wrote that they continued "traveling nearly the same course" (south-southeast) for a "space of many days" before they reached the place where they turned east (1 Nephi 16:33, 34; 17:1). (3) There is a long summer-months tradition of the permanent residents of Bishah leaving their businesses, which were mostly involved with providing support and supplies to trading caravans, and moving into the mountains. In the mountains they tended to hunt for game and tend fruit orchards in the highlands. (4) Though camels have difficulty traveling in the mountains, two large wadis pass through Bishah from the mountains which provide a ready-made path into the mountains. Surrounded by mountain peaks, the wadis end at an altitude of approximately 6,000 feet or more. Nephi says that he "did go forth up into the top of the mountain" (1 Nephi 16:30) to hunt. This seems to imply that they were already on the slope of a mountain and that he went up to the top to hunt. From this point in the wadi, Nephi could have continued on foot to the tops of the mountains, which are up to 9,000 feet high. (5) After considerable research, Potter and Wellington learned that the best wood in southern Arabia for making bows was from the Atim tree, a type of wild olive. Most other dead woods simply broke when bent. Atim is known to have been used anciently for making bows, arrows, staffs, throwing sticks, and spears (Miller and Morris, *Plants of Dhofar*, 216). Atim is found in abundance on the eastern slopes of the Asir Mountains only between the altitudes of 6,000 and 7,000 feet, but the eastern mountain slopes farther south in Yemen are too dry to support the growth of trees. In fact the entire range where the Atim trees grew was seventy-two miles, north to south. However all but the very northernmost trees of the Atim range were too far from the Frankincense Trail for Nephi to have reached them. The best Atim groves were found due west of Bishah.

18 And it came to pass that as I, Nephi, went forth to slay food, behold, I did break my bow, which was made of fine steel; and after I did break my bow, behold, my brethren were angry with me because of the loss of my bow, for we did obtain no food.

verse 18 "which was made of fine steel" For years the mention of steel in the Book of Mormon (see also 1 Nephi 4:9) was considered by critics of the Book of Mormon to be an anachronism—an embarrassing mistake. An anachronism is something out of its appropriate historical timeframe. They believed that steel was not available in 600 BC. It is now well established that the Egyptians had been making steel since 1200 BC (Hugh Nibley, "Howlers in the Book of Mormon," a FARMS reprint).

It is perhaps pertinent here to comment further on anachronisms. Since the earliest days of the Church, critics of the Book of Mormon have pointed to certain

alleged anachronisms—claims that ideas, words, events, persons, and objects are historically out of place—as evidence that the Book of Mormon is false.

Let us evaluate, for example, three categories of alleged anachronisms: linguistic, cultural, and doctrinal:

1. Allegations of linguistic anachronisms concern words in the Book of Mormon. For example, the book of Jacob ends with the French word for farewell, “adieu.” Please see the commentary for Jacob 7:27 for a discussion of this particular issue.

2. Critics of the Book of Mormon have noted certain cultural features of the Book of Mormon that supposedly do not square with its presumed setting in Mesoamerica. For example, according to these critics, the Book of Mormon describes ancient Americans involved in massive armed conflicts, with armies of hundreds of thousands engaged in single battles, but they claim ancient Americans were sedentary and peaceful.

This cultural criticism of the Book of Mormon is becoming more and more difficult to maintain in the light of more recent research. According to one scholar, “It has been held that the Maya pursued a peaceful existence. From the beginning of the Classical Era, however, the trading of victors on captives is represented and such scenes carved in stone increase in numbers and complexity with the passage of time” (Lothrop, Samuel K., *Treasures of Ancient America* [Cleveland, Ohio, 1964], 107). John L. Sorenson has also identified many fortified Mesoamerican sites indicative of a warring people that date to Book of Mormon times (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985).

Another cultural claim is that the use of the word “horse” is another striking anachronism, because no horses existed in Mesoamerica unto the time of Columbus. For a discussion of this issue, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 18:25.

3. An example of a presumed anachronism to doctrine is the early reference to the unpardonable sin (see Jacob 7:19; Alma 39:6; cf. 2 Nephi 31:14). See the discussion of this issue in the commentary for Jacob 7:19.

19 And it came to pass that we did return without food to our families, and being much fatigued, because of their journeying, they did suffer much for the want of food.

20 And it came to pass that Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael did begin to murmur exceedingly, because of their sufferings and afflictions in the wilderness; and also my father began to murmur against the Lord his God; yea, and they were all exceedingly sorrowful, even that they did murmur against the Lord.

verse 20 “also my father began to murmur” Perhaps none of us is exempt from real discouragement given prolonged exposure to adverse circumstances!

Here is yet another use of that verb “murmur” (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:11). That commentary mentions the frequent association in scripture of the verb *murmur* with the exoduses—the Israelites from Egypt and the Lehites from Jerusalem. It is suspected that Nephi had in mind a comparison with his family’s travails in the wilderness and the Israelite Egyptian exodus. Perhaps he obtained the word “murmur” from the brass plates’ account of Moses and the exodus. It is interesting to note the similarities between the Israelites’ experiences in the Sinai and the Lehites’ experiences in that wilderness. Both groups experienced hunger, and in both the problem of insufficient food was solved miraculously—for Israel, manna from heaven; for the Lehites the Liahona which showed them where to obtain game. Both groups feared dying in the wilderness (1 Nephi 2:11; Exodus 14:11). Both groups at times wished they had died before coming into the wilderness (1 Nephi 17:20; Numbers 14:2), and both also at times wished to come back from where they had come (1 Nephi 16:35-36; Numbers 14:1-4). Both people were ultimately saved from destruction by an object—the Liahona among the Lehites and the symbolic serpent among the Israelites (Numbers 21:8-9). The similarity between these two devices is obvious. To be healed or saved from destruction one had only to exercise simple faith. The Lord guided both groups in their wilderness experience (1 Nephi 17:13-14; Exodus 6:7-8). Both Nephi and Moses received from the Lord a summons to climb a high mountain where they would receive instruction (1 Nephi 17:7; Exodus 19:20; 24:12-13). While on the mountain, Nephi received instructions on building a ship (1 Nephi 17:8), and Moses received instructions on building a tabernacle (Exodus 25:1, 8-9). Both structures were eventually described as being of “curious workmanship” (1 Nephi 18:1-2; Exodus 35:30-33). Both groups had inappropriately raucous parties (1 Nephi 18:9; Exodus 32:4-6, 18-19, 25). Both the Israelites and the Lehites subsequently developed the custom of retelling their exodus experience to remind them of their dependence on God (see, for example Mosiah 7:19-20; Alma 36:28-29).

It is at this point in the story where Nephi emerges as the dominant leader of the expedition. He started the trip in Jerusalem as a young man (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:16) but soon assumed leadership of the entire group.

21 Now it came to pass that I, Nephi, having been afflicted with my brethren because of the loss of my bow, and their bows having lost their springs, it began to be exceedingly difficult, yea, insomuch that we could obtain no food.

verse 21 “having been afflicted with my brethren because of the loss of my bow” A careful reading of this phrase suggests that even Nephi had been “afflicted” or discouraged, but he seems to have made a quick recovery as evidenced by the next verse.

22 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did speak much unto my brethren, because they had hardened their hearts again, even unto complaining against the Lord their God.

verse 22 “because they had hardened their hearts again” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

23 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did make out of wood a bow, and out of a straight stick, an arrow; wherefore, I did arm myself with a bow and an arrow, with a sling and with stones. And I said unto my father: Whither shall I go to obtain food?

verse 23 “I, Nephi, did make out of wood a bow, and out of a straight stick, an arrow” Some might wonder why Nephi had to make a new arrow in addition to his new bow. Certainly he would have had arrows already. Those familiar with archery have pointed out that arrows used with a metal bow, likely metal arrows, would have been unusable with a wooden bow (David S. Fox in a letter to FARMS and “Nephi’s Arrows Create Solid Bulls-eye,” *Insights: An Ancient Window*, a FARMS publication, October 1984).

Nephi’s bow had broken, and the bows of his brothers had lost their spring. We will learn that Nephi’s fashioning for himself a new bow will quickly result in his brothers’ accusing him of having ambitions to rule over them (see verses 37-38). Alan Goff taught: “Bows were symbols of political power. One thinks of Odysseus bending the bow to prove himself. An overlord would break the bow of a disobedient vassal to symbolically put the rebel in his place” (see Jeremiah 49:35) (FARMS newsletter, March 1984).

“And I said unto my father: Whither shall I go to obtain food?” Notice also how Nephi evidences his humility and respect for his father’s patriarchal authority. His asking his father where he should go to get food seems an ingenious act, since it seems to have helped his father and the others to humble themselves again.

24 And it came to pass that he did inquire of the Lord, for they had humbled themselves because of my words; for I did say many things unto them in the energy of my soul.

25 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came unto my father; and he was truly chastened because of his murmuring against the Lord, insomuch that he was brought down into the depths of sorrow.

26 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord said unto him: Look upon the ball, and behold the things which are written.

verse 26 Messages were apparently written upon the outside of the ball. We will also learn that messages were also written on the pointers (see verse 29).

27 And it came to pass that when my father beheld the things which were written upon the ball, he did fear and tremble exceedingly, and also my brethren and the sons of Ishmael and our wives.

verse 27 We are never told what was written on the ball. Presumably it was a message of chastisement and a stern warning of the possible consequences of continued rebelliousness.

28 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them.

verse 28 To heed is to observe, to attend to, to take notice of.

29 And there was also written upon them a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord; and it was written and changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it. And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things.

verse 29 “And there was also written upon them” The word “them” refers back to “the pointers” in the previous verse.

“And thus we see” This phrase or similar phrases are frequently used by Book of Mormon record keepers to emphasize a principle, precept, or consequence that can be learned from the event(s) or behavior(s) just discussed. It signals the reader that something important will immediately follow. Simply put, by using the phrase “and thus we see,” the writer is saying, “If you missed the point of what you just read, I will now explain the message you should have received.” Other forms of this phrase include: “And now . . . ye see”; “And now . . . we see”; “And thus we can behold”; “And thus it is”; “And we see”; “And when ye shall see”; “For I see”; “For . . . we see”; “Look . . . and see”; “Nevertheless . . . we see”; “Now we see”; “Now . . . we see”; “Seeing we know”; “Thus we may see”; “Thus we see”; “Thus . . . we see”; “We may see”; “We see”; “We shall see”; “When ye see these”; “Ye see”; “Ye shall see”; and “Ye should see.”

This phrase does not appear in other volumes of scripture, but such words as “behold,” “therefore,” “wherefore,” “because,” and sometimes, “thus saith the Lord” often function as cause-and-effect conjunctions. It becomes apparent that most writers of holy writ used some form of the “and thus we see” model (e.g., Deuteronomy 9:6; 32:39; Joshua 23:15; Judges 2:16; 1 Samuel 24:13; John 3:16; Acts 10:34-35; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 3:19-4:2).

When “and thus we see” phrases are used, the antecedent may be only a few verses or it may be hundreds of pages.

“by small means the Lord can bring about great things” Knowing what we do today about the Liahona from the Book of Mormon story, I think if we could see and

handle and make use of the Liahona, we would hardly regard it as “small means.” We would regard it as a fascinating wonder! There is evidence from the text, however, that Lehi’s party often took it for granted and did not regard it as a constant miracle. Often they seemed even to ignore it (see the commentary for Alma 37:41).

30 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did go forth up into the top of the mountain, according to the directions which were given upon the ball.

31 And it came to pass that I did slay wild beasts, insomuch that I did obtain food for our families.

32 And it came to pass that I did return to our tents, bearing the beasts which I had slain; and now when they beheld that I had obtained food, how great was their joy! And it came to pass that they did humble themselves before the Lord, and did give thanks unto him.

33 And it came to pass that we did again take our journey, traveling nearly the same course as in the beginning; and after we had traveled for the space of many days we did pitch our tents again, that we might tarry for the space of a time.

Leaving the camp where Nephi made his bow, the family would have taken the wadi back to the plain to rejoin the Frankincense Trail and continue south-southeast. The next oasis would have been Tathlith and then on to Najran, the northernmost of the kingdoms of southern Arabia (see the map of the Frankincense Trail).

Beyond Najran, the Frankincense Trail comes into direct contact with the southwestern corner of the infamous Rub’ al Khali, or Empty Quarter. The Arabs have a legend that when the world was made, two quarters were made for man to inhabit, one quarter was sea, and the last quarter was the Empty Quarter. No one, in written history, has ever lived there. Usually the Empty Quarter is avoided as the largest and one of the most treacherous sand dune deserts in the world. A colleague of George Potter and Richard Wellington told the following story about this area (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, 108-10): As a young man this colleague had intended to travel into the Rub’ al Khali. He asked his grandfather how much water he should take. “In winter take as much water as you can carry,” said the grandfather. “And what about the summer?” retorted the young man. “For the summer I have no advice for you,” came his reply.

Even in this day and age, traveling through the Rub’ al Khali, even along established trails, is not without its perils. On August 21, 2001 the *Arab News* newspaper reported the death of fourteen people as they tried to cross the Empty Quarter. Apparently they died because of a lack of water after their jeep had run out of fuel. Without the help of the Liahona to direct them away from perils, the family of Lehi would not have lasted long in this wilderness. To become lost there would have meant almost certain death. But we will learn that it is possible that Lehi’s family did just that. Let us continue our discussion.

34 And it came to pass that Ishmael died, and was buried in the place which was called Nahom.

verse 34 It is notable that during the group's journey from the valley of Lemuel to the sea, Nephi seems to purposefully omit mention of all persons and places except for Nahom. Nahom is a word derived from the Hebrew root *nhm* which may be translated "to sigh, to beat upon the breast, to mourn, to grieve" (Hugh Nibley, *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988] volume 5, 79). An alternate translation of this same Hebrew root is "growl, groan, suffer from hunger, complain" ("Lehi's Trail and Nahom Revisited," *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992] 47-50). The scholar David Damrosch says of the word:

It [the root for *naham*] appears twenty-five times in the narrative books of the Bible, and in every case it is associated with death. In family settings, it is applied in instances involving the death of an immediate family member (parent, sibling, or child); in national settings, it has to do with the survival or impending extermination of an entire people. At heart, *naham* means "to mourn," to come to terms with a death; these usages are usually translated . . . by the verb "to comfort," as when Jacob's children try to comfort their father after the reported death of Joseph (*The Narrative Covenant* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987] 128-29).

Book of Mormon scholars have tried to make much of the association between the meaning of the name Nahom and the situation of Lehi's group at the time of their sojourn there (see, for example, Alan Goff's article "Mourning, Consolation, and Repentance at Nahom" in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 92-99). All of this association would only be pertinent if the group had given the place of Ishmael's death and burial its name. Nephi's wording here in verse 34, however, suggests that Lehi's group did not concoct the name but learned it from local inhabitants. Incidentally, this verse is the first evidence that Nephi gives that they had met others while traveling, though as is evident from the foregoing, nearly constant interaction with others on the Frankincense Trail would have been necessary and expedient.

The modern-day site on the Arabian peninsula, which seems to be the leading candidate for Nahom, is the tribal area still known as Nehem which lies about twenty-five miles northeast of Sana'a, capital of the republic of Yemen. This area is about 1,400 miles south-southeast of Jerusalem. It is the only place in Arabia where the Semitic name *nhm* (spelled variously as *Nahm*, *Nehem*, or *Nihm*) is preserved. The name has now been accounted for in the same location by means of maps and early writings to as early as AD 600 and possibly earlier. Modern Nehem includes an extensive traditional burial area with tombs dating as far back as neolithic times, long predating Lehi's day.

There seems to be little reason to draw an association between the name of the place and the vocal mourning, murmuring, and rebellion of some members of Lehi's group. It seems likely that Ishmael died before (possibly weeks or even months before) the Lehites arrived at Nahom. Hugh Nibley has pointed out that it is not uncommon for desert people to carry their dead many miles to locate the proper place of burial (*Lehi in the Desert; World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, 79). There is also a scriptural precedent: "And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought" (Joshua 24:32). Just as Joseph was buried in a special parcel of land, it seems only natural that the Lehites would wait until they found a proper place to bury Ishmael. Warren and Michaela Aston have shown that the place of Nehem is a few miles off the main trail that the Lehites took ("The Place Which Was Called Nahom: The Validation of an Ancient Reference to Southern Arabia" a FARMS reprint). The logical conclusion, then, is that Ishmael died along the way and was carried to Nahom.

Because of the remarkable insights contained in the Book of Mormon text regarding the route from Jerusalem to the point of the group's eventual embarkation, it has been suggested that Joseph Smith had access to a literary work on ancient Arabia. Brother S. Kent Brown has researched the possibility that Joseph might have had access to such a work, and he concludes: "Any hypothesis that Joseph Smith had access to a private library that contained works on ancient Arabia is impossible to sustain" ("New Light From Arabia on Lehi's trail" in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 75).

35 And it came to pass that the daughters of Ishmael did mourn exceedingly, because of the loss of their father, and because of their afflictions in the wilderness; and they did murmur against my father, because he had brought them out of the land of Jerusalem, saying: Our father is dead; yea, and we have wandered much in the wilderness, and we have suffered much affliction, hunger, thirst, and fatigue; and after all these sufferings we must perish in the wilderness with hunger.

verse 35 This verse makes it clear that Lehi's group has suffered much affliction before arriving at Nahom. Obviously the entire journey was not easy for those unaccustomed to desert travel. Yet, this verse seems to paint a picture of particularly severe suffering including "much affliction," "hunger," "thirst," and "fatigue." Here, the daughters of Ishmael indicate feelings of despair—feelings that they "must perish in the wilderness with hunger." When was this particularly severe suffering? If it was between the camp of the broken-bow incident and Nahom, then the relative silence of verse 34 is especially poignant.

Potter and Wellington have suggested a plausible scenario for what happened between the camp of the broken bow and Nahom that might explain the negative

attitude of the daughters of Ishmael (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, 110-15). They speculate as to a great drama which might have unfolded to cause the death of Ishmael and to lead to the intervention of the Lord both to save and chasten the travelers.

The despair which the daughters of Ishmael express in this verse, after their arrival in Nahom, suggests that they may have spent some time actually lost in the wilderness in an area uninhabited by other people. The elder brothers of Nephi will refer to this wilderness as a “strange wilderness” (verse 38). Nephi will later avow that if the Lord had not blessed them, they would have died of hunger (see verse 39). But where was this “strange wilderness” where they might have become lost and placed themselves in danger of starvation? They had essentially traveled the Frankincense Trail for the length of Arabia. They had described this as being in the wilderness. What could be different about this “strange” wilderness?

Alma seems to give us some insight into this question and what might have happened to the family at this time. In Alma we read concerning the Liahona: “They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey; Therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions” (Alma 37:40-41). Alma appears to be describing a time when the faith of the family was faltering, and so they wandered around in the wilderness. After leaving Najran, the family would have encountered the first huge dune desert on their journey. This is the southwest corner of the terrible desert, the Rub’ al Khali. The Frankincense Trail skirts to the west of the dunes, hugging the side of the mountains. Without the help of the Liahona—if the Lord had withheld his help due to their faithlessness—they may well have wandered east into the desert. Potter and Wellington describe a segment of the trail, south of Najran which is particularly tortuous and difficult to follow. It also seems possible that the Lord may have even directed them into the desert to chasten them. In the desert, they would have undergone extreme deprivation and hardship. Ishmael may have died during this period and his body carried with them. The sand dunes are huge and the soft sand quickly drains the strength of the traveler. It is noteworthy that Nephi will use the word “wade” to describe their journey after leaving Nahom (1 Nephi 17:7)—just as one would wade through water or soft sand. The Rub’ al Khali has sand dunes that sometimes reach seven hundred to eight hundred feet in height. The terrain of this corner of the Rub’ al Khali, its vast emptiness, and the fact that it was not traveled by the overland incense caravans, suggest this could have been considered as passing through a “strange wilderness.”

36 And thus they did murmur against my father, and also against me; and they were desirous to return again to Jerusalem.

37 And Laman said unto Lemuel and also unto the sons of Ishmael: Behold, let us slay our father, and also our brother Nephi, who has taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren.

verse 37 “who has taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren” Throughout the Old Testament is found the tradition of “primogeniture” which means that the first born son ranks highest among his siblings. Undoubtedly the culture at the time of Lehi held to this tradition. This may have been an additive factor that intensified the resentment of Nephi that his older brothers obviously experienced. There are additional verses yet to come in the Book of Mormon in which the brothers of Nephi betray their chafing resentment of him. These will be mentioned as we come to them.

38 Now, he says that the Lord has talked with him, and also that angels have ministered unto him. But behold, we know that he lies unto us; and he tells us these things, and he worketh many things by his cunning arts, that he may deceive our eyes, thinking, perhaps, that he may lead us away into some strange wilderness; and after he has led us away, he has thought to make himself a king and a ruler over us, that he may do with us according to his will and pleasure. And after this manner did my brother Laman stir up their hearts to anger.

verse 38 “he worketh many things by his cunning arts, that he may deceive our eyes, thinking, perhaps, that he may lead us away into some strange wilderness” Laman accuses Nephi of making the Liahona for the purpose of deceiving his family. Nephi will later testify that it was made by the hand of the Lord (1 Nephi 18:12; 2 Nephi 5:12). Alma the younger will also so testify (Alma 37:38-39).

It is interesting, here in this verse, to understand the thinking of Laman and Lemuel—especially to view the episode of the family’s traveling in the “strange wilderness” (described in the commentary for verse 35) through the eyes of Laman—to come to understand his interpretation of Nephi’s motives. As the family found themselves in desperate trouble in the “strange wilderness,” it is natural and appropriate that Nephi would have taken charge (see Mosiah 10:13). He had done so at the camp of the broken bow. No doubt, through his skill, the family was saved, yet Laman interprets Nephi’s leadership as a desire to control and to impose his rule over the group. Laman states in this verse that Nephi had led them away into a strange wilderness. Away from what? Had they not been in the wilderness for some considerable time? From what could have Nephi led them away? The answer would seem to be the trail. If they had stayed on the trail to the probable site of Nahom, they would have traveled a stretch of the trail adequately supplied with oases, and they would not have been starving at the time they reached Nahom. Leaving the trail would have separated the family from other travelers, effectively isolating the family. Laman felt that Nephi had manipulated their circumstances in order to produce the ideal setting

in which to stage his takeover bid and to realize his ambition to rule the group. Note that Laman used the past tense “has led us away” and “he has thought to make himself a king and a ruler over us” evidencing that this event had already taken place by the time they tarried at Nahom.

39 And it came to pass that the Lord was with us, yea, even the voice of the Lord came and did speak many words unto them, and did chasten them exceedingly; and after they were chastened by the voice of the Lord they did turn away their anger, and did repent of their sins, insomuch that the Lord did bless us again with food, that we did not perish.

verse 39 “even the voice of the Lord came and did speak many words unto them” How did the Lord speak to them? Directly in an audible voice? Through Nephi or Lehi? Through the Holy Spirit? We are obviously not told. It is unusual for wicked people to be addressed directly and audibly by the voice of the Lord.

“and did chasten them exceedingly” The word *chasten* here means scold or reprimand.

This verse provides evidence that the Liahona had ceased to work again perhaps because of the rebellious spirit among those in the traveling party.

1 Nephi Chapter 17

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 17 Building the ship

This chapter contains the account of the sojourn in the land called Bountiful.

1 And it came to pass that we did again take our journey in the wilderness; and we did travel nearly eastward from that time forth. And we did travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness; and our women did bear children in the wilderness.

verse 1 “and we did travel nearly eastward from that time forth” It is pertinent that from the ancient tribal area of Nihm (the likely location of Nahom) almost all of the ancient roads turned east, veering from the general north-south direction of the Frankincense Trail. The trail beyond Nihm was another part of the ancient incense trail that ran east-west.

“we did travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness” The main trail east from Nahom would have passed through the capitals of the incense kingdoms and ended in the port of Cana (Qana) (see the map of the Frankincense trail). The downside to this trail is that all of the capitals extracted a levy from the caravans as they passed and that route would have been “enormously expensive” (Kiernan, *Unveiling of Arabia*, 31). Consequently there existed a number of “shortcuts” or secondary trails. Though cheaper, these trails were more difficult going, with only a few wells and virtually no caravanserais or camps. Consequently these trails were not heavily traveled, in fact some were likely little used in Lehi’s day.

During their crossing of this isolated section of the trail, Nephi will note that the meat was eaten raw. The Lord instructed the family not to make much fire (1 Nephi 17:12). Hugh Nibley studied the accounts of the early explorers of the Arabian sands and concluded that the family did not have fires because of fear of being raided by unfriendly Bedouin tribes (“Lehi in the Desert,” *Improvement Era* [May 1950]: 382). The need to avoid the Bedouin raiders was imperative, as they were an aggressive and brutal people. Fires can be seen for great distances in the desert. While traveling south from Jerusalem, Nephi never mentions that they did not use fires. This earlier part of the trail, from Jerusalem to Nahom, was well used in Nephi’s time, and payment of a toll guaranteed protection from the Bedouins. However, the trail that led eastward from Nahom to Bountiful was a different story. Apparently raiding by Arab tribesmen increased whenever there was an economic downturn (Salibi, *History of Arabia*, 31-32). As the Bedouins became impoverished they turned more and more to raiding which subsidized their already meager income (*Ibid.*, 9-10). Historical evidence suggests that

about the time Lehi was leaving Jerusalem, economic forces were driving the Bedouins on the northern part of the trail to increase their raiding. In response to their incursions, King Nebuchadrezzar II launched an attack in 599 BC on the Arab tribes (al-Sudairi, *Desert Frontier of Arabia*, 31). If the same conditions existed on the southern part of the trail, then we see why Lehi was told not to make fires.

This last leg of the journey would have been the toughest yet. Nephi informs us in this verse, “And we did travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness.” But after eight years in the wilderness, the family finally reached the land they called Bountiful where more drama would unfold.

It is worth mentioning that the culture of Arabia might well have had another influence upon Lehi and his party, particularly so upon Nephi. While it is possible to find in the Near East many examples of ancient writing on metal plates, those found in south Arabia are particularly relevant for comparative purposes. Recent decades have seen a number of discoveries of writing on hard surfaces from south Arabia (*L’Arabie antique de Karib’ila Mahomet*, 162-66). Examples come from ancient temples, indicating perhaps that people understood such writing to be connected in some way to the realm of the divine. They apparently chose hard surfaces—metal and stone—for writing because of durability. Skilled Arabian artisans had adopted and developed the skills to inscribe important records on metal surfaces. Of course, the record on the brass plates of Laban would have served as the chief model for Nephi’s later efforts to keep records on metal plates. Even so, the artisans and scribes who created records on stone and metal in all the major centers of south Arabia may also have impressed Nephi, who wrote his narrative on metal plates only after passing through Arabia. As mentioned previously, there are indications that the party, particularly Lehi, kept a diary of the Arabian trek, but on a perishable material, not on metal plates.

2 And so great were the blessings of the Lord upon us, that while we did live upon raw meat in the wilderness, our women did give plenty of suck for their children, and were strong, yea, even like unto the men; and they began to bear their journeyings without murmurings

3 And thus we see that the commandments of God must be fulfilled. And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them; wherefore, he did provide means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness.

verse 3 See the commentary for 1 Nephi 3:7.

To *sojourn* is to dwell.

4 And we did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even eight years in the wilderness.

verse 4 The distance from Jerusalem to Southern Arabia then east to Bountiful is a distance of about 2,100 miles. Then you might add an additional 800 to 1,000 miles journeyed by the four sons in their two additional round trips from the valley of Lemuel to Jerusalem!

There are hints in the text that this next stage of the journey between Nahom and the ocean was not only the most difficult, but also required the longest time. The distance from Nahom eastward to the seacoast—the party’s Bountiful—was seven hundred miles or less. This was about half the distance that the party had already traveled from Jerusalem to Nahom. However, apparently the party spent the bulk of its “eight years in the wilderness” on this leg of the journey.

There is no clear evidence that, during the era of Lehi, an established incense trail ran east of Shabwah (Shabwa), the major south Arabian city where caravans stopped to allow grading and taxing of incense coming from that general area (see the map of the Frankincense Trail). Hence, Lehi and his party may not have had access to a trail taken by camel drivers and their cargoes. Presumably their party followed a course that snaked eastward between the sands of the Rub’ al Kahli (the “Empty Quarter”) on the north and the craggy landscape on the south. In addition, it is now known that the tribes in the region east of Shabwah were in a constant state of tension with one another and that a person could not cross tribal boundaries without having to negotiate afresh the terms of safe conduct. Such negotiations could and often did lead to temporary servility (submissiveness) for the traveler among local tribes. Moreover, there were no assured sources of food in the region east of Shabwah except flocks and herds that belonged to tribesmen. Agriculture was little practiced.

Such challenges fit the vivid reminiscences of the party’s troubles preserved by writers other than Nephi. These later Book of Mormon authors had access to the fuller account of the party’s journey preserved on the large plates of Nephi. For instance, King Benjamin recalls that at certain points along the way party members “were smitten with famine” (Mosiah 1:17). We do have the account of the family’s suffering from lack of food on the way to Nahom, but the word *famine* sounds a more ominous note. Alma writes of Lehi’s party suffering “from famine” as well as “from sickness, and all manner of diseases” (Alma 9:22). Alma also records that party members “did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst” (Alma 37:42). We should probably understand most of these difficulties described by Benjamin and Alma to have befallen the group after they turned “nearly eastward” at Nahom (verse 1).

In almost identical language, both Amaron and Alma write of God’s preserving Lehi’s party from “the hands of their enemies” (Omni 1:6; Alma 9:10). Who were these enemies? The most attractive possibility is that they were people encountered on the leg of the journey between Nahom and the seacoast, even though Nephi himself does not mention enemies. Nephi’s abbreviated account of crossing south Arabia from Nahom to the seacoast consists of only four verses, 1 Nephi 17:1-4. Alma seems to tie

a recollection of ancestors who were “strong in battle” to Lehi’s party, whom God “delivered . . . out of the land of Jerusalem” (Alma 9:22). If so, then we might well imagine that the party struggled against more than the harsh realities of the desert as they forged on toward the seacoast. One of their biggest challenges may have come in dealing with tribesmen whom they met. This impression matches what we know of tribal troubles in this part of Arabia (The peace brokered by the British representative Harold Ingrams, for example, in 1937 included the signatures of “1400 tribal leaders”—J. G. T. Shipman, “The Hadhramaut,” *Asian Affairs* 71/2 [1984]: 159).

Presumably, Lehi’s company used camels to carry their cumbersome gear and essential possessions as well as themselves. Traveling 20 to 25 miles a day, the capacity pace for laden camels, Lehi could have covered the distance between Jerusalem and suggested locations for Bountiful in weeks rather than eight years. The company obviously camped for lengthy periods or was otherwise detained during the journey. To account for some of the added years of “sojourning,” S. Kent Brown has conjectured that Lehi’s family experienced periods of servitude or bondage among larger desert clans and that the family may have traded food and water, or more likely their skills in reading and writing, for their freedom (*From Jerusalem to Zarahemla*, 55-67). Perhaps longer periods of camping and resting occurred during the women’s advanced stages of pregnancy and subsequent childbirth. Nephi recorded that the women, including Sariah, gave birth to one or more children during their eight years in the wilderness (see 1 Nephi 17:1; 18:7). One scholar described the desert birthing bed as “a mantle or tent-cloth spread upon the earth.” Older women among the clan typically assisted the mother by taking her away from the camp—“apart in the wilderness,” to be delivered (Charles M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* [New York: Random House, 1936], 268).

5 And we did come to the land which we called Bountiful, because of its much fruit and also wild honey; and all these things were prepared of the Lord that we might not perish. And we beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum, which, being interpreted, is many waters.

verse 5 “much fruit and also wild honey” Among the classic writings on ancient Arabia are those of Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79). His book, *Natural History* (6.32) reports that “the Sabaei” people of south Arabia produced “honey and wax.”

6 And it came to pass that we did pitch our tents by the seashore; and notwithstanding we had suffered many afflictions and much difficulty, yea, even so much that we cannot write them all, we were exceedingly rejoiced when we came to the seashore; and we called the place Bountiful, because of its much fruit.

verse 6 The group has now arrived at a place called Bountiful which is likely on the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. From its description it is a fertile place. Here Nephi will build a ship that will carry the group to the New World. In Joseph Smith's day, and for more than a century afterward, it seemed impossible that such a place could exist in barren Arabia. Today an ideal general location is known to exist on the southern coast of Arabia, the Dhofar region of southern Oman.

Is it possible for us to narrow our quest for Bountiful to a specific area within the Dhofar region? Before considering specific suggestions, let us summarize the characteristics of the place called Bountiful:

1. Bountiful was "nearly eastward" from Nahom (see 1 Nephi 17:1).
 2. Overland access to Bountiful had to be possible from the interior desert. Access to the southern coast from the interior of Arabia is usually difficult and in some places impossible. The Qara mountains hinder access to much of the most fertile region of coastal Arabia where we would expect Bountiful to be situated.
 3. Bountiful was fertile. The Qara Mountains form an abrupt transition "between two worlds." As Lehi and his family reached the top of the mountain pass, they would have left behind them the desert, and before them were the lush tree-lined slopes of Bountiful. Nephi describes Bountiful as yielding "meat" (perhaps small game that could be hunted), "much fruit," and "honey" (see 1 Nephi 17:5, 6; 18:6).
 4. Bountiful had to be suitable for a long encampment and for shipbuilding. It would likely have taken Nephi and his brothers at least a year to construct a ship substantial enough to carry as many as thirty people two-thirds of the way around the globe. Thus, the site for Bountiful must have been capable of sustaining a small colony for at least one and perhaps a few years.
- For several months each year during the monsoon, heavy seas, fog, and rain envelope the southern Arabian coastline, making outdoor activities like shipbuilding difficult. Presumably Nephi and his brothers stopped work on the ship during this period of the year or perhaps Bountiful offered enough shelter to allow them to continue.
5. Timber had to be readily available. To build his ship, Nephi would have needed access to sufficient timber of the right types and sizes to fashion a seaworthy vessel (see 1 Nephi 18:1, 2, 6).
 6. A year-round supply of fresh water has to be available for the camp.
 7. Bountiful had a prominent mountain. In the Book of Mormon text, Nephi refers to this mountain as "the mount" (1 Nephi 17:7; 18:3) which was close enough to the camp-site that Nephi could go there to "pray off" (1 Nephi 18:3).
 8. Bountiful likely had cliffs overlooking the ocean. Laman and Lemuel attempted to kill Nephi by throwing him into the sea (see 1 Nephi 17:48). This seems to imply cliffs overlooking the ocean, since Nephi's life would not have been threatened by being thrown into the ocean from a beach.

9. Bountiful had a source of ore which could be smelted for the making of tools, along with flint used in starting fires (see 1 Nephi 17:9-11, 16). Nephi did not need a large deposit of copper or iron ore for his tools. Fifty pounds or so would have met his needs. In February 2000, geologists from BYU discovered two large deposits of iron ore in the Dhofar region of Oman. And they both lie within a few days' walk of any campsite along the seacoast. Although iron ore in the amounts that make mining profitable do not occur in southern Oman, ore does occur in sufficient quantities that Nephi could easily have traveled to a substantial deposit and extracted enough to smelt for his tools. Thus, the natural occurrence of iron ore in the Dhofar area offered a clear solution to Nephi's need for tools.

10. Bountiful had to have suitable winds and currents to carry Nephi's ship out into the Arabian Sea and eventually into the Indian Ocean. Apparently at a particular season of the year, Arab voyagers from the Red Sea and the southern Arabian coast routinely sailed eastward to southern India and Ceylon. Nephi could have used the same winds to sail across the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, every few years the marine and meteorological phenomenon, popularly known as the El Niño effect, changed the pattern of winds across the Pacific so that travel in an easterly direction, even as far as America, becomes possible for a period of a year or two (George F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* [Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1951] and David L. Clark, "Lehi and El Niño: A Method of Migration," *BYU Studies* 30/3 [1990], 57-65).

As to the specific site of Bountiful within the Dhofar region of southern Oman, two specific sites have been suggested:

Khor Kharfot

The first was described by Warren and Michaela Aston ("The Arabian Bountiful Discovered?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 7, number 1, 1998, 4-11). It is Khor Kharfot ("Fort Port"), a unique and fertile place along the coastline of the southern Arabian peninsula. It lies at the end of a long, narrow ravine, the Wadi Sayq ("River Valley"). This wadi provides the only access from the interior desert to the coast through the Qara Mountains, though that access would have been difficult along this narrow and boulder strewn wadi. Let us compare this site with the characteristics of Bountiful outlined above.

Khor Kharfot is located almost due east of Nehem, the modern-day site which is the leading candidate for ancient Nahom (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:34).

Khor Kharfot is fertile. Trees grow naturally, some bearing fruit, and there are nesting birds, a variety of small animals, bees that provide wild honey (Oral report at BYU by Professors Terry B. Ball, Loreen Wolstenhulme, and Gary Baird on Friday, December 3, 1999), and abundant fish.

Ruins at Khor Kharfot, which have yet to be excavated, appear to indicate that at least one small community lived there for some time.

Numerous large trees are still found at Khor Kharfot almost down to the ocean, and they were certainly even more plentiful in the past. Drought in recent centuries has reduced the natural forests that formerly covered the sides of the valley and the surrounding mountains. Timber from several species has been identified at Kharfot—especially the sycamore fig and the tamarind, which would have been suitable for building a seagoing craft.

Khor Kharfot contains the largest source of fresh water on the Arabian coast. In this particular coastal area there are streams and springs which would have provided ample water.

And what of Bountiful's requirement for a mountain? Fittingly, at Khor Kharfot the highest and most prominent peak is isolated directly above the little western plateau where evidence of former settlement is most abundant and on which Lehi's family would have been most likely to camp. At Khor Kharfot, there are also dangerous cliffs averaging 200 feet high which overlook the ocean.

Preliminary investigations in Khor Kharfot have proved promising as to the availability of sufficient iron ore for the making of tools.

The Astons feel that another criterion for Bountiful is that it be uninhabited by other peoples at the time Lehi and his family camped there. At least the Book of Mormon text mentions no such interactions with other people. Preliminary investigations of archaeological evidences suggest only intermittent periods of human habitation at Kharfot. Because of the rugged coastline, overland travel to Kharfot along the coast is very difficult. This is probably the primary reason why such an attractive and fertile place as Kharfot has remained uninhabited for most of the time, including the present day. It is very isolated, and difficult to reach by any route, except the sea. This relative isolation of Khor Kharfot may be why Laman and Lemuel assisted with the shipbuilding and seem not to have objected to leaving Bountiful.

Khor Rori

The second candidate for Bountiful is Khor Rori and was first described by George Potter and Richard Wellington (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, 121-37). It is located about sixty miles to the east of Khor Kharfot on the Salalah coast of southern Arabia. Potter and Wellington emphasize that at the time of Lehi, Dhofar was a land of great wealth due to the groves of Frankincense trees.

Potter and Wellington also suggest that Lehi and his family were probably not alone in Bountiful, but took their place there as part of a larger community of seafarers, farmers, business people, traders, and craftsmen. They write, "It would have been highly unlikely for Lehi to have entered southern Arabia undetected by the local inhabitants. Historian William J. Hamblin reminds us of the geo-political environment of

Lehi's southern Arabia. He states that "there they would have necessarily made contact with the local inhabitants, if only because every well in the region would have been owned by some tribe or city, and strangers would not have been allowed to drink from the wells without permission" (*Ibid.*, 124). The text of the Book of Mormon also appears to support the idea that Bountiful was populated and that the family had interaction with the inhabitants. The implication is that Nephi was working within a community that had carpenters and shipbuilders. A common definition of the word *wilderness* is an area devoid of signs of human life. Nephi never refers to Bountiful as a wilderness. Yet another indication from the Book of Mormon that Bountiful was populated is Nephi's use of the word *land* to define it, which connotes ownership and habitation, e.g., "land of Jerusalem" (1 Nephi 2:11), the land of Egypt (1 Nephi 5:14), and the "land of our inheritance" (1 Nephi 3:22). Every time Nephi uses the word *land* it is in the context of a people. Finally, Bountiful's "much fruit" implies cultivated fields and orchards. Most farmers will tell us that wild fruit trees do not produce "much fruit." Cultivated fruit trees do. A neighboring town to Khor Rori was Moscha (the modern-day Taqah)—see the map of the Frankincense Trail.

Let us now consider some evidences for Khor Rori's being the land of Bountiful.

As with Khor Kharfot, Khor Rori is approximately 3 degrees off true east from the point in Yemen where the eastward trail to Dhofar splits off the main Frankincense Trail.

A mountain range runs parallel to the southern coast of Arabia from Yemen to Dhofar, the Qara Mountains. In order to reach the coast from the trail the family would have had to cross the mountains. Camels with provisions would only have been able to cross the mountains on established trails through passes. The mountains in southern Oman are limestone mountains that have been eroded by rainwater into virtually impassable flowstone formations. Maps of the ancient trade routes in southern Arabia show only one pass through the mountains of southern Oman to the coast. This route goes through the Thammarit Pass and is now the modern Salalah/Thammarit road. This route is east of Wadi Sayq and has been in use for thousands of years.

The soil of the Salalah coastal plain is remarkably rich and is said to be capable of producing three crops in a year. There is evidence to suggest that the Salalah plain has been cultivated for thousands of years—dating back to the third Millennium BC (Doe, *Southern Arabia*, 13; Allen, *Oman: The Modernization of the Sultanate*, 21-25). Some of the tropical fruits and vegetables grown on the Salalah plain in older times were probably introduced through ancient trade. Omani sailors have traded with India as far back as 1000 BC (Tosi, "Early Maritime Cultures of the Arabian Gulf," 101). The Salalah plain has several khors, or inlets, and some of them are fresh water, being filled predominantly from streams and wells coming forth from the mountains. Irrigation from the streams that feed these freshwater khors might have been used by Lehi's family to irrigate their crops.

The reference to “wild honey” seems at first odd as we are used to bee-keeping as a more efficient means of collecting honey. In Dhofar, however, honey is still collected from wild bees. To this day, these Omani bees are considered only “somewhat” managed. The Salalah honey is not sold in shops, but rather in pharmacies. It commands high prices, being considered possessed of numerous medicinal properties. The honey from various parts of Dhofar differs in color and flavor depending on which flowers and plants grew where the bees feed. Bees are rare in Arabia, and the Dhofar coast is one of the few places they are found.

The Lord is specific about one particular mountain. Potter and Wellington have not been able to identify any specific peak from Nephi’s account, but there are a number of possibilities. Closest to Khor Rori are the mountains of the Jabal Al Qara range, bounding Wadi Dharbat. Approximately 3,000 feet, it is the highest mountain in southern Oman and is mentioned by name in Genesis 10:30, where it is known as “Sephar, a mount of the east.”

We do not actually know what type of ore Nephi was shown by the Lord. The two most likely possibilities are iron ore and copper ore. Bronze (a metal alloy containing some copper) tools have been found in Dhofar dating to 1100 BC (These are on display in the Salalah Museum of National Heritage and Culture). See the commentary on iron ore above.

Nephi tells us, “I did smite two stones together that I might make fire” (1 Nephi 17:11). Flint is usually the stone of choice for making sparks. Flint deposits have been found at Shisur (a town Lehi’s family would have encountered on the trail before coming through the mountain pass). Nephi could have picked these stones up as he passed through the city.

Since large timbers are imperative for building a ship, Nephi had to acquire them. He had only two choices. One way was to purchase imported wood. The other way would be to find a locally grown source. Nephi needed large timbers made of hardwood to build a seaworthy ship. The hardwood species found on the foothills of Dhofar tend to be small and do not produce the large timbers necessary for the construction of large ships. However, there is one notable exception. In wadi Dharbat, a large upper valley to Khor Rori located about seven miles away, a unique combination of environmental factors—exceptional soil and high rainfall—have combined. They have resulted in the only large trees in Dhofar. Indeed, the locals call wadi Dharbat “the valley of the big trees.” It may be that in Nephi’s time, this small but ideal growing area produced enough hardwood trees for him to have harvested large timbers for his ship. Other possible sources of large timbers might have been mango trees or coconut palms.

Nephi used the skins of beasts to make a bellows. When loading the ship they took “meat from the wilderness,” (1 Nephi 18:6). Perhaps there is a distinction between these two. Since “beasts” were different from “meat from the wilderness,” it is possible that “beasts” were not wild. Dhofar is the only place in Arabia where cattle could have

been found. The earliest settlers of Dhofar took cattle into that area long before Lehi's time (Clapp, *Road to Ubar*, 221-22). The mountains are now populated by a tribe known as the Jibalis, the mountain people. They speak a different language than the Arabs of Oman. They make their living by raising cattle and camels, and to this day their livestock still graze the mountains of Dhofar. It would appear to make sense that if leather were available for sale, it would be easier for Nephi to have used that than go off and hunt beasts, skin them, and then make a bellows.

Regarding the "meat from the wilderness," there are many wild animals in the Dhofar mountains. Dhofar contains twenty species of wild mammal. These include "the caracul, the leopard, the Arabian gazelle, and the ibex which appear in small numbers and are vulnerable to hunting" (Vine, *Heritage of Oman*, 50). Ancient cave art in wadi Dharbat shows large wild animals (Hanna and Al-Belushi, *Caves of Oman*, 100,103). The lakes in wadi Dharbat would have served as watering holes for the animals and an ideal place for Nephi to have hunted, only ten miles from the harbor in Khor Rori. Several species of wild birds also exist there.

We will read in verse 48, "And now it came to pass that when I said these words they were angry with me, and were desirous to throw me into the depths of the sea." This was no boisterous romp among loving siblings. This was an attempt on Nephi's life. There are cliffs near Khor Rori that are high and overhang deep water. They offer no beach where Nephi might have been able swim to safety, but only treacherous rocks where he would have been pounded by the surf. What truly separates the cliffs at Khor Rori from those of any other spot along the Dhofar shoreline is that they consist of an odd set of two giant rock promontories that reach into the sea some one hundred fifty yards from the natural shoreline. It is apparently the only place along the Omani coast where someone could literally be thrown into deep water.

Unlike the site at Khor Kharfot, in Khor Rori they would have discarded their tents and lived in a house among the other inhabitants of the area.

Perhaps the most compelling feature of Khor Rori is that it is a protected harbor where large ocean-going ships could be built and launched. Indeed, Khor Rori was the site of ancient Omani shipbuilding well before the time of Lehi. In Khor Rori, Nephi could find all of the resources for building a large ship including materials, help in learning the art of ship building and sailing, skilled labor, and especially an appropriate place for building and launching a large ship. A large sailing vessel simply cannot be built and launched from a shallow beach which characterizes the coast at Khor Kharfot. Ordinarily a hull of the ship is built on "ways," or greased logs. Once the hull was finished, the massive structure could be gently lowered along the ways into the water. The hull can then be checked for water tightness. Then the remainder of the ship—the deck, fittings, ballast, provisions, anchor, etc.—is built while the ship is floating on the water. Thus the building site has to be a harbor protected from storms. But how can we be sure Khor Rori is where Nephi build his ship? Could there have been other

natural harbors in Dhofar where Nephi could have built a ship? George Potter and Richard Wellington (*Lehi in the Wilderness*) studied these questions by visiting ten inlets besides Khor Rori. Their findings were clear and definitive in showing that the strongest candidate for Nephi's harbor was Khor Rori. Apparently Khor Rori has been in use as a port as far back as 3000 BC. The great strengths of Khor Rori as a port include natural breakwaters consisting of huge cliffs and surrounding hills that provide protection from both the summer southwest monsoons and the winter northeast monsoons. Thus, the port could be used for shipbuilding and shipping all year, unlike any other place in Dhofar.

There is evidence to suggest that Dhofar was the same area also known as Tarshish. The expression "ships of Tarshish" was used in ancient times to denote ships of the largest size, suitable for long voyages. The frankincense port at Kohr Rori would have been a main port between India and Egypt.

Joseph Smith could have known almost nothing about ancient Arabia when he began translating the Book of Mormon. In 1830, it was known to people in the west as only a desert wasteland. Yet the narrative of the journey of the party of Lehi through ancient Arabia, written by their son Nephi, fits with what we know about the Arabian Peninsula literally from one end to the other, for their journey began in the northwest and ended in the southeast sector. Nephi's narrative faithfully reflects the intertwining of long stretches of barren wilderness with pockets of verdant, lifesaving vegetation. The Book of Mormon account shines as a radiant beam across the centuries, inviting us to adopt its more important message of spiritual truths as our own.

7 And it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had been in the land of Bountiful for the space of many days, the voice of the Lord came unto me, saying: Arise, and get thee into the mountain. And it came to pass that I arose and went up into the mountain, and cried unto the Lord.

verse 7 "get thee into the mountain" Mountains have always served as natural temples when no temple is available. There, prophets have communicated with the Lord and have received revelation.

8 And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Thou shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee, that I may carry thy people across these waters.

verse 8 "that I may carry thy people across these waters" Some students of the Book of Mormon have paid particular attention to the use of the word *people* here instead of families. They have wondered if the traveling group included more than simply the families of Lehi and Ishmael and Zoram. Could they have with them others, especially household servants which had worked for them in Jerusalem? It would have been the norm for a wealthy man of Lehi's social stature to have had household

servants, and it is hard to imagine Lehi's deserting them in a city that was about to be destroyed. There is some likelihood that Lehi took with him a large party, though they are never mentioned. Zoram was a servant who was mentioned. We may keep in mind that in that patriarchal society, servants were never mentioned. Zoram had been freed, and that may be why he was mentioned. Keep in mind that we never hear the names of Nephi's sisters, any of Ishmael's daughters, and even the name of Ishmael's wife is never recorded.

9 And I said: Lord, whither shall I go that I may find ore to molten, that I may make tools to construct the ship after the manner which thou hast shown unto me?

10 And it came to pass that the Lord told me whither I should go to find ore, that I might make tools.

verses 9-10 As has been discussed above, Nephi did not need a large deposit of copper or iron ore for his tools. Fifty pounds or so would have met his needs. In February 2000, geologists from Brigham Young University discovered two large deposits of iron ore in the Dhofar region of Oman (W. Revell Phillips, "Metals of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/1 [2000]: 36-43). And they both lie within a few days' walk of any campsite along the seacoast. Although iron ore in the amounts that make mining profitable do not occur in southern Oman, ore does occur in sufficient quantities that Nephi could easily have traveled to a substantial deposit and extracted enough to smelt for his tools. Thus, the natural occurrence of iron ore in the Dhofar area offered a clear solution to Nephi's need for tools.

11 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did make a bellows wherewith to blow the fire, of the skins of beasts; and after I had made a bellows, that I might have wherewith to blow the fire, I did smite two stones together that I might make fire.

12 For the Lord had not hitherto suffered that we should make much fire, as we journeyed in the wilderness; for he said: I will make thy food become sweet, that ye cook it not;

verse 12 Why had they not been allowed to build fires in the wilderness? We have already discussed one reason. That is, by not building fires they may have remained less conspicuous, thus avoiding contact with unfriendly groups (Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 72-77). Another possible reason is that the Lord might have forbidden the use of fire to teach the traveling party dependence on him—that he was leading and protecting and enabling them. In the following verse, the Lord is quoted as saying, "Ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led."

13 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.

14 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; yea, that I did bring you out of the land of Jerusalem.

verse 14 Shortly after the group arrived in the western hemisphere, Lehi informed them that he had seen in vision the destruction of Jerusalem, and he learned by revelation that if they had remained in Jerusalem, Lehi and his family would have perished (see 2 Nephi 1:4).

15 Wherefore, I, Nephi, did strive to keep the commandments of the Lord, and I did exhort my brethren to faithfulness and diligence.

16 And it came to pass that I did make tools of the ore which I did molten out of the rock.

17 And when my brethren saw that I was about to build a ship, they began to murmur against me, saying: Our brother is a fool, for he thinketh that he can build a ship; yea, and he also thinketh that he can cross these great waters.

verse 17 “he also thinketh that he can cross these great waters” It is not surprising that Laman and Lemuel, in their faithless state, were skeptical and frightened about Nephi’s proposed voyage. Keep in mind that in that day people of the Old World must have had a profound fear of the great oceans. Doubtless many feared that one who ventured out onto the ocean was in real danger of never returning. Columbus would not dispel this fear, by making the journey from the Old World to the New, for another twenty-one centuries!

The seafaring people of Oman limited their sea voyages to India and Persia and the Mediterranean, and the seafaring crews usually kept land in sight. To head out into the great ocean was quite another matter. As far we can tell, Nephi would have been aware that this is something no one had ever done before! It might be compared today to being commanded to build a spaceship and setting out, with one’s family, to Mars.

18 And thus my brethren did complain against me, and were desirous that they might not labor, for they did not believe that I could build a ship; neither would they believe that I was instructed of the Lord.

verse 18 The thoughtful reader is now brought to a place where he or she must face the question of the practical realities of building a large boat adequate to carry Lehi and his party thousands of miles on open ocean to the promised land. One might argue that it was no problem at all; for the Lord could have simply supplied Nephi with all the materials, knowledge, and skills he needed on request. Potter and Wellington refer to this notion as the “storybook” version of Nephi’s shipbuilding experience (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, 148-49). Of this storybook version, those authors write:

It is a scenario that we think grossly misrepresents how the Lord deals with his faithful servants and significantly undervalues what Nephi actually accomplished through applied faith and works, and it also leads to a mythological rather than factual understanding of the Book of Mormon. Besides, the storybook version makes no sense. If the Lord simply wanted to supply everything for Nephi, one miracle after another, why build a ship in the first place? Why not have them walk across the ocean?

The likelihood of the Lord-did-it-all theory seems even more doubtful if one considers the context in which the ship was built. Why would the Lord suddenly start intervening in every matter, after having Nephi and his group suffer great afflictions for eight years in the desert where they nearly died and having them later almost drown in a great tempest at sea? Nephi seems to have had to suffer through each ordeal the same as any man. The sun shone just as hot on him as anyone else; the rain fell just as wet on him; and the wind blew just as hard.

Like the desert journey, building a ship was part of Nephi's development under the hand of the Lord. He, too, would have had to learn line upon line, precept upon precept, as all who had gone before him or would go after. The Lord seems to have made a pioneer par excellence of the faithful Nephi who, on his journey, acquired all the basic skills necessary for the creation and settlement of a new society in the strangeness of the promised land.

Building a ship required Nephi to learn from local tradesmen how to smelt ore to make tools, to cut stones to form anchors, to work wood with very tight specifications, to weave sails, to fabricate rope, to mold pots for storing water, to tan hides for bellows, and how to fasten the ship's riggings. Culminating with the building of a great ship, Nephi's journey was, we might say, his university. In the New World he became a ruler and teacher, passing on to a new society a storehouse of knowledge that took civilizations thousands of years to acquire. Nephi personally taught his people the basic skills of metallurgy (2 Nephi 5:15), high quality wood working skills—manifested in the wilderness family's ability to construct a temple of "exceedingly fine" workmanship (2 Nephi 5:16), building construction, and to work in all manner of woods (2 Nephi 5:15).

Let us now acquaint you, the reader, with the practical problems that confronted Nephi as he began the project of building a ship large enough and strong enough to cross two great oceans. I will draw heavily from Potter and Wellington's book, *Lehi in the Wilderness* (149-62), for this material. They, in turn, have drawn from the experience of a marine archaeologist Tim Severin's experience in building and sailing a replica medieval Arab merchant ship from Oman to China (*Sindbad Voyage*). Even with advanced rigging and sails, it took him seven and a half months to sail from Oman to China, a distance of less than half that sailed by Nephi.

The first question is, just how large was Nephi's ship? We know it had to be large enough to carry the people and necessary provisions for the long journey. For a discussion of the size of the traveling group, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 18:6. The

ship also had to be large enough to withstand the great storms the party would encounter. Nephi will describe his ship's being out of control and driven back for four days in a "terrible tempest" that became "exceedingly sore" (1 Nephi 18:13-15). A member of the Church, Frank Linehan, the Western Region Marine Surveyor for the United States and an expert in hull construction and deep-water sailing, was asked to calculate the needed dimensions of Nephi's ship. He wrote:

Parts of the voyage were in extreme weather from the description of the trip in the Book of Mormon. This would dictate a fairly stout vessel of at least 100 to 120 feet in length but could have been as small as 80 feet with a side beam, high freeboard or bulwarks and light tonnage of no less than 100 tons. [The vessel was] . . . most likely a split rig like a schooner rig or equal. That being the main mast aft and the mizzenmast being forward. A one-masted vessel would have been too tall and not so well balanced in heavier weather. She would have to be constructed above calm deep waters and built on "ways" [greased logs] so that she could be launched prior to outfitting i.e., stepping the masts, rigging, ground tackle etc. This rules out a launch from a beach with waves (Personal Communication with Potter and Wellington, the authors of *Lehi in the Wilderness*).

Now, let us consider some practical realities regarding the construction and sailing of such a ship:

1. Materials to Construct a Ship:

Large Timbers. In the commentary for verse 6 of this chapter, we mentioned the possibility that hardwood timbers sufficiently large to construct a substantial ship could have been found in wadi Dharbat. However, it is more likely that Nephi used imported hardwood, especially teak or even coconut. Tim Severin, whose experience building and sailing a replica Arab merchant ship from Oman to India we mentioned previously, explains, "Historically, nearly all materials for shipbuilding in Oman have been imported from the Indian subcontinent, Oman being lacking in suitable timber for large boat building" ("Construction of the Omani Book Sohar," 279-80). Frank Linehan, the LDS expert in large boat hull construction, stressed the need for large straight hardwoods. Severin, whose boat was probably smaller than that which Nephi would have built described his search for the right timber:

I carried a shopping list for my timber, an inventory of every plank, beam, and frame, its size and curve. All agreed that the keel of the ship was the key to its construction. The keel of a boat is long, straight, and massive; it is the very backbone of the vessel, and its dimensions dictate the remainder of the ship, for an Arab shipwright builds mathematically. The problem was that the keel piece to my replica needed to be 52 feet long, 12 inches by 15 inches in cross-section, and dead straight (*Sindbad Voyage*, 37-38).

Using imported lumber would certainly not contradict Nephi's claim that he worked timbers. Nephi's text alludes to the fact that the timber they were working had

already been cut somewhere else. He wrote, “We did work timbers of curious workmanship” (1 Nephi 18:1). How could they have been curious to Nephi and his workers, if they had logged the lumber themselves? Apparently, some of the timbers Nephi used to construct his ship were precut in an unfamiliar manner. How could Nephi have paid for imported lumber? There were at least a couple of options for obtaining money. They would have arrived at Bountiful with camels that they no longer needed. These would have been eminently marketable at the end of the Frankincense Trail where camels were used as the principle beasts of burden. It is even possible that Lehi could have sold property and belongings in Jerusalem while he was in Bountiful. The tradesman’s journey to Jerusalem took only about four months.

Coconut Rope. After Nephi acquired large timber, he still needed materials to affix the timbers together to form a stout vessel. He probably had two choices: nail the timbers in place, or sew the timbers together with coconut rope and wooden pegs. With the Lord’s help, he had found a source of ore, so nails are not out of the question, but binding the timbers with nails would have required thousands of nails—probably more than twenty thousand. The other choice was that of sewing the ship together with coconut rope. This was the only way large ships were constructed in Dhofar in ancient times (*Omani Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, Oman, a Seafaring Nation*, 154-55), and is probably the method Nephi used to affix the timbers of his ship. Even if Nephi used nails, he still would have needed ropes for the ship’s riggings. So where did Nephi acquire coconut rope? If he made it himself, he would have needed the precise knowledge of how to make good quality rope, a very complex process (Severin, *Sindbad Voyage*, 40). Tim Severin needed fifty thousand coconuts to make the forty miles of rope to build his replica ship (*Ibid.*, 41). In ancient Dhofar, coconuts were imported from India.

Sails. Nephi’s ship needed several sets of excellent quality sails to power it half way around the world. Tim Severin, in building his replica Omani ship, originally acquired sails of “very poor quality canvas,” and they had to be replaced or his ship “stood little chance of reaching China” (*Ibid.*, 102). Severin’s replacement sails required two and one half tons of canvas. Traditionally, the sails on the Arab ships were woven from coconut fiber or palm leaves, or made from cotton cloth (*Omani Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, Oman, a Seafaring Nation*, 113). It probably would have taken Nephi, or someone in his party, as much time to weave the tons of quality canvas as it would have taken to build the rest of the ship.

Other Materials. Severin’s list of items needed for the construction of a large sewn sailing ship is interesting and instructive. His list included a quarter ton of tree gum, mutton fat, a half dozen barrels of fish oil, a large quantity of sugar, a half ton of lime (*Sindbad Voyage*, 42). These materials were mixed into caulking and antifouling compounds. Without caulking, Nephi’s ship would have sunk in the very harbor in which she was built. Without anti-fouling, shipworms would have destroyed the ship

before it reached the west coast of India. Some species of tropical shipworms grow to six feet in length and attain the thickness of a man's arm (Morton, *Wind Commands*, 207). As an experiment, Severin's crew left unprotected timbers below the waterline to judge the impact of the teredo worms. The results were sobering. Within weeks, they became honeycombed with wormholes. One two-and-one-half-inch thick piece "snapped with one's bare hands like wafers" (Severin, *Sindbad Voyage*, 32). How could Nephi, with no shipbuilding knowledge, have found the proper ingredients for caulking and anti-fouling? If he made these compounds himself, how did he learn to prepare them? Any mistake in the formula would have been fatal. Without caulking the ship would have sunk at launching. Ineffective anti-fouling coating on the ship would have met with the same fate as Severin's unprotected wood within a matter of weeks.

2. Shipwrights:

It is probably a fact that when Nephi arrived at Bountiful, his knowledge of shipbuilding was nil. John L. Sorensen goes so far as to state: "No hint can be found in the text that anyone in Lehi's party had any knowledge whatever of nautical matters" ("Transoceanic Crossings," 257). Frank Linehan believes that to build his ship Nephi needed access to skilled shipwrights. Nephi could not have developed the required expertise in Jerusalem. While the Lord gave Nephi the instructions on how to build the ship, he did not give him the lifetime of experience that shipwrights need to perform their craft. Nephi built a ship that was large and of fine workmanship (1 Nephi 18:4). Tim Severin noted the skills required of his shipwrights: "Whether cutting a foot-thick lump of timber to size, or shaping the finest sliver of wood for a delicate joint, ninety per cent of the [shipwright's] work was done with hammer and chisel; only very reluctantly did they pick up a saw or a plane. The soft iron chisel was their tool, and with it, they could work wonders. They could carve a plank into delicate curves, or they could shape the 60-foot spar into a taper as if it had been turned on a giant lathe" (*Sindbad Voyage*, 207). To prevent leaks, Severin's ship's planks had to be planed to 1/64 of an inch in exactness. How could Nephi have learned to do this if not at the side of an experienced shipwright?

The same can be said for *sailing* a large multi-sail ship. It takes years to learn and practice the skills needed to master a large sailing ship at sea. Severin wrote of his shipwrights: "Their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers, and untold generations before that, had been carpenters. . . . They had begun work as soon as they were big enough to pick up a mallet" (*Ibid.*, 58). Nephi's statement, "I had finished the ship" (1 Nephi 18:4) does not mean that he built it all by himself. Nephi does not tell us how many people worked on the construction of his ship, only that "we did work timbers" (1 Nephi 18:1), and that at least on one occasion his workers were his reluctant brethren. However, his brothers were not working on the ship when it was being finished (1 Nephi 18:4). It would have been impossible for a lone man to have outfitted and finished a large ship by himself. Simply lifting the heavy timbers would have

required many men. If his brothers were not helping him build the finished ship, then who was? It was imperative that Nephi needed at least one experienced shipwright to train and assist him, as well as, a number of other workers.

3. Trained Crew and Captain to Sail the Ship:

A ship the size of Nephi's would need a trained crew of probably at least twenty men. We do not know if he hired experienced sailors for his crew. At a minimum, prior to leaving port, he needed someone to organize the crew and to teach every man aboard how to perform his responsibilities within the team. For the crew of his Omani replica ship, Tim Severin had a crew of twenty experienced sailors whom he described as having saved the ship on "several occasions." Without a trained crew to handle the sails and riggings, Nephi's ship would have never left the port in which she was built. It would also have been necessary for the crew and captain to test the ship on sea trials before actually launching for the Promised Land. Sea trials are more than just a precautionary measure to make sure the ship is sound. They are the means by which the captain and crew learn to sail her. They are the process by which shipbuilders discover the proper amount of sail for different conditions, and of utmost importance—what the right amount and balance of the ballast should be. Before they entered the ship for the voyage to the New World, Nephi's family knew that the finished ship was "good," and the "workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine" (Nephi 18:4). This implies that they had already conducted successful sea trials. Otherwise, how could they have judged the ship's workmanship unless they saw that the hull was sound and watertight, that the ship rested properly and equally balanced in the water, and that the ship handled well in various seas? Without sea trials, the words "good ship" would have been as meaningless as pronouncing an airplane "good" before seeing if it could fly.

Nephi was apparently the ship's captain. The question remains, "How did Nephi learn to command a multi-sail ship and her crew?" The captains that sailed the ancient waters of the Mediterranean stayed close to the shoreline, seldom venturing out of sight of land. In the Red Sea, because of its dangerous shoals, all vessels sail only during the day, putting in toward nightfall at the nearest available anchorage (Casson, *Ancient Trade and Society*, 187). Nephi needed to learn to sail in open seas. Today the California Maritime Academy, of the California State University of Engineering, Technology, and Marine Transportation, offers a degree in Marine Transportation. The curriculum includes thirty-seven courses on topics relevant to sailing a ship. Upon completing the course, the cadets become junior officers with many years at sea lying ahead of them before they can qualify to command a ship. Frank Linehan, a sailing expert, states it quite simply, "Even with the inspiration of the Lord, it was simply impossible for Nephi to have sailed to the New World without training."

In addition to having the Liahona, which appointed the direction the traveling group should go, it seems clear that Nephi knew how to calculate his position in the

open sea for he realized that during the “terrible tempest” they were “driven back” four days (1 Nephi 18:13).

Let us now consider some of the practical realities of provisioning a vessel making such a voyage:

1. Food and Water for a Pacific Crossing. In describing his provisioning of the ship, Nephi used the phrases we “prepared all things,” taking “much fruits and meat,” “honey in abundance,” “provision according to that which the Lord had commanded,” “all our loadings and our seeds,” and “whatsoever thing we had brought with us.”

When marine archaeologist Tim Severin sailed his replica Arab ship to China, he covered a distance less than half that of Nephi’s voyage, and he carried a crew of only twenty men. Severin describes loading his eighty-foot ship with provisions:

There was not enough room to store all the provisions for the entire journey. I calculated that we would carry a basic store of rations, and supplement our supplies with purchases made at countries along the route. . . . We had boxes of nuts and dried fruit, hundreds of eggs preserved in grease and wrapped in sawdust, sacks of onions, dried peas, rice, and packets of spice. For variety there was a selection of tinned foods and sauces. Our cooking would be done on deck over a simple charcoal fire burning in a tray of sand. . . . I watched a ton of dates being manhandled aboard in sacks. . . . The list of necessities was unending (*Sinbad Voyage*, 82).

Once past India there were few, if any, ports where Nephi could have restocked his ship. Presumably, they fished and collected rainwater when possible, but it is likely they stopped often along the way to search for water and food. Depending on the winds, the voyage to the New World doubtless took at least a year. It is certain Nephi needed to have taken on board large stores of food and water. He needed enough fresh water for 50-75 people who would have been exposed to hot tropical conditions.

Severin, with his crew of only twenty, rationed only twenty-five gallons of water a day for drinking and cooking. All washing was done in sea water, while the cooking water was diluted, half and half, with sea water. His ship carried a month-and-a-half supply of water, roughly eleven hundred gallons. It is reasonable to assume that Nephi’s ship required a water reserve at least twice that size. Fortunately, Nephi’s ship carried enough water for them to have survived the “great calm” that seems to have entrapped the ship between the time of the tempest and the time when there was once again enough wind to sail (1 Nephi 18:21-22).

2. Ship’s Repairs and Tools. A wooden ship is in constant need of maintenance, an endless effort that once stopped dooms the ship. Nephi had to maintain his ship while on route to the Promised Land. Many of these had to be made at sea, though it is almost certain that Nephi beached his vessel a time or two for repairs. It is also probable that during the great storm in which his ship nearly sunk, the vessel was damaged (1 Nephi 18:13-15). Thus, he needed to carry with him all the tools and supplies necessary to maintain the ship, its riggings and its sails.

On route to China, Severin purchased many supplies along the way. Still he took aboard many maintenance supplies:

On board we would have to carry enough spare materials to maintain an early medieval ship at sea for at least eight months of voyaging. . . . The ship rapidly began to fill up with hundreds of items necessary for a sea voyage that would last seven or eight months. The forepeak was stuffed with bosun's stores—coil upon coil of rope of every size, from bundles of light lashing twine to 8-inch-thick spare halyards. There were dozens of extra blocks, each one lovingly carved out of a single chunk of wood and with their wooden wheels revolving on wooden pins. . . . There were spare sacks of lime for the day when we careened the ship in a foreign port and smeared on a new coat of the traditional antifouling. There were tins of mutton fat, rank and nauseating, to mix with the lime or to grease the running ropes and tackles. There were marlin spikes and mallets, chests of carpenter's tools, odd lengths of spare timber, bolts of spare sailcloth, spare oxhide, and the needle and thread to sew chafing patches (Sindbad Voyage, 81.)

The fact that Nephi's ship was new does not mitigate the need for repairs and maintenance. Severin's ship was newly built, yet it needed repairs before it reached its first stop on the west coast of India. Included in these repairs was a new coat of antifouling compound, which if not maintained allows the destructive teredo worms to eat through the hull.

3. Other Supplies. We can be assured that Nephi's ship needed several sets of sails, and so she had need of a large space to hold the extra sails. Sailing ships carried one set of sails for the night and bad weather, the other for day and fair weather. The wrong sail in the wrong wind conditions, can lead to a ship's being capsized. During one stormy day in the China Sea, Severin had five sails "ripped to shreds" (*Ibid.*, photos).

Nephi's family took tents with them to the Land of Promise (1 Nephi 18:23). It is likely that these were the traditional Middle Eastern heavy goat and camel hair tents. There were at least eight married couples in the group. A folded 10 foot by 10 foot goat hair tent measures 3 feet by 3 feet by 6.5 feet or 58.5 cubic feet. Multiply that by eight families, and the tents form a stack 13 feet long 6 feet wide and 6 feet tall, not counting floor rugs, bedding, and at least a ton of tent poles and stakes.

At least one, and probably multiple, anchors would have been required. Ancient anchors have been recovered in Omani waters. They were made from stone and were, of course, heavy. A recently recovered anchor in Oman weighed twenty-two hundred pounds and was nine feet long (*Anchors, Field report, Traditional Boats of Oman Project*).

Other supplies would have included weapons (we know they had at least one sword—the sword of Laban), some form of fishing tackle, a sand pit for cooking, pots

and other kitchen items, along with a large store of charcoal or firewood with flint. The brass plates of Laban, of course, were also on board.

19 And now it came to pass that I, Nephi, was exceedingly sorrowful because of the hardness of their hearts; and now when they saw that I began to be sorrowful they were glad in their hearts, insomuch that they did rejoice over me, saying: We knew that ye could not construct a ship, for we knew that ye were lacking in judgment; wherefore, thou canst not accomplish so great a work.

verse 19 It seems likely that Nephi was sorrowful because he was beginning to realize the hopeless spiritual plight of his recalcitrant brothers, Laman and Lemuel. Nephi's brothers obviously misinterpreted the cause of his sorrow. Quite another reason that he might have been exceedingly sorrowful is that he realized the enormity of the task ahead and was overwhelmed. He was about to attempt something that no one else had ever done—head out into the great ocean to an unknown destination. It could well be that this was Nephi's darkest hour. He may have been stuck with the awesome reality of what he was about to attempt. This may well have been a watershed moment for the great Nephi! He likely walked alone somewhere to contemplate his situation and to pray. It was in this setting that the Spirit touched his heart and mind, and he recalled the miraculous story of Moses's leading the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt (see verses 23-33). Perhaps this moment, as much as any other, was instrumental in changing Nephi from an ordinary man to a powerful and capable prophet of God who was forged in the fires of adversity. If we are to learn that which the Lord would have us learn from this great prophet, we must come to know his experiences as they actually occurred. We must never regard Nephi's journey from Jerusalem to the Promised Land as one which was made easy by the Lord's revelations. For Nephi personally, this was surely a refiner's fire like few people on earth have had to endure. And the end result was a magnificent and capable prophet of God fully capable of leading his people in establishing a new society in a new world.

20 And thou art like unto our father, led away by the foolish imaginations of his heart; yea, he hath led us out of the land of Jerusalem, and we have wandered in the wilderness for these many years; and our women have toiled, being big with child; and they have borne children in the wilderness and suffered all things, save it were death; and it would have been better that they had died before they came out of Jerusalem than to have suffered these afflictions.

21 Behold, these many years we have suffered in the wilderness, which time we might have enjoyed our possessions and the land of our inheritance; yea, and we might have been happy.

verse 21 “yea, and we might have been happy” Isn't this a revealing statement in teaching us what happiness was to Laman and Lemuel and the others of

the same mettle in the traveling company? To them happiness was what? Worldliness—what a man is able to amass and enjoy. Were Laman and Lemuel, though, really unrighteous in yearning for their “land of inheritance”? After all, their “land of inheritance” must have consisted of more than just property—land and a house. It also included a familiar culture, friends, and familiar surroundings! Is it really that bad to seek for this type of happiness? Worldliness consists of a dependence for happiness on material circumstances and material possessions. Joseph Smith taught that the key to happiness is “. . . keeping the commandments of the Lord”—whatever hardship, deprivation, or sacrifice is implied (*TPJS*, 255-256).

22 And we know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord, and all his commandments, according to the law of Moses; wherefore, we know that they are a righteous people; and our father hath judged them, and hath led us away because we would hearken unto his words; yea, and our brother is like unto him. And after this manner of language did my brethren murmur and complain against us.

verse 22 “And we know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people” The brothers’ perception of the righteousness of the people in Jerusalem was colored by their misunderstanding of the “chosen people” concept. At the time, the Lord was allowing the Kingdom of Judah a period of relative peace and economic prosperity. Laman and Lemuel were smugly proud of the idea that the Jews and other Israelites were a chosen people and unconditionally favored of the Lord. Had the Israelites been truly righteous, of course, they would not have been crushed by Babylon.

Lehi will explain that the Lord judges the individual by his heart and not his label. One’s righteousness does not consist in one’s being identified with this or that nation or group or church. Brother Hugh Nibley pointed out that the Lord taught that the perfect example of a righteous person was “a man who was a member of the wrong nation, the wrong party, and the wrong church, who did a very unpleasant, messy, and inconvenient thing in helping a total stranger who, for all he knew and to all appearances, was a dirty, drunken, no-good tramp. At least two members of the right party and the right nation and the right religion . . . discreetly and quietly declined the awkward involvement, which could certainly lead to complications, by passing down the other side of the road (Luke 10:25-37)” (“Freemen and King-men in the Book of Mormon” a FARMS reprint).

verses 23-32 The story of Moses’s parting the Red Sea and indeed the complete story of the exodus and sojourn in the wilderness is an important and appropriate motif in the Book of Mormon (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 4:2). Nephi

could probably have recounted the story by heart since it likely had been taught to him since his childhood. Perhaps Laman and Lemuel had been similarly taught. Thus, the opening phrases of verses 25 through 29 contain the idea, “ye also know.”

As you read this account, don't fail to note that you are reading an entirely separate account of the exodus story. In a very real way, this account corroborates the historicity of that found in the Bible.

In the past decade, there have been several reports on what has been called the “Exodus Pattern” in the Book of Mormon. Many comparisons have been made between the exodus of the children of Israel out of Egypt and the exodus made by the Lehites from Jerusalem. Some similarities have included the divine call of the leader accompanied by fire; the deliverance of the people on the other side of a water barrier involving the crossing of that barrier; the extended wandering; and the complaints and rebellion (George S. Tate, “The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” in *Literature of Belief*; Terrence L. Szink, “Nephi and the Exodus,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*; S. Kent Brown, “The Exodus: Seeing It as a Test, a Testimony, and a Type,” *Ensign* [February 1990] 54-57; S. Kent Brown, “The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 30/3[1990]: 111-26; and “Nephi and the Exodus,” *Ensign* [April 1987]: 64-65).

23 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, spake unto them, saying: Do ye believe that our fathers, who were the children of Israel, would have been led away out of the hands of the Egyptians if they had not hearkened unto the words of the Lord?

24 Yea, do ye suppose that they would have been led out of bondage, if the Lord had not commanded Moses that he should lead them out of bondage?

25 Now ye know that the children of Israel were in bondage; and ye know that they were laden with tasks, which were grievous to be borne; wherefore, ye know that it must needs be a good thing for them, that they should be brought out of bondage.

26 Now ye know that Moses was commanded of the Lord to do that great work; and ye know that by his word the waters of the Red Sea were divided hither and thither, and they passed through on dry ground.

27 But ye know that the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea, who were the armies of Pharaoh.

28 And ye also know that they were fed with manna in the wilderness.

29 Yea, and ye also know that Moses, by his word according to the power of God which was in him, smote the rock, and there came forth water, that the children of Israel might quench their thirst.

30 And notwithstanding they being led, the Lord their God, their Redeemer, going before them, leading them by day and giving light unto them by night, and doing all things for them which were expedient for man to receive, they hardened their

hearts and blinded their minds, and reviled against Moses and against the true and living God.

31 And it came to pass that according to his word he did destroy them; and according to his word he did lead them; and according to his word he did do all things for them; and there was not any thing done save it were by his word.

verse 31 “according to his word he did destroy them” Do you recall the incident in the exodus story that is being referred to here? Shortly after breaking the tablets containing the ten commandments, Moses ordered the Levites to go through the camp of Israel and slay the misbehaving men. By the sword, some three thousand Israelite men were thus slain (Exodus 32:26-29).

32 And after they had crossed the river Jordan he did make them mighty unto the driving out of the children of the land, yea, unto the scattering them to destruction.

33 And now, do ye suppose that the children of this land, who were in the land of promise, who were driven out by our fathers, do ye suppose that they were righteous? Behold, I say unto you, Nay.

verse 33 The meaning of this verse is somewhat problematic. In some measure the difficulty hinges on the meaning of the words “this land.” If it had read “that land,” it would likely have referred to the land of Canaan at the time of Moses and Joshua. The “children of this land,” then, would be the Canaanites who lived in Canaan at the time of the arrival of the Israelites. Then the verse would be easy to interpret. This interpretation seems most plausible.

Another possibility is that “this land” refers to the Promised Land that Lehi and his traveling group encountered in the western hemisphere. Keep in mind that Nephi was living in the western hemisphere when he wrote the record we are now reading. It would then imply that the Lehites had to wage war against the indigenous peoples in the land of promise before they were able to establish themselves. If there was such a battle, we have no mention of it in the Book of Mormon.

Yet another idea has been proffered. Brother Hugh Nibley regards this verse as referring to the desert tribes through whose territories Lehi and his people were traveling (*Since Cumorah*, 218). This seems a difficult meaning for your author to understand. After all, these desert tribes were not in a promised land.

34 Do ye suppose that our fathers would have been more choice than they if they had been righteous? I say unto you, Nay.

verses 34 The “theys” in this verse refer to the inhabitants of the land of promise who dwelt there before the arrival of the Israelites. Nephi takes a swipe at the contestable righteousness of the Israelites. He asks, “Do you really think that the Israelites would have been regarded by the Lord as righteous if those who already

inhabited the land of promise had themselves been at all righteous?" It was not the Israelites' righteousness that entitled them to be victorious as they moved into the promised land. Rather it was the relatively greater unrighteousness of their enemies.

Is the Lord prejudiced? Does he play favorites? Did he favor and help the Israelites just because they were Israelites? He is not racist. He is no respecter of persons. There is only one pertinent criterion by which his favoritism is meted out—that of righteousness. He favors those who keep his commandments: "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Samuel 2:30).

Nephi's brothers had just reiterated the idea that the people of Jerusalem were a "righteous people" (1 Nephi 17:22), indeed a chosen people. Nephi could see clearly that the perversion of the "chosen people" concept among the Israelites had led to a harmful pride and smugness which had eventually led to their downfall and destruction. Nephi could see that his brothers had fallen into this same trap.

35 Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God. But behold, this people had rejected every word of God, and they were ripe in iniquity; and the fulness of the wrath of God was upon them; and the Lord did curse the land against them, and bless it unto our fathers; yea, he did curse it against them unto their destruction, and he did bless it unto our fathers unto their obtaining power over it.

verse 35 "the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one" All men are subject to the same eternal laws. We will see in the ensuing verses that while he loves all his children, he favors with blessings those who obey and honor him.

"this people" The Canaanites of the Bible.

"they were ripe in iniquity" A people that is "ripe in iniquity" means that they have reached the stage of sin and evil which inevitably leads to a people's destruction. The Canaanites had rejected every word of God. Thus the Israelites were able to clobber them as they moved into the Holy Land. They may also be said to have reached a "fulness of iniquity" (Ether 2:10).

"the Lord did curse the land against them" As people are cursed and blessed for their wickedness or righteousness, so are the lands which they inhabit.

36 Behold, the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited; and he hath created his children that they should possess it.

verse 36 The Lord intends that righteous people have a land of their own whereon they can feel safe and secure. This verse also hints at the fact that the reason the earth was created was for the spiritual progression and ultimate exaltation of man (Moses 1:39).

37 And he raiseth up a righteous nation, and destroyeth the nations of the wicked.

verse 37 “he raiseth up a righteous nation” It seems unlikely that a specific righteous nation is being referred to here. Rather this is a statement of a general principle: Righteous nations are blessed, and unrighteous nations are not.

38 And he leadeth away the righteous into precious lands, and the wicked he destroyeth, and curseth the land unto them for their sakes.

verse 38 When we think of promised lands or covenant lands, we usually think of only Palestine and the Americas. Our vision is probably limited. When the truth is known, we will probably find that in the history of the earth the Lord has covenanted with many peoples concerning their lands of promise.

39 He ruleth high in the heavens, for it is his throne, and this earth is his footstool.

verse 39 This verse contains a thought that Nephi obviously borrowed from the writings of Isaiah on the plates of Laban (see Isaiah 66:1). The earth is the Lord's footstool in that he will again stand upon it (see D&C 38:17).

40 And he loveth those who will have him to be their God. Behold, he loved our fathers, and he covenanted with them, yea, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and he remembered the covenants which he had made; wherefore, he did bring them out of the land of Egypt.

41 And he did straiten them in the wilderness with his rod; for they hardened their hearts, even as ye have; and the Lord straitened them because of their iniquity. He sent fiery flying serpents among them; and after they were bitten he prepared a way that they might be healed; and the labor which they had to perform was to look; and because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished.

verse 41 How would you interpret the verb “did straiten”? Here it is probably reasonable to interpret it as “disciplined.”

Take a moment to review the colorful story of the Lord's setting fiery serpents upon the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. The story is found in Numbers 21:4-9:

And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for [there is] no bread, neither [is there any] water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord

and against thee; pray unto the Lord that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

Notice the typological or symbolic reference to Christ. In the Book of Mormon the serpent is used on a few occasions as a symbol of Christ (see also 2 Nephi 25:20; Alma 33:19-21; Helaman 8:14-15). Each of these references refers to the same incident when Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness. The word “brazen” in this context means simply made of brass. Some have been confused by this symbolism since in the Garden of Eden the serpent was the symbol of Satan. Some have suggested that Satan, who was aware of the serpent symbol’s being representative of Christ, took upon himself this identity because he is the great counterfeiter. It is also interesting that in Mesoamerican history, there is a legend of the white god that some investigators believe originated with Christ’s visit to that land. This god is known as Quetzalcoatl, which means feathered serpent (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 159-167).

It is interesting to note that a symbol in the scriptures can have dual even opposite meanings. For example, the shedding of a man’s blood brings about physical death. On the other hand, the shedding of Christ’s blood brings about spiritual life. In the Garden of Eden it was the serpent that represented the devil, the father of death and darkness. Later, however, it was the brazen serpent that represented the Savior, the source of life and light. The waters of Noah’s day destroyed all but eight souls, yet the waters of baptism symbolically cleanse and save every soul who seeks eternal life. Fire is the token of punishment for the anguished in hell, but Isaiah spoke of the righteous who shall dwell in “everlasting burnings” (Isaiah 33:14; see also Revelation 15:2). At the second coming of Christ it is fire that will destroy the wicked, but in the interim it is the fire of the Holy Ghost that purges and edifies the spiritually repentant.

42 And they did harden their hearts from time to time, and they did revile against Moses, and also against God; nevertheless, ye know that they were led forth by his matchless power into the land of promise.

43 And now, after all these things, the time has come that they have become wicked, yea, nearly unto ripeness; and I know not but they are at this day about to be destroyed; for I know that the day must surely come that they must be destroyed, save a few only, who shall be led away into captivity.

verse 43 Between verses 42 and 43, a sudden transition is made of nearly seven hundred years from the time of the Israelites at the time of Moses (the Exodus

occurred in about 1260 BC) to that of the Jews in Jerusalem in 600 BC. See the supplemental article, *Chronology of the Bible and the Book of Mormon*.

44 Wherefore, the Lord commanded my father that he should depart into the wilderness; and the Jews also sought to take away his life; yea, and ye also have sought to take away his life; wherefore, ye are murderers in your hearts and ye are like unto them.

verse 44 “ye also have sought to take away his life” See 1 Nephi 16:36-37.

Do you suppose that eternal truths have always engendered anger and resentment among those who refuse to accept them?

45 Ye are swift to do iniquity but slow to remember the Lord your God. Ye have seen an angel, and he spake unto you; yea, ye have heard his voice from time to time; and he hath spoken unto you in a still small voice, but ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words; wherefore, he has spoken unto you like unto the voice of thunder, which did cause the earth to shake as if it were to divide asunder.

verse 45 “Ye have seen an angel” See 1 Nephi 3:29.

“ye were past feeling” Laman and Lemuel had been witnesses to overt spiritual manifestations, yet their hearts were never lastingly softened. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 2:14. They never could “feel the words of the Lord.”

The reader may wish to notice the example of antithetic parallelism contained in this verse (see the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*):

Ye are swift to do iniquity
but slow to remember the Lord your God

46 And ye also know that by the power of his almighty word he can cause the earth that it shall pass away; yea, and ye know that by his word he can cause the rough places to be made smooth, and smooth places shall be broken up. O, then, why is it, that ye can be so hard in your hearts?

47 Behold, my soul is rent with anguish because of you, and my heart is pained; I fear lest ye shall be cast off forever. Behold, I am full of the Spirit of God, insomuch that my frame has no strength.

verse 47 “I am full of the Spirit of God, insomuch that my frame has no strength.” Apparently the process of being in tune with the Spirit can be physically enervating (cause a loss of strength). For other examples, see the following references: 1 Nephi 1:7, 1 Nephi 19:20, Alma 27:17, Daniel 10:8, Moses 1:9-10, and JS-H 1:20.

48 And now it came to pass that when I had spoken these words they were angry with me, and were desirous to throw me into the depths of the sea; and as they came forth to lay their hands upon me I spake unto them, saying: In the name of the Almighty God, I command you that ye touch me not, for I am filled with the power of God, even unto the consuming of my flesh; and whoso shall lay his hands upon me shall wither even as a dried reed; and he shall be as naught before the power of God, for God shall smite him.

verse 48 This scene is reminiscent of a future experience of the prophet Abinadi when speaking before King Noah's court (see Mosiah 13:2-3, 5). Most likely Nephi and Abinadi were transfigured and given special power by the Spirit in these situations of their righteous indignation. Bruce R. McConkie defines transfiguration as "a special change in appearance and nature which is wrought upon a person . . . by the power of God" (*Mormon Doctrine*, 803).

"and whoso shall lay his hands upon me shall wither even as a dried reed"

There are a number of instances in original manuscript of the Book of Mormon where Dr. Royal Skousen feels that Oliver made a mistake in transcribing Joseph Smith's dictation. If a word or a phrase was unknown to him, he substituted a more common word or phrase (but with varying degrees of success). In each of these cases, the substitution is found in the original manuscript and was later copied into the printer's manuscript. It then was either corrected by the typesetter or appeared in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. This phrase offers such an example. In the original and printer's manuscripts, this phrase read "and whoso shall lay his hands upon me shall wither even as a dried weed [not reed]." Dr. Skousen feels that the reading in the present edition is the correct one.

49 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto them that they should murmur no more against their father; neither should they withhold their labor from me, for God had commanded me that I should build a ship.

50 And I said unto them: If God had commanded me to do all things I could do them. If he should command me that I should say unto this water, be thou earth, it should be earth; and if I should say it, it would be done.

verse 50 Here is a reminder that miracles of this sort can happen, but only if the Lord commands that they be performed (see D&C 24:13).

51 And now, if the Lord has such great power, and has wrought so many miracles among the children of men, how is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship?

verse 51 One of the definitions for *wrought* in Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language is, "effected; performed."

52 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said many things unto my brethren, insomuch that they were confounded and could not contend against me; neither durst they lay their hands upon me nor touch me with their fingers, even for the space of many days. Now they durst not do this lest they should wither before me, so powerful was the Spirit of God; and thus it had wrought upon them.

verse 52 *Durst* is the past, preterit tense of dare.

53 And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: Stretch forth thine hand again unto thy brethren, and they shall not wither before thee, but I will shock them, saith the Lord, and this will I do, that they may know that I am the Lord their God.

54 And it came to pass that I stretched forth my hand unto my brethren, and they did not wither before me; but the Lord did shake them, even according to the word which he had spoken.

verses 52-54 It is interesting that throughout the First Book of Nephi, Laman and Lemuel, notwithstanding their rebellious natures, were the recipients of so many miraculous manifestations of the Holy Ghost. Usually manifestations of the Spirit are given only to those who are prepared by righteous living to receive them. It would seem that the likely explanation for these unexpected favors shown to Laman and Lemuel is that they could not be allowed to thwart the Lord's purposes. It was consequently vital that their rebellious influences be held in abeyance at least until the group arrived in the promised land.

"I will shock them" I will cause them to shake or tremble.

55 And now, they said: We know of a surety that the Lord is with thee, for we know that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us. And they fell down before me, and were about to worship me, but I would not suffer them, saying: I am thy brother, yea, even thy younger brother; wherefore, worship the Lord thy God, and honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God shall give thee.

verse 55 Nephi's demonstration of the Lord's power was a bit too effective. His brothers fell down before him and were about to worship him.

"We know of a surety that the Lord is with thee, for we know that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us" These words stand as a witness against Laman and Lemuel. Because of their subsequent openly rebellious actions, they stand condemned after this utterance.

1 Nephi Chapter 18

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 18 Voyage to the Promised Land

Chapter 18 is notable for its account of the voyage to the Promised Land.

1 And it came to pass that they did worship the Lord, and did go forth with me; and we did work timbers of curious workmanship. And the Lord did show me from time to time after what manner I should work the timbers of the ship.

verse 1 “from time to time” We have previously discussed Nephi's need for much expert help from at least one shipwright, from an experienced captain of large boats, and from experienced crew members.

2 Now I, Nephi, did not work the timbers after the manner which was learned by men, neither did I build the ship after the manner of men; but I did build it after the manner which the Lord had shown unto me; wherefore, it was not after the manner of men.

verse 2 In Joseph Smith's day the Arabian Peninsula was not well known to Americans and was generally understood to be a desert wasteland, devoid of timber that could have been used for shipbuilding. As we discussed in the commentary for 1 Nephi 17:6, there now exists convincing evidence that Oman's Dhofar coast is the probable location of Nephi's Bountiful, where he and his family constructed the ship that carried them to the Americas. Oman, with its borders on the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, is relatively geographically isolated, and its history, according to archaeologist Michael Rice, is “most notably a record of Oman's marriage with the sea.” He continues: “Her people have always been energetic and courageous seamen, probably from the earliest times. Oman's ships are distinctive and her sailors were foremost among the seamen of Islam” (*The Archaeology of the Arabian Gulf, 5000-323 BC*, 246-48). Ancient Oman played an important role in early trade routes and served as an international center for trade by sea. Long before 600 BC, their trade linked India, Persia, Mesopotamia, Africa, Egypt, and eventually China. In ancient times it was the natural location to build and launch a ship for a journey eastward into the Indian Ocean. It is likely that Nephi learned his skills as a shipbuilder from the Omani shipwrights.

One possible meaning of this verse is that Nephi was shown by the Lord some variations in the usual Omani techniques of ship construction. Another possible meaning, however, of this verse is that the Omani style of ship construction was unique and differed from the rest of the world. Hence the Omani ships were built in a manner which was “not after the manner of men.” The Omani used a distinctive ship, the “sewn

boat,” which, though of very ancient origin, is still used by modern Omani. These sewn boats, also called “booms,” are wooden boats, but they are not nailed. They are completely stitched together, without using nails. Approximately 56,000 meters of coconut hair rope are required to sew together one complete ship. Using these vessels, the Omani have maintained active trade with neighboring countries over most of a five-thousand year period. It is highly improbable that Joseph Smith or his contemporaries knew that southern Arabia was home to world-class mariners and shipbuilders for millennia. We do not know whether Nephi built his ship in the Omani style (which would have been different from “the manner of men” he would have known from the Mediterranean) or whether the construction style the Lord showed him was different from both of these. But the reputation of ancient Oman as a center of shipbuilding demonstrates clearly that the necessary materials for the successful constructions were available in that land in Lehi’s day.

The skills required to build a large and seaworthy ship and to successfully complete a treacherous journey from the coast of Arabia to the Americas carrying a large group of people are considerable. Practically speaking, they could not have been obtained by Nephi, the revelation to which he was entitled notwithstanding, without help. And so it appears the Lord led him to a place where the body of accumulated knowledge and tradition of sailing were already in place.

3 And I, Nephi, did go into the mount oft, and I did pray oft unto the Lord; wherefore the Lord showed unto me great things.

verse 3 “into the mount oft” In modern-day English, we may prefer the preposition “onto” here rather than “into.”

4 And it came to pass that after I had finished the ship, according to the word of the Lord, my brethren beheld that it was good, and that the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine; wherefore, they did humble themselves again before the Lord.

verse 4 It is interesting to remind ourselves that Laman and Lemuel had no choice but to board the ship and go with Nephi. The only way out of Bountiful was back through the foreboding desert or out to sea.

5 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came unto my father, that we should arise and go down into the ship.

verse 5 Even though it was Nephi who had been receiving the revelation relative to the specific task of building the ship, notice who it was that received the revelation regarding the group’s departure. Lehi is the priesthood leader in charge.

6 And it came to pass that on the morrow, after we had prepared all things, much fruits and meat from the wilderness, and honey in abundance, and provisions according to that which the Lord had commanded us, we did go down into the ship, with all our loading and our seeds, and whatsoever thing we had brought with us, every one according to his age; wherefore, we did all go down into the ship, with our wives and our children.

verse 6 “every one according to his age” Here it is suggested that the sequence in which the group entered the ship was determined by their rank in the family, which rank was in turn determined by their age.

“we did all go down into the ship, with our wives and our children” Obviously Lehi and Sariah, by this time, had some grandchildren (see also a mention of Nephi’s children in 1 Nephi 18:19). Just how large is the traveling group? Since Lehi and Sariah had two children, Jacob and Joseph, while traveling in the wilderness we might well expect the younger couples to have been more fertile and to have had at least as many children as their parents did over that same time period. Let us make a few assumptions. First, we may assume that Nephi’s older brothers (Laman, Lemuel, and Sam) each had at least four children. This is assumed because shortly after arriving in the promised land, Lehi will bless the “sons and daughters” of Laman (2 Nephi 4:3) and the “sons and daughters” of Lemuel (2 Nephi 4:8). Nephi’s sisters will be mentioned in 2 Nephi 5:6, but we know they were married to Ishmael’s sons. Nephi went back to get Ishmael’s family, so his sisters were presumably already married to Ishmael’s sons before they left Jerusalem. Since these two couples had been married for at least eight years, they most likely had more than four children each. We will assume that each couple had four. Nephi states that his “children” traveled on the ship (verse 19), and so we will assume that he and his wife also had four children.

So far, then, we have a minimum of 40 people (Lehi, Sariah, Laman and his wife and four children, Lemuel and his wife and four children, Sam and his wife and four children, Nephi and his wife and four children, Jacob, Joseph, and Nephi’s two sisters, their husbands, and their four children per couple). Then if we add the wife of Ishmael, Zoram, his wife, and their probably four children, we are up to 47 as a reasonable minimum. Then there is the possibility that Lehi and maybe even Ishmael had brought servants with them in the wilderness (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 17:8). In addition, one cannot rule out the possibility that some of the local people from Dhofar (Bountiful) joined the family. The Omanis had a great tradition of seafaring. When building the ship the family may have had help from the locals. The local young men would doubtless have been drawn by the adventure and romance of a far journey in the ship, and their seafaring skills would have been vital for the ship’s crew. It is certainly possible that the total number of people on board the ship could have been in the neighborhood of 50 to 75.

7 And now, my father had begat two sons in the wilderness; the elder was called Jacob and the younger Joseph.

8 And it came to pass after we had all gone down into the ship, and had taken with us our provisions and things which had been commanded us, we did put forth into the sea and were driven forth before the wind towards the promised land.

9 And after we had been driven forth before the wind for the space of many days, behold, my brethren and the sons of Ishmael and also their wives began to make themselves merry, insomuch that they began to dance, and to sing, and to speak with much rudeness, yea, even that they did forget by what power they had been brought thither; yea, they were lifted up unto exceeding rudeness.

verse 9 “much rudeness . . . exceeding rudeness” What kind of activity might be referred to in this way? During their exodus from Egypt, the Israelites on at least one occasion involved themselves in lewd and lascivious dancing (see Exodus 32:18, 19, and 25). Perhaps this same type of behavior provoked this somewhat euphemistic description of their behavior.

10 And I, Nephi, began to fear exceedingly lest the Lord should be angry with us, and smite us because of our iniquity, that we should be swallowed up in the depths of the sea; wherefore, I, Nephi, began to speak to them with much soberness; but behold they were angry with me, saying: We will not that our younger brother shall be a ruler over us.

verse 10 Here, again, the rancor of Nephi’s older brothers surfaces. Their resentment may have had, at least in part, a cultural origin. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:37.

11 And it came to pass that Laman and Lemuel did take me and bind me with cords, and they did treat me with much harshness; nevertheless, the Lord did suffer it that he might show forth his power, unto the fulfilling of his word which he had spoken concerning the wicked.

verse 11 “the Lord did suffer it” Sometimes the Lord will allow the wicked to abuse and mistreat the righteous. We might say that he allows them to dig their own spiritual grave.

12 And it came to pass that after they had bound me insomuch that I could not move, the compass, which had been prepared of the Lord, did cease to work.

verse 12 The “compass” is, of course, the Liahona.

13 Wherefore, they knew not whither they should steer the ship, insomuch that there arose a great storm, yea, a great and terrible tempest, and we were driven

back upon the waters for the space of three days; and they began to be frightened exceedingly lest they should be drowned in the sea; nevertheless they did not loose me.

14 And on the fourth day, which we had been driven back, the tempest began to be exceedingly sore.

15 And it came to pass that we were about to be swallowed up in the depths of the sea. And after we had been driven back upon the waters for the space of four days, my brethren began to see that the judgments of God were upon them, and that they must perish save that they should repent of their iniquities; wherefore, they came unto me, and loosed the bands which were upon my wrists, and behold they had swollen exceedingly; and also mine ankles were much swollen, and great was the soreness thereof.

16 Nevertheless, I did look unto my God, and I did praise him all the day long; and I did not murmur against the Lord because of mine afflictions.

verse 16 Take note of the relationship between Nephi and the Lord, particularly the humility that Nephi evidences. Presumably Nephi had done nothing to offend the Lord, yet Nephi assumed no automatic favors from the Lord. He approached the Lord with humble submissiveness.

17 Now my father, Lehi, had said many things unto them, and also unto the sons of Ishmael; but, behold, they did breathe out much threatenings against anyone that should speak for me; and my parents being stricken in years, and having suffered much grief because of their children, they were brought down, yea, even upon their sick-beds.

18 Because of their grief and much sorrow, and the iniquity of my brethren, they were brought near even to be carried out of this time to meet their God; yea, their grey hairs were about to be brought down to lie low in the dust; yea, even they were near to be cast with sorrow into a watery grave.

19 And Jacob and Joseph also, being young, having need of much nourishment, were grieved because of the afflictions of their mother; and also my wife with her tears and prayers, and also my children, did not soften the hearts of my brethren that they would loose me.

20 And there was nothing save it were the power of God, which threatened them with destruction, could soften their hearts; wherefore, when they saw that they were about to be swallowed up in the depths of the sea they repented of the thing which they had done, insomuch that they loosed me.

verses 17-20 We continue to learn about the character of Laman and Lemuel. They were unmoved by the pleading of their elderly and ailing parents, the deprivation of their youngest brothers, and even the tears of Nephi's wife. Only the threat to their personal safety finally motivated them to release Nephi.

21 And it came to pass after they had loosed me, behold, I took the compass, and it did work whither I desired it. And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord; and after I had prayed the winds did cease, and the storm did cease, and there was a great calm.

22 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did guide the ship, that we sailed again towards the promised land.

23 And it came to pass that after we had sailed for the space of many days we did arrive at the promised land; and we went forth upon the land, and did pitch our tents; and we did call it the promised land.

verse 23 What is your concept of this brand new Promised Land? What did Lehi and his group encounter there? What about other people? Did the emigrants from Jerusalem actually encounter indigenous peoples in the Promised Land? As many have read the Book of Mormon, they have developed the intuitive notion that father Lehi and his group were alone in a pristine land, never previously inhabited by man. Actually, the western hemisphere was inhabited millennia before Lehi and company arrived here. There were doubtless remnants from the Jaredite culture and probably other indigenous subcultures. It is probable later on, however, that the Nephites and Lamanites did multiply to become a significant part, though probably not a majority, of the Mesoamerican scene during the Book of Mormon years.

Dr. Joseph L. Allen (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 237) suggested a possible scene encountered by Lehi's colony as they arrived in the promised land: "[They] were probably greeted by the scantily clothed, sun-baked, dark-skinned natives living along the coast. These natives were probably part of the great Jaredite nation. Most likely, Laman and Lemuel, in their traditional jealousy of Nephi, assumed the leadership of these natives. Thus began the great Lamanite culture."

A logical extension of the mistaken presumption that Lehi's colony was alone in this new land is that the emigrants from Jerusalem (Lehi's group and the Mulekites—also from Jerusalem) then proceeded, over the centuries, to populate the entire western hemisphere by themselves. At one point in our church history, it was commonly believed that all American Indians were descendants of Lehi, Ishmael, Zoram, and the Mulekites. Be careful not to fall into this simplistic trap. The contemporary Indian cultures and language groups are too diverse to be explained by origination from these few ethnic groups sixteen centuries ago.

"we did arrive at the promised land" In early church history it was commonly believed that Lehi landed in Chile. This idea seems to have originated from a statement by Frederick G. Williams which stated that Lehi "landed on the continent of South America in Chile thirty degrees south Lattitude [sic]." In 1882 Franklin D. Richards attributed this statement to Joseph Smith. Subsequent research finds no evidence that

Joseph ever made this statement (*Re-exploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, 57-60).

24 And it came to pass that we did begin to till the earth, and we began to plant seeds; yea, we did put all our seeds into the earth, which we had brought from the land of Jerusalem. And it came to pass that they did grow exceedingly; wherefore, we were blessed in abundance.

25 And it came to pass that we did find upon the land of promise, as we journeyed in the wilderness, that there were beasts in the forests of every kind, both the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat and the wild goat, and all manner of wild animals, which were for the use of men. And we did find all manner of ore, both of gold, and of silver, and of copper.

verse 25 Apparently they encountered several types of domestic animals in the wilderness as well as “all manner of wild animals.” How could domestic animals have been found in this pristine, uninhabited land? First, Nephi does not specifically state that the animals were domestic when first encountered. Second, as is stated above in the commentary for verse 23, archaeologists assure us that people already inhabited all parts of Mesoamerica in 580 BC. Thus, domestic animals might well have been found.

There are actually some twelve specific animals mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Six of them are found in this verse. The entire list of twelve includes the ass (see also Mosiah 12:5), the cow (see also Ether 9:18), the dog (Mosiah 12:2; Alma 16:10; Helaman 7:19; 3 Nephi 14:6), the goat (see also Enos 1:21; Ether 9:18), the wild goat, the horse (2 Nephi 12:7; Enos 1:21; Alma 18:9, 10, 12; Alma 20:6; 3 Nephi 3:22; 3 Nephi 4:4; 3 Nephi 6:1; 3 Nephi 21:14; Ether 9:19), the sheep (Ether 9:18), the ox (see also 2 Nephi 21:7; 2 Nephi 30:13; Mosiah 13:24), the swine (3 Nephi 14:6; Ether 9:18), the elephant (Ether 9:19), and the “curelom” the “cumom” (see the commentary for Ether 9:19). Also mentioned are calf, cattle, fowl, lamb, and fatling which are variations of the twelve already mentioned.

Since the classification and nomenclature of animals have varied so widely from culture to culture, it is probably best not to assume that these animals are the same as we know them today. For example, there is no good evidence that the cow as we know it was present in the Americas before the time of Columbus. What then is referred to in the Book of Mormon by the term “cow”? It is not entirely possible to know, but we might speculate. At the time of the Spanish conquest, some of the Indians of Mesoamerica owned and tended herds of deer. In Peru some pastoral Indians kept domesticated llamas. Could these be the Book of Mormon’s “cow”? Perhaps also the “cow” is the bison or the alpaca?

“the horse” Some have long been troubled by the mention of the horse in the Book of Mormon since horses were not generally thought to be present in the western hemisphere before the time of Columbus. It would seem, however, that all one has to

do is be patient. New discoveries are being made all the time. John L. Sorenson has reported, "Actual horse bones have been found in a number of archaeological sites on the Yucatan Peninsula, in one case with artifacts six feet beneath the surface under circumstances that rule out their coming from Spanish horses" (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 295-96). Also, can we be certain that the Book of Mormon's "horse" is, in fact, a true horse as we know the horse? Ancient Mesoamerican figures have been found with people riding on the back of deer, holding onto their ears or horns.

Brother Sorenson has suggested, using the list of animals known to have existed in Mesoamerica during Book of Mormon times, the following identities for other animals mentioned in the book: The "ox" may have been the tapir, the llama, or the bison. The "ass" might be the tapir or the llama. The llama or the paca might qualify to be called the "sheep." The "goat" may have been the deer, and the "swine" fits with the peccary. The "dog" is probably one of the species of dog indigenous to Mesoamerica.

Metaphorical references to animals also occur. For instance, "ye are his sheep . . . suffer no ravenous wolf to enter among you" (Alma 5:60); "the people had turned from their righteousness, like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow to her wallowing in the mire" (3 Nephi 7:8); "they shall be driven before like a dumb ass" (Mosiah 12:5); "they were struck with great fear, and fled from the presence of Alma and Amulek even as a goat fleeth with her young from two lions" (Alma 14:29).

1 Nephi Chapter 19

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 19 Nephi commanded to make the large plates of Nephi and begin engraving upon them.

1 Nephi 19:23 I did liken all scriptures unto us.

This chapter provides us with the account of Nephi's making the large plates of Nephi and starting his engravings upon them.

1 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded me, wherefore I did make plates of ore that I might engraven upon them the record of my people. And upon the plates which I made I did engraven the record of my father, and also our journeyings in the wilderness, and the prophecies of my father; and also many of mine own prophecies have I engraven upon them.

verse 1 About ten years after Lehi's family's departure from Jerusalem—the family's departure was likely between 587 and 577 BC—Nephi was commanded to begin a record which we now know will become part of the “large plates of Nephi.” If the reader does not have a clear understanding of this set of plates, please review the article *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

“I did engraven the record of my father” We are taught that Nephi's early engravings on the large plates of Nephi included a record of his father Lehi. Nephi likely used, as his source for his father's record, Lehi's personal journal (S. Kent Brown, “Nephi's Use of Lehi's Record,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 3-5). Nephi probably copied his father's record onto the large plates of Nephi in the same way that he later copied the Isaiah chapters from the brass plates onto the small plates of Nephi. The fact that Nephi copied his father's record onto metal plates suggests that Lehi's record was written on perishable material rather than on more durable metal plates.

Do we have access today to the book of Lehi? Actually, in a way, we do. We have access to a version of a part of the book of Lehi. Apparently, the 116 pages of manuscript lost by Martin Harris contained the complete book of Lehi. This book had been translated by Joseph Smith from the plates of Mormon. It included an account of the period of time from Jerusalem down to the reign of King Benjamin. The first eight chapters of 1 Nephi contain another abridgment father Lehi's journal. This abridgment was written onto the small plates of Nephi and is found in the book of 1 Nephi—chapters 1 through 8. These chapters, of course, will not be written by Nephi upon the small plates of Nephi for another twenty years.

2 And I knew not at the time when I made them that I should be commanded of the Lord to make these plates; wherefore, the record of my father, and the genealogy of his fathers, and the more part of all our proceedings in the wilderness are engraven upon those first plates of which I have spoken; wherefore, the things which transpired before I made these plates are, of a truth, more particularly made mention upon the first plates.

verse 2 Don't be confused by this verse. Remember, as we read 1 Nephi, we are reading from the small plates of Nephi. See if you can keep straight the various references to the two sets of plates, the large plates of Nephi and the small plates of Nephi.

"Them" refers to the large plates of Nephi. "These plates" are the small plates of Nephi. "Those first plates" are, again, the large plates of Nephi. Again, "these plates" refers to the small plates of Nephi. Finally, "the first plates" are the large plates of Nephi.

Nephi would not even begin the small plates of Nephi, those from which we are now reading, until at least twenty years following the events about which we have been reading in chapter 18 (567 to 557 BC—see 2 Nephi 5:28-33).

We learn that some precious things were contained on the large plates of Nephi to which we do not have access today, including the genealogy of Lehi. This genealogy was probably taken from the brass plates. We also learn that the account of the party's sojourn in the wilderness was found in more detail on the large plates of Nephi. In fact, every event that occurred between the exodus from Jerusalem and Nephi's creation of the small plates, was described in more detail on the large plates of Nephi.

"genealogy of his fathers" A point of some interest but minor importance is that in the first edition, the printers skipped from one "f" to another in the same word, which shortened "genealogy of his forefathers" to read "genealogy of his fathers" in this verse. The longer word is supported by the original manuscript, the printer's copy, and the 1840 edition.

3 And after I had made these plates by way of commandment, I, Nephi, received a commandment that the ministry and the prophecies, the more plain and precious parts of them, should be written upon these plates; and that the things which were written should be kept for the instruction of my people, who should possess the land, and also for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord.

4 Wherefore, I, Nephi, did make a record upon the other plates, which gives an account, or which gives a greater account of the wars and contentions and destructions of my people. And this have I done, and commanded my people what they should do after I was gone; and that these plates should be handed

down from one generation to another, or from one prophet to another, until further commandments of the Lord.

verses 3-4 Both references to “these plates” in verse 3 and the single reference to “these plates” in verse 4 refer to the small plates of Nephi. Here we learn that the small plates of Nephi were to contain the more “plain and precious parts” of “the ministry and the prophecies”—the more spiritual record. The “other plates,” or the large plates of Nephi, were to give a “greater account of the wars and contentions and destructions” of the people—a more secular record.

By our reading of the small plates of Nephi, we are made aware, in general terms, of the tensions between Nephi and his followers and the adherents of Laman and Lemuel (see 2 Nephi 5:1-5). In the lifetime of Nephi, however, we do not have any record of “wars and contentions and destructions of [Nephi’s] people.” Apparently, there was open conflict, and the record of this would have been recorded on the large plates of Nephi.

One further question for clarification: When Martin Harris lost the 116 pages of manuscript, did he lose only the book of Lehi? We know that he lost all the secular writings of the prophets from the exodus from Jerusalem down to the reign of King Benjamin. While today we are inclined to refer to this entire lost segment of scripture as “the book of Lehi,” if we did have access to these lost materials today, we may find that they were organized and divided into a few books, not just the book of Lehi.

5 And an account of my making these plates shall be given hereafter; and then, behold, I proceed according to that which I have spoken; and this I do that the more sacred things may be kept for the knowledge of my people.

verse 5 Here Nephi refers to his account of making the small plates of Nephi found in 2 Nephi 5:28-33.

6 Nevertheless, I do not write anything upon plates save it be that I think it be sacred. And now, if I do err, even did they err of old; not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me, according to the flesh, I would excuse myself.

verse 6 “if I do err, even did they err of old” Some of the sacred teachings that Nephi will enter onto the small plates of Nephi will be based on the writings of prophets that preceded him. In this verse he suggests that he might be excused if he includes any erroneous materials from the writings of these earlier prophets.

verses 7-10 Secular biblical scholars, in general, do not believe that a prophet can prophesy outside of his own life’s time reference. They also would not allow that a prophet could prophesy explicit particulars about any matter. Indeed, biblical prophecies about Jesus Christ are scarce, and those few that do exist are veiled.

However, in the Church today we are committed to the idea that a prophet can predict specific events to occur in any era of the earth's future existence. These verses contain remarkable prophetic detail concerning the Messiah.

7 For the things which some men esteem to be of great worth, both to the body and soul, others set at naught and trample under their feet. Yea, even the very God of Israel do men trample under their feet; I say, trample under their feet but I would speak in other words—they set him at naught, and hearken not to the voice of his counsels.

8 And behold he cometh, according to the words of the angel, in six hundred years from the time my father left Jerusalem.

verse 8 Who is the “angel” spoken of here? He is “the angel” who assisted Nephi in his vision experience in 1 Nephi 11-15. He is first introduced in 1 Nephi 11:14.

9 And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men.

10 And the God of our fathers, who were led out of Egypt, out of bondage, and also were preserved in the wilderness by him, yea, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself, according to the words of the angel, as a man, into the hands of wicked men, to be lifted up, according to the words of Zenock, and to be crucified, according to the words of Neum, and to be buried in a sepulchre, according to the words of Zenos, which he spake concerning the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of his death unto those who should inhabit the isles of the sea, more especially given unto those who are of the house of Israel.

verse 10 It is made clear in this verse that Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, is Jesus Christ.

Here also are reiterated the non-biblical prophets, Zenock, Neum, and Zenos, who are quoted in the Book of Mormon and whose writings were presumably found on the brass plates. These prophets prophesied and testified of Christ with unparalleled plainness. A fourth such prophet was Ezias who is mentioned in Helaman 8:20. For speculation concerning these four non-biblical prophets, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:16. We know very little of these prophets. We do know that they lived “since the days of Abraham” (Helaman 8:19). An interesting verse in 3 Nephi (3 Nephi 10:16) suggests that the Nephites actually descended from the prophets Zenos and Zenock. It is likely that Zenos and Zenock were descendants of ancient Joseph, the son of Jacob. Of the prophet Ezias, we know only that he prophesied of the coming of the Messiah (Helaman 8:19-20). The prophet Zenock was apparently martyred for his beliefs (Alma

33:15-17), as was Zenos (Helaman 8:19). For further commentary on the prophet Zenos, see the introductory commentary for Jacob 5.

A point of little importance but of some interest is that the name Zenock was spelled Zenocho in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon. There is good evidence to suggest that during the translation process, when a proper name was initially encountered, Joseph actually saw the specific spelling of that name and spelled it out for the scribe. We may thus wonder if a more appropriate spelling of this prophet's name would be Zenocho rather than Zenock. Zenocho is, incidentally, more appropriate as a Hebrew name.

A profoundly important and revolutionary concept, as far as our present-day world is concerned, is taught explicitly in the brass plates. This concept is that Christianity, with its doctrines and ordinances, began at the time of Adam (see D&C 20:25-26; Jacob 4:4-5; Alma 39:17-19). All of the prophets since Adam were Christian prophets. They prophesied of Christ, taught Christian doctrine, and administered Christian ordinances. Bruce R. McConkie taught, "What interests us more than the books included on the brass plates is the tone and tenor and general approach to the gospel and to salvation that they set forth. They are gospel oriented and speak of Christ and the various Christian concepts which the world falsely assumes to have originated with Jesus and the early apostles" (*The Doctrinal Restoration*, 17). This concept is also taught in the Bible by the Savior himself. Study carefully Luke 24:25-27, 44.

The phrase "isles of the sea" found here and in subsequent verses (1 Nephi 19:12, 16) is metaphorical and refers simply to scattered Israel, wherever they may be found upon the earth. This phrase is found exclusively in 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi. It has been suggested that the Nephites might have been especially inclined to use this phrase since they at first thought they were living on an island. These Israelites are far removed from Jerusalem. We thus learn here that the three days of darkness to occur at the Lord's death were intended as a specific sign to scattered Israel, probably especially to those in "Book of Mormon country," and perhaps not to those in Jerusalem. Was there a specific sign given to those in Jerusalem? Matthew described, "The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent" (Matthew 27:51; see also Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). The gospel writers also describe darkness at the time Jesus was on the cross, but there was apparently no three-day period of darkness in Jerusalem.

verses 11-12 The signs described in these verses, of course, would occur at the time of Christ's crucifixion.

11 For thus spake the prophet: The Lord God surely shall visit all the house of Israel at that day, some with his voice, because of their righteousness, unto their

great joy and salvation, and others with the thunderings and the lightnings of his power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and vapor of darkness, and by the opening of the earth, and by mountains which shall be carried up.

verse 11 “The prophet” in this verse and also in verses 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, and 24 refers to the prophet Zenos. This designation as “the prophet” perhaps suggests an unusual degree of greatness and importance among other prophets.

“all the house of Israel” Aside from those who resided in Judah, the major elements of scattered Israel at the time of Christ’s crucifixion consisted of the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel taken captive by Assyria between 732 and 722 BC and the Book of Mormon peoples. The Lord will visit these either directly with his voice (and his presence) or by giving them a specific sign of his crucifixion. Apparently, it was and is the Lord’s plan to visit directly the more righteous among scattered Israel. And whatever he plans to do, he will do.

12 And all these things must surely come, saith the prophet Zenos. And the rocks of the earth must rend; and because of the groanings of the earth, many of the kings of the isles of the sea shall be wrought upon by the Spirit of God, to exclaim: The God of nature suffers.

verse 12 Here the prophet Zenos prophesies of the response of all nature to the Savior’s atoning sacrifice (Matthew 27:52-54). His atonement permeates and applies to all reality, including the inanimate earth. When he suffered, creation itself responded (see Moses 7:56).

The phrase “wrought upon” means influenced or prevailed on.

13 And as for those who are at Jerusalem, saith the prophet, they shall be scourged by all people, because they crucify the God of Israel, and turn their hearts aside, rejecting signs and wonders, and the power and glory of the God of Israel.

verse 13 “as for those who are at Jerusalem, saith the prophet” Zenos’s wording suggests that he was writing from somewhere other than Jerusalem. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:16. This provides some evidence that the brass plates, from which Zenos’s writings were taken by Nephi, may have had their origins in the northern kingdom of Israel, rather than the southern kingdom of Judah some time between Israel’s division into separate kingdoms in 931 BC and the fall of the northern kingdom between 732 and 722 BC.

Were the Jews scattered and scourged because they crucified Jesus? The answer is “certainly not.” It is pernicious and inaccurate doctrine to believe that an entire progeny would be punished because those few ruling Jews in the Jerusalem Sanhedrin sought to and succeeded in having Jesus crucified by the Romans. The

answer as to why all Israel, including the Jews, was scourged and scattered is found in the next verse.

14 And because they turn their hearts aside, saith the prophet, and have despised the Holy One of Israel, they shall wander in the flesh, and perish, and become a hiss and a byword, and be hated among all nations.

verse 14 Here is plainly expressed by Nephi the reason the Jews, and indeed all Israel, were scattered—because they rejected the gospel. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained: “Our Israelite forebears were scattered because they rejected the gospel, defiled the priesthood, forsook the church, and departed from the kingdom. They were scattered because they turned from the Lord, worshiped false gods, and walked in all the ways of the heathen nations. They were scattered because they . . . rejected the Lord Jehovah, who is the Lord Jesus, of whom all their prophets testified. Israel was scattered for apostasy” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 515).

This verse contains a fundamental and important truth. A people is scattered when they reject Jesus Christ and his gospel. Apostasy leads to scattering. The converse principle is just as important. A people is gathered when they accept the Messiah and his message and become disciples (see 2 Nephi 9:2, 2 Nephi 25:14). Let us then summarize: Scattering results from apostasy, and gathering occurs as a result of repenting and accepting the gospel of Christ.

“Holy One of Israel” It is of interest that this expression is found several times in the Book of Mormon text but only in the small plates of Nephi (1 Nephi through Omni). The phrase appears thirty times in the Old Testament, and almost all of those occurrences are in Isaiah or in texts that originated around the time of Lehi. Perhaps this name reflects attitudes about God that were particularly relevant and current around Lehi’s time.

“hiss and a by-word” This colorful expression is found in none of the other scriptures. In the Book of Mormon it is found here and in 3 Nephi 16:9. One of the definitions of *hiss* in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language is, “An expression of contempt or disapprobation, used in places of public exhibition.” As a verb, to “hiss” is to express disapproval by hissing. A “by-word” or “byword” is, in this context, a person or thing known for contemptible qualities.

15 Nevertheless, when that day cometh, saith the prophet, that they no more turn aside their hearts against the Holy One of Israel, then will he remember the covenants which he made to their fathers.

16 Yea, then will he remember the isles of the sea; yea, and all the people who are of the house of Israel, will I gather in, saith the Lord, according to the words of the prophet Zenos, from the four quarters of the earth.

verse 16 The phrase “from the four quarters of the earth” means from all parts of the earth.

17 Yea, and all the earth shall see the salvation of the Lord, saith the prophet; every nation, kindred, tongue and people shall be blessed.

verses 15-17 Nephi speaks of the great final gathering which will begin in the dispensation of the fulness of times and will continue through the Millennium. The expression “all the earth shall see the salvation of the Lord” refers to the period of time of the Millennium. For a more complete review of the concepts of scattering and gathering of Israel, see the introductory comments for 1 Nephi 20.

The expression “the earth” has three meanings when it is used in the Book of Mormon:

1. This globe on which we live—one of the many worlds created by Jesus Christ.
2. A collective term referring to all the inhabitants of this world. This meaning applies in this verse (see also 2 Nephi 21:9).
3. The soil or ground (e.g., 1 Nephi 18:24; 23:21; Mosiah 6:7; Alma 48:8).

18 And I, Nephi, have written these things unto my people, that perhaps I might persuade them that they would remember the Lord their Redeemer.

19 Wherefore, I speak unto all the house of Israel, if it so be that they should obtain these things.

20 For behold, I have workings in the spirit, which doth weary me even that all my joints are weak, for those who are at Jerusalem; for had not the Lord been merciful, to show unto me concerning them, even as he had prophets of old, I should have perished also.

verse 20 “workings in the spirit . . . for those who are at Jerusalem” Nephi is emotional and distraught as he considers the fate of Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon, and how he might have still been in Jerusalem when it was crushed.

“which doth weary me, even that all my joints are weak” See the commentary for 1 Nephi 17:47.

21 And he surely did show unto the prophets of old all things concerning them; and also he did show unto many concerning us; wherefore, it must needs be that we know concerning them for they are written upon the plates of brass.

verse 21 “all things concerning them” Old Testament prophets, whose writings are contained on the plates of brass, prophesied in depth about the fate of the people of Jerusalem.

“many [things] concerning us” Those same prophets prophesied concerning this branch of the tribe of Joseph, Lehi’s colony. Even though the Old Testament of the Bible has not maintained its pure original form, we still find references which might well

refer to Lehi and his group. Consider, for example, Genesis 49:22-26, Deuteronomy 33:13-16, Psalm 85:11, and Isaiah 29:9-14.

Nephi is about to quote chapters 48 and 49 of Isaiah (1 Nephi 20-21). It appears that his motivation for quoting these two chapters is to illustrate the truth contained in this phrase.

“we know concerning them” Since Old Testament prophets wrote of the prophecies of the fate of the people of Jerusalem, which writings are contained on the brass plates, Nephi and his people can read them.

22 Now it came to pass that I, Nephi, did teach my brethren these things; and it came to pass that I did read many things to them, which were engraven upon the plates of brass, that they might know concerning the doings of the Lord in other lands, among people of old.

verse 22 “the doings of the Lord in other lands, among people of old” In verses 20 and 21, Nephi has been writing of the prophecies of Old Testament prophets concerning Jerusalem and also prophecies concerning his own people. Here he expands his reference in space and time to include the Lord’s dealings with people who had lived before the time of Nephi and in other lands as will be seen in the next verse.

23 And I did read many things unto them which were written in the books of Moses; but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah; for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning.

verse 23 “I did liken all scriptures unto us” Some have suggested that as we study the writings of the Old Testament prophets today, we should be careful as we try to apply their teachings to ourselves. After all, they were speaking mainly to the people of their own day and addressing the problems of their own people. To apply a scripture to a different situation than that in which it originated may lead one away from the original meaning of that scripture. There is certainly merit to this argument, but here Nephi confirms the validity of seeking to apply the teachings of the ancients prophets to ourselves as he “did liken all the scriptures unto us [his own people], that it might be for our profit and learning.” This is the so-called process of “likening” the scriptures, and it is often a valid process, particularly if we seek only to apply mainly the principles contained in the scriptures to ourselves (see also 2 Nephi 6:5).

In this verse, Nephi suggests that he prefers the writings of Isaiah over those of Moses for the purpose of teaching about Christ.

24 Wherefore I spake unto them, saying: Hear ye the words of the prophet, ye who are a remnant of the house of Israel, a branch who have been broken off; hear ye the words of the prophet, which were written unto all the house of Israel,

and liken them unto yourselves, that ye may have hope as well as your brethren from whom ye have been broken off; for after this manner has the prophet written.

verse 24 “The prophet,” of course, is Isaiah.

This verse forms an excellent introduction to the next two chapters which consist of some verses from the book of Isaiah. It is a message of hope to scattered Israel.

“a branch who have been broken off” Nephi informs his people that they are like unto a branch which has been broken off or scattered from the main olive tree (the main body of the house of Israel). For a discussion of the interesting word *branch*, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:12.

“which were written unto all the house of Israel” Here Nephi is “likening” the words of Isaiah to his own people—the “branch who have been broken off.”

An interesting and important point is made by Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet in their book, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (150-51). They write: “A misunderstanding of scripture results when a prophecy made to all the house of Israel and then applied to the descendants of Lehi by Book of Mormon prophets is assumed to find its fulfillment only in the activities of the descendants of Lehi.” In other words, we might today read prophecies in the Book of Mormon by prophets who specify that those prophecies apply to the remnants of the Nephites and Lamanites. We might then assume that those prophecies will find their fulfillment only among those native Indian peoples of North, Central, and South America who might be descended from Book of Mormon peoples. In fact, those prophecies might have been intended by the Lord to apply to all Israel. Millet and McConkie continue, “Some have erred by supposing that statements made by Book of Mormon prophets, in which they applied the prophecies of Old World prophets to their own people, applied only to the descendants of Book of Mormon people or the Lamanites. This has led them to greatly exaggerate the role the Lamanites will play in the events of the last days. Faithful Lamanites will play a role equal in importance to that of all the faithful descendants of Abraham” (*Ibid.*).

1 Nephi Chapter 20

Scripture Mastery

1 Nephi 20-21 Isaiah 48-49

Chapters 20 through 22 are concerned with the scattering and gathering of Israel. Chapters 20 and 21 are Nephi's quotation of Isaiah chapters 48 and 49, taken from the brass plates of Laban. Before beginning a verse by verse commentary on these chapters, let us review the concepts of scattering and gathering and the essential historical events of the scatterings and gatherings of Israel in the past and in the future.

Gathering. What is the purpose of gathering, and why would our Father in heaven wish to gather his people? Perhaps we can best understand his divine yearning by examining an analogous situation here in mortality. One of the compelling instincts earthly mothers possess is the need to gather their children about them. Mothers are happiest when their sons and daughters are gathered close. Then she can reassure herself that they are safe. She can nurture and teach them personally. She can see to it that their needs are fulfilled. Through observing this powerful maternal drive, we may come to understand something of the desire the Father has to gather his children about him. It is clear that the Father's desire is shared equally by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. On one occasion during his mortal ministry, the Savior looked over Jerusalem and wistfully pined: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, [thou] that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under [her] wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37). Perhaps a practical and highly significant reason for the physical gathering is to allow the saints to have access to the blessings of the temples and the covenants entered into in the temples. Joseph Smith taught that the main object of gathering the people of God in any age to certain places is "to build unto the Lord a house whereby he could reveal unto his people the ordinances of his house and the glories of his kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation" (*TPJS*, 307-08). The ultimate gathering will take place in the celestial kingdom where the Father will welcome his children with arms outstretched. There he can rejoice in their safe arrival, and nurture and instruct them for eternity.

Before this great and final gathering, it is clear that he would have us gather together here on earth for our mutual safety and protection from the evils of the world. The Lord would have his people separate themselves from the sins of the world (spiritual Babylon) and gather to their own safe "promised land" or "Zion," that they might together learn the ways of God in a secure refuge and serve him more fully.

The term "Israel" refers to his chosen people. And who are they? The faithful ancient patriarch Abraham committed himself unwaveringly to the service of the Lord

and was blessed to be able to enter into a grand covenant with him. This covenant was to be passed on to his seed through the patriarchal line, contingent upon the continued righteousness of that posterity. In making this covenant, the Lord promised Abraham: (1) a promised land; (2) a vast posterity both in this world and in the eternal worlds; (3) the priesthood and the gospel; and (4) that his posterity would bless all families of the earth, both in and out of the house of Israel, by taking the gospel message to them. For a more thorough summary of the Abrahamic covenant, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8.

Contingent upon continued faithfulness and obedience, the right to share in the Abrahamic covenant was passed along through the patriarchal lineage to Isaac, to Jacob (Israel), to Jacob's twelve sons, and to their posterity, the "house" of Israel. Abraham's seed, the house of Israel, are indeed a chosen people. In being called *chosen*, however, they are not necessarily blessed with more favorable circumstances or an easier road to exaltation, and they are not loved more by God. Rather, they are chosen or called to serve in much the same way that each of us today may be called to service in the Church. See further discussion on the scriptural word *chosen* in the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

Why are some born into the covenant line, while others are not? Are those born into the house of Israel somehow better than the others? It is clear that those who were most valiant and who made more progress in the first estate are privileged to be born into the house of Israel here in mortality. Rather than being easier for them to earn their exaltation, it will likely be even more difficult because "of him unto whom much is given much is required" (D&C 82:3). Yet it is logical to suppose that these chosen people have the potential to progress faster and farther than those who were less valiant in the pre-existence. This potential may be realized if they continue to be valiant in righteousness and obedience. Here on earth, the categorization of a people as "chosen" or "Israel" is quite another matter. Those born into the covenant line must maintain and progress in their allegiance to the gospel, or they will lose their place. Those not born into the house of Israel can win a position there by accepting and persisting in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, there is a saying: Whether or not you are in the house of Israel here on earth depends on your heart, not your genes.

There are practical fundamental reasons why gathering or its opposite, scattering, occur here on earth. The only circumstances under which the Lord will assist in his peoples' gathering are true repentance and conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 43:1-7; Jeremiah 3:12-23; 16:11-21; 1 Nephi 10:14; 2 Nephi 9:2; 10:6-7; 3 Nephi 20:29-33).

Scattering. The dispersion or scattering of a people occur when they apostatize from the truth (Deuteronomy 28:15, 25, 64; Jeremiah 16:11-13; 2 Nephi 6:9-11; 10:5-6; Helaman 7:19). Moses prophesied what would happen if the Israelites rebelled against God: "The Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number

among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you” (Deuteronomy 4:27). “The Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other” (Deuteronomy 28:64).

On occasion there may be other reasons for a people to be scattered. For example, the Lord might lead a group of people away from the main body of Israel intending to raise up a righteous branch and preserve them from the sins of the rest of Israel. By this means is the blood of Abraham preserved and spread throughout the world. Lehi’s group was just such an example.

It is also important to acknowledge that a people, as a whole body, may be gathered, but the most important gathering to the blessings of the gospel is the “gathering” of each individual. Each person must accept Christ and his gospel and become, in his own right, one of the Savior’s chosen and covenant people, indeed a member of the house of Israel.

Historical gatherings and scatterings. Let us now summarize the historical gatherings and scatterings that befell and will befall the house of Israel. After the Israelites (the descendants of father Jacob) had lived captive in Egypt for some 215 years or “four generations,” the Lord raised up Moses and commanded him to lead them to their promised land in about 1260 BC. Before the children of Israel were allowed to take possession of Palestine, the Lord warned them through Moses that if they failed to keep his commandments, they would be driven from their land and scattered among other nations. Their entry into Palestine in 1220 BC was the first gathering of Israel to their promised land though some might argue that this gathering might not have been wholly merited by the repentance and righteousness of the Israelites. In Palestine they lived through the 200-year period of the rule of judges and through the reigns of the great Israelite kings Saul, David, and Solomon.

In about 931 BC King Solomon died, and the scattering began as civil war divided the whole of Israel into the Kingdom of Israel in the north, with its center in Samaria, and the Kingdom of Judah in the south, with its center at Jerusalem. The northern kingdom consisted of ten tribes and was initially led by the rebel military leader Jeroboam. The dominant tribe of the northern kingdom (actually a sub-tribe) was comprised of the descendants of ancient Joseph’s son Ephraim. Thus these northern ten tribes are often referred to as simply “Ephraim.” The southern two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) were led originally by Solomon’s son, Rehoboam. We may refer to the southern kingdom as simply “Judah.”

All Israel, both in the north and in the south, did apostatize, and the stage was set for a major scattering of all Israel.

Between 732 and 722 BC, the Assyrian army crushed the northern Kingdom of Israel and took captive 27,290 of its educated aristocracy and anyone with any leadership ability. These were carried away—back to Assyria. Their fate from that point on is historically undocumented. Were they subsequently simply dispersed

among the many nations, or did some of them remain together in a body? While it is clear that many were scattered and dispersed in several countries, there is a possibility that some of them remained together in a group. This possibility finds some support in scripture (see Jeremiah 3:12; D&C 110:11; 133:26-34) and in apocryphal literature (book of Esdras) which suggests they traveled into the “north country.” We know also that the resurrected Christ went forth to minister among them after his visit to the Nephites (3 Nephi 15:15; 16:1-3). Did he visit scattered remnants, perhaps, by then, combined with other peoples? Or, did he visit a group of Israelites descended from the ten tribes who had remained together in a group? We obviously do not know.

The southern kingdom existed precariously until 587 BC when the Babylonians conquered Judah and partially destroyed the city of Jerusalem. The Jews were carried off to exile in Babylon. In the Book of Mormon, the term “Jew” has a specific meaning. It refers to the inhabitants of Judah at the time Lehi left Jerusalem and their descendants, regardless of whether they descended from the tribe of Judah or from some other tribe. Once in Babylon, instead of being absorbed into Babylonian society, the Jews preserved their religion, their culture, and their sense of national identity by excluding Babylonian influence whenever possible.

In 539 BC the Babylonian empire was conquered by Cyrus, King of Persia. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their ancestral homes. Many did return and sought to reestablish themselves on the scale of their former power. However, many others had already left Babylon for other locations. By the time of Jesus, probably two-thirds of all Jews lived outside the Holy Land, with Jewish communities scattered throughout the Mediterranean region and the Near East, where many persisted into the twentieth century AD. The Jews never were again a truly independent people. This gathering of the Jews in 539 BC, however, does qualify as the second great gathering.

Some have suggested that the time of Christ’s mortal ministry was a significant period of gathering of Israel. After all, the keys of gathering were restored to the earth by Moses on the Mount of transfiguration at that time. Certainly the Lord did “set his hand” to gather Israel at that time. It turned out to be, however, a gathering that did not quite succeed.

The culmination of the scattering of Israel occurred in AD 70 after the Savior’s ministry. Some four years previously the Jews had revolted against ruthless Roman leadership. Rome retaliated in force, and in August of AD 70, Jerusalem fell. Hundreds of thousands of its inhabitants were slaughtered or died from the famine incident to the siege, and thousands more were sent to the arena as victims for Roman entertainment, sold into slavery, or forced into exile. The Jerusalem temple was burned to the ground, and Jerusalem itself was leveled. The scattering of Israel was thus complete. From that time forth, the Jews became wanderers, a people without a country, a nation without a home. Many settled in Europe, as well as the Mediterranean and Near East as already mentioned.

The great and final gathering of the Jews, and indeed all Israel from the four corners of the earth, will occur in the final dispensation as predicted by many prophecies.

Two components of gathering. Gathering has two components—spiritual and temporal. The spiritual gathering occurs when a people accept Christ and join his church. The temporal gathering consists in moving to that location where the saints have gathered (2 Nephi 9:2). The sequence of gathering generally is first to Christ and his church, and then to specific locations. President Spencer W. Kimball explained the spiritual gathering and suggested that temporal gathering was not, in all cases, essential: “The gathering of Israel consists of joining the true church and their coming to a knowledge of the true God. . . . Any person, therefore, who has accepted the restored gospel, and who now seeks to worship the Lord in his own tongue and with the saints in the nations where he lives, has complied with the law of the gathering of Israel and is heir to all of the blessings promised the saints in these last days” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball, 439).

The temporal gathering in this final dispensation is to occur in two separate places:

1. The “lost” ten tribes will gather to the New Jerusalem or “Zion” on the North American continent. Some of these may return in a group. Obviously others of the ten lost tribes are dispersed throughout the nations of the world. Who are they? Where are they? Most who have joined the Church in this last dispensation are told in their patriarchal blessings that they are of the “loins of Ephraim.” They are the scattered remnants of the ten lost tribes. The “center pole” of the “tent” under which Israel will be gathered is to be located in Jackson County, Missouri. The several “stakes” of this tent will be located all over the earth.

2. The tribe of Judah will gather to its own land of promise—to Jerusalem and Palestine, also called “Zion.” The land of Israel has been dedicated for this purpose in this dispensation on more than one occasion.

A question to consider: Do you see the current gathering of the Jews in the land of Israel a manifestation of the prophesied “gathering” of the tribe of Judah in Jerusalem in the latter days? Certainly it is not the spiritual gathering that will occur. The gospel is not playing a part in the current Zionist movement in Palestine. That movement and gathering is more of a political affair. Who can doubt, however, that the Spirit of the Lord is beginning to move upon the tribe of Judah as we see unfolding a preliminary phase of the temporal latter-day gathering of Judah.

To initiate the gathering of the house of Israel in the latter days, the Lord will raise up a mighty nation among the Gentiles—the United States of America. A special servant will be selected from these “Gentiles,” and through him the gospel will be restored. Who is this servant? He is the president of the High Priesthood of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. How did he receive these keys? They

have been passed on directly by the laying on of hands since the time of Joseph Smith, Jr. Joseph received them from Moses in the Kirtland temple on April 3, 1836. Missionaries will go out from this great Gentile nation to Israel—to the Lamanites, to the Jews, and to Israelites in all the world. Thus, this nation will become an ensign to the world and to all Israel. These missionaries may be referred to in scripture as “Gentiles” even though many of them are, by descent, of the house of Israel. They are “Gentiles” by virtue of the fact that culturally they belong to the “mighty nation among the Gentiles.” Also the Book of Mormon is wont to refer to any non-Jew as a “Gentile.” Through this missionary work, the Lord will bring the Israelites out of “captivity” or “out of obscurity and out of darkness” to the lands of their inheritance—to Jerusalem or to the New Jerusalem. Zion will thus be established. All who fight against Zion—the “great and abominable church” or the “whore of all the earth”—will be destroyed.

Is there a difference between being “gathered” and being “redeemed” or “restored”? Not only will Israel be gathered geographically from their dispersed state throughout the world, but also the gospel will be “declared among them,” and they will be redeemed or “restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers.”

It is clear from the scriptures that at least part of the gathering will occur after the return of Christ to the earth and after the beginning of the Millennium (1 Nephi 22:15, 24-25; 3 Nephi 21:24-26). Just prior to Christ’s advent and the Millennium, the wicked (telestials) will be burned as stubble, for God will not suffer that the wicked will destroy the righteous. The (terrestrial and celestial) righteous will be preserved and need not fear. During the Millennium, the Holy One of Israel will rule in might, power, and glory, and because of the righteousness of the people, Satan will have no power. These factors will facilitate the gathering and restoration of the house of Israel which will continue throughout the Millennium.

The final gathering to occur in this last dispensation, prior to the Millennium, will be done under difficult circumstances. We are taught in prophetic scripture that a veil of darkness shall cover the earth before the second coming (Moses 7:61; D&C 112:23). This veil, likely one of spiritual darkness, shall only be removed at the time or just before the Lord’s second coming (D&C 38:7). Perhaps this veil of darkness is now in place and has not yet been removed. Those of us involved in the final gathering of Israel will labor under the handicap of the spiritual unresponsiveness caused by this veil.

We may then summarize the main periods of Israel’s gathering and scattering:

The scatterings occurred in 931 BC when civil war divided the whole of Israel into two kingdoms, between 732 and 722 BC when Assyria captured the northern kingdom, in 586 BC when Babylon seized control of Judah, and finally in AD 70 when Rome ransacked and destroyed Jerusalem.

The first of the gatherings occurred in 1220 BC when the Lord allowed Joshua to lead the Israelites into Palestine. Following the Babylonian captivity (587-539 BC), the

Jews were allowed to return to their homeland. The great and final gathering is now occurring in this final dispensation when Israel will be temporally and spiritually restored—Ephraim and the rest of the lost ten tribes to the New Jerusalem in the western hemisphere and the tribe of Judah to Old Jerusalem.

The means by which this great final gathering will be accomplished will include the restoration of the gospel and the translation and distribution of the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 29:1; Ether 4:17). This great work will be initiated by the prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. (2 Nephi 3:7, 11-12, 14-15; 3 Nephi 21:9-11) and will be continued by each President of the High Priesthood in this final dispensation. Under their direction, an army of valiant missionaries will spread over the earth to proclaim the restored gospel and bring scattered Israel back to the fold.

The Scatterings and Gatherings of Israel

Scatterings	Gatherings
	1220 BC Joshua leads Israelites into Palestine
931 BC Civil war divides Israelites into northern kingdom of Israel and southern kingdom of Judah.	
732-722 BC Assyria captures and carries away many people of northern kingdom of Israel (ten tribes).	
596 BC Lehighites "scattered" from Jerusalem and gathered to New World	
586 BC Babylon captures southern kingdom of Judah	
	539 BC Cyrus of Persia defeats Babylon and allows Judah to return to their homeland.
	AD 30 Christ's mortal ministry and establishment of his Church in the Old World
AD 70 Rome destroys Jerusalem and scatters the Jews.	
AD 300 Apostasy from Christ's Church in Old World is complete.	
AD 385 Lamanites destroyed and scatter the Nephites—Lamanites also scattered.	
AD 1522 Spanish under Cortez further scatter some of the remnants of Book of Mormon people.	
	AD 1830 Church restored, onset of final gathering of Israel

AD 1900 Early American settlers further scatter remnants of Book of Mormon people.	
	AD ?? Gathering of Jews to Palestine—after Christ's second coming

Why all this emphasis on the house of Israel anyway? Not everyone is born into the house of Israel. Why is it so important? In the Lord's plan there is no exaltation outside of the house of Israel. An individual can be reconciled to God only by being received into the house of Israel either by birth or by adoption. The Savior himself is Israel's king.

Since this is a Book of Mormon commentary, it seems appropriate also to summarize the scatterings and gatherings of that branch of the tribe of Joseph led by father Lehi. They were "scattered" as they left Jerusalem some time between 597 and 587 BC. Shortly thereafter they were "gathered" to their promised land in the western hemisphere. After about ten years Nephi and those who continued to adhere to his teachings were "scattered"—that is forced to leave the land of their first inheritance on the western hemisphere, and they moved to the land of Nephi. And there they were gathered. After nearly four centuries of apostasy, in about 210 BC another major scattering occurred when Mosiah led many of the believers north to the land of Zarahemla where they were gathered. Another significant gathering occurred following the Savior's appearance to the people in the land Bountiful. There was a significant general repentance among the people, and they lived together in relative peace during the period referred to as the Nephite "Mini-Millennium." In AD 385 another scattering occurred when the Lamanites defeated and decimated the Nephites. Some centuries later another great scattering would occur at the hands of Spanish invaders in AD 1522. The opportunity for gathering of the remnants of the Book of Mormon peoples will occur in this final dispensation along with the rest of the tribes of Israel.

This chapter, 1 Nephi 20, contains the first major segment of Isaiah's writings. Without help these writings are difficult to understand. Most church members, as they read along in the Book of Mormon, might be inclined to skip over this chapter and several subsequent chapters which are taken from the book of Isaiah. Or, they read the words, but little meaning or substance is perceived. This is an unfortunate tendency found in most of us. There follows a verse by verse interpretation of the vital writings of this great prophet, Isaiah. It is hoped that this commentary will enable the reader to truly understand these precious writings.

Acknowledgment is given to the following books and authors whose materials have been used in preparing this interpretive guide: (1) *Isaiah, Prophet, Seer, and Poet*, Victor L. Ludlow, (Deseret Book Company, 1982); (2) *Isaiah Speaks to Modern Times*, W. Cleon Skousen, (Ensign Publishing Company, 1984); (3) *Great Are the Words of Isaiah*, Monte S. Nyman, (Bookcraft, 1980); (4) *The Voice of Israel's*

Prophets, Sidney B. Sperry, (Deseret Book, 1952) chapters 7 through 10; (5) *The Book of Isaiah, a New Translation with Interpretive Keys from the Book of Mormon*, Avraham Gileadi, (Deseret Book, 1988); and (6) *Understanding Isaiah*, Donald W. Parry, Jay A. Parry, and Tina M. Peterson, (Deseret Book, 1998).

Before beginning a study of some of Isaiah's writings, it is vital to prepare oneself. Please read and reread the two supplemental articles, *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah*, and *Historical Setting for the Book of Isaiah*. Once armed with this material, we are prepared to begin to study the text itself.

There is, even to the casual observer, a striking similarity between wording in the book of Isaiah in the King James version of the Bible and Joseph Smith's translation of the Isaiah materials which he obtained from the brass plates and recorded in the Book of Mormon. Why is this so? If Joseph had translated these passages from an ancient text, wouldn't we expect the wording to be different? Opinions as to the answer to these questions vary among knowledgeable scholars.

Daniel H. Ludlow attempted to explain the similarities between the Book of Mormon Isaiah passages and the KJV Isaiah as follows: "When Joseph Smith translated the Isaiah references from the small plates of Nephi, he evidently opened his King James version of the Bible and compared the impression he had received in translating with the words of the King James scholars. If his translation was essentially the same as that of the King James version, he apparently quoted the verse from the Bible; then his scribe, Oliver Cowdery, copied it down. However, if Joseph Smith's translation did not agree precisely with that of the King James scholars, he would dictate his own translation to the scribe" (*A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*, 141-42). Sidney B. Sperry added: "The text of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon is not word for word the same as that of the King James version. Of 433 verses of Isaiah in the Nephite record, Joseph Smith modified about 233. Some of the changes made were slight, others were radical. However, 199 verses are word for word the same as the old English version. We therefore freely admit that Joseph Smith may have used the King James version when he came to the text of Isaiah in the gold plates. As long as the familiar version agreed substantially with the text on the gold plates [taken from the brass plates], he let it pass; when it differed too radically he translated the Nephite version and dictated the necessary changes" (*Answers to Book of Mormon Questions*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980.)

It should be noted that the opinions of Drs. Ludlow and Sperry are not based on any witness's account or on Joseph's account of the translation process, for there exists no written account that describes the use of the King James Bible by Joseph during the translation process. Other Book of Mormon scholars find no historical evidence to substantiate the idea that Joseph actually used the King James version in the process of translating the Book of Mormon (Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon,

Evidence from the Original Manuscript” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited, The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, 61-93 and personal communication with Dr. Skousen).

Addressing himself to the question of the similarity of the wording of the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon to the wording of the King James Version of the Bible, Hugh Nibley said simply, “When ‘holy men of God’ quote the scriptures it is always in the received standard version of the people they are addressing.” Brother Nibley then went on to explain, “When Jesus and the apostles and, for that matter, the angel Gabriel quote the scriptures in the New Testament, do they recite from some mysterious Urtext? Do they quote the prophets of old in the ultimate original? Do they give their own inspired translations? No, they do not. They quote the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament prepared in the third century BC. Why so? Because that happened to be the received standard version of the Bible accepted by the readers of the Greek New Testament” (*The Prophetic Book of Mormon. Volume 8 of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, 215).

It should be noted that the brass plates version of Isaiah predates the earliest extant version of Isaiah, the Dead Sea Scrolls document called the Great Isaiah Scroll, by about 450 years and the Masoretic Text by about 1,500 years. This latter text is what we call the Hebrew Bible, whence came the KJV Old Testament. So the writings of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon become the earliest text of Isaiah available to the world today.

1 Hearken and hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, or out of the waters of baptism, who swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, yet they swear not in truth nor in righteousness.

verse 1 The Lord is speaking and addressing the house of Israel—“Hearken and hear this, O house of Jacob.” Phrases similar to this are found elsewhere in the writings of Isaiah. These phrases introduce divine proclamations that are revealed through prophets. To hearken is to listen; to lend the ear; to attend to what is uttered with eagerness; to give heed; to observe or obey; to comply. Through Isaiah the Lord is rebuking those in Israel who call themselves Israelites because of their lineage but do not keep the covenants and commandments that covenant Israel ought to maintain. While the rebuke is directed particularly at those descended from the tribe of Judah (“are come forth out of the waters of Judah”), it likely has broader application to all of those of the house of Israel.

It is common in all of Isaiah’s writings for him to refer simultaneously to his own day and to us in the latter days. We must be always sensitive to the possibility of this dual meaning. Also, his allusions may be literal or figurative. This chapter, for example, speaks also to people of our day, especially members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Lord addresses those who have come up out of the waters of

baptism—those who have joined themselves to the covenant but who are not true to their covenants. They are stubborn and slow to respond to the counsel of the Lord.

“out of the waters of baptism” This phrase is not contained in the corresponding verse in the book of Isaiah (Isaiah 48:1). It also was not found in the original 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. Rather, it was first found in the 1840 edition. Thus, we would not expect to find it in the book of Isaiah on the brass plates. The phrase seems to be simply a commentary by Joseph Smith, placed here to define the phrase, “out of the waters of Judah.” A phrase on the title page of the 1840 edition reads, “Third Edition, Carefully Revised by the Translator.”

For a discussion of the term *Israel*, as used in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 5:9.

“they swear not in truth nor in righteousness” These church members make oaths and covenants in the Lord’s name, but they do so hypocritically rather than in diligent righteousness.

2 Nevertheless, they call themselves of the holy city, but they do not stay themselves upon the God of Israel, who is the Lord of Hosts; yea, the Lord of Hosts is his name.

verse 2 The “holy city” is Jerusalem. These hypocritical baptized Israelites may call themselves Jews or claim to be descended from Judah or Jerusalem. They claim to be holy like their God (Leviticus 19:2) —they “call themselves of the holy city.” They regard themselves as part of the Lord’s people—part of the Church, or part of Zion—but they do not “stay themselves.” That is, they do not lean upon or put their trust in God for spiritual guidance. The concept is implied that there are no holy places or cities unless holy people inhabit them.

It is notable that the KJV renders this verse, “. . . they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel.” Thus the Book of Mormon version makes a substantial change in meaning.

“Lord of Hosts” This title, which may be translated as Lord of Armies, is the same as the title “Lord of Sabaoth” found in D&C 88:2. *Sabaoth* means “hosts” and should not be confused with Sabbath. Jehovah is the “captain” (2 Chronicles 13:12), “leader” (Isaiah 55:4), and “man of war” (Exodus 15:3) who will lead the armies of the righteous against the armies of evil.

The Lord’s hosts or armies consist of: (1) ancient Israel, which was called “the armies of the living God” (1 Samuel 17:26, 36); (2) the hosts of heaven, also called armies (Daniel 4:35; Revelation 19:14; D&C 88:112); and (3) the latter-day Church, described as being “terrible as an army with banners” (D&C 5:14). The latter-day Church is also described in scripture as “the army of Israel” (D&C 105:26, 30-31; 109:73).

As the Lord's army, we are equipped with the "whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11-17; D&C 27:15-18), spiritual armor designed to assist us to use light and truth in the battle against the forces of evil.

verses 3-8 In these verses the Lord reviews his earlier actions with Israel. He also emphasizes his own omniscience and his ability to prophesy of things in the future.

3 Behold, I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I showed them. I did show them suddenly.

verse 3 His meaning is, "Long ago I foretold, through my prophets, things that would happen, and they came to pass suddenly." Specifically, he foretold the miraculous deliverance of Israel under the leadership of Moses (see Isaiah 42:9; 43:9; 46:9).

Some have made much of the word *show* in the phrase "I did show them suddenly." This word is not found in the KJV. They would suggest that this phrase clarifies the point that the Lord suddenly *revealed* rather than suddenly *orchestrated* the prophesied events.

4 And I did it because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass;

verse 4 Isaiah's meaning here is: "I showed you these things as a sign because I know how stubborn you are." Note Isaiah's colorful metaphors used in describing an obstinate, stubborn, and proud people: "thy neck is an iron sinew" and "thy brow is brass." Those with stiff necks will not bow before the Lord (Deuteronomy 9:6; 31:27). Those with brass brows will not give their minds or thoughts to the Lord (Ezekiel 3:9).

The Lord knew that many ancient Israelites as well as many members of the Church in this dispensation would be stubborn, unyielding, and hard hearted (Ezekiel 3:7-9).

5 And I have even from the beginning declared to thee; before it came to pass I showed them thee; and I showed them for fear lest thou shouldst say—mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image hath commanded them.

verse 5 Isaiah's meaning is: "I told you about these things long before they happened, so that when they did happen you wouldn't give your false gods credit." This verse gives an interesting insight into reasons the Lord reveals knowledge of future events to his people. He doesn't always do so simply to enlighten them. Apparently at times his goal is to provide an undisputable witness of his own prophets' divine connections. Also he does so to provide a witness against those who reject his prophecies.

A “graven” image is a carved idol. A “molten” image is an idol made of metal.

6 Thou hast seen and heard all this; and will ye not declare them? And that I have showed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, and thou didst not know them.

verse 6 The Lord is still speaking and addressing the house of Israel.

“Thou hast seen and heard all this; and will ye not declare them?” In effect the Lord says, “You have heard and seen all my prophecies and teachings. Now, shouldn’t you acknowledge them and bear testimony of them?” The KJV has this phrase as, “Thou hast heard, see all this; and will not ye declare it?” The wording here in the Book of Mormon is thought to show more clearly that the house Israel has a clear knowledge of the Lord’s prophecies and teachings and also has an obligation to testify of them.

Isaiah then says: “Now I will announce to you new things—well guarded secrets you do not already know.” This might have referred in Isaiah’s day to the prophecy concerning Israel’s deliverance from Babylon through Cyrus (Isaiah 42:9; 43:9) or anything given by the Lord, who is a God of continuing revelation.

7 They are created now, and not from the beginning, even before the day when thou heardest them not they were declared unto thee, lest thou shouldst say—Behold I knew them.

verse 7 They are new things, not old things. Before today you have not heard them, in fact no one has heard them. You cannot say, “I know them already.”

8 Yea, and thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time thine ear was not opened; for I knew that thou wouldst deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb.

verse 8 The Lord says, “Unfortunately you have never heard, you have never known; your spiritual ears have been closed from the beginning.”

To deal “treacherously” is to deal unfaithfully, deceitfully, or in a dishonest manner.

“a transgressor from the womb” A “transgressor” is an apostate or rebel. Israel had been a rebellious nation from the moment of her mortal inception. Perhaps some of the Lord’s chosen people had evidenced rebellious behaviors even in the premortal life—even after they had earned the right to be called Israel.

Again, keep in mind a possible latter-day application of these words. They may describe church members who are sinners from their very mortal (or premortal) inception.

verses 9-13a Here the Lord states what he is going to do. In verses 9-11 he emphasizes his love for his covenant people.

9 Nevertheless, for my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain from thee, that I cut thee not off.

verses 9, 11 Jehovah had placed his name and the promise of his blessings and power upon Israel. They were his elect—his chosen people. He was not about to allow his name to be forgotten, ignored, or profaned. He had covenanted with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to raise up a mighty nation from their seed (Exodus 32:11-14). He will hold back or put off his anger against and judgment of Israel.

“for my praise will I refrain from thee” That my name might be known, I will delay my judgment of thee.

“I cut thee not off” He first promises that he will not destroy ancient Israel or destroy those rebellious latter-day church members.

10 For, behold, I have refined thee, I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.

verse 10 Just as gold is smelted in the fire to remove impurities, so God tries his covenant people with fire to remove their impurities. Both in the past and in the future, ancient Israel and the latter-day Church have been placed in bondage where they will experience the purifying heat of trial. There they will be “refined” or pay the penalty for her sins and be purged or made pure. The initial furnace of affliction for Israel was her servitude in Egypt (Deuteronomy 4:20, 1 Kings 8:51). In all dispensations the saints are to be refined and made pure through affliction, as metal is refined in the fiery furnace.

For a discussion of the interesting scriptural word *chosen*, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20. See also the discussion of the concepts of *covenants* and a *covenant people* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 3, *Covenants and Covenant Making*.

11 For mine own sake, yea, for mine own sake will I do this, for I will not suffer my name to be polluted, and I will not give my glory unto another.

verse 11 “for I will not suffer my name to be polluted” Everything redemptive is accomplished in the name of Christ, who mediates all transactions between God and man. To use his name for anything other than a righteous and redemptive purpose is to use his name in vain—to pollute his name (see the commentary for verse 9). To be “polluted” is to be defiled or stained. The wording of this verse here in the Book of Mormon is clearer than the KJV which says, “. . . for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? . . .” This book of Mormon verse makes it clear why the Lord intervenes. He is anxious to redeem the family of man in his name. He loathes to damn them.

“I will not give my glory unto another” Even though his covenant people, those who have taken upon themselves his name, have been rebellious, the Lord expresses hope that they will be refined through affliction. He also hopes they will not bring dishonor to his name and that they will continue to qualify to receive his glory.

verses 12-21 In these verses, the Lord emphasizes his omnipotence.

12 Hearken unto me, O Jacob, and Israel my called, for I am he; I am the first, and I am also the last.

verse 12 The Lord addresses his “called”—those selected in the premortal existence to be among those of Israel. “Listen to me, O Israel, for I am Jehovah.” The “first, and . . . last” contains the idea that he is the eternal God.

“O Jacob and Israel” The Lord addresses the house of Israel by both their natural name (“Jacob”) and their covenant name (“Israel”).

“my called” Both Israel in general and members of his Church specifically are selected or called to be the ministers of salvation to all other peoples of the earth (Abraham 2:9-11; Deuteronomy 32:7-9). To be “called” does not mean to be singled out for special privileges. Rather, it means to be selected for a special assignment. For further discussion of the scriptural words *called* and *chosen*, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

13 Mine hand hath also laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens. I call unto them and they stand up together.

verse 13 **“Mine hand hath also laid the foundation of the earth”** I have created the earth and the heavens.

“my right hand hath spanned the heavens” The right hand is the hand of authority. My influence has stretched across or spread over the whole of the universe.

“I call unto them and they stand up together.” When I call to all the inhabitants of the universe and to the elements of the entire universe, they respond.

14 All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear; who among them hath declared these things unto them? The Lord hath loved him; yea, and he will fulfil his word which he hath declared by them; and he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall come upon the Chaldeans.

15 Also, saith the Lord; I the Lord, yea, I have spoken; yea, I have called him to declare, I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous.

verses 14-15 Isaiah is now the speaker. He announces in these two verses that the Lord Jehovah will send forth a servant to do many wonderful things. Note how, in verse 14, Isaiah abruptly begins to speak of this servant.

“All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear” Isaiah seems to intend, “Now, all of you, sit still and listen to me. I’m about to say something particularly important.”

“who among them hath declared these things unto them?” Before Isaiah describes what wonderful things this servant will do, he seems to be providing a clue as to the identity of this servant. He seems to indicate that this servant is the mortal Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah asks, “who among them hath declared these things unto them?” The “them” seems to refer to all of the universe’s inhabitants and elements mentioned in the previous verse. “Just who is it that has spoken to all these and caused them to obey (“stand up together”)?” Isaiah leaves the question unanswered, but the implication is that it was Jehovah himself, and that he is the servant who will work marvelous works in heaven and eventually come to earth and complete his calling as a servant.

It is interesting to note that in one phrase in verse 14 Isaiah refers to Jesus both in the first person and in the third person: “The Lord hath loved him.” That is, the Lord Jehovah hath loved the servant who is Jesus Christ or Jehovah.

This marvelous servant will (1) foretell the future (“declared these things unto them” and “I have called him to declare”); (2) fulfill the Lord’s word as spoken through his prophets (“fulfil his word which he hath declared by them”); (3) wield power over Babylon (“he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall come upon the Chaldeans”). In a literal sense this servant will conquer Babylon. Symbolically, Babylon refers to sinfulness or worldliness. Chaldea was an area in southern Babylon and is simply another term used here to designate Babylon; (4) and ultimately succeed in his mission (“make his way prosperous”).

These verses provide evidence that the Lord will not forget his chosen people. After their cleansing in the “furnace of affliction” (verse 10), he will send his servant (He will send himself) to rescue them from their scattered state.

On another level, some have wanted to interpret these verses alternatively and have suggested that the servant is Cyrus, the king of Persia who defeated the Babylonian empire in 539 BC. Cyrus is referred to by name in Isaiah and designated a “shepherd” and even the “anointed one” (Hebrew “messiah;” Isaiah 44:28; 45:1). Cyrus can certainly be regarded as a type of the servant or servants called by the Lord to deliver Israel from spiritual Babylon.

“and he will fulfil his word which he hath declared by them” This phrase is not found in the corresponding verse in the KJV Isaiah. It is probably a reference to the several servants by whom the Lord has delivered his people from spiritual Babylon—a type of the world with its pride and wickedness (D&C 1:16; 133:14; Revelation 14:8). These include the Deliverer himself, Cyrus, the king of Persia, Isaiah or other prophets, and Joseph Smith.

“he will do his pleasure on Babylon” He will have his will with Babylon. Again, on one level this phrase has been interpreted as referring to Cyrus, king of Persia. Obviously Babylon here could refer to the literal ancient city of Babylon or to the

figurative spiritual Babylon (wickedness, worldliness). In the latter case, the reference may be to one of the other servant deliverers of Babylon.

“and his arm shall come upon the Chaldeans” Chaldea is generally used interchangeably with Babylonia.

“I have called him to declare, I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous” The Lord has called his servant(s) and will assure his (their) success.

16 Come ye near unto me; I have not spoken in secret; from the beginning, from the time that it was declared have I spoken; and the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me.

verse 16 Now Jehovah is again the speaker. Draw near to me and hear this: “From the beginning, I have never functioned in secret. From the time anything was declared, I was there and was speaking. I have spoken openly through my prophets. The voice of the Lord is unto all men.”

“the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me” In this phrase, Jehovah testifies of his relationship to his Father—the “Lord God”—and to the Holy Ghost.

17 And thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I have sent him, the Lord thy God who teacheth thee to profit, who leadeth thee by the way thou shouldst go, hath done it.

verse 17 “And thus saith the Lord” In his book *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, biblical scholar David E. Aune sets forth the various formulaic expressions that characterize prophetic speech in the Old Testament (see Donald W. Parry, “Thus Saith the Lord: Prophetic Language in Samuel’s Speech,” *JBMS* 1/1 [1992]:181-83). These expressions serve to formally introduce vital, sacred utterances and to announce that the Lord is the source behind them. The Book of Mormon prophets used these same formulas in their prophetic discourse. This particular expression, “And thus saith the Lord,” is called the “messenger formula” and is found thirty-nine times in the Book of Mormon (e.g., Mosiah 3:24; Alma 8:17). It serves to indicate the origin of the revelation. The revelation is directed to the messenger (i.e., a prophet) from the Lord himself.

“I have sent him” The pronoun *him* is a reference to the servant mentioned in verse 14. This verse seems to settle the issue of the identity of that servant. The Lord refers to himself in the third person: “Thus saith the Lord your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I, the Lord, have sent myself to instruct you for your own benefit and guide you in the way you should go.”

“hath done it” This seemingly awkward appendage to this verse seems incomplete. It almost seems to complete the thought: “I have sent him, [and he] hath done it.” Keep in mind the so-called “prophetic perfect” verb tense rule which allows the

prophet to mix up the verb tenses, apparently at his discretion. It might be preferable for the reader to interpret this phrase as “he will do it or accomplish it.”

18 O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments—then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.

verse 18 The Lord is still addressing the house of Israel. If only you had heeded my commands! Your prosperity and feeling of peace would have flowed “as a river” and prospered forever. Your righteousness would have been constant and unstoppable as are the “waves of the sea.”

19 Thy seed also had been as the sand; the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof; his name should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me.

verse 19 The phrases “thy seed” and “the offspring of thy bowels,” of course, mean “your descendants.”

“**Thy seed also had been as the sand; the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof**” Your offspring would have been numerous, and I would never forsake them. If you had not been rebellious, you would have enjoyed a renewal of the promise to Abraham (Genesis 22:17-18; D&C 132:30).

Note the hyperbole and parallelism: “thy seed [would have] been as the sand” and “the offspring . . . like the gravel thereof.” Both of these hyperbolic expressions have the same meaning and thus are an example of poetic parallelism.

And finally, had you not been rebellious, you would have remembered and honored the name of Jehovah. You would not have forsaken him.

verses 20-22 These verses may be referred to as the song of the flight from Babylon.

20 Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter to the end of the earth; say ye: The Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob.

verse 20 A divine directive is given for Jacob (the house of Israel) to gather—to flee out of Babylon.

Since Babylon and Chaldea mean the same thing, you will recognize the first two phrases of this verse as another example of poetic parallelism in which the same thought is stated twice: “Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans.”

Again, don’t forget different levels on which this directive might be received. First, the Lord promised ancient Israel that after almost fifty years of Babylonian captivity, Israel would be blessed to return to the land of her inheritance (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10). Next, it is a general directive to the house of Israel to leave the carnal world (“Babylon”) for the spiritual. Finally, it has a latter-day application. Those who

leave the things of the world behind—return to Zion—will become heirs to great promises and blessings.

When the gathering is complete, it will be “uttered,” announced, or proclaimed that Israel has been gathered. When Israel has been gathered, we may use the phrase, “Israel has been redeemed.” The implication is that they have been gathered spiritually (they have accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ) as well as temporally.

21 And they thirsted not; he led them through the deserts; he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them; he clave the rock also and the waters gushed out.

verse 21 Even though Israel in her scattered state was led through the parched and barren places, they were not allowed to perish. He made water flow for them from a rock. Isaiah’s reference here may be to Moses’s providing water for the Israelites while leading them across Sinai by striking a rock (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:11), but a broader application is also appropriate. The Lord will lead us through spiritual deserts and give us living waters to drink. The rock symbolizes Christ who is our living water.

22 And notwithstanding he hath done all this, and greater also, there is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked.

verse 22 Despite seeing great miracles of deliverance, some in Israel continue in wickedness, so the Lord gives his final warning. There is no peace of soul to those who continue in sin.

1 Nephi Chapter 21

In the previous chapter Isaiah spoke directly to ancient and modern members of the house of Israel who are already gathered to the area of Jerusalem or to the Church. This chapter is addressed to the members of the house of Israel who have been “broken off,” “driven out,” and “scattered abroad” upon the “isles” (see verse 1). Accordingly, Nephi felt this chapter had special application to his people (cf. 2 Nephi 10:21). This chapter corresponds to Isaiah chapter 49, and is a vital chapter for each Latter-day Saint. It applies specifically also to any today who may not be of the blood of Israel, but desire to investigate the gospel of Jesus Christ and be gathered to the Lord’s earthly kingdom.

The first six verses of this chapter comprise one of the five recognized “servant songs” of Isaiah (see also Isaiah 42:1-4; 50:4-11; 52:13-15; and 53:1-12). These passages all speak of a servant or servants who, though they may appear insignificant, will do a great work for the Lord.

The preeminent servant is Jesus Christ, described as “a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of . . . Israel” (Luke 2:32), who would deliver the world from sin, death, and hell and direct the work of all other servants. It is likely that these servants are at least types of Christ. These individuals may include Isaiah and other Old Testament prophets; Cyrus (a non-Israelite), called a “shepherd” and an “anointed one” (Isaiah 43:28; 44:1), who would deliver ancient Judah from Babylon; and the prophet Joseph Smith, whom the Lord used to restore the gospel and initiate the gathering of Israel in the latter days.

Scholars in and out of the Church have suggested various possibilities for the identity of the servant or the speaker in this particular passage. Your author will try to make a case for the idea that the speaker or “servant” is the dominant tribe of the house of Israel, Ephraim. Furthermore, since the time reference for the restoration or gathering of Israel is the latter days, the speaker might even be the one who presides over the tribe of Ephraim in the latter days, Joseph Smith, Jr.

For our discussion of the first six verses of chapter 21, I am indebted to Kent P. Jackson, specifically his essay “Revelation Concerning Isaiah,” in *Studies in Scripture, Volume One, The Doctrine and Covenants*, 326-30.

1 And again: Hearken, O ye house of Israel, all ye that are broken off and are driven out because of the wickedness of the pastors of my people; yea, all ye that are broken off, that are scattered abroad, who are of my people, O house of Israel. Listen, O isles, unto me, and hearken ye people from far; the Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.

verse 1 We will learn in verse 3 that the speaker or first person in this passage is named “Israel.” The secret to proper interpretation of this verse and those that follow is to identify this speaker. As already mentioned, from the context of this verse we may conclude that Isaiah appears to be speaking as though he were Ephraim, the dominant tribe of covenant Israel and the tribe designated by the Lord to direct the ultimate latter-day gathering of scattered Israel.

Ephraim is addressing scattered Israel. The phrases **“all ye that are broken off and are driven out,” “all ye that are broken off, that are scattered abroad,” “O isles,”** and **“ye people from far”** all refer to the scattered remnants of Israel. Again, our time frame is this final dispensation or the latter days. Of all these expressions, the one the reader will want to become most aware of is “O isles,” as the word *isles* invariably refers to the people of scattered Israel (1 Nephi 22:4; cf. 2 Nephi 10:20-22).

From the days of the ancient patriarchs, Joseph, the son of Jacob (or Israel), and his descendants have been foreordained to stand at the head of the house of Israel and provide spiritual or priesthood leadership (see Genesis 37:5-11; 48:13-20; 49:26; Deuteronomy 33:16-17). This calling includes the challenge to Joseph’s descendants to be saviors of their brethren of Israel, just as their forefather Joseph had been a temporal savior of his family in ancient times. Of Joseph’s sons, Ephraim had the birthright. Jeremiah prophesied concerning Ephraim’s role in the latter-day gathering of Israel. As the presiding tribe, it would be he who would announce to all that the time of the gathering and return had come. The prophet Jeremiah said, “For there shall be a day, that the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God” (Jeremiah 31:6).

The terms **“called me from the womb”** and **“from the bowels of my mother hath he mentioned my name”** imply that Ephraim’s role was foreordained from the premortal or pre-existent phase. Joseph Smith was also foreordained or called from very early times. Ancient Joseph prophesied of Joseph Smith (2 Nephi 3:15), and Joseph Smith himself testified that he was foreordained to be a prophet in this dispensation (D&C 127:2, *TPJS*, 365).

To reiterate, it seems reasonable to conclude then that “Israel” or the speaker in this prophecy is Ephraim, the tribe that is to preside in these latter days. And, as mentioned, since the prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. presides over latter-day Ephraim, one might even read these verses as though Joseph Smith himself were speaking them.

“driven out because of the wickedness of the pastors of my people” The spiritual leaders of Israel were and are apostate. This has resulted in the scattering of Israel. The congregations of these leaders have acquiesced readily to these apostate teachings and share equally in the blame, however.

2 And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me;

verse 2 “mouth like a sharp sword” This metaphor is found elsewhere in scripture (see also Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:16; D&C 6:2) and refers to the power of Ephraim’s message, the penetrating power of the word of God. Nephi spoke of truth cutting people “to the very center” (1 Nephi 16:2).

“in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me” At the same time Joseph’s father, Jacob, pronounced the blessing of spiritual leadership or priesthood presidency on Joseph and his posterity, he prophesied that the government would be in the hands of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:8-10). This was fulfilled in the kingship of David and his descendants, and it will be fulfilled to its fullest measure in the millennial kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ. The descendants of Joseph never ruled over the house of Israel in spite of the fact that they inherited from their ancestor the keys of presidency. Ephraim’s presidency over Israel was to be realized in the last days, thus Ephraim was hidden “in the shadow of his hand” until the last days.

With the calling of Joseph Smith, Jr., a descendant of Ephraim, in this dispensation, the tribe to which he belonged took its rightful position at the head of the family of Israel. Foreordained to a great latter-day service, ancient Joseph’s descendants—both of Ephraim and of Manasseh—have been called to bring the blessings of the gospel to their brethren.

“a polished shaft . . . in his quiver” A “shaft” is the body of an arrow. Joseph Smith himself provided an interpretation that may explain the fulfillment of this scripture: “I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else . . . all hell knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty” (*TPJS*, 304). A polished shaft, then, is a smooth arrow, a metaphor for being well prepared. Thus, Joseph viewed himself as a polished shaft in the Lord’s quiver, in direct fulfillment of Isaiah’s words.

3 And said unto me: Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

verse 3 The Lord speaks to his servant. Here the servant is identified as “Israel.” Through Israel the Lord will be glorified. That this act of glorification would take place later than Isaiah’s day is suggested from his use of future tenses throughout the passage.

Those who promote God’s work contribute to his glory. The ways in which the servant named Israel will glorify the Lord are specified in verses 5 and 6 and include: (1) re-establish Israel and gather it again to the Lord and, (2) serve as a “light to the Gentiles,” to make the gospel available to them.

4 Then I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for naught and in vain; surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.

verse 4 “Israel” points out that his labors in the past have been “for naught,” or in vain. The history of the house of Israel has been marred with apostasy and scattering. To this the Lord responds with a powerful prophecy of more significant labors that lay ahead in verses 5 and 6.

“surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God” A modern translation of Isaiah renders this phrase, “Yet what is due me is in the Lord’s hand, and my reward is with my God” (NIV).

5 And now, saith the Lord—that formed me from the womb that I should be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him—though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength.

verse 5 This verse, as has already been discussed, is the commission of the birthright children of ancient Joseph to bring about the gathering of Israel in the last days. Ephraim’s leader, Joseph Smith, Jr., was the one to whom the keys of gathering were restored (D&C 110:11). It will be under the authority of those keys that the gathering will occur. In modern revelation the Lord has affirmed that “they who are in the north countries” will return and receive their blessings under the hand of “the children of Ephraim” (D&C 133:26-34). Today it is, with few exceptions, the children of Ephraim and Manasseh, who constitute the Lord’s Church who are taking the gospel message to the scattered remnants of Israel and who thus are gathering their brethren. Thus, the expression “children of Ephraim” refers to the latter-day Church of Jesus Christ.

“though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord” Ephraim says, “Even if I were to fail in my attempts at gathering, the Lord would continue to regard me with favor.”

6 And he said: It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel. I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth.

verse 6 “And he said” The Lord continues speaking.

“It is a light thing” This phrase means it is a comparatively small task—it is simply not sufficient—that Israelites should work to gather and restore only other blood Israelites. Israelites must also serve as a “light to the Gentiles”—an ensign, an example or missionary, to all the world, even those outside the blood of Israel. Nephi and others taught how the great blessings of the last days would be made available not only to the house of Israel, but to the Gentiles as well (see 1 Nephi 15:18; 22:8-11; 3 Nephi 20:25-27). The gospel is to be taken by Ephraim in the dispensation of the fulness of times to all people. It is not enough to simply bless Israel—Ephraim is destined to bless the whole earth. Once again the tribe of Ephraim and Joseph Smith stand out as the main participants in this work.

To “raise up the tribes of Jacob” is to gather scattered Israel and therefore lift them up through the covenants of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The “preserved of Israel” are those of scattered Israel who, through their righteousness have remained prepared to receive the gospel message and thus responsive to the call to gather.

“unto the ends of the earth” To “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6; 1 Nephi 19:16; D&C 133:37).

An important group of verses in D&C 86:8-11 identify Joseph Smith and his co-workers of the tribes of Joseph—the members of the Church of Jesus Christ in these latter days—as the fulfillment of these words from Isaiah. These are they “with whom the priesthood hath continued through the lineage of [their] fathers—for [they] are lawful heirs according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God.” Having been foreordained long ago to this calling, and having inherited it through lineal descent, Ephraim’s children are now no longer “hid from the world” but are at the forefront of the Lord’s work in the last days to restore scattered Israel to the covenant blessings, and to bring the message of the gospel to the Gentiles.

7 Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nations abhorreth, to servant of rulers: Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful.

verse 7 “Thus saith the Lord” In the remainder of the chapter, Isaiah quotes the Lord who speaks in the first person.

“to him whom man despiseth” “to him whom the nations abhorreth” The servant shall be despised. Again, this servant may be the tribe of Ephraim or, more specifically, he who presides over Ephraim in this last dispensation, Joseph Smith, Jr. It is perhaps pertinent that Joseph Smith was promised by Moroni that his name would be “had for good and evil among all nations.”

“to servant of rulers” On the other hand, the Lord is also speaking to one, the servant, who will be influential even in the lives of some rulers.

“Kings shall see and arise” “princes also shall worship” The Lord saith to Ephraim: In that latter day, even kings and princes will respond to the servants message and worship the Lord.

“the Lord that is faithful” The Lord never fails to keep his promises.

verses 8-12 These verses describe the time of gathering of Israel from her prolonged dispersal.

8 Thus saith the Lord: In an acceptable time have I heard thee, O isles of the sea, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee; and I will preserve thee, and give

thee my servant for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;

verse 8 “In an acceptable time” At a favorable or appropriate time the Lord will respond to the spiritual yearnings of scattered Israel and commence the process of gathering.

“O isles of the sea” means, “O scattered Israel.”

“in a day of salvation have I helped thee” In the great final dispensation, referred to as the “day of salvation,” the Lord will “help” scattered Israel by bestowing the keys of gathering so that the work might be commenced. Note Isaiah’s use of the past perfect tense in this phrase for an event that will occur in the future. This is yet another example of the so-called “prophetic perfect” verb tense.

Thus saith the Lord: At a time acceptable to me, I will send you my servant created and prepared by me. He will re-establish my covenant with Israel, restore the earth, and rejuvenate Israel’s desolate spiritual heritage.

“to cause to inherit the desolate heritages” Restore lands, blessings, and covenants to which Israel was formerly entitled.

9 That thou mayest say to the prisoners: Go forth; to them that sit in darkness: Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.

verse 9 That the servant may say to the prisoners, “Go forth” and “show yourselves.” The prisoners are scattered, apostate Israel, those in spiritual bondage, whether on the earth or in the spirit world. They “sit in darkness” because they lack the truths of the gospel. They shall be freed by the restoration of gospel truths (see D&C 45:28). They shall be freed from the bonds of sin and spirit prison.

Gathering Israelites are compared to sheep:

“they shall feed in the ways” They shall be spiritually nourished as they go along their way to the gathering.

“their pastures shall be in all high places” The concept of “high places” has been used in other scriptural verses. See, for example, D&C 19:29 and D&C 112:7. Figuratively speaking, mountains or high places are often used as the meeting place for God and man, especially the temples. Israel shall be spiritually nourished in these high places—Israel will be nurtured and succored by divine intervention.

The entire phrase “they shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places” is a metaphor for the Lord’s care and nurturing.

10 They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the heat nor the sun smite them; for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.

verse 10 The comparison of gathering Israel with sheep continues. The gathering Israelites shall not suffer unnecessarily, for the Lord, who loves them, will nourish them as he leads them to the “springs of water,” to the living water—to Jesus Christ and his gospel.

11 And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted.

verse 11 This expression simply means that the Lord will prepare paths or means for the return of scattered Israel to the Lord’s earthly kingdom.

The Lord through Joseph Smith spoke of the miraculous creation of a great highway “in the midst of the great deep” which will be created to assist in the gathering of Israel. This terminology seems a bit ambiguous, and perhaps is used because this miraculous thoroughfare is analogous to one that appeared as Moses led the Israelites across the Red Sea. We are left with the impression that this will be a spectacular miracle (see D&C 133:26-33)!

12 And then, O house of Israel, behold, these shall come from far; and lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.

verse 12 The gathering of dispersed Israel will be extensive. They will come from all parts of the earth. Some will even come from “Sinim”! Where is that? No one really knows. Some scholars hold that it is Syrene, a place in southern Egypt, also known as Aswan. This was the location of a large Jewish colony after the scattering. Others have suggested that Sinim is China. Still others think it might be the desert of Sin, which is in the peninsula of Sinai. The point is that the Lord will gather his people from wherever they have been scattered.

verses 13-21 In these verses the Lord comforts and reassures his gathering children.

13 Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; for the feet of those who are in the east shall be established; and break forth into singing, O mountains; for they shall be smitten no more; for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.

verse 13 Shout, O heavens, and rejoice O earth, and sing O mountains, for the Lord will have mercy on gathering Israel. Even the inanimate creations of God, all nature, will witness and rejoice at his mercy and at the exaltation he offers.

The Lord will protect and comfort the gatherers. Some of them are established in the east (in and around Jerusalem?).

“for they shall be smitten no more” These people have been “smitten” because of their dispersion and long exile and because some have lived under

circumstances of severe persecution. They have also been afflicted spiritually because of sin.

14 But, behold, Zion hath said: The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me—but he will show that he hath not.

verse 14 Zion is usually the place where the covenant people will gather. Here, however, Zion is used to personify the scattered Israelites.

Isaiah, in this and in the next several verses, personifies scattered Israel who “complains” and thus betrays her lost faith in the Lord’s ability to save her. But Isaiah reassures scattered Israel that the Lord has not forgotten.

15 For can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee, O house of Israel.

verse 15 A “sucking child,” of course, is a nursing baby. In our mortal experience, each of us has experienced first-hand the profound love of a mother for her child. Here the Lord’s love for us and his desire to gather us to him is compared to this maternal love. The verse suggests that the Lord’s love for us is even greater. Though unlikely, a mortal mother may forget, but I will never forget—“they may forget, yet will I not forget thee, O house of Israel.” The Lord’s love for us is incomprehensible, absolute, and completely incredible. He will never fail us!

16 Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.

verse 16 **“I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands”** I have engraved you on the palms of my hands, and you are always present with me. This phrase may have reference to the ancient Hebrew practice of tattooing the palm with a symbol or emblem or name to show devotion and to serve as a reminder of one’s commitment. This phrase also may have reference to the crucifixion of Christ, in which nails pierced his hands and left scars that remained after his resurrection (Luke 24:38-40; 3 Nephi 11:13-14). These nail marks are a sign to Israel—and to the world—that Christ loves us more than we can understand and that he has indeed completed his mission as Savior. He ever stands ready to receive us to him if we are willing.

“thy walls are continually before me” This phrase implies protection. The Lord is ever mindful of his people, and he has enclosed Israel with protective walls.

17 Thy children shall make haste against thy destroyers; and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee.

verse 17 The “children” are the descendants of ancient Israel. The “destroyers” are the nations that attacked and captured ancient Israel. In the days when Israel shall

be restored to her former blessings, the descendants of ancient Israel will quickly turn against their ancient enemies.

“they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee” The “of” in this passage may be rendered “from.” Those who conquered and held captive Israel will flee or depart.

This passage may also refer to the success the faithful of Israel will have against those who would destroy them spiritually—including Satan and his followers.

18 Lift up thine eyes round about and behold; all these gather themselves together, and they shall come to thee. And as I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on even as a bride.

verse 18 The Lord addresses Zion, the place of gathering. Multitudes will gather to Zion—“to thee”—and they will complement Zion as a wedding gown and ornaments complement a bride. Those of gathered Israel are Christ’s jewels. In this verse the bride represents those gathered in Zion.

19 For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants; and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away.

verse 19 The returning multitudes will be so numerous that they will occupy even the desolate places in Israel’s promised lands that have previously been laid waste and lie empty. The returning masses will be unimpeded since their enemies, including spiritual enemies, will be far away.

20 The children whom thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the first, shall again in thine ears say: The place is too strait for me; give place to me that I may dwell.

verse 20 Israel is characterized as a mother who has lost her children—those earlier generations of Israel who fell away in apostasy—and is barren, but she shall have more—those of gathering Israel.

Their numbers will be so large that the Lord says, speaking to Israel, “You thought all of scattered Israel was irretrievably lost, but those who return will be so numerous that they will say, ‘This place is too strait—too tight or narrow or crowded. Help me find a place to dwell here in Zion (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 8:20).’”

21 Then shalt thou say in thine heart: Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? And who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where have they been?

verse 21 Israel will then say to herself, “Where did all these come from?” It is surprising that a barren woman should turn up with so many children.

22 Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

verse 22 The Lord is addressing Israel.

“I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles” The reader ought to become sensitized to the imagery of the “hand” or the “arm” of the Lord. It invariably signifies his power to intervene in the affairs of men and in the events of history. In the latter days, the Lord will strengthen and enable the Gentiles to gather scattered Israel.

“set up my standard to the people” A standard is a banner or flag or ensign to which people gather. It is frequently used metaphorically, as it is here, for the restored gospel of Christ that will come forth among the Gentiles.

“and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders” This is a figurative expression indicating that the Gentiles, through whom the gospel is restored, will gather the Lord’s covenant people, Israel (cf. 1 Nephi 22:6-10). In this context these latter-day Gentiles constitute the Lord’s servant Israel mentioned earlier in this chapter (verse 3). They are Gentiles by nationality and culture (citizens of the great Gentile nation) but Israelite by genealogical descent (cf. D&C 109:60).

23 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their face towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

verses 22-23 These can be confusing verses. To understand them, see Nephi’s own inspired commentary on them in 1 Nephi 22:7-14.

The phrase “I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people” refers to the Lord’s delivering the everlasting gospel to the great Gentile nation in the latter days (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 15:13). This great Gentile nation will then take the gospel message to those of the house of Israel—the Lamanites and the Jews and the other scattered peoples. The gospel and the Church of Jesus Christ shall serve as a flag or ensign or a rallying point around which people may gather. Scattered Israel, including its sons and daughters, will be nourished and gathered by the Gentiles. This missionary work or gathering is represented by the phrase, “they [the Gentiles] shall bring thy [Israel’s] sons in their [the Gentiles’] arms, and thy [Israel’s] daughters shall be carried upon their [the Gentiles’] shoulders.”

The Prophet Jacob commented on the meaning of verse 23 (see 2 Nephi 6:12-13 and 2 Nephi 10:7-9). There is a sign that awaits the gathering Israelites in the latter days: The very elect and righteous among the Gentiles (the “kings” and “queens”) will bow down to the Israelites and humbly serve them and teach the gospel to them without

shame, for true humility is seen among the disciples of Christ. Hence the verse may be restated: “And the very elect of the Gentiles shall be thy (Israel’s) nursing fathers and mothers; they (the very elect of the Gentiles) shall bow down to thee (Israel) with their face towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy (Israel’s) feet; and thou (Israel) shalt know that I am the Lord; for they that wait for (serve and trust in) me (the elect of the Gentiles) shall not be ashamed.” This is figurative or metaphorical language suggesting that governments will also assist with the gathering and restoration of the covenant people (cf. 2 Nephi 10:7-9).

“lick up the dust of thy feet” This is a figurative expression meaning to be humble and subservient. An explanation of this phrase will be offered by Jacob, the son of Lehi, who will quote the same Isaiah passage (2 Nephi 6:13). He will identify those who “lick up the dust” of Israel’s feet not as the kings and queens who would be nursing fathers and mothers aiding Israel’s return but as those who fight against Zion—against the covenant people of the Lord. Hence, God does fulfill his covenants, and his people need not be ashamed. Those who oppose his plans and purposes will in the end be humbled (cf. D&C 49:10).

24 For shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captives delivered?

verse 24 All of this prophecy on the gathering of Israel seems too much to believe. Normally no one takes away from the mighty beasts their helpless prey, or from the mighty political powers the captives that they have taken. Therefore, Israel asks, “Is it really possible to free imprisoned Israel from her captors?”

25 But thus saith the Lord, even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children.

verse 25 The “mighty” and the “terrible” are the tyrants, conquerors, and unrighteous leaders who hold scattered Israel captive.

The Lord reassures Israel that not only is it possible, it will be done! “Thy children” are the descendants of the Israelites. The Lord will deliver his covenant people.

26 And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine; and all flesh shall know that I, the Lord, am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

verse 26 Isaiah comments upon the fate of those who war against the Israelites in the last days. These Israelites are those who have been converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ and have thus learned of their own true identity and their proper place in the chosen or royal family.

The fate of those who contend against Israel is graphically described, “I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine.” The specific meaning of these phrases is given by Nephi in 1 Nephi 22:13. Those who afflict Israel shall eventually become internally divided and make destructive war upon each other.

“all flesh” This term may refer to all human beings (Ezekiel 21:4-5; D&C 63:5-6; 84:97-98) or even all members of the animal kingdom (Genesis 6:17, 19; Leviticus 17:14). Perhaps the Lord’s manifestations of power will be so great that all creatures will know he is God.

“thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob” These three titles for Jehovah emphasize his ability to rescue us from spiritual death (Savior) and to ransom us from the demands of justice (Redeemer), as well as his ability to deliver us from all our earthly enemies (Mighty One).

1 Nephi Chapter 22

1 And now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had read these things which were engraven upon the plates of brass, my brethren came unto me and said unto me: What meaneth these things which ye have read? Behold, are they to be understood according to things which are spiritual, which shall come to pass according to the spirit and not the flesh?

verse 1 Apparently Nephi is asked whether the prophecies he has just read from the plates of brass pertaining to the scattering and gathering of Israel (Isaiah chapters 48 and 49) are to be taken literally (“according . . . to the flesh”) or figuratively (“according to the spirit”). That is, will Israel actually be scattered and gathered physically (literally) or just spiritually (figuratively)?

2 And I, Nephi, said unto them: Behold they were manifest unto the prophet by the voice of the Spirit; for by the Spirit are all things made known unto the prophets, which shall come upon the children of men according to the flesh.

verse 2 “The prophet,” of course, is Isaiah.

The Spirit of the Holy Ghost, of course, is involved in a prophet’s receiving revelation. Even so, the events of which the prophet foretells often may occur literally—“according to the flesh.”

3 Wherefore, the things of which I have read are things pertaining to things both temporal and spiritual; for it appears that the house of Israel, sooner or later, will be scattered upon all the face of the earth, and also among all nations.

verse 3 “both temporal and spiritual” As mentioned in the commentary for verse 1, Nephi was asked whether the prophecies of Isaiah should be regarded as literal or figurative. Nephi answers that both meanings should be taken. Israel will be scattered physically or literally and later gathered literally (return to their lands of promise). They will also be gathered spiritually (returned to the gospel of Jesus Christ).

As an aside, it should be mentioned that there is no question more fundamental to scriptural interpretation than whether a given passage is intended to be interpreted literally or figuratively. Prophets write some passages which they intend to be understood literally, and others they intend to have symbolic meanings. Mistakes may be made in both directions. There are often no easy answers to this dilemma.

If you would like to review the concepts of scattering and gathering of Israel, see the introductory comments for 1 Nephi 20 (see also verses 7-14 below).

4 And behold, there are many who are already lost from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem. Yea, the more part of all the tribes have been led away;

and they are scattered to and fro upon the isles of the sea; and whither they are none of us knoweth, save that we know that they have been led away.

verse 4 “many who are already lost from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem” Who are those of the house of Israel “who are already lost from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem” at the time of Nephi? They are the ten tribes of the northern Kingdom of Israel who were captured by Assyria’s forces in the series of conquests between 732 and 722 BC. In other words, they are scattered Israel. See the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the time of Lehi*.

“Yea, the more part of all the tribes have been led away” It has often been maintained that the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed and deported by the Assyrians but that the southern kingdom of Judah remained essentially unaffected. In the case of Judah, however, nothing could be further from the truth. In 701 BC, some ninety percent of the kingdom of Judah—consisting not only of people whose tribal heritage was Judah, but of many refugees and other citizens of Judah whose tribal heritage was of Ephraim or Manasseh, Dan or Asher, Zebulon or Naphtali—was also taken away, and became part of “lost Israel.” In this regard, it is perhaps more accurate to speak not of the ten lost tribes, but of the twelve lost tribes (or at least the 11.9 lost tribes) since the majority of all twelve tribes, including Judah, was carried away captive by the Assyrians. See the discussion of Assyria’s attack on the land of Judah in 701 BC, also contained in the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the Time of Lehi*.

“isles of the sea” The term “isles of the sea,” as mentioned previously, refers simply to scattered Israel, wherever they may be found upon the earth. It does not necessarily mean they occupy an island.

“they are scattered to and fro” The phrase “to and fro” means literally to and from. Israel is scattered everywhere—to and from, hither and thither.

In what ways are the “lost ten tribes” or others of scattered Israel lost? They are: (1) lost to the lands of their inheritance; (2) lost to the gospel, the priesthood, and its saving ordinances; and (3) they have lost their identity. They no longer know that they are of the house of Israel and that they are a chosen and covenant people.

5 And since they have been led away, these things have been prophesied concerning them, and also concerning all those who shall hereafter be scattered and be confounded, because of the Holy One of Israel; for against him will they harden their hearts; wherefore, they shall be scattered among all nations and shall be hated of all men.

verse 5 “since they have been led away [from the truth]” As mentioned previously, scattering occurs because of apostasy. Those who apostatize and are scattered will tend to become isolated, lonely, and despised of men.

6 Nevertheless, after they shall be nursed by the Gentiles, and the Lord has lifted up his hand upon the Gentiles and set them up for a standard, and their children have been carried in their arms, and their daughters have been carried upon their shoulders, behold these things of which are spoken are temporal; for thus are the covenants of the Lord with our fathers; and it meaneth us in the days to come, and also all our brethren who are of the house of Israel.

verse 6 See the commentary for 1 Nephi 21:22-23.

“behold these things of which are spoken are temporal” Again, this phrase implies that the prophecies of the Lord’s prophets and the covenants which the Lord has made with man will find their fulfillment physically or literally.

“it meaneth us” Lehi’s descendants, probably numbered among the Indian populations of North, Central, and South America, will be included in the gathering as will all others of the house of Israel (“also all our brethren”).

7 And it meaneth that the time cometh that after all the house of Israel have been scattered and confounded, that the Lord God will raise up a mighty nation among the Gentiles, yea, even upon the face of this land; and by them shall our seed be scattered.

verse 7 “a mighty nation among the Gentiles” See the commentaries for 1 Nephi 10:14 and 1 Nephi 15:13 for a discussion of the “mighty nation among the Gentiles.” In the Church, we have come to refer to this nation as “the great Gentile nation,” though this phrase is not found in scripture. This nation would seem to be the United States of America. Before missionaries from this great Gentile nation begin to gather Israel, including the Lamanites, the citizens of this Gentile nation will first have a role in scattering them. Presumably this refers to the oppression and disruption of the native American Indian tribes (by American and Spanish settlers). Some of those scattered (likely only a few) might include Lehi’s descendants.

8 And after our seed is scattered the Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed; wherefore, it is likened unto their being nourished by the Gentiles and being carried in their arms and upon their shoulders.

verse 8 The “marvelous work” is the restoration of the gospel and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

“wherefore, it is likened . . . upon their shoulders” This phrase explains the meaning of 1 Nephi 21:22-23 and 1 Nephi 22:6.

“It” refers to the gathering of Israel. The first “their” refers to gathering Israelites. The second “their” and third “their” refer to the Gentile missionaries. Since the gospel will be restored and the Book of Mormon will come forth to the great Gentile nation, the “Gentile” missionaries will carry the gospel to the house of Israel. Remember that even

though these missionaries are called “Gentiles” by virtue of their residence in the great Gentile nation, most of them are actually descendants of the tribe of Joseph through Ephraim (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 21:1-6).

9 And it shall also be of worth unto the Gentiles; and not only unto the Gentiles but unto all the house of Israel, unto the making known of the covenants of the Father of heaven unto Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

verse 9 “It” is the gathering of Israel and the restoration of gospel blessings which include the covenants made with father Abraham. Part of the “marvelous work” of restoration to occur in the latter days, under the direction of the prophet Joseph Smith, is the making known to the Israelite peoples the covenants of the Father unto Abraham. The covenants which the Lord made with Abraham are reviewed in the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8.

This verse makes special reference to one specific covenant: “In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.” What is the meaning of this particular covenant? In what way will all of the families or kindreds of the earth be blessed through the seed of Abraham or the house of Israel? Abraham’s posterity will prove to be a blessing to all families of the earth, in that Israel will bear the priesthood and preach the gospel to them. Thus, will every family have the opportunity, through the posterity of Abraham, to enjoy the blessings of the gospel, which include the “blessings of salvation, even of life eternal” (Abraham 2:9-11).

This verse implies that this particular covenant which the Lord made with Abraham will be “of worth” both to the house of Israel and to the Gentiles. In other words it will apply to, or benefit, or be of value to both Abraham’s posterity and to the Gentiles. This covenant has obvious application to those of the house of Israel. But how does it apply to Gentiles? Once an individual who descends from ancestors outside the house of Israel accepts the gospel, he is adopted into the house of Israel. He becomes, in a literal sense, one of the posterity of Abraham. All of the covenants made with Abraham apply to him just as if he were a blood descendant of Abraham. Hence, the “Gentiles” who are the missionary citizens of the great Gentile nation, those of the house of Israel who accept the gospel, and the “Gentiles”—those not of Israelite blood—who accept the gospel will all be blessed by this particular covenant.

10 And I would, my brethren, that ye should know that all the kindreds of the earth cannot be blessed unless he shall make bare his arm in the eyes of the nations.

verse 10 “**make bare his arm in the eyes of the nations**” When we say that the Lord “makes bare his arm” we mean that the Lord shows his power. Those

missionaries who take the gospel to all peoples and nations of the earth will go with God's power (see D&C 35:13-14).

11 Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to make bare his arm in the eyes of all the nations, in bringing about his covenants and his gospel unto those who are of the house of Israel.

12 Wherefore, he will bring them again out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel.

verse 12 “they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance”

Keep in mind the fact that the land of inheritance for the lost ten tribes of Israel is the western hemisphere (with its theoretical center in Jackson County, Missouri), and the land of inheritance for those of Jewish descent is Jerusalem and the land of Israel.

The phrase “out of obscurity and out of darkness” originated with Isaiah (Isaiah 29:18) and refers to scattered Israel.

13 And the blood of that great and abominable church, which is the whore of all the earth, shall turn upon their own heads; for they shall war among themselves, and the sword of their own hands shall fall upon their own heads, and they shall be drunken with their own blood.

14 And every nation which shall war against thee, O house of Israel, shall be turned one against another, and they shall fall into the pit which they digged to ensnare the people of the Lord. And all that fight against Zion shall be destroyed, and that great whore, who hath perverted the right ways of the Lord, yea, that great and abominable church, shall tumble to the dust and great shall be the fall of it.

verses 13-14 “great and abominable church” See the commentary for 1 Nephi 21:26. See also the introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 13.

This verse describes the internal strife and fratricide that will occur in the latter days among those in the great and abominable church. Since the verse has a latter-day orientation, the great and abominable church referred to here is the less specific entity described in 1 Nephi 14 (see 1 Nephi 14:10) and not the specific church referred to in 1 Nephi 13. This generic or less specific entity consists of all those organizations (in this instance, nations) who fight against the kingdom of God. Here we learn that they will be caught in their own traps. The fall of this great and abominable entity will only occur just prior to the Millennium.

15 For behold, saith the prophet, the time cometh speedily that Satan shall have no more power over the hearts of the children of men; for the day soon cometh

that all the proud and they who do wickedly shall be as stubble; and the day cometh that they must be burned.

verse 15 The “prophet” spoken of here may well be Isaiah (see Isaiah 47:14) or even Zenos.

“Satan shall have no more power over the hearts of the children of men”
Satan is bound during the Millennium.

This verse has been a source of trouble and criticism for the Church. It has served as fodder for anti-Mormons. The reason is that its phraseology is very similar to a prophecy of Malachi. Compare the wording of this verse with Malachi 4:1. Malachi is the only biblical scripture that has wording similar to 1 Nephi 22:15. Why should this be a source of trouble? Couldn't Nephi have simply taken this wording from the brass plates? No, he couldn't have. Why? Simply because the prophet Malachi prophesied in about 450 BC, well after Lehi's family left Jerusalem! There were no writings of Malachi on the brass plates that Lehi's family took with them. The anti-Mormons have said, “Aha! We've got you this time!” Joseph Smith must have had before him the Book of Malachi when he wrote 1 Nephi 22:15. Nephi could not have had access to Malachi's writings! This is not the only verse that has caused this trouble. Anti-Mormons have also compared 1 Nephi 22:23-24 and 2 Nephi 26:4, 8-9 with Malachi 4:1-2 and have found unmistakable similarities. What is the explanation? How do we get out of this one?

Before we try to resolve this issue, let's raise yet another similar criticism of the Book of Mormon. Almost since the publication of the Book of Mormon it has been noticed that there is a similarity between 2 Nephi 1:14 and a passage written by William Shakespeare in his play *Hamlet*. 2 Nephi 1:14 reads: “in the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveler can return.” The passage in *Hamlet* is: “But that the dread of something after death, the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns.” Yet another passage in Mosiah 3:25 is similar: “a state of misery and endless torment from whence they can no more return.” Shakespeare wrote in the late 1500s and early 1600s AD.

Well then, did Joseph Smith quote from Shakespeare as he wrote the Book of Mormon? For the discussion of the issue of 2 Nephi 1:14, I am indebted to Robert F. Smith. In his article “Shakespeare and the Book of Mormon,” (a FARMS reprint) he has provided us the following explanation.

It would seem that there are two possible explanations for the similarities between these passages in the Book of Mormon and those in Malachi and *Hamlet*. The first is that Joseph Smith's mind might have been laced with the literature of his day. He certainly had read Malachi, and I suppose he might have been familiar with *Hamlet*. There are also passages in the King James Version of the Book of Job which are vaguely similar to 2 Nephi 1:14 (see Job 7:9- 10, 21; 16:22). There is other literature which was theoretically available to Joseph in 1828. For example, the phrase “. . . from

whence no traveler returns” has been found in a book by Josiah Priest, published in Albany, New York, in 1825. Perhaps as he translated, he used words and phrases which were in his mind, and perhaps one result was the phraseology in 2 Nephi 1:14.

A better explanation is that Malachi, Nephi, and Shakespeare all had an abundant common source of literature available to them from which they might have taken their ideas and even their phraseology. For example, Brother Smith in his article gives a few examples of specific “ideas and expressions . . . [which] . . . were available from Mesopotamia to Egypt in Lehi’s own time—especially in Egypt.” A few of these specific examples follow (reproduced here without references which might be obtained from Brother Smith’s article): “May you not go on the roads of the western ones [the dead]; they who go on them [travelers] do not return.” “There is nobody who returns from there.” “Behold, there is nobody who has gone, who has returned.” “None that have gone have come back.” “Why, pray, have you come to the ‘Land of No Return,’ on the road whose traveler returns never.” “To the house from which he who enters never goes forth. To the road whose path does not lead back.”

Referring to 2 Nephi 1:14, Hugh Nibley wrote:

This passage has inspired scathing descriptions of the Book of Mormon as a mass of stolen quotations. . . . A recent study of Sumerian and Akkadian names for the world of the dead lists prominently “the hole, the earth, the land of no return, the path of no turning back, the road whose course never turns back, the distant land, etc.” . . . This is a good deal closer to Lehi’s language than Shakespeare is. . . . Lehi . . . can hardly be denied the luxury of speaking as he was supposed to speak (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 276-77; see also Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 162; and Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 90-91.)

Let us, then, turn our attention back to 1 Nephi 22:15. What common source might have influenced both Malachi and Nephi? Elder Bruce R. McConkie has proposed an interesting explanation. He has suggested that the prophet Zenos may have been a common source for both Nephi and Malachi:

Our understanding of the prophetic word will be greatly expanded if we know how one prophet quotes another, usually without acknowledging his source.

Either Isaiah or Micah copied the prophetic words of the other relative to the mountain of the Lord’s house being established in the last days with all nations flowing thereto. Their ministries overlapped, but we assume that the lesser Micah copied from the greater Isaiah and then appended some words of his own about the Millennial Era.

Some unnamed Old Testament prophet, who obviously was Zenos, as the Book of Mormon testifies, spoke of the day when the wicked would be destroyed as stubble; when the righteous would be “led up as calves of the stall”; when Christ should “rise from the dead, with healing in his wings”; and when the Holy One of Israel would then reign on the earth [1 Nephi 22:24; 2 Nephi 25:13].

Malachi, who lived more than two hundred years after Nephi [sic], uses these very expressions in his prophetic writings. Can we do other than conclude that both Nephi and Malachi had before them the writings of Zenos? . . .

Once the Lord has revealed his doctrine in precise language to a chosen prophet, there is no reason why he should not inspire another prophet to choose the same words in presenting the same doctrine on a subsequent occasion. It is much easier and simpler to quote that which has already been given in perfection. We are all commanded—including the prophets among us—to search the scriptures and thereby learn what other prophets have presented (“The Doctrinal Restoration” in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, editors: Monte S. Nyman and Robert L Millet, 17-18.)

“they who do wickedly shall be as stubble; and the day cometh that they must be burned” Stubble is the stumps of wheat, rye, barley, oats, or buckwheat left in the ground; the part of the stalk left by the scythe or sickle. This cleansing of the earth, which will eliminate all telestial elements, will occur at the Savior’s second coming—at the onset of the Millennium.

verses 16-18 These verses also describe those events that will occur prior to the Millennium. Just as the earth was baptized by water in the days of Noah, so it will yet be baptized by fire and the Holy Ghost so that it may commence its terrestrial, Millennial period.

16 For the time soon cometh that the fulness of the wrath of God shall be poured out upon all the children of men; for he will not suffer that the wicked shall destroy the righteous.

17 Wherefore, he will preserve the righteous by his power, even if it so be that the fulness of his wrath must come, and the righteous be preserved, even unto the destruction of their enemies by fire. Wherefore, the righteous need not fear; for thus saith the prophet, they shall be saved, even if it so be as by fire.

verse 17 “thus saith the prophet” Nephi is perhaps still quoting the prophet Zenos.

18 Behold, my brethren, I say unto you, that these things must shortly come; yea, even blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke must come; and it must needs be upon the face of this earth; and it cometh unto men according to the flesh if it so be that they will harden their hearts against the Holy One of Israel.

verse 18 “these things must shortly come” Since the things prophesied will not occur for nearly three millennia following the time of Nephi, the word “shortly” here is of interest. Perhaps “shortly” here is less a reference to the time of occurrence and

more a reference to the fact that these things will occur acutely or quickly when they do occur. It may also carry the connotation that these things will surely come.

“fire and vapor of smoke” It has been suggested that these may result from a nuclear holocaust (Bruce R. McConkie, *CR*, April 1979, 133).

“if it so be” This phrase marks this as a conditional prophecy or one that need not occur lest mankind bring it upon themselves by their own wickedness.

“Holy One of Israel” is an interesting term which is used here for Deity. It is found thirty-four times in the Bible—all in the Old Testament. It is not used in the New Testament. Most instances of its use are in the book of Isaiah (twenty-nine times), and all instances are in the 150 years preceding Babylonian captivity. Thus we might expect that it would be found in the Book of Mormon, particularly because of the Book of Mormon’s Old Testament orientation, and more particularly because the term was commonly used during and just prior to Lehi’s day. Indeed, it is found some thirty-nine times in the Book of Mormon—all in materials translated from the small plates of Nephi. The term is not found once in the Doctrine and Covenants. Again, we encounter a piece of evidence that Joseph Smith, Jr., did not write the Book of Mormon. If he had authored it, we would expect to find the term “Holy One of Israel” also in the Doctrine and Covenants and also in Mosiah through Alma in the Book of Mormon.

19 For behold, the righteous shall not perish; for the time surely must come that all they who fight against Zion shall be cut off.

20 And the Lord will surely prepare a way for his people, unto the fulfilling of the words of Moses, which he spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that all those who will not hear that prophet shall be cut off from among the people.

verse 20 “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you” This prophet is, of course, Jesus Christ. This remarkable verse is perhaps the most often quoted messianic prophecy in all scripture. It originated with Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). Lehi quoted it to his children; (1 Nephi 10:4); Paul quoted it while preaching in the temple (Acts 3:22-23); Christ quoted it during his appearance to the Nephites (3 Nephi 21:11); Stephen quoted it before the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 7:37); Moroni quoted it to Joseph Smith (JS-H 1:40); and it is found in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 1:14; 133:63).

“like unto me” Moses, the great deliverer of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt, was one of the purest “types” of Christ among all of the world’s prophets.

21 And now I, Nephi, declare unto you, that this prophet of whom Moses spake was the Holy One of Israel; wherefore, he shall execute judgment in righteousness.

verse 21 “he shall execute judgment in righteousness” There are many scriptural references to Jesus Christ as the judge of all the earth (John 5:22, 30; Psalm 50:6; 94:1-2; Acts 10:42; Isaiah 9:7; 11:4; Genesis 18:25). There are also references that suggest Christ may delegate at least part of the responsibility of judging to others (Matthew 10:14-15; 19:28; Luke 22:30; D&C 29:12; 75:21:22; 1 Nephi 12:9-10; 3 Nephi 27:27; Mormon 3:19; Daniel 7:22).

At what specific point in our eternal lives do we stand before our Lord to be judged? Certainly, a judgment must occur prior to the resurrection since the body we receive at the moment of our resurrection indicates how we have been judged. We will come forth with a telestial body, a terrestrial body, or a celestial body. When is the judgment then? In his book *Gospel Doctrine*, Joseph F. Smith taught of a “partial judgment” that occurs at the time of our death (448). In this judgment, which is meted out by the “gatekeeper”—surely Jesus Christ himself—all will be assigned to either paradise or prison. This is a vital judgment since all assigned to paradise will continue on to their exaltation, and most, if not all, of those assigned to prison will eventually inherit a lesser degree of glory in the terrestrial or telestial kingdoms. Apparently those who have not received the gospel will be judged by the Lord according to how they would have responded had they received it (D&C 137:5-9). Surely other judgments will follow involving those in spirit prison prior to their resurrection. For additional discussion of the judgments, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 9, *The Judgments*.

The word “righteousness” used in this verse is richer than we might initially suppose. The fact that Jesus Christ is the “righteous” judge means that He is the perfect judge—the only one qualified to judge us. And this title He earned by virtue of his atoning suffering and death at Gethsemane and at Golgotha (see “The Perfect Judge” in *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement* in volume 1, chapter 19 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*).

22 And the righteous need not fear, for they are those who shall not be confounded. But it is the kingdom of the devil, which shall be built up among the children of men, which kingdom is established among them which are in the flesh—

23 For the time speedily shall come that all churches which are built up to get gain, and all those who are built up to get power over the flesh, and those who are built up to become popular in the eyes of the world, and those who seek the lusts of the flesh and the things of the world, and to do all manner of iniquity; yea, in fine, all those who belong to the kingdom of the devil are they who need fear, and tremble, and quake; they are those who must be brought low in the dust; they are those who must be consumed as stubble; and this is according to the words of the prophet.

verses 22-23 The “kingdom of the devil” corresponds to the entity defined as the “great and abominable church” in 1 Nephi 14 (see the introductory discussion for 1 Nephi 13). It is a generic term much the same as Babylon or “whore of all the earth” (2 Nephi 10:16). Keep in mind the fact that the word “churches” here does not necessarily refer to religious organizations. Rather, it referred anciently to an assembly, congregation, or association of people who bonded together and shared the same loyalties.

“and this is according to the words of the prophet” Presumably Nephi is still quoting from the prophet Zenos.

verses 24-26 These verses refer to the Millennium.

24 And the time cometh speedily that the righteous must be led up as calves of the stall, and the Holy One of Israel must reign in dominion, and might, and power, and great glory.

verse 24 “calves of the stall” The only biblical reference containing this phrase is Malachi 4:2. Both Nephi and Malachi were probably quoting the prophet Zenos (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 22:15).

The implication of the expression “led up as calves of the stall” suggests that the gathering back to the fold of Zion will, during the Millennium, occur more easily, frequently, willingly, and with less opposition as cows in the stall are herded.

25 And he gathereth his children from the four quarters of the earth; and he numbereth his sheep, and they know him; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd; and he shall feed his sheep, and in him they shall find pasture.

verse 25 A major part of the gathering of the house of Israel will not take place until the Millennium.

26 And because of the righteousness of his people, Satan has no power; wherefore, he cannot be loosed for the space of many years; for he hath no power over the hearts of the people, for they dwell in righteousness, and the Holy One of Israel reigneth.

verse 26 “he hath no power over the hearts of the people” Apparently Satan’s being bound during the Millennium is actually the result of two separate phenomena:

1. Satan will actually be restrained by the power of God. This will likely occur by means of the Lord’s pouring out his Spirit upon the righteous who remain on the earth to the extent that Satan’s power will be simply overwhelmed. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught concerning the binding of Satan: “There are many among us who teach that the binding of Satan will be merely the binding which those dwelling on the earth

will place upon him by their refusal to hear his enticings. This is not so. He will not have the privilege during that period of time to tempt any man” (*Church History and Modern Revelation*, 1:192).

2. The Lord will destroy telestial wickedness from off the earth, and thus there will not be people on the earth who will respond to his promptings. In this verse Nephi teaches here in this verse that “because of the righteousness of his [the Lord’s] people, Satan has no power; wherefore, he cannot be loosed for the space of many years; for he hath no power over the hearts of the people, for they dwell in righteousness, and the Holy One of Israel reigneth.”

President George Q. Cannon taught that both the power of God and the righteousness of the saints are necessary to bind Satan:

We talk about Satan’s being bound. Satan will be bound by the power of God; but he will be bound also by the determination of the people of God not to listen to him, not to be governed by him. The Lord will not bind him and take his power from the earth while there are men and women willing to be governed by him. That is contrary to the plan of salvation. To deprive men of their agency is contrary to the purposes of our God. . . .

Satan only gains power over man through man’s exercise of his own agency; and when Satan shall be bound, as the Lord says he will be for a thousand years, one of the great powers that will help bring this to pass will be man’s agency. The Lord has never forced men against their will to obey him. He never will do so. If Satan, therefore, has power with man, it is because man yields to his influence. . . .

The time is not far distant when great judgments will be poured out upon the wicked inhabitants of the earth. Every prophet who has looked forward to our day has seen and predicted that the wicked would be destroyed. Their destruction means the destruction of Satan’s power [including the literal destruction of the wicked]. The righteous will be left, and because of their righteousness the Lord will have mercy upon them; they, exercising their agency in the right direction, will bring down his blessings upon them to such an extent that Satan will be bound (*Gospel Truth*, 1:86-87).

Joseph Smith Taught: “Christ and the resurrected saints will reign over the earth during the thousand years. They will not probably dwell upon the earth, but will visit it when they please, or when it is necessary to govern it” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *TPJS*, 268).

27 And now behold, I, Nephi, say unto you that all these things must come according to the flesh.

verse 27 “according to the flesh” All these prophecies are not merely figurative. Rather their fulfillment will be literal—“according to the flesh.”

28 But, behold, all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people shall dwell safely in the Holy One of Israel if it so be that they will repent.

verse 28 This verse raises an interesting idea. It suggests that the concept of salvation, actually exaltation, is somehow not only applicable to individuals, but under certain circumstances it might be more broadly applicable—even to whole nations. Perhaps the ambiance created by some righteous nations is generally conducive to exaltation, though surely each individual must earn his own salvation.

29 And now I, Nephi, make an end; for I durst not speak further as yet concerning these things.

30 Wherefore, my brethren, I would that ye should consider that the things which have been written upon the plates of brass are true; and they testify that a man must be obedient to the commandments of God.

31 Wherefore, ye need not suppose that I and my father are the only ones that have testified, and also taught them. Wherefore, if ye shall be obedient to the commandments, and endure to the end, ye shall be saved at the last day. And thus it is. Amen.