

CHAPTER 39

3 Nephi 1–7

Introduction

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) observed that “the record of the Nephite history just prior to the Savior’s visit reveals many parallels to our own day as we anticipate the Savior’s second coming” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1987, 3; or *Ensign*, May 1987, 4). Only those with firm testimonies and full conversions were able to remain steadfast prior to the Savior’s appearance in America. The same is true in our day. Only those with firm testimonies and full conversions will be able to remain steadfast prior to the Lord’s Second Coming. A careful study of 3 Nephi 1–7 will help you understand how your testimony of Jesus Christ and conversion to His gospel will give you the sustaining strength you need to stay true to the Savior during the challenging days in which you live.

Commentary

It may be instructive to compare the length of books in the Book of Mormon and the time periods they covered. Refer to the chart “Book of Mormon Pages and Time Periods” in the appendix (p. 411).

3 Nephi 1. The Fulfillment of Prophecy

• Nephi prayed mightily to the Lord when enemies threatened to kill those who believed the signs foretold by Samuel the Lamanite. In answer to his prayer, the Lord told Nephi not to fear, for the signs of Christ’s birth would be fulfilled that very night. The record carefully documents the fulfillment of all of Samuel’s prophecies (see chart in commentary for Helaman 14 on p. 283).



3 Nephi 1:1. The Nephite Calendar Systems

• Throughout the course of the Book of Mormon, the Nephites used three different points of reference for measuring time with their calendars:

Reference Point	When Used	Scripture Block
From the time when Lehi left Jerusalem	600–92 B.C.	1 Nephi 1– Mosiah 29
From the time when the government changed from kings to judges	92 B.C.–A.D. 1	Mosiah 29– 3 Nephi 1
From the time of the sign of the birth of Jesus Christ	A.D. 1–421	3 Nephi 1– Moroni 10

Note: The sign was given at Jesus’s birth. However, they did not start using it as a point of reference until A.D. 9.

3 Nephi 1:29. We Must Protect Ourselves from Being Led Astray

• Verse 29 of 3 Nephi 1 illustrates that it only takes one generation for apostasy to occur. We read the sad tale of the children of faithful parents who were led away by “lyings and . . . flattering words, to join those Gadianton robbers.”

President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency taught: “The young people of the Church . . . hold the future in their hands. The Church has always been one generation away from extinction. If a whole generation were lost, which will not happen, we would lose the Church. But even a single individual lost to the gospel of Jesus Christ closes doors for generations of descendants, unless the Lord reaches out to bring some of them back” (“We Must Raise Our Sights” [Church Educational System conference on the Book of Mormon, Aug. 14, 2001], 1; see LDS.org under gospel library/additional addresses/CES addresses).

• President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) counseled the youth of our day on how to avoid being led away from the truth:

“To our young people, the glorious youth of this generation, I say, be true. Hold to the faith. Stand firmly for what you know to be right.

“You face tremendous temptation. It comes at you in the halls of popular entertainment, on the Internet, in

the movies, on television, in cheap literature, and in other ways—subtle, titillating, and difficult to resist. Peer pressure may be almost overpowering. But, my dear young friends, you must not give in. You must be strong. You must take the long look ahead rather than succumbing to the present seductive temptation. . . .

“ . . . You are the best generation we have ever had. You know the gospel better. You are more faithful in your duties. You are stronger to face the temptations which come your way. Live by your standards. Pray for the guidance and protection of the Lord. He will never leave you alone. He will comfort you. He will sustain you. He will bless and magnify you and make your reward sweet and beautiful. And you will discover that your example will attract others who will take courage from your strength” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2003, 86–88; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 83–84).

3 Nephi 2:1–2. They Began to Disbelieve the Signs That Had Been Given

- Immediately after the sign of Christ’s birth was given, Satan sent forth lies to harden the hearts of the people (see 3 Nephi 1:22). Though the impact was not immediate, it was not long before many people became “hard in their hearts, and blind in their minds, and began to disbelieve all which they had heard and seen” (3 Nephi 2:1).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that we too can become vulnerable to Satan’s attack on our beliefs: “How quickly [Satan] moves in even where people have had special spiritual experiences, seeking to get people who have seen signs ‘to disbelieve all which they had heard and seen.’ (3 Nephi 2:1–2.) The adversary has a better chance to persuade us that what we believe is foolish if we worry about looking foolish in front of our fellowmen” (*Things As They Really Are* [1978], 41).



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What is the lesson believers should learn concerning signs and salvation? (see D&C 63:8–12). Signs flow from faith and are a product of it. They strengthen the faithful and produce faith in the spiritually receptive. The chief purpose of signs, however, is not to produce faith but to reward it (see D&C 68:9–11). Signs do not force faith upon anyone. Sadly, it is common to see both in scripture and in today’s world most marvelous signs and evidences of God’s power ignored or rationalized away by those without faith.

3 NEPHI 2:1–3

How did these people explain away the signs of Christ’s birth? What did their disbelief lead to? How does belief affect action?

3 Nephi 2:1–4. Why Do the Wicked Sometimes See Signs?

- Scripturally we can see some reasons why the Lord will occasionally show signs to the wicked:

To vindicate prophets. The sign that Nephi, son of Helaman, gave to the people concerning the death of the chief judge showed that Nephi was right (see Mosiah 20:21).

Leave the wicked without excuse. The wicked are completely responsible for their actions thereafter. The

Lord has stated, “He that seeketh signs shall see signs, but not unto salvation” (D&C 63:7).

Show correctness of prophets’ words. Since the wicked seek to prove the prophet wrong, the Lord will occasionally show indisputable signs (see Helaman 9:2–4).

Condemn the wicked. When the wicked see signs, it is through the Lord’s anger and to their condemnation (see D&C 63:11). The Savior stated, “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign” (Matthew 12:39).

3 Nephi 3–4. Physical and Spiritual Preparation

- It is easy to see Satan’s imprint in Giddianhi’s words (3 Nephi 3:1–10) as he used flattery (v. 2), feigned concern (v. 5), and made false promises (vv. 7–8) to accomplish his evil designs. How like the devil’s promises were Giddianhi’s promises of freedom when all he had to offer was bondage and a promise to share possessions that were not even his to share (see v. 7).

Lachoneus straightway turned his attention to his people. He knew they needed to be physically and spiritually prepared for the imminent attack of Giddianhi’s robbers. He had his people build strong fortifications (v. 14) and gather their animals and families (v. 13) into one place—the land of Zarahemla (vv. 22–23). He had them make weapons and armor (v. 26) and gather a seven-year supply of provisions (3 Nephi 4:4). Lachoneus instructed his people to leave the deserted land “desolate” so the robbers would not be able to forage for food (vv. 3–4).

Most importantly, Lachoneus had his people prepare spiritually. He reminded them of the safety of repentance (3 Nephi 3:15). His people repented and prayed mightily unto the Lord (v. 25; 4:8). Thus they wisely prepared themselves both physically and spiritually for the imminent attack of their enemies.

- We have been asked to prepare physically and spiritually in our day for imminent calamities. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught what we should do to prepare for the events that precede the Savior’s coming:

“What if the day of His coming were tomorrow? If we knew that we would meet the Lord tomorrow—through our premature death or His unexpected coming—what

would we do today? What confessions would we make? What practices would we discontinue? What accounts would we settle? What forgivenesses would we extend? What testimonies would we bear?

“If we would do those things then, why not now? Why not seek peace while peace can be obtained? If our lamps of preparation are drawn down, let us start immediately to replenish them.

“We need to make both temporal and spiritual preparation for the events prophesied at the time of the Second Coming. And the preparation most likely to be neglected is the one less visible and more difficult—the spiritual. . . .

“Are we following the Lord’s command, ‘Stand ye in holy places, and be not moved, until the day of the Lord come; for behold, it cometh quickly?’ (D&C 87:8). What are those ‘holy places’? Surely they include the temple and its covenants faithfully kept. Surely they include a home where children are treasured and parents are respected. Surely the holy places include our posts of duty assigned by priesthood authority, including missions and callings faithfully fulfilled in branches, wards, and stakes” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 7–8; or *Ensign*, May 2004, 9–10).

3 Nephi 4:10. Faith in God Overcomes Fear

- The Nephites prepared themselves physically and spiritually to meet Giddianhi’s robbers. As a final act of submission to the Lord, which was misinterpreted by their foes, they fell to the earth and cried unto the Lord. They then stood on their feet and met their enemy with faith in God. (See 3 Nephi 4:8–10.) We too can stand up to our enemies and replace our fears with faith in God.

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote concerning the faith that is needed to face the challenges of our day: “Preparing ourselves and our families for the challenges of the coming years will require us to replace fear with faith. We must be able to overcome the fear of enemies who oppose and threaten us. The Lord has said, ‘Fear not, little flock; do good; let earth and hell combine against you, for if ye are built upon my rock, they cannot prevail’ (D&C 6:34)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1989, 43; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 34).

3 Nephi 5:1–3. Faith Leads to Repentance and All Good Works

• While serving as a member of the Seventy, Elder John H. Groberg explained the relationship between faith and repentance:

“If we think deeply, we realize that the first principle—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—underlies all else; that is, it takes faith in Christ to repent or be baptized or perform any other ordinances of the gospel. Jesus made saving repentance possible and He made baptism meaningful. If we have faith in Him, we will repent and be baptized.

“If we do not repent, or refuse to be baptized, or are unwilling to keep His commandments, it is because we do not have sufficient faith in Him. Thus, repentance, baptism, and all other principles and ordinances are not entirely separate but are actually extensions of our faith in Christ. Without faith in Him, we do little of eternal value. With faith in Him, our lives become focused on doing things of eternal value” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 35; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 26).

3 NEPHI 5:1–3; 6:4–5

*What did the people know with certainty?
What did Mormon say was the only thing
that would stop them from prospering?*

3 Nephi 5:13. “A Disciple of Jesus Christ”

• Mormon described himself as a disciple of Christ. President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) explained the nature of Mormon’s calling: “While in every instance the Nephite twelve are spoken of as disciples, the fact remains that they had been endowed with divine authority to be special witnesses for Christ among their own people. Therefore, they were virtually apostles to the



Nephite race, although their jurisdiction was, as revealed to Nephi, eventually to be subject to the authority and jurisdiction of Peter and the twelve chosen in Palestine” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. [1957–66], 1:122).

While Mormon’s personal call was that of an Apostle, the term *disciple* can also have a more general definition. A disciple is also “a follower of Jesus Christ who lives according to Christ’s teachings (D&C 41:5)” (Guide to the Scriptures, “Disciple”).

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles further explained:

“The following has been written about discipleship:

“The word *disciple* comes from the Latin [meaning] a learner. A disciple of Christ is one who is learning to be like Christ—learning to think, to feel, and to act as he does. To be a true disciple, to fulfill that learning task, is the most demanding regimen known to man. No other discipline compares . . . in either requirements or rewards. It involves the total transformation of a person from the state of the natural man to that of [a] saint, one who loves the Lord and serves with all of his heart, might, mind, and strength’ (Chauncey C. Riddle, ‘Becoming a Disciple,’ *Ensign*, Sept. 1974, 81)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 77; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 61).

In addition to speaking about discipleship, Mormon here may be making a statement about his authority not just as a disciple but as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Nephi 5:22–26. The Meaning of the Gathering in the Latter Days

• Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained the meaning and purpose of the gathering:

“Another sign of the times is the gathering of the faithful (see D&C 133:4). In the early years of this last dispensation, a gathering to Zion involved various locations in the United States: to Kirtland, to Missouri, to Nauvoo, and to the tops of the mountains. Always these were gatherings to prospective temples.



Courtesy of LDS Church Archives

“With the creation of stakes and the construction of temples in most nations with sizable populations of the faithful, the current commandment is not to gather to one place but to gather in stakes in our own homelands. There the faithful can enjoy the full blessings of eternity in a house of the Lord. There, in their own homelands, they can obey the Lord’s command to enlarge the borders of His people and strengthen her stakes (see D&C 101:21; 133:9, 14). In this way the stakes of Zion are ‘for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth’ (D&C 115:6)” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 6; or *Ensign*, May 2004, 8).

3 NEPHI 6:10–16, 18, 29

What led to the apostasy of many Nephites? How can this serve as a warning for us in the latter days?

3 Nephi 6:12. Prosperity and Peace Can Lead to Pride

- During the years immediately prior to the Savior’s personal ministry among the Nephites, the people enjoyed a period of brief prosperity. Unfortunately, this temporal success led to “pride and boastings because of their exceedingly great riches” (3 Nephi 6:10).

President Henry B. Eyring warned about such challenges in our day: “A little prosperity and peace, or even a turn slightly for the better, can bring us feelings of self-sufficiency. We can feel quickly that we are in

control of our lives, that the change for the better is our own doing, not that of a God who communicates to us through the still, small voice of the Spirit. Pride creates a noise within us which makes the quiet voice of the Spirit hard to hear. And soon, in our vanity, we no longer even listen for it. We can come quickly to think we don’t need it” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 16; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 16).

- Several times in Book of Mormon history the people passed through a cycle of righteousness, prosperity, riches, pride, wickedness, destruction, humility, and righteousness again. For more information and a diagram depicting the pride cycle, refer to “The Cycle of Righteousness and Wickedness” in the appendix (p. 414).

3 Nephi 6:12–13. We Determine Our Response to Circumstance

- The record states that “some were lifted up in pride, and others were exceedingly humble” (3 Nephi 6:13). Each of us must determine which way we are going to turn. Elder Marvin J. Ashton (1915–94) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught of this principle: “Certainly one of our God-given privileges is the right to choose what our attitude will be in any given set of circumstances. We can let the events that surround us determine our actions—or we can personally take charge and rule our lives, using as guidelines the principles of pure religion. Pure religion is learning the gospel of Jesus Christ and then putting it into action. Nothing will ever be of real benefit to us until it is incorporated into our own lives” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1982, 91; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1982, 63).

3 Nephi 6:15–18. Satan Tempted Them to Willfully Sin against God

- Satan, who rebelled against God in our premortal existence (see Moses 4:3; D&C 29:36; 76:25), seeks to stir up rebellion among the Saints of God. The danger of willful participation in sin has to do with the voice we choose to follow. King Benjamin warned:

“And now, I say unto you, my brethren, that after ye have known and have been taught all these things, if ye should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken. . . .

“I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples” (Mosiah 2:36–37).

- In connection with this, Elder Neal A. Maxwell observed: “Surely it should give us more pause than it does to think of how casually we sometimes give to [Satan] who could not control his own ego in the premortal world such awful control over our egos here. We often let the adversary do *indirectly* now what we refused to let him do *directly* then” (*We Will Prove Them Herewith* [1982], 45).

- Elder M. Russell Ballard further explained the danger of heeding Satan’s temptations:

“In the premortal world before we left the presence of Heavenly Father, He warned and cautioned us about new experiences we would have in mortality. We knew that we each would have a physical body of flesh and bone. Never having been mortal before, we had no experience dealing with the temptations of mortality. But Heavenly Father knew and understood. He charged us to control our mortal bodies and to make them subject to our spirits. Our spirits would have to master the physical temptations that our bodies would encounter in a temporal world. Spiritual power over the influence of Satan comes to us by keeping the commandments of our Lord, Jesus Christ. . . .

“Satan will seek to tempt us at times and in ways that exploit our greatest weaknesses or destroy our strengths. But his promises of pleasure are short-lived deceptions. His evil design is to tempt us into sinning, knowing that when we sin we separate ourselves from our Heavenly Father and the Savior, Jesus Christ. We begin to move away from Heavenly Father’s promised blessings toward the misery and anguish in which Satan and his followers languish. By sinning we put ourselves in Satan’s power.

“Now, my dear young friends, I understand the struggles you face every day in keeping the commandments of the Lord. The battle for your souls is increasingly fierce. The adversary is strong and cunning. However, you have within your physical body the powerful spirit of a son or daughter of God. Because He loves you and wants you

to come home to Him, our Father in Heaven has given you a conscience that tells your spirit when you are keeping the Lord’s commandments and when you are



not. If you will pay more attention to your spiritual self, which is eternal, than to your mortal self, which is temporary, you can always resist the temptations of Satan and conquer his efforts to take you into his power” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1993, 5–6; or

Ensign, May 1993, 6–7).

3 Nephi 7:15–26. The Faithfulness of Nephi and His Followers

- One bright spot in the otherwise sad account of the Nephites’ turn from their righteousness is the steadfast faithfulness of Nephi and his people. Their example provides a pattern to help us maintain our righteousness during times of wickedness. We read of Nephi’s firm testimony, born of personal experience (see 3 Nephi 7:15), that he boldly taught “repentance and remission of sins through faith on the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 16). He ministered with power and authority because “great was his faith on the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 18), and those who responded to his testimony were themselves visited “by the power and Spirit of God” (v. 21). Those who believed were healed (see v. 22), repented, were baptized, and “received a remission of their sins” (see vv. 24–25).

3 NEPHI 7:21–25

What did those who were converted do? What is your experience with these important principles?

3 Nephi 7:21–26. Full Conversion

- Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke of the difference between those who are fully converted and those who are still lacking. He further taught the continual need for a cycle of

conversion, which builds steadiness in true followers of Christ:

“Each of us has observed how some individuals go through life consistently doing the right things. . . . When difficult choices are to be made, they seem to invariably make the right ones, even though there were enticing alternatives available to them. We know that they are subject to temptation, but they seem oblivious to it. Likewise, we have observed how others are not so valiant in the decisions they make. In a powerfully spiritual environment, they resolve to do better. . . . Yet they are soon back doing the same things they resolved to abandon. . . .

“Sometimes the word *converted* is used to describe when a sincere individual decides to be baptized. However . . . *conversion* means far more than that. . . . President Marion G. Romney explained conversion:

“‘Converted means to turn from one belief or course of action to another. Conversion is a spiritual and moral change. *Converted* implies not merely mental acceptance of Jesus and his teachings but also a motivating faith in him and his gospel. A faith which works a transformation, an actual change in one’s understanding of life’s meaning and in his allegiance to God in interest, in thought, and in conduct. In one who is really wholly converted, desire for things contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ has actually died. And substituted therefore is a love of God, with a fixed and controlling determination to keep his commandments’ [in Conference Report, Guatemala Area Conference 1977, 8]. . . .

“Stated simply, true conversion is the fruit of *faith*, *repentance*, and *consistent obedience*. *Faith* comes by hearing the word of God [see Romans 10:17] and responding to it. You will receive from the Holy Ghost a confirming witness of things you accept on *faith* by willingly doing them [see Ether 12:6]. You will be led to *repent* of errors resulting from wrong things done or right things not done. As a consequence, your capacity to *consistently obey* will be strengthened. This cycle of *faith*, *repentance*, and *consistent obedience* will lead you to greater conversion with its attendant blessings” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2002, 26–28; or *Ensign*, May 2002, 24–25).

Points to Ponder

- What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ? (see 3 Nephi 5:13). What would help you be a more devoted disciple of Jesus Christ?
- The inequality among the Nephites is examined in 3 Nephi 6:14. What did this inequality do to the Church? What did Mormon say was the real cause of this iniquity? (see v. 15). What generally happens when people begin to believe that they are better than others? How does this part of Book of Mormon history substantiate Proverbs 16:18?
- We have been taught the importance of actions accompanying beliefs and the importance of enduring in faith. These chapters contain both positive and negative examples of these concepts. What examples did you see? What can we learn from these examples? Which of them have direct relevance as you strive to remain faithful?

Suggested Assignments

- We learn the importance of individual testimony and conversion in 3 Nephi 1–7. Divide a piece of paper into two columns and put the following two headings at the top of each column:
 1. Attitudes, beliefs, and actions that lead to individual testimony and conversion
 2. Attitudes, beliefs, and actions that destroy individual testimony and conversion
 Then review 3 Nephi 1–7 and list in the appropriate column the teachings, events, principles, and doctrines you discover. Write a short explanation of what you have learned from this exercise and teach it in a family home evening lesson.
- President Ezra Taft Benson taught that many of the events just prior to the Savior’s first coming to the Book of Mormon people parallel those of His Second Coming. Make a list of events, teachings, doctrines, and principles from Helaman 14 through 3 Nephi 7 that you believe have parallels to the “last days.”
- Memorize 3 Nephi 5:13. As you recite these words, think of ways you could declare the Savior’s words to others. You may want to start your declarations of faith with the phrase, “I believe that . . .”