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Glad Tidings from Cumorah: Interpreting the Book of Mormon through the Eyes of Someone in Hell

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GLAD TIDINGS FROM CUMORAH: INTERPRETING THE BOOK OF MORMON THROUGH THE EYES OF SOMEONE IN HELL

Steve Fotheringham

Abstract: *This article offers evidence that at least some Book of Mormon authors may have understood the potential for post-mortal preaching of the gospel. Indeed, they may have recognized that the future Book of Mormon would be a tool to spread the gospel not only among the living but also among those in the spirit world. Prophecies about the message of the Book of Mormon and the restored gospel being for all mankind may have broader scope than previously recognized, with application on both sides of the veil.*

One of the most distinctive doctrines in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that of the redemption of the dead, including the concepts of Christ preaching the gospel to those in the spirit world during the three days His body was in the tomb, baptism for the dead, and temple ordinances for the dead. Though such doctrines and practices have been widely criticized by other Christian groups, there is now substantial evidence that some early Christians also believed that post-mortal evangelization was possible.¹ Likewise, there is significant support for vicarious baptism for the dead in at least part of

1. David L. Paulsen, Roger D. Cook, and Kendel J. Christensen, “The Harrowing of Hell: Salvation for the Dead in Early Christianity,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19/1 (2010): 56–77, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1466&context=jbms>. Also see David L. Paulsen, Kendel J. Christensen, and Martin Pulido, “Redeeming the Dead: Tender Mercies, Turning of Hearts, and Restoration of Authority,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20/1 (2011): 28–51, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1471&context=jbms>.

early Christianity.² Latter-day Saints generally see these doctrines and practices as an indication of God’s mercy and fairness, and cherish these elements as a beautiful and vital part of the Restoration.

One frequently encountered conundrum, though, is why the key volume of scripture of the Restoration, the Book of Mormon, is silent on the possibility of evangelization among the dead. Its teachings seem to many to teach nothing but heaven or hell, with those who die in a state of wickedness doomed to suffer in hell. This puzzle has been addressed in various ways, such as suggesting that these grand doctrines of the Restoration were not yet known to Book of Mormon prophets. But if known to at least some early Christians, why would the Nephites not also learn of the Lord’s tender mercies toward all men?

On the other hand, in the complex Book of Mormon is clear evidence that the various authors are truly different people with difference voices and differing levels of knowledge of or interest in various topics.³ For example, A. Keith Thompson suggests that King Benjamin may not yet have had the time or the ability to read the small plates of Nephi that he had inherited from Amaleki while serving as king. Thus, in King Benjamin’s beautiful sermon in Mosiah 2–4, he does not seem to be aware of information that Nephi and Jacob had revealed regarding the resurrection of all mankind and the name of the Messiah. In fact, tracing the doctrine of the resurrection in the Book of Mormon reveals a “subtle doctrinal sub-plot” with remarkable plausibility and consistency, a sub-plot that it is difficult to imagine could have been crafted by Joseph Smith in a fictional work.⁴

The possibilities for the dead may involve yet another “subtle sub-plot” in the text for us to consider, one we may have been overlooking all these years. There may be evidence in the language of the Book of Mormon that there was some degree of awareness that the gospel could in fact be preached to the dead. In fact, there is evidence

2. David L. Paulsen and Brock M. Mason, “Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture*, 19/2 (2010): 22–49, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1478&context=jbms>.

3. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon* (Oxford University Press, 2010), especially 11–25, 62–65, 84. See also Daniel C. Peterson “An Apologetically Important Nonapologetic Book,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 25/1 (2016): 58–61, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1590&context=jbms>.

4. A. Keith Thompson, “The Doctrine of Resurrection in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16 (2015): 115–19; 128, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-doctrine-of-resurrection-in-the-book-of-mormon/>.

that at least some Book of Mormon writers were aware that the future Book of Mormon would be a tool for teaching the gospel not only among the living, but also in the spirit world, to both the Gentiles as well as the House of Israel, including the deceased Nephite and Lamanite peoples. This possibility can lead us to look at the Restoration and the ongoing work of the Church in a new light.

While Joseph Smith would not receive revelation about the concept of preaching the gospel to the dead, and vicarious ordinance work for them, until well after completing the translation of the Book of Mormon, events early in the Restoration hinted at what was to come. As A. Keith Thompson shows, examination of the words spoken to Joseph in the First Vision and their implications, of Moroni's repeated message to Joseph Smith regarding the Book of Mormon and the Restoration, and the words of John the Baptist in restoring the Aaronic Priesthood suggest that preparing for the work of the temple and bringing the blessings of the gospel to the post-mortal world was a divine priority.⁵

While the words from Malachi 4:5–6, quoted by Moroni many times to Joseph about sending Elijah to “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers,” were cited by Christ in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 25: 5–6), the detailed implications are not spelled out. But the Book of Mormon does offer a hint in a speech from Abinadi about the mercy of God toward those who lived in ignorance of the gospel, mercy that must relate to the work for the dead:

And there cometh a resurrection, even a first resurrection; yea, even a resurrection of those that have been, and who are, and who shall be, even until the resurrection of Christ — for so shall he be called.

And now, the resurrection of all the prophets, and all those that have believed in their words, or all those that have kept the commandments of God, shall come forth in the first resurrection; therefore, they are the first resurrection.

They are raised to dwell with God who has redeemed them; thus they have eternal life through Christ, who has broken the bands of death.

And these are those who have part in the first resurrection; and these are they that have died before Christ came, in their

5. A. Keith Thompson, “Joseph Smith and the Doctrine of Sealing,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 21 (2016): 1–21, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-smith-and-the-doctrine-of-sealing/>.

ignorance, not having salvation declared unto them. And thus the Lord bringeth about the restoration of these; and they have a part in the first resurrection, or have eternal life, being redeemed by the Lord.

And little children also have eternal life. (Mosiah 15:21–25)

Speaking of v. 22 above, in light of v. 24, Thompson raises an intriguing point:

Abinadi's use of the word *or*, between those who believed the prophets and those who kept the commandments in his list of those who would have part in the first resurrection, raises a question. It suggests that while he knew there would be a resurrection of people who died in ignorance, he was not sure how they qualified for resurrection [i.e., the *first* resurrection] if they did not know the gospel so as to live it. Surely participation in the first resurrection was not the simple product of ignorance of the gospel and principles of righteousness. If the generally wicked and rebellious were excluded from resurrection at the time of Christ, then surely those who were ignorant and wicked would not be resurrected.⁶

Abinadi may not have known the details that made this possible, but knowing that faith in Christ, repentance, and baptism were essential for salvation, he surely recognized that there must be some means for the those in the post-mortal world to be counted among “those that have kept the commandments of God.” This inference, speculative as it may seem, should be considered in light of additional passages that may help reveal what may be an important but subtle sub-plot in the Book of Mormon that resonates with key priorities revealed in the earliest acts of the Restoration.

A Book for All Mankind

The more clearly we see eternity, the more obvious it becomes that the Lord's work in which we are engaged is one vast and grand work with striking similarities on each side of the veil.
— President Spencer W. Kimball⁷

6. Thompson, “Resurrection,” 123.

7. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Things of Eternity — Stand We in Jeopardy?,” *Ensign*, January 1977, 3, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1977/01/the-things-of-eternity-stand-we-in-jeopardy>.

When we speak of the *gathering*, we are simply saying this fundamental truth: every one of our Heavenly Father’s children, on both sides of the veil, deserves to hear the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. They decide for themselves if they want to know more. — President Russell M. Nelson⁸

We have considerable evidence that when Joseph Smith published the Book of Mormon, he did not understand the nature of the work of gathering taking place in the post-mortal world. It would be over ten years after the Church was organized before he would recognize the role of the Church in saving the dead.⁹ It would, therefore, be fascinating if the words of Book of Mormon prophets showed awareness of this concept long before it was revealed to Joseph.

Book of Mormon hints about the merciful opportunities provided for the dead to hear and accept the gospel can be found in multiple references about the purpose of the Book of Mormon itself. Consider these words of Mormon:

And now I, Mormon, being about to deliver up the record which I have been making into the hands of my son Moroni, behold I have witnessed almost all the destruction of my

8. Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, “Hope of Israel,” video, Worldwide Devotional for Youth, June 3, 2018, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2018/06/hope-of-israel>.

9. While the mercy of the Lord to those who died without hearing the Gospel was further revealed in 1836 when Joseph had a vision and saw his deceased brother Alvin in the celestial kingdom (D&C 137), the earliest indication of baptism for the dead was given on August 15, 1840, in statements Joseph Smith made at the funeral of Seymour Brunson. See *Historical Department Journal History of the Church, 1830–2008*, August 15, 1840, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=e442a380-ab26-49fc-8fbd-4576729e820f&crate=0&index=170> and *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, comps. and eds. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 49, <https://rsc.byu.edu/words-joseph-smith/15-august-1840-saturday>. This was followed by a revelation citing baptism for the dead in D&C 124:37–39, given in 1841, and more fully revealed in D&C 128 in 1842. For further details on the development of the doctrine of work for the dead, see Alexander L. Baugh, “‘For Their Salvation Is Necessary and Essential to Our Salvation’: Joseph Smith and the Practice of Baptism and Confirmation for the Dead,” in *An Eye of Faith: Essays in Honor of Richard O. Cowan*, eds. Kenneth L. Alford and Richard E. Bennett (Provo, UT / Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center; Brigham Young University / Deseret Book, 2015), 113–37, <https://rsc.byu.edu/eye-faith/their-salvation-necessary-essential-our-salvation-joseph-smith-practice-baptism>.

people, the Nephites. And it is many hundred years after the coming of Christ that I deliver these records into the hands of my son; and it supposeth me that he will witness the entire destruction of my people. But may God grant that he may survive them, that he may write somewhat concerning them, and somewhat concerning Christ, *that perhaps some day it may profit* them. (Words of Mormon 1:1–2)

Alma prophesied (and Mormon recorded) that the Nephites would become “extinct” (Alma 45:11). Any Nephites who remained in Moroni’s day were numbered among the Lamanites, meaning they were no longer Nephites (see Alma 45:11–14, see also 1 Nephi 15:5 and Moroni 1:1–3). For Moroni to “survive them” means they would be dead (see Mormon 6:11), yet Mormon’s words suggest that he believed that the sacred records he was turning over to Moroni might someday “profit them,” the destroyed and deceased Nephite people.

We may have previously read this passage as if Mormon were simply thinking about the future descendants of Lehi, both Lamanites and former Nephites who joined them, but in this passage, Mormon does not use the terms that are frequently used to describe the future remnants of Lehi’s posterity. After speaking of the Nephites about to be slain, he refers to “them;” the most natural reading is that the slain Nephite people are in his thoughts, and he yearns that his record will “profit them” in the future. Could it be that he believed their book could someday help them in the post-mortal world? Is there further evidence to support such a reading?

Out of the Books Which Shall Be Written Shall the World Be Judged

Peter wrote, “For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh” (1 Peter 4:6). Men in the flesh have the scriptures, the standards for that judgment. The Savior taught that “out of the books which shall be written shall the world be judged” (3 Nephi 27:26). Regarding the judgment, and his book, Mormon wrote:

And these things doth the Spirit manifest unto me; therefore I write unto you all. And for this cause I write unto you, that ye may know that ye must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, yea, every soul who belongs to the whole human family of Adam; and ye must stand to be judged of your works, whether they be good or evil;

And also that ye may believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, which ye shall have among you; and also that the Jews, the covenant people of the Lord, shall have other witness besides him whom they saw and heard, that Jesus, whom they slew, was the very Christ and the very God. (Mormon 3:20–21)

Some may assume he was writing to the Jews in general, not to those who slew their Messiah (see also 2 Nephi 25:17–18). But was not Mormon speaking to them and to “all”? Could not these words also indicate that Mormon was speaking to the entire House of Israel and indicating that the Book of Mormon would serve as a witness to help them believe the gospel of Jesus Christ?

The future role of the Book of Mormon is described several times in such universal terms, as when Moroni taught that the book “shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day” (Ether 5:4), suggesting that everyone in the world will have access to that book. Could that just be limited to the fortunate few who lived in the last days in those parts of the earth with significant missionary work?

The Savior Himself prophesied about the future role of the Book of Mormon. In 34 AD He told the people at Bountiful how they would know the latter-day gathering had commenced:

And verily I say unto you, *I give unto you a sign*, that ye may know the time when these things shall be about to take place -- that I shall gather in, from their long dispersion, my people, O house of Israel, and shall establish again among them my Zion. (3 Nephi 21:1)

The sign, He explained in the following verses (3 Nephi 21:2–11), would be, or at least include, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. We know those He was talking to would be long gone when that book came forth. Why would they care about that sign? The Savior told Joseph Smith why, citing what He had taught His disciples in Jerusalem:

And I will show it plainly as I showed it unto my disciples as I stood before them in the flesh, and spake unto them, saying: As ye have asked of me concerning the signs of my coming, in the day when I shall come in my glory in the clouds of heaven, to fulfil the promises that I have made unto your fathers, For as ye have looked upon the long absence of your spirits from your bodies to be a bondage, I will show unto you how the day of redemption shall come, and also the restoration of the scattered Israel. (D&C 45:16–17)

They will know when the Book of Mormon comes forth. The Savior, at Bountiful, continued, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, when these things shall be made known unto them [the gentiles] of the Father, and shall come forth of the Father, from them unto *you*” (3 Nephi 21:2–3).

He is not speaking here to corporate Israel, nor latter-day Israel, but to 34 AD Israel. We know this because the Lord then differentiated between them and their seed. Concerning their seed, the Savior continued:

For it is wisdom in the Father that they should be established in this land, and be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, that these things might come forth from them [the gentiles] unto a remnant of your seed, that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel;

Therefore, when these works and the works which shall be wrought among you hereafter shall come forth from the Gentiles, unto your seed which shall dwindle in unbelief because of iniquity; ...

And when these things come to pass that thy seed shall begin to know these things — it shall be a sign unto them, that they may know that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel. (3 Nephi 21:4–5, 7)

Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni each said they were writing to “the ends of the earth” (Mormon 9:21; 2 Nephi 29:2; Mormon 3:18; see also 3 Nephi 27:20). They said they were writing to “all.” Does that mean all those in the last days only? Perhaps not, for Mormon seems to be saying he was offering another witness to those who saw and heard and slew Jesus. The Savior seems to be saying that those people, long dead, and their seed would see that sign and have access to the Book of Mormon.

What would be the purpose of such access or knowledge? The Book of Mormon can hardly benefit anyone without the atonement of Jesus Christ. Its purpose is to bring souls to Christ, and receiving the full blessings offered by the grace of Christ requires faith, repentance, and baptism. If Mormon knew his book would go to the dead, he may also have known that baptism would be made available to them. Reading a book about Christ in hell, without access to His atonement, would only add coal to the fire. This suggests he recognized that the work for the dead would be underway in our day, a day in which his sacred record would benefit both the living and the dead.

The Book of Mormon Reads Equally Well on Both Sides of the Veil

Joseph Smith taught:

All things whatsoever God in his infinite wisdom has seen fit and proper to reveal to us, while we are dwelling in mortality, in regard to our mortal bodies, are revealed to us in the abstract, and independent of affinity of this mortal tabernacle, but are revealed to our spirits precisely as though we had no bodies at all.¹⁰

We can, therefore, expect the Book of Mormon to apply equally to those with or without bodies, on either side of the veil. Imagine reading that book in hell. As Nephi's record begins, we learn that an angel delivered a book to his father:

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.

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! (1 Nephi 1:13–14)

In that passage, Lehi saw the impending destruction of family and friends. If God's goodness and mercy doesn't include them, his rejoicing seems incongruent. On the other hand, if "all" really means all, the passage makes more sense. God's mercy is available whether we are in our bodies or not.

A Marvelous Work for All

When I ask my students, "How many people were baptized into our church last year?" they generally reply, "About 250,000." I then

10. "The King Follett Sermon," *Ensign*, May 1971, 15, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1971/05/the-king-follett-sermon>. See also *Teachings of The Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 355.

remind them that the real figure is millions, taking into account the work on the other side of the veil. So which church did Mormon see, the one of Joseph Smith's day which baptized thousands, or the one gathering millions (and striving to ultimately gather all)? When the Book of Mormon authors talked about our church, they almost always used the word "all."

Of that work, the Lord at Bountiful continued:

For in that day, for my sake shall the Father work a work, which shall be a great and a marvelous work among them ...

And they [the gentiles] shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob, and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem. And then shall they assist my people that they may be gathered in, who are scattered upon all the face of the land, in unto the New Jerusalem.

And then shall the power of heaven come down among them; and I also will be in the midst.

And then shall the work of the Father commence at that day, even when this gospel shall be preached among the remnant of this people. Verily I say unto you, at that day shall the work of the Father commence among *all* the dispersed of my people, yea, even the tribes which have been lost, which the Father hath led away out of Jerusalem.

Yea, the work shall commence among *all* the dispersed of my people, with the Father to prepare the way whereby they may come unto me, that they may call on the Father in my name.

Yea, and then shall the work commence, with the Father among *all* nations in preparing the way whereby his people may be gathered home to the land of their inheritance.

(3 Nephi 21: 9, 23, 25–28)

Likewise, Ezekiel was shown that "the whole house of Israel" will be gathered home to the land of their inheritance (see Ezekiel 37:11, 12). Nephi finished his small plates with the following.

And now, my beloved brethren, all those who are of the house of Israel, and all ye ends of the earth, I speak unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust: Farewell until that great day shall come.

And you that will not partake of the goodness of God, and respect the words of the Jews, and also my words, and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day. (2 Nephi 33:13–14)

Words that condemn when ignored surely bless when followed. Those words, the words of the Book of Mormon, will be used to bless or judge *all* those who are of the house of Israel, and *all* the ends of the earth. Like Mormon, Nephi was writing not just to the House of Israel, but to the “ends of the earth”:

And now, my beloved brethren, and also Jew, and all ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good. (2 Nephi 33:10)

A Book for Lamanites and Nephites

Mormon and Moroni wrote specifically to the Lamanites of the last days (see the title page and Mormon 7), knowing that the Nephites would be entirely destroyed (Helaman 3:16). In our day the missionaries were called to go amongst the “Lamanites” (see D&C 32:2), not the “Lamanites and Nephites.” The once great Nephite civilization was destroyed (D&C 3:18). It is, therefore, interesting that, when Joseph Smith lost the 116 pages, the Lord told him:

Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people —

And to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers.
(D&C 3:16–17)

Note that while this passage in D&C 3 speaks of the knowledge of the Savior reaching the Nephites and associated groups through the Book of Mormon, the next verse (v. 18) reminds us that the Lord allowed the Lamanites “to *destroy* their brethren the Nephites, because of their iniquities and abominations.” There may not be any surviving group today that identifies as or can be identified as Nephites, Jacobites,

Josephites, etc., but there certainly are in the spirit world, where the words “my work shall go forth” and “even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people” may be especially appropriate.

Speaking of the last days when God’s word will be gathered into one, the Lord prophesied:

And it shall come to pass that the Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews; and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel; and the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews.

And it shall come to pass that my people, which are of the house of Israel, shall be gathered home unto the lands of their possessions; and my word also shall be gathered in one. And I will show unto them that fight against my word and against my people, who are of the house of Israel, that I am God, and that I covenanted with Abraham that I would remember his seed forever. (2 Nephi 29:13–14)

A Book for the Whole House of Israel

We cannot assume God will only remember Abraham’s seed living in the last days. Regarding that gathering, and regarding inheriting the lands of their possessions, Ezekiel prophesied:

Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are *the whole house of Israel*: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.

Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. (Ezekiel 37:11–12)

A few verses later, the Lord said, “then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for *all* the house of Israel his companions” (Ezekiel 37:16). From the Latter-day Saint perspective, Ezekiel 37 may be consistent with the gathering of Israel both for the living and the dead, with v.16 being understood to refer to the Book of Mormon (D&C 27:5), which is meant to benefit “all the house of Israel.”

Mormon and Moroni wrote specifically to the Lamanites. But they also wrote to the “Jews or all the house of Israel” (Mormon 5:14)

and the gentiles — meaning the rest of mankind (see title page and Mormon 3:18-20) — and all the ends of the earth (2 Nephi 29:2; 2 Nephi 33:10–13; 3 Nephi 27:20; Mormon 3:18–22; Moroni 10:24), which, we will see, means the entire human family.

Further, Mormon explained:

And behold, they [the words of The Book of Mormon] shall go unto the unbelieving of the Jews; and for this intent shall they go — that they may be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; that the Father may bring about, through his most Beloved, his great and eternal purpose, in restoring the Jews, or *all the house of Israel*, to the land of their inheritance, which the Lord their God hath given them, unto the fulfilling of his covenant ... (Mormon 5:14).

Mormon seems to be saying the house of Israel will be restored to the land of their inheritance when they accept Jesus Christ through the instrumentality of the Book of Mormon. To accept their Redeemer, they must be baptized. That, we know, requires the priesthood authority found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is good to keep in mind the broad scope of its mission.

In considering the importance of words such as “all” and the “ends of the earth,” we must note that some absolute terms in the scriptures must be understood with caution, as they may sometimes be used as a figure of speech for emphasis. Eve, after all, was not technically “the mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20) — yes, humans, but not animals or plants, which we now consider living. And we do not assume “all Judaea” literally went out to meet John the Baptist (Matthew 3:5). However, there does not seem to be reason to propose limitations on the intended scope of the Lord’s intention to bring the gospel message to all.

A Church for All Mankind

As previously mentioned, when the Book of Mormon authors talked about our church, they often used the word “all.” This terminology is echoed in the words of modern-day prophets like President Hinckley, who said our church is for “all” many times. For example, President Hinckley once spoke of the threefold mission of the church and its scope:

[The Lord] has given us a three-fold mission: first, the teaching of the restored gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; second, the building of the Saints in their faith and encouraging them in all of their activities to walk in obedience to the

commandments of the Lord; and third, the great work of salvation for the dead. This vast mission contemplates all generations of mankind — those who have gone before, all who live upon the earth, and those who will yet be born. It is larger than any race or nation or generation. It encompasses all mankind.¹¹

President Hinckley also said, “Keep before you the big picture, for this cause is as large as all mankind and as broad as all eternity. This is the church and kingdom of God.”¹² Further, Joseph F. Smith taught:

The work in which Joseph Smith was engaged was not confined to this life alone, but it pertains as well to the life to come, and to the life that has been. In other words, it relates to those who have lived upon the earth, to those who are living and to those who shall come after us. It is not something which relates to man only while he tabernacles in the flesh, but to the whole human family from eternity to eternity.¹³

This modern community understands that our church — its teachings and ordinances — is for all people, living and dead. Salvation for the dead is not a new concept for us. But perhaps we tend to think the ancients saw our church as being more for us than them, as we also see latter-day prophecies as being for latter-day saints. We may not consider that the ancients looked upon a future restoration of teachings and truths with anything like self-interest, but they must have had a sense that it would provide not only future salvation, but their own as well.

Commenting on Isaiah’s prophecy about our church (see Isaiah 49:22), Nephi taught:

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

11. Gordon B. Hinckley, “He Slumbers Not, nor Sleeps,” *Ensign*, May 1983, 8, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1983/04/he-slumbers-not-nor-sleeps>.

12. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Five Million Members — A Milestone and Not a Summit,” *Ensign*, May 1982, 46, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1982/04/five-million-members-a-milestone-and-not-a-summit>.

13. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, comp. John Andreas Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1919), 608, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Gospel_Doctrine/UnlVAAAAYAAJ.

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. (1 Nephi 22:6)

Those “days to come” are the latter days. We know that the standard referred to is associated with the restored church. And yet Nephi was claiming it for his people (“and it meaneth us”), as well as all the house of Israel. Later, Nephi asked his brother Jacob to speak to his brothers about the same prophecy:

And now, behold, I would speak unto you concerning things which are, and which are to come; wherefore, I will read you the words of Isaiah. And they are the words which my brother has desired that I should speak unto you. *And I speak unto you for your sakes*, that ye may learn and glorify the name of your God.

And now, the words which I shall read are they which Isaiah spake *concerning all the house of Israel*; wherefore, they may be likened unto you, for ye are of the house of Israel. And there are many things which have been spoken by Isaiah which may be likened unto you, because ye are of the house of Israel.

And now, these are the words: 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. (2 Nephi 6:4–6)

Some may interpret this prophecy to mean the latter-day Zion will bless Israel’s children living in the last days, which of course is true. But that hardly constitutes “all the house of Israel.” What about Israel’s children who lived in 1492? Surely, they are also part of “all.” If the standard mentioned by Nephi is not for them, then the teachings of Jacob and Nephi would be difficult to understand. On the other hand, if they saw our church the way we do, as really being for all, their words make perfect sense.

The reference to that standard to be raised was central in Nephi’s commentary on two chapters of Isaiah (Isaiah 48 and 49 in 1 Nephi 20 and 21). Before reading those chapters to his brothers, he identified Isaiah’s intended audience:

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

likened 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. (1 Nephi 19:24)

Those “from whom [they had] been broken off” ended up in Babylon. They were taken into bondage because they, like the ten tribes, hardened their hearts against the Holy One of Israel (see 1 Nephi 22:5). The first chapter Nephi quoted from Isaiah (Isaiah 48) is about Israel being chosen in the furnace of affliction and eventually returning to Jerusalem. The furnace-like nightmare of being torn from home and family, scattered, and made to serve in bondage must have refined many of them. Yet most of Israel, even if penitent, would find themselves without the gospel in mortality. We know that those who would have accepted the gospel in this life, if they had had the opportunity, can be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God (D&C 137:7). We know that will require the latter-day church that Nephi spoke so much about.

Perhaps this is related to Nephi’s purposes in also quoting the next chapter of Isaiah, Isaiah 49. It speaks of prisoners being freed from what may be spirit prison (1 Nephi 21:9), the Lord assuring Israel that He had not forgotten them (1 Nephi 21:14–16), and the standard to be raised in the last days (1 Nephi 21:22). Commenting on that standard, Nephi spoke of a “marvelous work,” with the Lord “bringing about his covenants and his gospel” (see 1 Nephi 22:8–11). In other words, he emphasized the Restoration.

But for whom that Restoration is intended may be his most important teaching. After quoting those Isaiah chapters, he then explains, “And since they [the ten tribes] have been led away, these things have been prophesied *concerning them, and also concerning all those who shall hereafter be scattered and be confounded*” (1 Nephi 22:5). Combining this with his introduction to the Isaiah chapters, it is as if he said, “The latter-day Zion is for those who have been scattered, those who are now being scattered, and those who would hereafter be scattered and confounded. It is for all the house of Israel.”

Hope

Nephi said Isaiah’s words offered hope to all the house of Israel. “That thou mayest say to the prisoners: Go forth” (1 Nephi 21:9) could give them hope. But can they “go forth” without baptism? Is hope possible without baptism? Nephi didn’t think so. He later wrote:

I also have charity for the Gentiles. But behold, for none of these can I hope except they shall be reconciled unto Christ,

and enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path which leads to life, and continue in the path until the end of the day of probation. (2 Nephi 33:9)

This makes most sense if viewed in light of the work of baptism for the dead. How else could our church offer ancient Israel hope? There is no hope in telling wayward people, “Although you’re going to hell, at least your children (or parts of a future corporate Israel) will be saved.” Hope is deeply personal. Notwithstanding all our Savior has done for us, without access to his atonement, we are hopeless. His atonement makes salvation possible. Zion makes it available. So, although there is a strong reference to Christ’s atonement in the chapters Nephi read (see 1 Nephi 21:14–16), he centered on Zion. Even in that reference, Christ’s church is part of the picture:

Zion hath said: The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me — but he will show that he hath not. ... Yea ... I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me. (1 Nephi 21:14–16)

Those walls (as we will see) can be understood as the latter-day Zion. Surely, they are continually before Him because they are His mechanism for saving the world. Zion has everything to do with how we will be saved.

The phrase “but he will show that he hath not,” is not found in the King James version of Isaiah. That prophecy was, at least in one way, fulfilled by the drama surrounding King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. The monarch’s outlandish demands for the interpretation of that dream would have made it very public, and Daniel’s resulting interpretation would serve to remind the people that the Lord had not forgotten them, and that His kingdom yet had a destiny. Isaiah’s prophecy, coupled with Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, could indeed give the Israelites hope, but only if they realized the walls of Isaiah’s prophecy have a gate, and that one day, they could go through it. Isaiah’s message could have given exiled Israelites hope, as Nephi said, particularly if we consider the opportunity they could have later in the spirit world to accept the fullness of the gospel.

Can they accept their Redeemer without baptism? Jacob did not seem to think so. He connected all of Israel being gathered to lands of inheritance with them coming into God’s true church:

And now, my beloved brethren, I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the house of Israel —

That he has spoken unto the Jews, by the mouth of his holy prophets, even from the beginning down, from generation to generation, until the time comes that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God; when they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise. (2 Nephi 9:1–2)

When commenting on the prophet Zenos’s allegory (which is about the gathering of Israel), Jacob exclaimed, “how merciful is our God unto *us*, for he remembereth the house of Israel, both roots and branches” (Jacob 6:4). We have no problem conceptualizing how the branches will be gathered (grafted in) in the last days. But the word “us” includes the roots. The roots, we know, are ancient Israel. “And, behold, the roots . . . are yet alive” (Jacob 5:54). Branches need roots and roots need branches. Jacob’s statement suggests we are all in this together. We all need The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (which shows up in the allegory in Jacob 5:61).

When the standard (associated with the latter-day church) is raised, and Israel’s seed is nourished, that seed does not comprise all the house of Israel. They are Israel’s children living in the last days:

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.

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. (1 Nephi 22:8–9)

We understand how Abraham’s seed will bless all the families of the earth. We understand how our mission encompasses all mankind. Nephi understood the same, evidenced by his subsequent explanation that blessing all the kindreds of the earth necessitated the Lord establishing His church in the last days:

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.

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.
(1 Nephi 22:10–11)

Immediately after these verses, Nephi uses the word *wherefore* to show that as a consequence of God “bringing about his covenants and his gospel,” He will provide means to save the dead:

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. (1 Nephi 22:12)

This refers to those (as Nephi said) who hardened their hearts against the Holy One of Israel (see 1 Nephi 22:5). It refers (as Nephi said) to “all the house of Israel.” It is indeed (as Nephi and Isaiah called it) a “marvelous work” (1 Nephi 22:8).

Did They Know the Gospel Would Be Preached to The Dead?

King Benjamin described two groups who are considered blameless after death. The first is those who die without the gospel. “For behold, and also his blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned” (Mosiah 3:11). The second are children who die before the age of accountability. “For behold he judgeth, and his judgment is just; and the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy” (Mosiah 3:18). Little children and those who sinned in ignorance are blameless, through the Atonement of Christ. Then he spoke of the time when knowledge of the gospel will be available to all:

And moreover, I say unto you, that the time shall come when the knowledge of a Savior shall spread throughout every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. And behold, when that time cometh, none shall be found blameless before God, except it be little children, only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent. (Mosiah 3:20–21)

It seems he went from two blameless groups to only one. If so, that’s reasonable, for once the gospel is taken to every people, ignorance will no longer serve as an excuse. Little children will be blameless, but as we now understand, those who are accountable and who die in their ignorance do not remain in their ignorance, receiving instruction and opportunity to make sacred covenants. While it is not clear if King

Benjamin understood that the message of the victory of Christ would also go to those who had died in ignorance, he recognized the hope that was available for them, which, as previously discussed, was more fully expressed by Abinadi (see Mosiah 15:24–30).

Did They Know Spirits in Hell Could Be Redeemed? Or That Hell Can Be Temporary?

Jacob told his brothers that they could “rejoice, and lift up [their] heads forever, because of the blessings which the Lord God shall bestow upon [their] children” (2 Nephi 9:3). Many of their children would perish because of unbelief (see 2 Nephi 10:2). We know, as did Jacob, that those who perish in unbelief end up in spirit prison. That pertained directly to Jacob’s point — God prepared a way to get them out. “O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit” (2 Nephi 9:10). As we will see, to escape is not just keeping people out of hell, it includes getting people out.

Of that deliverance, Jacob continued, “and hell must deliver up its captive spirits, and the grave must deliver up its captive bodies, and the bodies and the spirits of men will be restored one to the other” (2 Nephi 9:12). Jacob then added that those in paradise would also be resurrected and judged. Then he continued:

And it shall come to pass that when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal, they must appear before the judgment-seat of the Holy One of Israel ...

And assuredly, as the Lord liveth ... they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still; wherefore, they who are filthy are the devil and his angels; and they shall go away into everlasting fire, prepared for them; and their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever and has no end. (2 Nephi 9:15–16)

When Jacob taught that those in hell are brought out and judged, he implicitly indicated that there is a possibility for salvation for the dead — unless after that judgment they are all sent back. Enoch saw “And as many of the spirits as were in prison came forth, and stood on the right hand of God; and the remainder were reserved in chains of darkness until the judgment of the great day” (Moses 7:57).

Among that “remainder” will be those who are considered “filthy still.” This seems to refer to the sons of perdition (see D&C 76:33–39, 88:35,102). The Lord revealed that He “saves all the works of his hands, except those sons of perdition who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him” (D&C 76:43, cf. vv. 31–32).

At the end of Jacob’s record, he described again the torment of those who are “filthy still” in a passage that suggests that those numerous sinners who are thrust into hell face endless torment there, as if their lots were like the sons of perdition:

For behold, after ye have been nourished by the good word of God all the day long, will ye bring forth evil fruit, that ye must be hewn down and cast into the fire?

Behold, will ye reject these words? Will ye reject the words of the prophets; and will ye reject all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ, after so many have spoken concerning him; and deny the good word of Christ, and the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and quench the Holy Spirit, and make a mock of the great plan of redemption, which hath been laid for you?

Know ye not that if ye will do these things, that the power of the redemption and the resurrection, which is in Christ, will bring you to stand with shame and awful guilt before the bar of God?

And according to the power of justice, for justice cannot be denied, ye must go away into that lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever, which lake of fire and brimstone is endless torment.

O then, my beloved brethren, repent ye, and enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until ye shall obtain eternal life. (Jacob 6:7–11).

However, through modern revelation, we understand that truly endless punishment in hell is not the common lot of most sinners, and though they may face exposure to the torments of “eternal torment” for a finite time, as explained in D&C 19:4–12 (compare also Alma₂’s suffering, “racked with eternal torment” and “tormented with the pains of hell” for a period of three days in Alma 36:12–16). President Spencer W. Kimball noted it would be “manifestly impossible for the

rank and file [members of the Church] to commit such a sin” as the sin against the Holy Ghost and become sons of perdition.¹⁴

If defecting to perdition is rare, then why does the Book of Mormon often describe hell in such dramatic terms as if it were eternal? Section 19 of the Doctrine and Covenants suggests that the terminology is accurate but ambiguous to stir men up to repentance (eternal punishment is God’s punishment since God is eternal, but such “eternal” torment may be temporary). Enos 1:23 also indicates that harsh language about punishment and eternity was necessary to stir the Nephite to repentance.

King Benjamin and Jesus Christ referred to hell “from whence [the wicked] can no more return” (see Mosiah 3:24–27; 3 Nephi 27:16–19). This, too, may be intentionally ambiguous to “work upon the hearts of the children of men” (D&C 19:7). But we need not assume “return” means they never get out of hell. Jeff Lindsay offers a viable explanation:

The verb *return* requires a frame of reference. Return to where? If I leave Wisconsin by going to China and never return, that doesn’t require that I stay in China forever. I may be in China for a week, then go to Europe or New Zealand for years.

The Book of Mormon concept of “from whence” one does not “return” has to be considered in light of the earliest use of this language in Father Lehi’s farewell speech:

Awake! and arise from the dust, and hear the words of a trembling parent, whose limbs ye must soon lay down in the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveler can return; a few more days and I go the way of all the earth. (2 Nephi 1:14)

Lehi is bidding farewell to his family and speaks of going soon to the grave, “from whence no traveler can return.” So did Lehi mean that for him there would be no resurrection? That he would be dead forever? If so, why did he then go on to bear witness of Christ and the Resurrection, telling us that Christ would “bring to pass the resurrection of the dead” (2 Nephi 2:8)? But here it is clear what Lehi’s frame of reference is: the mortal world. Lehi will die and will never return to be among his family and be part of this mortal life. But he knew

14. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 123.

that he would rise again and have eternal life. But once he died, he would never return to mortality.¹⁵

Lindsay also explains that when the Book of Mormon speaks of the wicked never returning after being judged (Mosiah 2:23–27; 3 Nephi 27:11, 16–17), the frame of reference appears to be the presence of Christ. The unrepentant wicked will never return to dwell in the presence of God and the Son, but that does not mean they dwell in hell forever.¹⁶

The authors of the Book of Mormon let us know that they also knew hell was not necessarily forever. H. Donl Peterson points out that the Book of Mormon at times describes hell as a temporary place,¹⁷ consistent with this passage:

Now this is the state of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them; thus *they remain in this state, as well as the righteous in paradise, until the time of their resurrection.* (Alma 40:14)

It seems that at least some Book of Mormon authors may have viewed hell much as we do, as a temporary place for many and a permanent place for a few. Mormon, like Jacob (see Jacob 6:11), described a way out of hell. Imagine reading the following in spirit prison:

Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name.

Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.

Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked —

15. Jeff Lindsay, “‘From Whence They Can No More Return’: What Lehi Teaches Us About the Book of Mormon’s Harsh Language on Hell,” *Mormanity* (blog), December 5, 2020, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2020/12/from-when-they-can-no-more-return-what.html>.

16. *Ibid.*

17. H. Donl Peterson, “What is the meaning of the Book of Mormon scriptures on eternal hell for the wicked?” *I Have a Question*, *Ensign*, April 1986, 36–38, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1986/04/i-have-a-question/what-is-the-meaning-of-the-book-of-mormon-scriptures-on-eternal-hell-for-the-wicked>.

And land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out. (Helaman 3:27–30; cf. Moses 7:57)

Considering the other teachings discussed above, this passage from the Book of Mormon may extend hope not only to those fortunate enough to read its message in this life, but to many more who may be reached with this message in the next.

An Equal Opportunity Salvation

There are some verses in the Book of Mormon that can be read two ways. For example, verses teaching that God will gather Israel to their lands of inheritance could refer to the living, the dead, or both. We presume the answer is both. But we don't always know the mind of the author. The following, however, doesn't seem to leave any question. Nephi taught:

After my seed and the seed of my brethren shall have dwindled in unbelief, and shall have been smitten by the Gentiles ... and after they shall have been brought down low in the dust, even that they are not, yet the words of the righteous shall be written, and the prayers of the faithful shall be heard, and *all those who have dwindled in unbelief shall not be forgotten.* (2 Nephi 26:15)

After their seed have dwindled in unbelief and perished, they shall not be forgotten. Indeed “all those who have dwindled in unbelief shall not be forgotten.” But who will remember them, and what does it mean to be remembered?

Obviously, it is God who will remember them (see 1 Nephi 21:14–16; 2 Nephi 29:2; Jacob 6:4). Remembering implies more than just mental awareness. It suggests He will do something on their behalf in consequence of the prayers of the faithful. Isaiah prophesied,

But, behold, Zion hath said: The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me — but he will show that he hath not.

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.

Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me. (1 Nephi 21:14–16)

Wilford Woodruff, referring to this passage, said, “Any man who has ever read the book of Isaiah ... can see that he, with other prophets,

had his eye upon the latter-day Zion of God.”¹⁸ Hence, the Lord connects remembering Israel to His Atonement (palms) and His church (walls). To remember them is to seek to save them.

Long before any of Lehi’s seed dwindled in unbelief, God promised Abraham He would remember them. “I covenanted with Abraham that I would remember his seed forever” (2 Nephi 29:14). Indeed, He “remembereth every creature of his creating, he will make himself manifest unto all” (Mosiah 27:30). God does not love some less because of their race or ethnicity, their gender, their age, their social status, etc. Indeed, as David Belnap points out with extensive documentation, the Book of Mormon — contrary to what some may assume or assert — is remarkable in its consistent and abundantly evidenced message of inclusion and anti-discrimination.¹⁹ If, in the words of Nephi, God “denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile” (2 Nephi 26:33), then obviously God does not favor the living over the dead. The plan of salvation is an equal opportunity plan, and the modern Church plays a critical role in making that opportunity equal for all.

Jacob spoke of many of his people perishing in unbelief, but he knew they would be restored to the knowledge of Christ:

For behold, the promises which we have obtained are promises unto us according to the flesh; wherefore, as it has been shown unto me that *many of our children shall perish in the flesh because of unbelief, nevertheless, God will be merciful unto many*; and our children shall be restored, that they may come to that which will give them the true knowledge of their Redeemer. (2 Nephi 10:2)

While all will be remembered, not all will accept the offered mercy. But many will.

18. Wilford Woodruff, in *Journal of Discourses*, 15:7–8, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/5904>.

19. David M. Belnap, “The Inclusive, Anti-Discrimination Message of the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*, 42 (2021): 195–370, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-inclusive-anti-discrimination-message-of-the-book-of-mormon/>.

The Ends of the Earth

The three primary authors of the Book of Mormon said they were writing to “the ends of the earth” (see 2 Nephi 33:10; Mormon 3:18; Moroni 10:24). When Jacob says “all” in the following passage it is clear he means “every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.” The last “all men” in this passage is significant:

And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.

And he suffereth this that the resurrection might pass upon all men, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day.

And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God. (2 Nephi 9:21–23).

The command for all men to repent was reiterated by the Lord during His ministry to the Nephites, using the phrase “all ye ends of the earth,” to describe the scope of this call. After explaining to His twelve disciples that He will draw all men unto Him, He said:

Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day. (3 Nephi 27:20)

”All ye ends of the earth” seems to be synonymous with “every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.” And the standard that will be raised up, the words of the Nephites in the Book of Mormon, shall “hiss forth unto the ends of the earth” (2 Nephi 29:2). It is a merciful gift offered widely but not accepted by all. It is a gift not limited to the fortunate people born in the latter days, but to all. In our day the Lord prophesied:

For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated. ... Wherefore the voice of the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear. (D&C 1:2, 11)

Many people will not have eyes to see or means to fairly consider and accept the gospel message in mortality. Perhaps the vast majority of

mankind will hear and feel these things after this life. Evangelizing in the spirit world may be a crucial path for carrying the Lord's voice and word "the ends of the earth."

The Role of the Church in the Plan of Salvation

2 Nephi 12 is about the latter-day temple, gathering of Israel, Christ's second coming, and millennial judgment and peace (see 2 Nephi 12 chapter heading). Before quoting Isaiah in that chapter, Nephi gave this introduction:

And now I write some of the words of Isaiah, that whoso of my people shall see these words may lift up their hearts and rejoice for all men. Now these are the words, and ye may liken them unto you and unto all men. (2 Nephi 11:8)

If we did not know our church could help save the dead, if we did not know the gathering would take place on both sides of the veil, what would we make of Nephi saying these things are for "all men"? How could someone who died in 1776 liken Isaiah's message unto himself? For us, that is not a hard question.

Peter spoke of the "restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:21). Why would those prophets or their people care? Because their salvation depends upon that Restoration. Christ's Latter-day church, the stone that will fill the earth, has a role that reaches across the centuries, across the veil between the living and the dead. It is, as the Book of Mormon repeatedly claims, for all. We can, therefore, assume its keystone is for all as well.

When Nephi told his brothers about the latter-day church, he said they could "liken" Isaiah's words unto themselves (see 1 Nephi 19:24) because those words applied to them. Isaiah's latter-day prophecies offered them hope.

That constitutes a shift in how we see the plan of salvation, for we traditionally have not included our church in the picture. It constitutes a shift in how we think the ancients saw Christ's latter-day church. They may have seen it at least somewhat how we see it, as being for all mankind, with a role that will bless the living in this era and the dead from all the ends of the earth and across the centuries. Its work, coupled with the evangelization in the spirit world organized by Christ, is intended to bring the power and love of Jesus Christ to all men.

Conclusion

There are multiple teachings in the Book of Mormon that allow a case to be made that some writers understood the possibility of people hearing and accepting the good news of Jesus Christ in the spirit world. They may have understood that the glorious message of the Book of Mormon would serve as a precious testament of Christ, not just to a few lucky people in our day, but as a tool for missionary work to countless more on both sides of the veil.

This may be another example of a subplot to the text. It appears the ancients may even have understood what an important role the Restored Church would play in bringing great blessings to the Nephites, the Lamanites, and their descendants, both in this life and in the spirit world. The work of the Church, the ministry of Jesus Christ, can reach them even there and let them know they are not cast off forever, as they will learn from the Book of Mormon and its message of grace, coupled with the ubiquitous word “all.”

Jacob asked, “And now, my beloved, how is it possible that these, after having rejected the sure foundation, can ever build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner?” (Jacob 4:17). Who are “these”? Are they those who rejected Him roughly 2000 years ago or their descendants who are an extension of them? Yes. As to how they — individually or as a people — could ever build on Him, Jacob’s answer was the same — Zenos’s allegory. He concluded, “And how merciful is our God unto *us* for he remembereth the house of Israel, *both roots and branches*” (Jacob 6:4). Who is this Savior who immediately after His death prepared a way for saving (to some degree) all, including those who had just rejected Him?

Six times in the Doctrine and Covenants He said, “I am the same that came unto mine own, and mine own received me not” (D&C 6:21). How that must have hurt Him! “And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads” (Mark 15:29). He could have destroyed them in an instant, but bore their insults, as well as their sins, meekly. And yet the moment He declared “It is finished” (John 19:30), He set out to reclaim them. Even they will not be forgotten.

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