

Introduction

Fourth Nephi covers the nearly 200 years of unity and harmony following Jesus Christ's visit to the Americas. The people "were all converted unto the Lord" (4 Nephi 1:2), resulting in a society that people of all ages have dreamed of. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles observed that following Christ's visit, "His majestic teachings and ennobling spirit led to the happiest of all times, a time in which 'there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another. And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift' [4 Nephi 1:2–3]. That blessed circumstance was, I suppose, achieved on only one other occasion of which we know—the city of Enoch, where 'they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them' [Moses 7:18]" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1996, 40; or *Ensign*, May 1996, 30).

Tragically, the second half of 4 Nephi reveals how a righteous and happy people allowed pride and apostasy to enter their lives, bringing the eventual destruction of their society. As you study this book of scripture, seek to understand what led to the happiness of the Nephite society as well as what led to the misery and destruction of their society.

Commentary

4 Nephi 1:2. "The People Were All Converted unto the Lord"

- President Marion G. Romney (1897–1988) of the First Presidency gave the following insight regarding the meaning of true conversion:

"Webster [dictionary] says the verb, 'convert,' means 'to turn from one belief or course to another.' That 'conversion' is 'a spiritual and moral *change*. . . .' As used in the scriptures, 'converted' generally implies not merely mental acceptance of Jesus and his teachings but also a motivating faith in him and in 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 wholly converted, desire for things inimical [contrary] to the gospel of Jesus Christ has actually died, and substituted therefor is a love of God with a fixed and controlling determination to keep his commandments. . . .

". . . From this it would appear that membership in the Church and conversion are not necessarily synonymous. Being converted . . . and having a



testimony are not necessarily the same thing either. A testimony comes when the Holy Ghost gives the earnest seeker a witness of the truth. A moving testimony vitalizes faith; that is, it induces repentance and obedience

to the commandments. Conversion, on the other hand, is the fruit of, or the reward for, repentance and obedience" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1963, 23–24).

4 Nephi 1:2. "There Were No Contentions and Disputations among Them"

- Regarding the way members of the Church should treat others, the Lord revealed, "Every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God" (D&C 82:19).
- What would it take in today's world to build a society that did not have any contentions or disputations? President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught how this goal can be achieved:

"First, we must eliminate the individual tendency to selfishness that snares the soul, shrinks the heart, and darkens the mind. . . .

"Second, we must cooperate completely and work in harmony one with the other. . . .

"Third, we must lay on the altar and sacrifice whatever is required by the Lord. We begin by offering a 'broken heart and a contrite spirit' [3 Nephi 9:20]" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1978, 123; or *Ensign*, May 1978, 81).

4 NEPHI 1:1–4, 16–17

Make a list of attributes associated with a converted people.

4 Nephi 1:2. “Every Man Did Deal Justly”

- Elder Sheldon F. Child of the Seventy explained what it means to “deal justly” with one another when he spoke about honesty and integrity:

“When we say we will do something, we do it.

“When we make a commitment, we honor it.

“When we are given a calling, we fulfill it.

“When we borrow something, we return it.

“When we have a financial obligation, we pay it.

“When we enter into an agreement, we keep it” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1997, 39; or *Ensign*, May 1997, 29).

- President N. Eldon Tanner (1898–1982) of the First Presidency illustrated the importance of dealing justly with others:

“A young man came to me not long ago and said, ‘I made an agreement with a man that requires me to make certain payments each year. I am in arrears [behind in fulfilling financial obligations], and I can’t make those payments, for if I do, it is going to cause me to lose my home. What shall I do?’

“I looked at him and said, ‘Keep your agreement.’

“‘Even if it costs me my home?’

“I said, ‘I am not talking about your home. I am talking about your agreement; and I think your wife would rather have a husband who would keep his word . . . and have to rent a home than to have a home with a husband who will not keep his covenants and his pledges’ (in Conference Report, Oct. 1966, 99).

4 Nephi 1:3. “They Had All Things Common among Them”

- One of the attributes that distinguished the Nephite people was that “they had all things common among them” (4 Nephi 1:3). President Marion G. Romney described what this phrase means and how it worked:

“This procedure [the united order] preserved in every man the right of private ownership and management of his property. . . . Each man owned his portion, which, at his option, he could alienate, keep and operate, or otherwise treat as his own. . . .

“. . . He consecrated to the Church the *surplus* he produced above the needs and wants of his own family. This surplus went into a storehouse, from which stewardships were given to others, and from which the needs of the poor were supplied” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1977, 119; or *Ensign*, May 1977, 93).

President Romney also explained what leads a people to live in such a way: “When we reach the state of having the ‘pure love of Christ,’ our desire to serve one another will have grown to the point where we will be living fully the law of consecration. Living the law of consecration exalts the poor and humbles the rich. In the process, both are sanctified. The poor, released from the bondage and humiliating limitations of poverty, are enabled as free men to rise to their full



potential, both temporally and spiritually. The rich, by consecration and the imparting of their surplus for the benefit of the poor, *not by constraint, but willingly as an act of free will*, evidence that charity for their fellowmen characterized by Mormon as ‘the pure love of Christ.’ (Moro. 7:47.) This will bring both the giver and

receiver to the common ground on which the Spirit of God can meet them” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1981, 132–33; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, 93).

- Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained how we are preparing to live the law of consecration: “The law of tithing prepares us to live the higher law of consecration—to dedicate and give all our time, talents, and resources to the work of the Lord. Until the day when we are required to live this higher law, we are commanded to live the law of the tithe, which is to freely give one-tenth of our income annually” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2002, 28; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 27).

4 Nephi 1:5. Miracles “in the Name of Jesus”

- President Spencer W. Kimball explained that miracles are also a part of the Church today, as they have been in the past:

“We do have miracles today—beyond imagination! If all the miracles of our own lifetime were recorded, it would take many library shelves to hold the books which would contain them.

“What kinds of miracles do we have? All kinds—revelations, visions, tongues, healings, special guidance and direction, evil spirits cast out. Where are they recorded? In the records of the Church, in journals, in news and magazine articles and in the minds and memories of many people” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [1982], 499).



4 Nephi 1:13, 15–16. “There Was No Contention among All the People”

- Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles described the source of the great peace that was described in 4 Nephi:

“Personal peace is reached when one, in humble submissiveness, truly loves God. Heed carefully this scripture:

“There was no contention in the land, *because of* the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people’ (4 Nephi 1:15; italics added; see also 1:2).

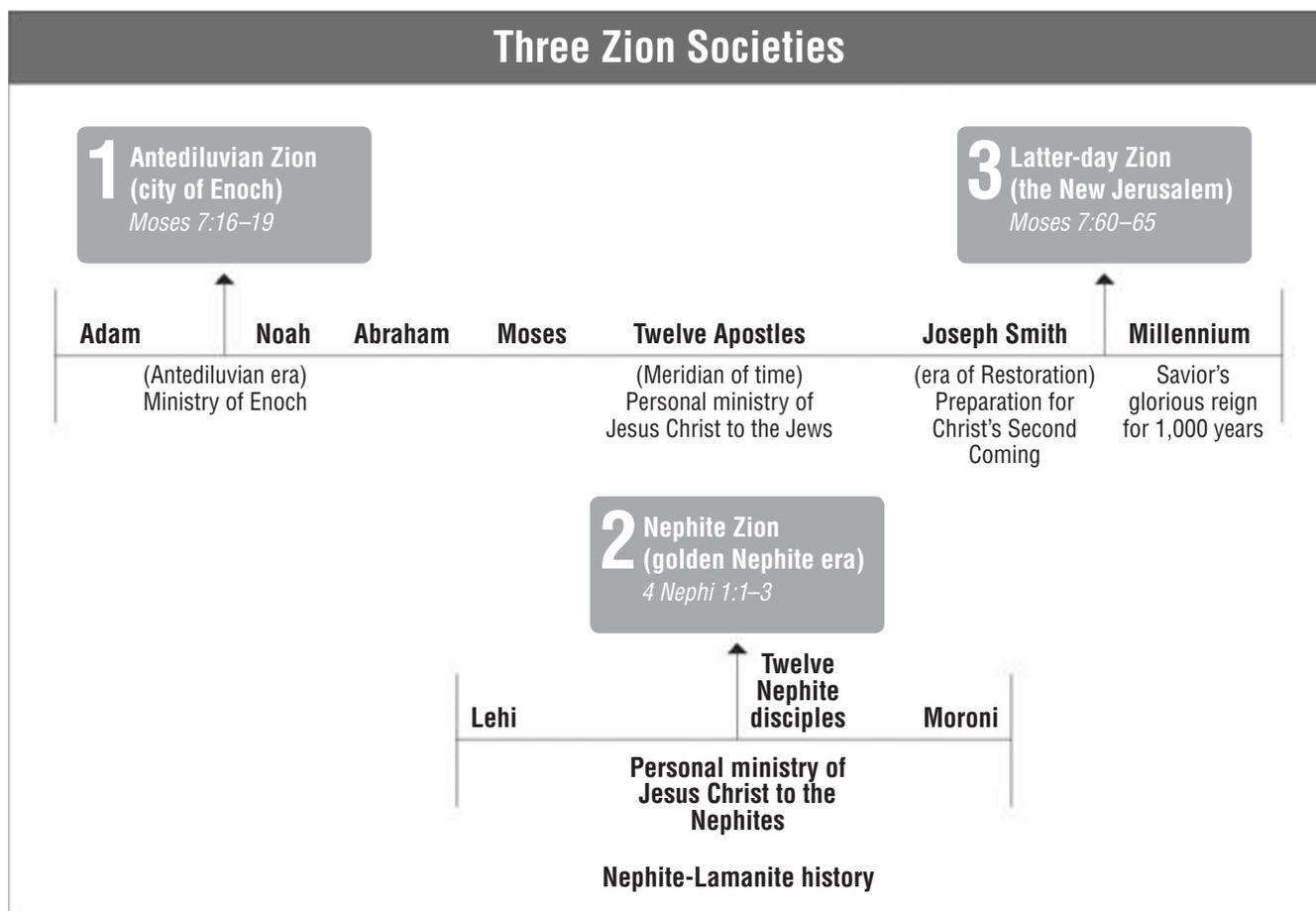
“Thus, love of God should be our aim. It is the first commandment—the foundation of faith. As we develop love of God and Christ, love of family and neighbor will naturally follow. Then will we eagerly emulate Jesus. He healed. He comforted. He taught, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God’ (Matthew 5:9; see also 3 Nephi 12:9).

“Through love of God, the pain caused by the fiery canker of contention will be extinguished from the soul. This healing begins with a personal vow: ‘Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me’ (Sy Miller and Jill Jackson, ‘Let There Be Peace on Earth’ [Beverly Hills, Calif.: Jan-Lee Music, 1972]). This commitment will then spread to family and friends and will bring peace to neighborhoods and nations.

“Shun contention. Seek godliness. Be enlightened by eternal truth. Be like-minded with the Lord in love and united with Him in faith. Then shall ‘the peace of God, which passeth all understanding’ (Philippians 4:7), be yours, to bless you and your posterity through generations yet to come” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 88; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 71).

4 Nephi 1:15–17. A Zion Society

- Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles described the conditions described in 4 Nephi 1:15–17 as a Zion society. This ought to be what we strive for today: “In those brilliant generations that followed the appearance of the resurrected Christ in the New World, ‘there were no contentions and disputations among [the people], and every man did deal justly one with another’ (4 Nephi 1:2). Fourth Nephi records: ‘Surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God’ (1:16). We should be striving to regain that condition. As modern revelation declares: ‘Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness’ (D&C 82:14)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1986, 28; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 23). (For additional information on latter-day Zion, see commentary for 3 Nephi 20:21–22; 21:23–29 on p. 325.)



4 Nephi 1:16–17. There Were No “Manner of -ites”

- Because of the unity and peace in the land, each of the formerly distinct groups in the Book of Mormon, such as the Lamanites and the Nephites, set aside their worldly traditions and embraced as their highest priority the doctrine that they “were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God” (4 Nephi 1:17). As the gospel spreads forth to “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” (Mosiah 16:1), one of the challenges we face as a Church is being “one,” or having unity among our members. This can be challenging when so many races, cultures, and traditions are brought together.

- President James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the First Presidency taught that despite diversity of cultures, races, or traditions, unity can be developed:

“I have learned to admire, respect, and love the good people from every race, culture, and nation that I have been privileged to visit. In my experience, no race or

class seems superior to any other in spirituality and faithfulness. Those who seem less caring spiritually are those individuals—regardless of race, culture, or nationality—spoken of by the Savior in the parable of the sower who are ‘choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection’ [Luke 8:14]. . . .

“As we move into more and more countries in the world, we find a rich cultural diversity in the Church. Yet everywhere there can be a ‘unity of the faith’ [Ephesians 4:13]. Each group brings special gifts and talents to the table of the Lord. We can all learn much of value from each other. But each of us should also voluntarily seek to enjoy all of the unifying and saving covenants, ordinances, and doctrines of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“In the great diversity of peoples, cultures, and circumstances, we remember that all are equal before

the Lord” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 81–82; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 61–62).

- Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles further counseled members of the Church to set aside any cultural traditions, racial traditions, or other traditions that conflict with the teachings of Jesus Christ, because these traditions undermine the great plan of happiness:

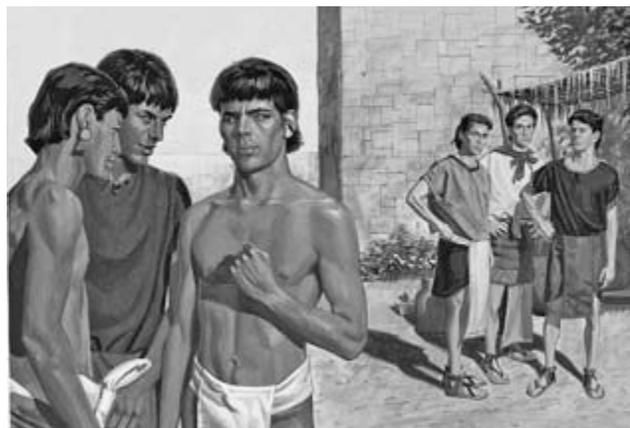
“Your Heavenly Father assigned you to be born into a specific lineage from which you received your inheritance of race, culture, and traditions. That lineage can provide a rich heritage and great reasons to rejoice. Yet you have the responsibility to determine if there is any part of that heritage that must be discarded because it works against the Lord’s plan of happiness. . . .

“I testify that you will remove barriers to happiness and find greater peace as you make your first allegiance your membership in the Church of Jesus Christ, and His teachings the foundation of your life. Where family or national traditions or customs conflict with the teachings of God, set them aside. Where traditions and customs are in harmony with His teachings, they should be cherished and followed to preserve your culture and heritage. There is one heritage that you need never change. It is that heritage that comes from your being a daughter or son of Father in Heaven. For happiness, control your life by that heritage” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 112, 114; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 86–87).

4 Nephi 1:20. “There Began to Be Lamanites Again”

- Divisiveness is a result of unrighteousness. The following commentary suggests that pride is the beginning of all such divisions and the reason that some individuals “revolted from the church” and took upon themselves the name *Lamanites* (4 Nephi 1:20). “Why would it matter to a people what they were called? Why would it be so important for them to be called Lamanites? Why would a group choose to forsake the transcendent privileges of unity in order to be designated by this or that name? The answer

is simple: pride. A desire to be different. A yearning to be acknowledged. A fear of being overlooked. A craving for public notice. The righteous feel no need for attention, no desire to be praised, no inclination to demand recognition. The prideful demand their rights, even when they are wrong. The prideful feel that they must do things their way, even when that way is the wrong way. The prideful insist that they must pursue their own path, even when the road they take is wide and broad and leads to destruction” (Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. [1987–92], 4:204–5).



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4 Nephi 1:24. “Lifted up in Pride”

- 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).

Refer to the commentary for Helaman 3:33–34, 36; 4:12 (p. 264) and the commentary for Helaman 12:5–6 (p. 278).

4 NEPHI 1:24–30

As you study these verses, identify the process that ultimately led the people to deny Christ.

4 Nephi 1:36. “True Believers in Christ”

- Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke of the characteristics that define those who truly believe in the Savior:

“True believers are settled in their views of Christ.

Despite their weaknesses, their spirituality is centered on the Savior, so their views of everything else are put in that precious perspective.

“True believers gladly perform their duties in the kingdom. These duties are usually measurable and straightforward. They include partaking worthily of the sacrament, rendering Christian service, studying the scriptures, praying, fasting, receiving ordinances, attending to family duties, paying tithes and offerings. . . .

“True believers are humble. They are ‘meek and lowly of heart’ [Moroni 7:43]. . . . They are not easily offended. They do not resist counsel. . . .

“True believers are willing to do what Christ wants. . . . Are we willing to let the Lord lead us into further developmental experiences? Or do we shrink back? The things which enlarge the soul inevitably involve stretching.

“True believers have a balanced contentment. They strike a balance between being too content and wishing for a more important role. . . .

“True believers truly pray. Their prayers are sincere. . . . The true believer’s prayers, at least some of the time, are inspired.

“True believers have both right conduct and right reasons for that conduct. They are so secure in their relationship with the Lord that their goodness would continue even if nobody were watching. . . .

“True believers rejoice in the success of others. . . . They don’t regard colleagues as competitors.

“True believers remember that forgetting is part of forgiving. They follow the Lord’s example: ‘I [will] remember [their sins] no more’ (D&C 58:42). . . .

“True believers are innocent as to sin, but not naive. They are kind, but candid. They love their fellowmen. . . .

“True believers are happy.

Instead of a ‘woeful countenance,’ true believers in Christ have a disciplined enthusiasm to work righteousness. They are serious about how they live life, but are also of good cheer” (“True Believers,” *New Era*, Apr., 1994, 20–24).



4 Nephi 1:38–39. “They Did Teach Their Children That They Should Not Believe”

- Elder Russell M. Nelson counseled parents to avoid using labels that polarize or lead to the development of prejudices in their children’s hearts:

“When the Nephites were truly righteous, their previous patterns of polarization vanished. ‘There was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. . . .

‘Unfortunately, the sequel to that story is not a happy one. This pleasant circumstance persisted until ‘a small part of the people . . . had revolted . . . and taken upon them the name of Lamanites’ [4 Nephi 1:20], reviving old prejudices and teaching their children again to hate, ‘even as the Lamanites were taught to hate the children of Nephi from the beginning’ [4 Nephi 1:39]. And so the polarizing process began all over again.

“I hope that we may learn this important lesson and delete segregating names from our personal vocabularies. The Apostle Paul taught that ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus’ [Galatians 3:28; see also Colossians 3:11].

“Our Savior invites us ‘to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; . . . all are alike unto God’ [2 Ne. 26:33]” (“A More Excellent Hope,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1997, 63).

4 Nephi 1:42–46. Secret Oaths and Combinations

- For further information on contention and secret works, see commentary for Helaman 1:1–21 (p. 262) and for Helaman 1–2 (p. 262).

4 Nephi 1:46. None Were Righteous Except the Disciples of Jesus

- After reading 4 Nephi 1:46 one might get the impression that the 12 disciples of Jesus and the three Nephites were the only righteous people left among the Nephites. However, Mormon left an important clarification on this point in Alma 45:13–14. According to these verses, at the end of the Book of Mormon, “the peaceable followers of Christ” (Moroni 7:3) were also referred to as disciples of Jesus.

Points to Ponder

- How would your life be different if you lived in a society similar to the one described in the first half

of 4 Nephi? How can you help create this same kind of harmony and peace in your family and home?

- In the second half of 4 Nephi the people fell into a two-part pattern that led to destruction. First, pride (4 Nephi 1:24–43; see also 3 Nephi 6:28–29) and second, secret combinations (4 Nephi 1:42–46; see also 3 Nephi 6:28–29). This pattern would again appear in the book of Ether (pride in Ether 11:12–14; and secret combinations in Ether 13:15). How can you avoid making the same mistakes the Nephites made at the end of the 200 years of peace and prosperity?

Suggested Assignments

- Contention and the importance of eliminating it are emphasized in 4 Nephi. After identifying sources of contention that occur in your own life, outline a strategy of what you can do to eliminate or minimize contention in your life.