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The Fulness of the Gospel: Foundational Teachings from the Book of Mormon

Editor(s): Camille Fronk Olson, Brian M. Hauglid, Patty Smith, and Thomas A. Wayment
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Abstract: The first publication of the Book of Mormon was completed only a few days before the Church was organized. The Lord revealed that it "contains a record of a fallen people, and the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Before the revelation was received on the organization of priesthood quorums, before the vision of the three degrees of glory, before knowledge of vicarious work for the dead, and before Joseph Smith was instructed to begin an inspired translation of the Bible, the Book of Mormon was received as scripture for all members of the Church. As the "keystone" containing a "fulness of the gospel," the Book of Mormon connects, enhances, and clarifies the other standard works. This volume was published to encourage all who read it to discover and rediscover for themselves that the Book of Mormon does indeed contain the fulness of the gospel.



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*T*HE FULNESS
OF THE
*G*OSPEL



Sidney B. Sperry

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THE FULNESS OF THE GOSPEL

FOUNDATIONAL TEACHINGS
FROM THE BOOK OF MORMON

THE 32ND ANNUAL
SIDNEY B. SPERRY SYMPOSIUM



DESERET
BOOK

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH



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PREFACE

*T*HE FIRST PUBLICATION OF THE Book of Mormon was completed only a few days before the Church was organized. At that time, the Lord revealed that this book “contains a record of a fallen people, and the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and to the Jews also; . . . proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old; thereby showing that he is the same God yesterday, today, and forever” (D&C 20:9–12).

Before the revelation was received for priesthood quorums, before the vision of the three degrees of glory, before knowledge of vicarious work for the dead, and before Joseph Smith was instructed to begin an inspired translation of the Bible, the Book of Mormon was received as scripture for all members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In surveying the great truths that God had restored to the earth, Joseph Smith declared that “the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion” (introduction to the Book of Mormon).

As the “keystone” containing a “fulness of the gospel,” the Book

of Mormon connects, enhances, and clarifies the other standard works. The Book of Mormon firmly establishes the core doctrines of the gospel. President Ezra Taft Benson explained that the “fulness of the gospel” does not mean that the Book of Mormon “contains every teaching, every doctrine ever revealed. Rather, it means that in the Book of Mormon we will find the fulness of those doctrines required for our salvation. And they are taught plainly and simply so that even children can learn the ways of salvation and exaltation. The Book of Mormon offers so much that broadens our understandings of the doctrines of salvation. Without it, much of what is taught in other scriptures would not be nearly so plain and precious” (*A Witness and a Warning* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988], 18–19).

The purpose of this volume is to explore core doctrines and teachings found in the Book of Mormon to bring the reader to a greater realization and appreciation of the book’s transcending worth. Each author has combined testimony with scholarship to provide insights, applications, and connections to gospel truths. Essays on the Fall of man and the Atonement of Jesus Christ are included as two foundational doctrines. Also addressed in this work are articles on the nature and function of covenants, the simplicity evident in accessing repentance through faith in Christ, the importance of our works in conjunction with Christ’s grace, and the uses and abuses of moral agency.

Topics such as the identity of the “Gentiles,” Isaiah’s writings as understood by the Nephites, Christ’s role as “Father,” and the meaning of the phrase “plain and precious truths” receive elucidation among the included essays. Other articles address such timely subjects as war among people of God, parenting in a challenging world, recognizing God’s mercy, showing mercy ourselves through forgiveness, and deciphering the fine line between hedonism and holiness. One essay surveys the entire Book of Mormon by suggesting a much broader understanding for the “wise purpose” of this book of scripture than what is typically seen.

Collectively, the articles in this volume point to the central and pivotal role of our Savior, Jesus Christ. They encourage the reader

to have greater faith in Christ through the witness of the Book of Mormon. They reconfirm the unparalleled invitation to come unto Christ and become like Him.

We gratefully acknowledge the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University for their expertise in copyediting, proofreading, and preparing this volume for publication.

We hope that this volume will encourage all who read to discover and rediscover for themselves that the Book of Mormon does indeed contain the fulness of the gospel.

The 2003 Sidney B. Sperry Symposium Committee

Camille Fronk

Brian M. Hauglid

Patty A. Smith

Thomas A. Wayment

1

"MAKE PLAIN THE OLD PATHS"

THE RESTORATION OF PLAIN AND PRECIOUS TRUTHS

Clyde J. Williams

IN NOVEMBER 1843 THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH wrote the following to a new member of the Church: "The fact is, that by the power of God I translated the Book of Mormon from hieroglyphics, the knowledge of which was lost to the world, in which wonderful event I stood alone, an unlearned youth, to combat the worldly wisdom and multiplied ignorance of eighteen centuries, with a new revelation, which (if they would receive the everlasting Gospel,) would open the eyes of [the world], and make 'plain the old paths,' wherein if a man walk in all the ordinances of God blameless, he shall inherit eternal life."¹

In the spring of 1820, Joseph had learned from his First Vision that the churches of his day were teaching creeds and doctrines that were wrong (see Joseph Smith—History 1:18–19). However, it would not be until several years later while Joseph was translating the Book of Mormon that he would more clearly come to understand why the doctrine of the churches was corrupt. From a vision

Clyde J. Williams is an associate professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

given to the prophet Nephi, Joseph learned that when the ancient prophets and apostles had written their books, they came forth “in purity” (1 Nephi 13:25). As their writings went forth, parts of the gospel that were “plain and most precious” and “covenants of the Lord” were “taken away” (1 Nephi 13:26). Nephi saw that these changes and omissions would cause “an exceedingly great many [to] stumble” (1 Nephi 13:29). Because Satan would gain great power through all of this, the Lord promised Nephi He would counter these efforts by bringing forth “much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious” (1 Nephi 13:34).

Many who are unfamiliar with the Book of Mormon have had the mistaken notion that it was written to somehow supplant the Bible. The Book of Mormon itself declares otherwise. The Nephite record was written in part, according to the angel of the Lord, to “establish the truth of the [Bible]” and to “make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away” (1 Nephi 13:40). Moreover, the prophet Mormon, in his final words, reaffirmed that the Book of Mormon was “written for the intent that ye may believe” the Bible (Mormon 7:9).²

The purpose of this brief study is to illuminate many of the plain and precious truths that have been brought forth through the Book of Mormon. Not all of these truths were necessarily a part of the original Old or New Testament record. In some cases it is impossible to know if such information was in the original manuscripts. However, the key is to see many of the great insights that the Book of Mormon brought forth: insights concerning people and events in ancient history, prophetic insights, and doctrinal insights.

PEOPLE AND EVENTS

The Book of Mormon preserves accounts of at least three groups of people that are not mentioned in any detail in the Bible. The first of these groups is the Jaredites. From the portion of their records preserved for us in the Book of Mormon, we learn details about this group of people who were scattered at the time of the Tower of Babel. One important piece of information we learn from

their writings is that they possessed a record containing an account of the creation of the world and other important events from Adam down to the time of the tower (see Ether 1:3). This account predates the time of Moses (the author of Genesis), and thus we learn that there were other accounts of the Genesis material before Moses wrote about them.

The second group consists of Lehi’s family and their associates. This account, which makes up the major portion of the Book of Mormon text, gives us a personal glimpse into the workings of the Lord with a particular family, beginning with their prophetic father, Lehi, around 600 B.C. The likelihood that these events occurred is enhanced by a significant passage found in 2 Chronicles 36, where during the short reign of Zedekiah, the priests and people are described in their wickedness as having “mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets” (vv. 11–16). Lehi was surely one of these prophet messengers.

The Mulekites are the third group in the Book of Mormon. It is not known how large this group was when they left Jerusalem about eleven years after Lehi and his group. The Old Testament tells us that the sons of King Zedekiah were slain; however, the Book of Mormon records that one of his sons, Mulek, escaped with others and was brought to this hemisphere by the hand of the Lord (see Helaman 6:10).

We know from the Book of Mormon that Lehi’s sons obtained the brass plates, which contained a more complete account of the ancient Israelite writings up to the time of Jeremiah than is found in the Bible (see 1 Nephi 13:23; 5:12–13). From this record and possibly the Jaredite record, the Book of Mormon records additional information about many Old Testament characters that is not recorded in our present Bible. We learn that Satan plotted with Cain in the secret murder of his brother Abel (see Helaman 6:27) and that he handed down secret oaths to others (see Ether 8:15). While mentioned in the Bible, details of Melchizedek’s ministry are clearer in the Book of Mormon. We learn that his people were “full of all manner of wickedness,” but through “mighty faith” he preached repentance and established peace in his day (Alma

13:17–18). It was said of Melchizedek that “none were greater” (Alma 13:19).

We also learn that Abraham saw Christ’s coming, as did many prophets both before and after his day (see Helaman 8:16–19). In a remarkable vision to the brother of Jared, Jesus Christ appeared long before His birth, indicating that His spirit body was in the likeness of how He would appear in the flesh (see Ether 3:14–17). Zenos, Zenock, and Ezias, Old Testament prophets who lived after the time of Abraham, testified of Christ, but their records are not yet available (see Helaman 8:19–20). We learn that the ancient Israelite prophet Moses specifically testified that as he lifted up the brass serpent in the wilderness “even so shall [the Son of God] be lifted up who should come” (Helaman 8:15). All of these accounts add new information not found in the Bible.

PROPHECIES AND VISIONS

One can separate the prophecies in the Book of Mormon into those given to Nephite or Jaredite prophets and those recorded on the brass plates. The prophetic vision of the brother of Jared (hereafter Moriancumer) is perhaps the most notable mentioned in the book. Nephi, in his great vision recorded in 1 Nephi 11–14, likely saw most of what Moriancumer saw, as did the New Testament Apostle John (see 1 Nephi 14:24–27). Moriancumer was shown “all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be; . . . the Lord could not withhold anything from him” (Ether 3:25–26). Moroni, who read and transcribed this wondrous vision, declared, “Never were greater things made manifest” (Ether 4:4). While the particulars of this vision have not yet been brought forth, the details of Nephi’s prophetic vision, dating to nearly 600 B.C., have been preserved. He beheld the birth, baptism, and ministry of the Son of God, including His miracles, persecution, and crucifixion (see 1 Nephi 11:13–33). Next, Nephi beheld the history of his people from his day until their destruction near A.D. 400, including the appearance of the resurrected Lord on the American continent (see 1 Nephi 12). He saw the influence of the devil bring corruption and

apostasy among the gentile nations, the subsequent departure of Columbus (see 1 Nephi 13:12), and then the travels of other Gentiles who fled captivity and settled the Americas (see 1 Nephi 13:12–13). He witnessed the establishment of the United States and its subsequent deliverance “out of the hands of all other nations” (1 Nephi 13:19). He saw the Bible brought forth among the early Gentiles. Unfortunately, plain and precious truths had been taken from it, and this led many to stumble and falter in their beliefs (see 1 Nephi 13:23–30). Nephi witnessed the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and other latter-day records that were designed to bring people to Christ and restore many plain and precious truths (see 1 Nephi 13:34, 39–40). The polarization of the wicked and the righteous, the church of the devil, and the church of the Lamb was foreseen (see 1 Nephi 14:10). He saw the church of the Lamb spread over the earth, and yet, relatively speaking, its dominions were small (see 1 Nephi 14:10–12). The great and abominable church would gather multitudes to “fight against the Lamb”; nevertheless, Nephi saw the church of the Lamb triumph because “they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God” (1 Nephi 14:13–14).

When Nephi prophesied about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, it appears his sources were the book of Isaiah and the visions he had received from the Lord. In very clear language he prophesied of the “three witnesses” and a few others who would see the Book of Mormon plates, and he spoke of the way the “learned,” in this case Charles Anthon, would respond to the record (see 2 Nephi 27:12–18). He also prophesied of the day when the Book of Mormon and the Bible would “run together” and become, as it were, one book (2 Nephi 29:8).

The brass plates contained many important prophecies lost from our present-day Bible; however, some of them are found in the Book of Mormon. We are indebted to Lehi, who quoted from a lost prophecy of Joseph of Egypt. Joseph prophesied of a “choice seer” who would be raised up in the latter days. This seer would be like unto Moses; he would bring forth new scripture, arise from humble circumstances, and his name and his father’s would be Joseph (see 2 Nephi 3:6–18). Joseph Smith rose to fulfill this prophecy in every

detail. Another remarkable prophecy concerning Joseph of Egypt was also preserved from the brass plates by Captain Moroni, a first-century B.C. Nephite military leader. While striving to spur his people on to greater faithfulness to God and their family, he referred to an account of the miraculous preservation of a piece of the coat of Joseph who was sold into Egypt. He quoted the words of Jacob, or Israel: "Even as this remnant of garment of my son hath been preserved, so shall a remnant of the seed of my son be preserved by the hand of God" (Alma 46:24). Moroni knew that his people were a part of the preserved seed of Joseph.

The allegory of Zenos (see Jacob 5) comprises the longest chapter in the Book of Mormon. This powerful allegory is a masterful treatment of the prophetic future of the house of Israel and the Lord's untiring and yearning effort to help them bring forth fruits of righteousness. It covers the history of Israel from its beginning days down to the millennial day. Its continued fulfillment is impressive. While we do not know exactly how early the allegory was written and recorded on the brass plates, we surmise that it was well before Nephi's day and sometime after Abraham's day (see Helaman 8:19–20).³

Perhaps the most important Book of Mormon prophecies are those pertaining to the coming of Christ. It is important to note that the coming of Christ was clearly and more specifically known in Old Testament times than one could ever imagine from reading our present Bible. As one writer put it, "Unlike the messianic Psalms and Isaiah passages, Book of Mormon prophecies of Christ are unmistakably specific."⁴ For example, from the brass plates Nephi learned that Zenock, Neum, and Zenos prophesied collectively that the Messiah would "yieldeth himself . . . into the hands of wicked men, to be lifted up," "crucified," and "buried in a sepulchre" (1 Nephi 19:10). Zenos also prophesied that three days of darkness would be a sign of the Messiah's death given to "those who should inhabit the isles of the sea" (1 Nephi 19:10).

The Book of Mormon also reveals that it was known from ancient times that secret combinations would be a major problem leading to much sorrow and destruction (see 2 Nephi 26:22; Ether

8:18–25). However, in a more positive vein, the Jaredite prophet Ether saw the day when a “New Jerusalem” would be established upon this land (Ether 13:4, 6–8). This prophecy was reaffirmed by the Savior during His ministry among the Nephites (see 3 Nephi 21:22–25).

DOCTRINAL RESTORATION

The Book of Mormon is a doctrinal gem. A major part of its purpose was to help in the “confounding of false doctrines” (2 Nephi 3:12). The book lays out in greater clarity than the Bible the doctrines and principles of the gospel. What follows is an overview of principles that have been omitted from or are unclear in the Bible. They were not the prevailing doctrines of the day when the Nephite record came forth in 1830.

The Book of Mormon records that the “plan of redemption” was laid out in premortal life (Alma 12:25), that all of the spirit children of God were on the “same standing” there, and that some were foreordained to priesthood callings “on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God” (Alma 13:2–5). This “high priesthood being after the order of” the Son of God is eternal and comes to one by ordination and by worthiness (Alma 13:7–10).

The Fall of Adam was not an accident but a purposeful and necessary fall (see 2 Nephi 2:22–25). With profound insight the Book of Mormon teaches us why we have natural weaknesses and how they are designed to turn us to Christ (see Ether 12:27). Agency and opposition are essential to the eternal growth and development of humankind (see 2 Nephi 2:11–16). Thus, this life became a “state of probation” (2 Nephi 2:21) in which our days are prolonged so that we can be “free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil” (2 Nephi 2:27). The principle of man’s right to act according to his own will or desires is a major theme throughout the Book of Mormon.⁵ Elder Dallin H. Oaks affirmed that the Book of Mormon “provides some of our most

important doctrinal insights on the significance of free agency in the gospel plan.”⁶ In fact, the necessity for and effects of agency ultimately required that there be an atonement (see Alma 42:9–15). In connection with agency, Lehi records that all of God’s creations are divided into two categories, “things to act and things to be acted upon” (2 Nephi 2:14). This leaves mankind with the open opportunity to “act for himself” (2 Nephi 2:16). To assist mankind in the use of his moral agency, the Book of Mormon revealed that the “Spirit of Christ” or “light of Christ” is “given to every man, that he may know good from evil” (Moroni 7:16–19). Its purpose and function are made clear in the Nephite record beyond anything in the biblical text.

Like the Fall and the agency of man, the Atonement was also known before the world began. In teaching about the eternal nature of the priesthood, Alma declared that those who were called and prepared for the priesthood before the “foundation of the world” were called “with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption” (Alma 13:3). That is to say, “they could preach redemption; they could foretell its coming; but their work was preparatory only. Redemption itself would come through the ministry of Him of whom they were but types and shadows.”⁷

Concerning the importance of the new light the Book of Mormon shed on the atoning mission of Christ, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland declared: “Surely the most plain and precious of all truths lost from the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, are the clear and unequivocal declarations of the mission of Jesus Christ, his foreordained role as Messiah and Savior of the world, and the covenantal elements of his gospel, which have been taught from Adam down through each succeeding dispensation. Thus the Book of Mormon’s highest purpose is to restore to the universal family of God that crucial knowledge of Christ’s role in the salvation of every man, woman, and child who now lives, has ever lived, or will yet live upon the earth.”⁸

In addition to the ancient prophecies of Christ’s mortal ministry which were mentioned earlier, there are clear examples of the “doctrine of Christ” being taught before the meridian of time (see

2 Nephi 31:1–21). Nephi declared, “We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children . . . may look forward unto that life which is in Christ” (2 Nephi 25:26–27). Jacob taught that “none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ” (Jacob 7:11). Nowhere in scripture are the breadth and depth and scope of the Atonement so clearly explained as in the Book of Mormon. The word *atonement* or a form thereof is found no less than thirty-five times in the Book of Mormon while it is found only once in the King James Version of the New Testament and not at all in the Revised Standard Version.

From the Book of Mormon we learn that the Savior took upon Himself not only our sins but also our pains, sicknesses, and infirmities, that He might “know according to the flesh how to succor his people” (Alma 7:12). The doctrine of the redemptive power of Christ over little children, while absent from the Bible, was taught with unmatched clarity in the revelatory epistle of Mormon to his son Moroni (see Moroni 8:4–20). The prospect of becoming “children of Christ,” as well as the profound understanding of who are “his seed,” is explained more clearly by the prophet Abinadi than anyone else (see Mosiah 5:7; Isaiah 53:10). He taught that those who “heard” and “hearkened” unto the prophets and “believed” and “looked forward” to the redemptive day of Christ would be His seed (Mosiah 15:11).

Elder B. H. Roberts explained how the unconditional nature of the Atonement in regard to Adam’s sin and the conditional nature in regard to men’s personal sins is a doctrine “peculiar to ‘Mormonism’ . . . and is derived almost wholly from the teachings of the Book of Mormon. In that distinction the beauty and glory of the Atonement, the balanced claims of justice and mercy shine forth as no where else, even in holy writ—much less in the uninspired writings of men. It may be regarded as the ‘Mormon’ contribution to views of the Atonement of Christ, for it is to be found no where else except in Mormon literature.”⁹ The perfect relationship between the atoning grace of Christ and the obedient efforts of mankind is powerfully stated in the following words: “We know that

it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23). Furthermore, we are invited to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32). When we “deny [ourselves] of all ungodliness,” then and only “then is his grace sufficient” for us (Moroni 10:32).

GUIDANCE FOR THE MODERN CHURCH

The principles of faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost and their interrelationship are not clearly taught in the Old Testament. However, the Book of Mormon prophets Nephi, Jacob, Alma the Elder, and Alma the Younger all taught the importance of these principles prior to the coming of Christ.¹⁰ The Book of Mormon became to Joseph and Oliver like a general handbook of instructions for the organization of the Church. Much of the procedural information in Doctrine and Covenants 20 was already outlined in the Book of Mormon. The specific manner of bestowing the Holy Ghost and the necessity of authority to do so are explained (see Moroni 2:2). The proper way to ordain one to a priesthood office was given (see Moroni 3:1–3), as well as the specific prayers to be used in administering the sacrament (see Moroni 4; 5). Furthermore, the requirements for one receiving baptism, the purpose for keeping membership records, and meeting regularly are explained in detail by Moroni (see Moroni 6:1–6). The need for confessing serious sins before a priesthood leader, as well the Lord, and the eventual forgiveness that comes are explained in greater clarity by the Lord as He spoke to Alma than in any other place in sacred writ (see Mosiah 26:29). It is also from the Book of Mormon that we first learn the importance of the Church following an approved or correlated curriculum (see Mosiah 18:19; 25:21–22).

The Book of Mormon demonstrates and teaches the importance of personal revelation to all.¹¹ Speaking of this principle, Terryl Givens wrote, “That may well be the Book of Mormon’s most significant and revolutionary—as well as controversial—contribution to religious thinking. The particularity and specificity, the vividness, the concreteness, and the accessibility of revelatory experience—those

realities both underlie and overshadow the narrated history and doctrine."¹² The Book of Mormon is the classic example that the heavens are still open and that God does indeed still speak to men on earth. In addition to personal revelation, the Book of Mormon reveals the role and ministry of angels in detail found nowhere in the Bible (see Moroni 7:29–32). Moreover, the greatest description of the nature and ministry of translated beings found anywhere in religious literature is recorded in 3 Nephi 28.

UNDERSTANDING OF SATAN

The knowledge of Satan and his influence is virtually absent from the Old Testament. One scholar wrote, "Nowhere in the OT [Old Testament] does Satan appear as a distinctive demonic figure, opposed to God and responsible for all evil."¹³ Another acknowledged, "Admittedly we have not yet the fully developed doctrine" concerning Satan.¹⁴ However, Lehi learned from the brass plates that Satan was originally an angel of God who fell from heaven by seeking "that which was evil before God" (2 Nephi 2:17). From the Book of Mormon we learn various ways he seeks to gain power over individuals, such as teaching men not to pray and revealing his secret plans to men to lead them down to destruction (see 2 Nephi 32:8; Helaman 6:26).¹⁵ Fortunately, the Book of Mormon also reveals that the key to binding Satan is ultimately the righteousness of the people (see 1 Nephi 22:26).¹⁶

CONCLUSION

After an intense study of all that the Book of Mormon reveals that is not found in the Bible, Elder Roberts concluded: "Beyond controversy neither the native intelligence nor learning of Joseph Smith can possibly be regarded as equal to such a performance as bringing forth the knowledge which the Book of Mormon imparts upon these profound subjects; nor can the intelligence or learning of those who assisted him in translating the book be regarded as sufficient for such a task. Nor was the intelligence and learning of any one to whom the origin of the book has ever been ascribed equal to

such an achievement. Indeed the book sounds depths on these subjects not only beyond the intelligence and learning of this small group of men referred to, but beyond the intelligence and learning of the age itself in which it came forth.”¹⁷

The great truth of the matter is that the more carefully one studies the doctrine and teachings of this book, the more powerful the evidence becomes that Joseph Smith was not merely reflecting the learning of his time nor of his own personal study. He was the instrument through whom God had chosen to reveal so many lost truths and once again “make plain the old paths,” which, if followed, will lead one to exaltation and eternal life.

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 6:74.

2. In Mormon 7:8, Mormon speaks of “*this* record,” meaning the Book of Mormon, and the record which would come unto the Gentiles from the Jews, meaning the Bible. Thus, in Mormon 7:9, “*this* [the Book of Mormon] is written for the intent that ye may believe *that* [the Bible]; and if ye believe *that* [the Bible] ye will believe *this* [the Book of Mormon] also” (emphasis added).

3. If we take the list of names in Helaman 8 to be in chronological order, which they appear to be, given the order of Isaiah and Jeremiah, then it would seem logical that Zenos was the earliest of these prophets and likely lived much closer to the days of Abraham.

4. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 199.

5. Examples of this principle are manifold; for instance, see Mosiah 2:21; Alma 29:4–5; 41:3, 5; 42:27; Helaman 3:28–29; 7:5; 12:3–6; 14:30–31.

6. Dallin H. Oaks, “Free Agency and Freedom,” in *Second Nephi: The Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 1.

7. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 451.

8. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 6–7.

9. B. H. Roberts, *Seventy’s Course in Theology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1907–12), 4:113–14.

10. See 2 Nephi 9:23; 31:4–11; Mosiah 18:8–10; 25:17–18, 22; Alma 5:62; 9:27.

11. For example, see 1 Nephi 4:6; 15:8–11; Alma 58:10–11; Moroni 10:4–5.

12. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 221.

13. Theodore H. Gastor, in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 4:224.

14. L. L. Morris, in *New Bible Dictionary*, 2d ed., ed. J. D. Douglas (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1982), 1074.

15. Additional ways the Book of Mormon discloses that Satan will use to gain power are found in the following verses: 2 Nephi 9:28; 15:20; 28:20–22; Helaman 16:22; 3 Nephi 6:15–16; 11:29.

16. Additional detail about ways to overcome Satan are also unveiled in the Book of Mormon; see 1 Nephi 15:23–24; 2 Nephi 1:13, 23; Alma 13:28; and Helaman 3:29–30.

17. B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), 3:230.

“CHOOSE ETERNAL LIFE”
AGENCY IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

Sherrie Mills Johnson

IT IS INTERESTING THAT THERE IS ONE GOSPEL concept that is taught or exemplified on almost every page of the Book of Mormon, and yet the word we use for that concept never appears in the book. The concept is agency, and Lehi beautifully explains the law and its ramifications in 2 Nephi 2. In verse 16 he says, “The Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself,” and in verses 28 and 29 he says that men should “choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit; and not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein.”

The dictionary defines an agent (someone who has agency) as one who has the power or authority to act. This power is the ability to make choices—any choice. However, Lehi is speaking of something more specific. He is explaining a certain type of agency—moral agency. Moral agency is the ability to make choices between good and evil and is the kind of agency spoken of throughout

Sherrie Mills Johnson is an instructor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

scripture. As President Boyd K. Packer explains, “The phrase ‘free agency’ does not appear in scripture. The only agency spoken of there is moral agency, ‘which,’ the Lord said, ‘I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment’” (D&C 101:78).¹

In any given day each of us uses his or her agency to make many choices. We choose what to wear, what to eat, where to go, and what to do with our time. However, when one of those decisions involves a commandment of the Lord or a prompting from the Spirit, the choice becomes a matter of moral agency. Thus, while a choice between milk and orange juice is a matter of agency, for Latter-day Saints a choice between coffee and milk is a matter of moral agency.

SPIRITUAL CONSEQUENCES

But what difference does it make whether we recognize that a choice is one of moral or nonmoral agency? It matters because whenever we use our moral agency there will be lasting, spiritual consequences—always. When we use our nonmoral agency, there are no spiritual consequences. There may be physical consequences, however. For example, if you are allergic to milk and drink it anyway, you will suffer physical consequences but no lasting, spiritual consequences.

Moses explains the law of moral agency to his people by saying, “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God . . . and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 11:26–28). In the Book of Mormon, Lehi explains, “Wherefore, the ends of the law which the Holy One hath given, unto the inflicting of the punishment which is affixed . . . is in opposition to that of the happiness which is affixed, to answer the ends of the atonement—for it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:10–11). In our own day, the Lord has spoken through the Prophet Joseph Smith: “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—and when we

obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:20–21).

The laws are set. We have been told what we need to do to come back into the presence of God and have been given the gift of moral agency to do it. As Lehi tells his sons, “Men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27).

In addition to explaining that there are eternal consequences that come from the use of moral agency, King Benjamin tells his people that consequences are immediate. In his great sermon from the tower, he says the Lord “doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you” (Mosiah 2:24).

The problem is that when we read Benjamin’s words we usually think of blessings such as “men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25), to “prosper in the land” (2 Nephi 4:4), or to “run and not be weary” (D&C 89:20) and are confused. Wasn’t Job “perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil”? (Job 1:1). And yet he lost everything and suffered greatly. If we identify prosperity, joy, or health as the blessing for obedience, Job was not immediately blessed. In addition, throughout scripture we read of mighty prophets who suffered all manner of afflictions. We also have neighbors, friends, and family who live the commandments and do not receive health, prosperity, or joy. So what was King Benjamin talking about?

Many who have gained a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ have struggled with this issue and come to realize that there is a process of trial and testing that often comes before the reception of the promised blessings. However, the promises are still fulfilled. Job eventually received the blessings, as will every righteous person, but they will be given the blessings according to the Lord’s timing. These blessings, therefore, are not the immediate blessing King Benjamin speaks of. So what is?

The answer is found in the lives of the prophets. They suffered. They endured hardships. They were sometimes weary and sometimes did not prosper materially, but what empowered them to endure these trials was their great faith—faith that was given to them because they used their moral agency to obey God.²

The immediate blessings of obedience are spiritual gifts, and paramount among these spiritual gifts is faith. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explains, “Faith is a gift of God bestowed as a reward for personal righteousness. It is always given when righteousness is present and the greater the measure of obedience to God’s laws the greater will be the endowment of faith.”³

In Alma 25:16 we are told that the people “did not suppose that salvation came by the law of Moses; but the law of Moses did serve to strengthen their faith in Christ.” It is the same for us. Salvation does not come to us through the law, but whenever we use our moral agency to obey the law, we are strengthened: we are blessed with increased faith and other spiritual gifts that will help us to return to our Father in Heaven. Elder Henry B. Eyring explains, “First comes obedience, and then come the confirming assurances, the revelation of truth, and the blessing of light.”⁴

A REASONING PROCESS ACCOMPANIES OUR USE OF AGENCY

Besides the wonderful explanation of moral agency Lehi gives us, the small plates of Nephi contain examples that illustrate the process involved in the use of that agency. Since any kind of agency is a mental power, when we use it we usually go through a reasoning process. However, when we are about to exercise our moral agency, the reasoning process will be value ridden and full of rationalization. Lehi explains that “man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other” (2 Nephi 2:16).

The distinction between the thought process when we use our nonmoral and our moral agency is important because if we recognize the thought processes we are using, we can know long before an action has been committed what the consequences will be.

Remember, choices of moral agency always have spiritual consequences. Choices of nonmoral agency do not. When our reasoning resonates with value judgments and rationalizations, we can know that we are about to make a choice that will either increase or deplete our faith and other spiritual gifts.

In the beginning of the Book of Mormon, Nephi recounts the reasoning processes he and his brothers use to make their decisions. In 1 Nephi 3, Lehi tells Nephi that the Lord has instructed him to send his sons to Jerusalem to get the brass plates from Laban. This is no simple task. Besides the long journey back, the boys know they will have a difficult time obtaining the plates. Lehi tells Nephi that he has already asked his older sons to return and says, "Behold thy brothers murmur, saying it is a hard thing which I have required of them" (1 Nephi 3:5).

Laman and Lemuel receive the commandment and rationalize on the basis of their own selfish desires. We can imagine the grumbling: "Going back will be difficult for us." "Getting the plates will cause us a lot of trouble and grief." "Why should we leave this place where we're camped and finally comfortable to travel back through that desert to Jerusalem?" To ease their consciences, they also rationalize that this is not a commandment from God, but is merely a request from their visionary father. They are not disobeying God, they tell themselves, only Lehi, so it's all right.

Nephi, on the other hand, listens to his father, recognizes this to be a command from God, and reasons God to be right. "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them" (1 Nephi 3:7). The conditions have not changed. The long journey, the unwanted confrontation with Laban, and all circumstances are the same for Nephi as they are for Laman and Lemuel. However, Nephi makes his decision based upon teachings of the gospel and promptings of the Spirit instead of selfish desires. His thoughts are something like this: "If the Lord wants me to do this, I can do it." "The Lord is always right." "Whatever the Lord wants is what I want."

Despite their objections, Laman and Lemuel are convinced or maybe coerced, and the brothers return to Jerusalem for the plates. But just as Laman and Lemuel predicted, it is hard. Doing what the Lord wants us to do often is. Twice they try to get the plates from Laban and both times are rejected. The second time Laban tries to kill them. Angry because of the hardships they have endured, Laman and Lemuel blame Nephi and Sam and beat their brothers with a rod. At this point, an angel intervenes to chastise Laman and Lemuel and to reassure them, saying, “Ye shall go up to Jerusalem again, and the Lord will deliver Laban into your hands” (1 Nephi 3:29).

They have now received another commandment directly from an angel: “Return to Jerusalem.” Thus, they are at a point where they are about to use their moral agency. This decision should be easy because they have been given a promise—by an angel—that they will succeed. So what do they reason? “How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands? Behold, he is a mighty man, and he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty; then why not us?” (1 Nephi 3:31). This time, besides their own selfish desires, Laman and Lemuel base their thinking on the logic of men: “We don’t stand a chance! Laban has an army that can slay fifty men easily, and there are only four of us. What the angel said is impossible. We can’t possibly do that.”

In contrast, Nephi responds, “Let us go up again unto Jerusalem, and let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; for behold he is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty, yea, or even than his tens of thousands? Therefore let us go up; let us be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground, and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea” (1 Nephi 4:1–2).

After much discussion, Nephi convinces his brothers to return and wait outside the walls of Jerusalem while he finds Laban. This time Nephi tells us that he is “led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do” (1 Nephi 4:6). In contrast to his

brothers, he abandons the reasoning or logic of men and follows the Spirit, doing in each moment what the Spirit directs him to do.

It is at this point that we read one of the most detailed and interesting accounts of this reasoning process to be found in scripture.⁵ In 1 Nephi 4:10, Nephi receives the impression from the Spirit that he should slay Laban and explains that “I said in my heart: Never at any time have I shed the blood of man. And I shrunk and would that I might not slay him.” We can be grateful that most of us will never face a situation where the Spirit instructs something contrary to an existing written commandment. But we can also be grateful that it is included in scripture because of the lessons it teaches us about Nephi and about the process of using our moral agency. One of the most obvious lessons is that while Nephi reasons about the commandment he has received, he never reasons as to whether this is the Spirit speaking or not. Nephi knows which voice is speaking to him. The voice is the Lord’s. Previous to this experience, Nephi has learned to recognize and to know the voice of the Lord. This can only happen through mighty prayer, trial-and-error experience, and extensive reliance on the Spirit. Nephi’s concern is not whose voice is speaking to him but rather the contradiction between written commandment and instruction from the Spirit. Because he knows who is speaking, he listens as the Spirit explains that the Lord has delivered Laban into his hands because it is better that “one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief” (1 Nephi 4:13).

Nephi ponders what the Spirit has told him, and we are privileged to hear the reasoning process that leads to his decision. He does not think about how difficult this will be or worry that the soldiers Laban commands will catch him and kill him. There is never one selfish thought in Nephi’s reasoning. Instead he remembers the words the Lord spoke to him in the wilderness: “Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise” (1 Nephi 4:14), and he realizes that they could not keep the commandments of the Lord without the brass plates to guide them. Knowing the command came from God and basing his decision

upon selfless thoughts concerning his family, Nephi reaches a decision: “Therefore I did obey the voice of the Spirit” (1 Nephi 4:18).

It is no accident that this reasoning process is taught in the first four chapters of the Book of Mormon. Learning to recognize who is speaking to us and understanding the thought processes we undergo as we attempt to obey are crucial to our spiritual development. When we use our moral agency, we will usually go through a similar process. The important thing to realize is that we can know exactly where a decision will take us by paying attention to the type of reasoning we are using. If we base a decision on our own selfish desires and the logic of men, our actions will usually be acts of disobedience and in consequence we will find it harder and harder to understand the ways of God (see 1 Nephi 15:7–10). This will lead to a condition the scriptures refer to as a hardened heart (see 1 Nephi 14:4) and eventually to living our lives in a state of misery, fear, captivity, and eternal death (see 2 Nephi 2:18, 27–29).

On the other hand, if our reasoning is based upon faith, the teachings of the gospel, and the promptings of the Spirit, we will choose obedience at the point of action, and in consequence we will be blessed with an increased understanding of the ways of God (see 1 Nephi 15:11). In this state the Lord can change our hearts (see 1 Nephi 2:16) and lead us to peace, increased faith, liberty, and eternal life (see 2 Nephi 2:27–29; see also D&C 59:23; Mosiah 2:24).

Learning to recognize the reasoning process helps us identify when we are about to use our moral agency, but what about impulsive behavior? There are moments when we make decisions that are instantaneous. Out of anger or jealousy or other such emotions we speak unkind words or hit the wall or throw dishes or perform other ill-tempered acts. In these cases we don’t consciously stop and reason out what we are going to do next, and yet these are often matters of moral agency because we have been commanded not to do them.

THE USE OF REASONING IN IMPULSIVE DECISIONS

Again, we learn from Nephi and his brothers that the reasoning process is part of impulsive behavior, but the timing of the

reasoning process is different. At some point each person either decides he or she will give in to impulsive behavior or fight against it. Nephi chooses to overcome it. Laman and Lemuel do not. After returning to Jerusalem to invite Ishmael and his family to accompany them to the promised land, Nephi's brothers again turn against him. In anger, they tie him with cords and determine to kill him. But Nephi prays, receives the power to break the cords, and calls his brothers to repentance (see 1 Nephi 7:16–17). This moment of release is a crucial moment. Nephi seems to be acting instinctively and could lash out in retaliation, as many people in a similar situation might do. However, Nephi does not do this.

Once free, his thoughts are not on retribution or vengeance. Instead his concern is for his brothers' eternal situation. Nephi's instinctive behavior is selfless. He teaches his brothers and begs them to repent and to turn to the Savior. Out of love, he urges and pleads for them to be obedient. He knows the path they are choosing is wrong and wants to help.

Later while crossing the waters, Laman and Lemuel again bind Nephi with cords and "treat [him] with much harshness" (1 Nephi 18:11). What does Nephi do? This time instead of the Lord breaking the cords, Nephi is made to suffer the abuse for four days until finally his brothers loose him. At this point, Nephi takes the compass and prays (see 1 Nephi 18:21). That compass would not work if there were anger or malice in Nephi's heart. But it works, which is a clear indication that his heart is full of positive feelings such as forgiveness and love. At all times Nephi uses his moral agency to obey God whether the command is to break out of the cords or to endure the suffering. Nephi chooses righteousness, which fortifies him and allows the Spirit to change the natural man in him so that even his instinctive behavior is good and righteous. Obviously, he has at some point reasoned something like "If God wants me to control my temper and to let the Spirit guide me, I can do it." We aren't told how long it took, and we all know that for some people it is harder than for others, but Nephi has to have made a conscious effort to overcome the natural man. In contrast to this, Laman and Lemuel's thought processes are different: "It's human nature to get angry and

to lash out with emotion. We can't change the way we are.” They refuse to do anything about it. The result is that despite the trials and tribulations, Nephi's actions are not reactions to his brothers; they are responses to the Spirit.

THE CHOICE IS OURS

Like Nephi, we can condition ourselves to use our moral agency righteously in matters of impulse by consistently choosing righteousness when we have time to reason out the decision. When we hear ourselves rationalizing such things as “This once won't matter” or “Everyone else does it,” we should remember Nephi. It does matter. We never know when situations that elicit instinctive actions will confront us. We never know when we are going to need to call upon our faith to sustain us through a trial or adversity. But we do know that faith and spiritual strength are cumulative. One decision at a time, we develop faith. Thus, when we need faith and spiritual strength, it is either there or it is not. In time of need, it is too late to accumulate it. This is why every decision involving our moral agency matters despite how small the adversary tries to tell us it is.

Knowing the importance of agency, we can do things to help us use it correctly. One thing we can do is create an environment where the Spirit can be present. The stronger the influence of good around us, the better chance we have of making correct decisions. Another thing we can do is to educate our conscience to make right choices. As Mormon explains, “The preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them” (Alma 31:5). Likewise, the more we study, the more we feast upon the word of God, and the more we educate our own conscience, the more we are apt to use our moral agency correctly. Another thing we can do is to predetermine that in any given circumstance we will use our moral agency to obey God.

Each of these suggestions for helping us to use our moral agency correctly also involves the reasoning process noted earlier,

but in these cases the reasoning process takes place long before the events it concerns. If we don't make a concerted effort to use our moral agency correctly, to reason through and correct even our impulsive behavior, we will find our lives—like Laman and Lemuel's—overpowered by instinct, impulse, and negative behavior.

God, in His wisdom and love, has offered us every “tool” we need in order to accumulate spiritual strength. As Lehi says, “Men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil” (2 Nephi 2:5). We have been given knowledge of good and evil from scriptures that teach principles and from the examples of prophets and other people. We have general conferences where living prophets of God instruct us in the ways of the Lord. In addition, we have the light of Christ to guide us. Mormon tells us that this gift “is given to every man, that he may know good from evil” (Moroni 7:16), and in Moroni 7 he goes on to explain exactly how to know if something is good and therefore of God or if it is evil and therefore of Satan. All who follow the light of Christ will eventually (in this life or the next) be led to the gospel of Jesus Christ, where they can receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, which, if used properly, allows the Spirit to sanctify them so that the very desires for evil that haunt their mortal journey are burned from their being.

But the path we choose depends on the use of our agency. We, like Laman and Lemuel, can reason, “This isn't the Lord asking; it's just the bishop.” Or we, like Nephi, have the power to reason, “This is of the Lord. He will help me do it.” We, like Laman and Lemuel, can think about the difficulty of the task and how much stress it will cause us. Or we, like Nephi, can listen carefully to the Spirit and do what we are instructed one step at a time until we accomplish the task. We, like Laman and Lemuel, can grow fearful, doubtful, and miserable. Or we, like Nephi, can grow faithful, graceful, peaceful, and free to progress. This leads us to the final irony.

While Satan entices with promises of liberty (“The commandments are bondage!” “If you follow me, you'll be free to do whatever you want!”), his path leads to bondage—to a state that allows for no progress or even joy. In this state, one is not free to enter the temple of the Lord, let alone into the Lord's presence. On the other hand,

Jesus Christ says, “Take my yoke upon you” (Matthew 11:28) and in return promises liberty—a state which allows us the freedom to obtain eternal happiness and joy, the freedom to live with God eternally, and to be co-inheritors with Christ of all that is divine. This is why it is so important that we recognize when we are about to use our moral agency and more importantly how we are about to use it.

Just as a runner accomplishes a race one step at a time, we accomplish our mortal probation one choice at a time. Every moral choice is either for Jesus Christ or against Him. Every righteous choice adds to our faith and to our spiritual strength.

NOTES

1. Boyd K. Packer, “Our Moral Environment,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 66.

2. President Joseph F. Smith said, “The men and the women who are honest before God, who humbly plod along, doing their duty, paying their tithing, and exercising that pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, which is to visit the fatherless and the widows in their afflictions and to keep oneself unspotted from the world, and who help look after the poor; and who honor the holy Priesthood, who do not run into excesses, who are prayerful in their families, and who acknowledge the Lord in their hearts, they will build up a foundation that the gates of hell cannot prevail against; and if the floods come and the storms beat upon their house, it shall not fall, for it will be built upon the rock of eternal truth” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939], 7–8).

3. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 264; emphasis in original.

4. Henry B. Eyring, *BYU Speeches of the Year, 2000–2001* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), 81.

5. Of this account, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland says, “I believe that story was placed in the very opening verses of a 531-page book and then told in painfully specific detail in order to focus every reader of that record on the absolutely fundamental gospel issue of obedience and submission to the communicated will of the Lord. If Nephi cannot yield to this terribly painful command, if he cannot bring himself to obey, then it is entirely probable that he can never succeed or survive in the tasks that lie just ahead” (*BYU Speeches of the Year, 1988–1989* [Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1989], 79).

3

VISION, VOICE, PATH, AND ROD

COMING TO PARTAKE OF THE FULNESS

Matthew O. Richardson

SINCE THE LORD SAYS THAT THE Book of Mormon contains the “fulness of my everlasting gospel” (D&C 27:5), it is uniquely positioned in “the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST” (title page to the Book of Mormon). This purpose is accomplished as the book “puts forth the doctrines of the gospel, outlines the plan of salvation, and tells man what they must do to gain peace in this life and eternal salvation in the life to come” (introduction to the Book of Mormon). Thus, in addition to the doctrinal fulness contained in the book, the Book of Mormon offers practical teachings that demonstrate what must be done to embrace the everlasting gospel. This approach is clearly found in Lehi’s vision of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 8).

While Lehi’s vision masterfully illustrates that individuals must come unto Christ and partake of His fruit, it also provides insight on how man accomplishes this task. Although it is often assumed that every person who arrives at the tree of life arrives in the same

Matthew O. Richardson is an associate dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University.

manner, Lehi's vision actually describes four different ways individuals or groups arrive at the tree. This paper focuses on how individuals or groups come to Christ and partake of the fulness of His joy through revelation, prophetic guidance, living the gospel, and holding fast to the word of God as outlined in Lehi's dream.

REVELATION

We must remember that the first person to arrive at the tree of life was Lehi himself. While following his guide through a "dark and dreary waste" and spending "many hours in darkness," Lehi prayed unto the Lord for mercy (1 Nephi 8:7–8). It was at this point that Lehi's vision drastically changed. "And it came to pass after I had prayed unto the Lord I beheld a large and spacious field. And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy" (1 Nephi 8:9–10). With prayer as a catalyst, new objects were visible or revealed to Lehi. His view expanded sufficiently for him to see through the darkness and the waste, almost as if someone had turned on the lights. Just as Moses foundered in darkness until he was enlightened by God, out of a burning bush (see Moses 1:17–18), so too did Lehi's wanderings and torment of darkness cease with his revelatory expansion. President Spencer W. Kimball taught, "There are bushes aflame with God in every desert; if one can see and hear and understand, revelation is there."¹

The narrative describing Lehi's success is simple and straightforward. It appears that with no other information, except for the revelatory answer to his prayer, Lehi "did go forth and partake of the fruit" of the tree (1 Nephi 8:11). Lehi's journey was summarized in only three verses (see 1 Nephi 8:9–11). How did he accomplish his task so efficiently? What was the secret to his success? "With the help of prayer," President Ezra Taft Benson concluded, "Lehi was led to partake of the fruit of that tree, which provided him 'with exceeding great joy.'"² Likewise, young Joseph Smith was also delivered from impending darkness and led to Christ with the help of prayer. As Joseph exerted all his powers "to call upon God to deliver" him, he saw a pillar of light descending over him that delivered him

from the enemy and opened a vision of incalculable consequence (Joseph Smith–History 1:16).

From this pattern in Lehi’s dream, we too can expect guidance through revelation in our personal journey through mortality. President Lorenzo Snow taught that it is “the grand privilege of every Latter-day Saint . . . to have the manifestations of the Spirit every day of our lives.”³ Elder Dallin H. Oaks offered the following illustrations of this point: “A child loses a treasured possession, prays for help, and is inspired to find it; an adult has a problem at work, at home, or in genealogical research, prays, and is led to the information necessary to resolve it; a Church leader prays to know whom the Lord would have him call to fill a position, and the Spirit whispers a name.”⁴ While our experiences with revelation may not be as dramatic as Lehi’s or young Joseph Smith’s, they can broaden our own perspective, help us determine relevance of events in our own life, and reveal solutions that we have not yet considered or even could not have imagined without divine guidance. In short, revelation provides sufficient direction to lead us onward to the Savior. With this in mind, President Gordon B. Hinckley’s urging to “be prayerful” is another reminder of Lehi’s vision. In tones reminiscent of Lehi’s early experience of wandering in the vast field, President Hinckley reminds us that “you can’t do it alone. You know that. You cannot make it alone and do your best. You need the help of the Lord, . . . and the marvelous thing is that you have the opportunity to pray, with the expectation that your prayers will be heard and answered.”⁵

PROPHETIC GUIDANCE

Once Lehi had eaten the fruit from the tree of life, he desired that his family should also partake (see 1 Nephi 8:12). He saw his wife, Sariah, and two of his sons, Sam and Nephi, in the distance “as if they knew not whither they should go” (1 Nephi 8:14). Lehi “beckoned” them and also called “unto them with a loud voice” that they should come unto him and partake of the fruit (1 Nephi 8:15).

According to the recorded vision, these three family members “did come . . . and partake of the fruit also” (1 Nephi 8:16).

Two distinct groups have now arrived at the tree of life, and both have partaken of the fruit. Yet interestingly enough, the ways both groups not only discovered but came to the tree were very different. Lehi first saw the tree after praying for mercy and deliverance. Through revelation, he discovered and found the tree. Sariah, Sam, and Nephi, on the other hand, were also lost. Yet the beckoning voice of Lehi gave them notice and guidance to come to the tree. It is important to point out that Lehi’s guiding instructions were not only those from a concerned spouse and parent, but also those concerned with his prophetic call. Without diminishing his role as a partner and parent nor the stewardship therewith, it is important to underscore Lehi’s other stewardship. Lehi was a “visionary man” (1 Nephi 2:11). He saw visions, dreamed dreams, and recorded the prophecies he received (see 1 Nephi 1:16). His stewardship extended beyond the boundaries of personal and family inspiration. By commandment, Lehi began to prophesy and declare the things revealed to him in dreams and visions to the people of Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 1:18; 2:1). In short, Lehi became what was noted in the Old Testament as *nabi* (literally a spokesman), or as is commonly translated in current Old Testament texts, a prophet. Lehi was not only a husband and a father seeking to guide and direct his own family, he was also the living prophet of the time—their living prophet.

If the text of the vision is taken literally, the only factor influencing the second group in coming to the tree of life was the living prophet. It is hard to imagine that Sariah, Sam, and Nephi would not have prayed for deliverance, mercy, or even guidance. But we find that the text is actually expanding other possibilities and is not diminishing the powerful connection between prayer and revelation and inspirational deliverance (we have already seen that point emphasized with Lehi’s experience). In truth, the text bears powerful insight to the need for a living prophet and the necessity of following that prophet. When reflecting upon the motives and actions of Lehi through the first eight chapters of Nephi’s record, Lehi’s role

as a prophet of God is clear. In fact, it was almost as if Gordon B. Hinckley, when describing his role as a living prophet to a curious interviewer, was also describing the role of Lehi of old. President Hinckley said: “My role is to declare doctrine. My role is to stand as an example before the people. My role is to be a voice in defense of the truth. My role is to stand as a conservator of those values which are important in our civilization and our society. My role is to lead people.”⁶

With the prophetic mantle firmly shouldered by Lehi, he led those not knowing “whither they should go” to the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:14). This vignette underscores the importance of not only having a living prophet but also of following that prophet’s counsel. “Now the only safety we have as members of this church is to do exactly what the Lord said to the Church in that day when the Church was organized,” President Harold B. Lee taught. He then concluded, “We must learn to give heed to the words and commandments that the Lord shall give through his prophet.”⁷

Unfortunately, Lehi found that not all would give heed to his words. Laman and Lemuel, for example, “would not come unto me and partake of the fruit” (1 Nephi 8:18). While this episode of the dream is heart-wrenching and caused discomfort to Lehi, it extends an important warning to those who disregard or even discount the teachings of the living prophets. Icons of self-centeredness, Laman and Lemuel not only serve as reminders of the outcome of such behavior but also portray the character of those who follow in their footsteps. Laman and Lemuel, known for their “stiffneckedness,” were unbelievers who “knew not the dealings of . . . God” (1 Nephi 2:11–12). Ironically, their lack of knowledge of God’s dealings was not due to lack of personal experience with godly things. On several occasions, they felt the power of the Spirit (see 1 Nephi 2:14), saw an angel (see 1 Nephi 2:29), and even heard the voice of the Lord (see 1 Nephi 17:45). Despite their many experiences, they were still unfamiliar with the Lord. Instead of finding liberation in Lehi’s prophecies, they saw only restrictions of personal behavior. “There will be some things that take patience and faith,” President Lee cautioned. “You may not like what comes from the authority of the

Church. It may contradict your political views. It may contradict your social views. It may interfere with some of your social life. But if you listen to these things, as if from the mouth of the Lord himself, with patience and faith, the promise is that ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory’ (D&C 21:6).”⁸

Rather than finding the tree by following the voice of the prophet—like the rest of their family—Laman and Lemuel mocked their father’s visions as “foolish imaginations of his heart” (1 Nephi 2:11) and “murmured” against him (1 Nephi 2:12). While Nephi, Laman, and Lemuel all used the term “visionary man” to describe their father, the term held a stark difference for each user. For Nephi, it reflected his own humility, as well as his reverence for and dependence upon God, while for Laman and Lemuel it was a term of disgust. Their view of a visionary man reflected their conceit and coveted independence from God. Elder Henry B. Eyring described this situation in the following way: “Looking for the path to safety in the counsel of prophets makes sense to those with strong faith. When a prophet speaks, those with little faith may think that they hear only a wise man giving good advice. Then if his counsel seems comfortable and reasonable, squaring with what they want to do, they take it. If it does not, they consider it either faulty advice or they see their circumstances as justifying their being an exception to the counsel.”⁹

THE PATH—LIVING THE GOSPEL

Two groups have now arrived at the tree and have partaken of the fruit; one came by way of prayer and revelation and the other by heeding the voice of the prophet. As Lehi looked to find and guide the rest of his stewards, he saw a path “which came . . . even to the tree” where he stood (1 Nephi 8:20). It now becomes apparent that there is another means of accessing the tree of life. The path in Lehi’s vision is typically interpreted to mean the gospel of Jesus Christ and is described as being both “strait” and “narrow”

(1 Nephi 8:20). Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount, taught that because the way is strait and narrow, “few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14). To some, this might be interpreted to mean that locating the path is the great difficulty. But according to the Book of Mormon, it seems that the difficulty of the path must be something besides just locating it. In Lehi’s vision, for example, he sees “numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree by which I stood” (1 Nephi 8:21). This was not a vain attempt, for Lehi saw “that they did come forth, and commence in the path which led to the tree” (1 Nephi 8:22).

The Lord actually taught that “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and *few there be that find it*” (Matthew 7:14; emphasis added). Perhaps the Lord was saying that there are few who find the end of the path rather than the beginning of the path. In other words, many may find the strait and narrow path, but few follow it long enough to find eternal life. This concept coincides with the Book of Mormon account of numberless concourses locating the path but losing their direction somewhere along the way. Lehi described this event when he saw that “they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost” (1 Nephi 8:23).

There must be something about the path being strait and narrow that creates such difficulty for so many that begin their short-lived journey. “That path which leads into the presence of God is . . . strait,” President Joseph Fielding Smith explained, “which means that those who enter into it will find it restricted.”¹⁰ One would assume that all who initially enter the gospel path understand that the life of a disciple will restrict worldly activity. But since that path bisects the “large and spacious field” which Lehi was told is the “world” (1 Nephi 8:9, 20), the distracted gospel disciple would have worldly scenery along the entire way. Such constant distraction undoubtedly weakens faith. When comparing the strait path of the gospel of Christ with the adjacent paths of the world, the gospel path is strait indeed. Unfortunately, those who “know not the ways of the Lord” view the paths of the world as wide freeways without

speed limits or restrictive guidelines. Since the gospel path restricts anything that distracts from the Lord's plan, some see the world's offerings as a multilaned highway of acceptance, tolerance, and diversity. Unfortunately, they fail to see that while the roadway accommodates breadth, it is short on distance. Sure you can change lanes whenever you wish, but you never actually seem to get anywhere.

Some may think that there is little or no need to consider what implications the term narrow might have since many consider strait and narrow to be synonymous. While strait describes the restriction or rejection of worldliness, narrow seems to align itself not so much with the rigidity of the path but the width of the path. Apparently the gospel path narrows as one gets closer to the kingdom. Of course there is plenty of room for gospel travelers but not much room for anything else. "They cannot take with them that which does not apply, or which does not belong to the kingdom of God," President Smith explained. "All such things must be left behind when we enter into this narrow way which leads into the presence of God, where we can receive life eternal."¹¹ When speaking of the narrowness of the way at another time, Christ encouraged one young rich man to sell his worldly possessions and instead seek for heavenly treasure (see Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 18:22–23). Laden with worldly baggage, this young man could not "fit" on the narrow path. Like Esau of old, who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, this young man lost his divine inheritance just so he could keep his earthy possessions and attitudes. Thus, Christ reminded the disciples that the narrowness of the path was like passing through the "eye of a needle" (Matthew 19:24), where only the unfettered traveler could enter.

No wonder Laman and Lemuel and all those who have self-indulgent appetites balk when it comes to walking the gospel path. A path that requires submission, sacrifice, and hard work will be far too "strait" and too "narrow" for their tastes. Thus, they gravitate toward a building described as "great and spacious" (1 Nephi 8:26) which has plenty of room for their own philosophies, temporal validations, self-indulgences, vain imaginations, and worldly possessions.

At a glance, this building may seem to have it all. But upon closer inspection, it lacks a foundation (see 1 Nephi 8:26). As a result, its inhabitants are “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness” (Ephesians 4:14). It is only a matter of time before such top-heavy structures crumble and experience an exceedingly great fall (see 1 Nephi 12:35). In contrast, the simple sojourner presses forward on a path unaffected by mocking insults, scorning fingers, or enticements of the world. Since the path is laid on a rock-solid foundation (see Helaman 5:12), and because there is no room for worldly baggage, disciples press forward with an eye single to meeting their Savior.

THE ROD OF IRON— HOLDING FAST TO THE WORD OF GOD

Finally, we come to the most familiar part of Lehi’s vision: the rod of iron. After urging and failing to get Laman and Lemuel’s attention, Lehi saw a rod of iron that “extended along the bank of the river” and “came along” the path “even to the tree” (1 Nephi 8:19–20). The geographical description Lehi gives of the rod of iron is important as it lends to a fuller understanding of the purposes of the rod.

Lehi first described the rod as extending “along the bank of the river” (1 Nephi 8:19), which was later described as being filthy and treacherously deep (see 1 Nephi 15:26–29; 16:16). It was so treacherous, in fact, Lehi saw that “many were drowned in the depths of the fountain” (1 Nephi 8:32), and Nephi went as far as to call the river “the depths of hell” (1 Nephi 12:16). This hazard threatened to engulf weary and unsuspecting travelers as well as those who became lost in the mists of darkness or even those who, like Laman and Lemuel, willingly chose another way. Yet the rod of iron was placed as if it were a fence marking a boundary. “Between the river bank and the path was a rod of iron,” President Lee taught, “presumably to safeguard the travelers from falling off the narrow path into the river.”¹² Standing between the filthy river and the gospel

path (see 1 Nephi 8:19–20) and marking the boundary between safety and peril, the rod keeps those pressing toward the tree safe regardless of the conditions at the time.

Nephi was told that the rod was, in truth, the “word of God” (1 Nephi 11:25), being both the written standard scriptural works and the messages of authorized servants speaking by the power of the Holy Ghost (see D&C 68:2–4). Therefore, in view of Lehi’s dream, the word of God marks the boundary of safety and acts as a fence to protect us from the filth and destruction of the world. “Whoso would hearken unto the word of God,” Nephi expounded, “and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction” (1 Nephi 15:24).

Another important geographical insight concerning the rod of iron is that it runs parallel to the path of the gospel. Because of its companion proximity, the rod acts as a handrail to those forging ahead on the gospel path. Just as one takes calculated steps and firmly grasps a handrail while navigating steep stairs, so too will those on the gospel path cling to the word of God. Disciples find that the word of God can, as Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, “give us needed rock-like steadiness, especially in this latter-day, topsy-turvy world in which ‘all things are set in commotion’ (D&C 45:25; 88:91).”¹³

Besides providing a steady influence for the gospel traveler, the rod of iron also provides constant guidance. President Lee taught: “If there is any one thing most needed in this time of tumult and frustration, when men and women and youth and young adults are desperately seeking for answers to the problems which afflict mankind, it is an ‘iron rod’ as a safe guide along the straight path on the way to eternal life, amidst the strange and devious roadways that would eventually lead to destruction and to the ruin of all that is ‘virtuous, lovely, or of good report.’”¹⁴ The guiding influence of the word of God gives clear direction throughout the journey to the tree. Lehi saw how the word of God provided protection, support, and direction to those clinging to the rod, especially when engulfed by mists of darkness or when ridiculed and scorned by the proud

patrons of the world. Those who hold fast to the handrail of the gospel path are encouraged to press forward, for the words of Christ “tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3).

It becomes clear that the rod of iron was not provided as something to lean against while catching our breath during an occasional rest stop. Lehi described a group that “came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree” (1 Nephi 8:24). Notice that success depends not on a momentary grasping the word of God but rather a “clinging” or holding fast until one arrives at the tree. Rather than using the rod as a crutch or even a cane, wise travelers tether themselves to the rod just as seasoned mountaineers belay themselves to sure structures at all times. This constant dependence is life-sustaining just as taking upon nourishment is not an occasional physical demand. With this in mind, we sense why Nephi described our need to be “feasting upon the word of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20). Consistent feeding, sustained nourishment, or a literal connection to the rod teaches disciples a daily routine. Those tethered to the word of God who press forward with faith, hope, and perseverance realize they must endure to the end to receive eternal life.

By understanding the vital role that the word of God plays in protecting and guiding, it is easy to see why Nephi would be so passionate in his endorsement of the rod. Nephi “did exhort them to give heed unto the word of the Lord; yea, I did exhort them with all the energies of my soul, and with all the faculty which I possessed, that they would give heed to the word of God and remember to keep his commandments always in all things” (1 Nephi 15:25).

CONCLUSION

Although Lehi’s vision of the tree of life is only one chapter long, it contains ample material that not only testifies of Christ but also “tells men what they must do to gain peace in this life and eternal salvation in the life to come” (introduction to the Book of

Mormon). It is clear that the primary object of the vision was to come to the tree, which of course is the representation of “the love of God” (1 Nephi 11:25), or Jesus Christ, and to partake of the fruit thereof. According to President Benson, “The prophet Lehi also saw our day in his great visionary dream of the tree of life.”¹⁵ Since all of us must navigate the large and spacious field of the world with darkness and mist clouding our way, it is fortunate indeed that Lehi’s vision tells us what we must do to accept the Savior’s invitation to “come unto me” (Matthew 11:28).

Rather than emphasizing only one way to come unto the Savior, Lehi’s vision seems to be an examination of complementary threads that can be woven together to make a disciple’s cloth. It is absurd to imagine that one could accept the gospel path without prayer and revelation, prophetic guidance, or the word of God. Likewise, it would be incredulous to think that one could maintain gospel devotion without receiving revelation, heeding the prophet, walking according to the tenants prescribed by the gospel path, and hearkening to the word of God. Unfortunately, there are those who are passionate about the scriptures but ignore or discount the living prophet. Some may be frequent in personal prayer but fail to see the need for the word of God. There are modern Lamans and Lemuels who prefer to “read by the lamp of their own conceit; who interpret by rules of their own contriving; who have become a law unto themselves, and so pose as the sole judges of their own doings”¹⁶ and thus feel that the strait and narrow path of the gospel cramps their style, inhibits their growth, or simply doesn’t fill their needs or desires. In their quest of tallying their personal gain, they fail to realize that they are missing something they cannot even imagine. They forfeit the experience of having their soul being filled with exceedingly great joy (see 1 Nephi 8:12). Such fruit can be harvested only from the true vine, even Jesus Christ.

Those who take advantage of personal revelation; heed the prophets, seers, and revelators; enter the gate and embrace the strait and narrow gospel path; and hearken to the word of God will find peace in this life and eternal salvation in the life to come. With this diligence, faith, and patience, the promise follows, “By and by

ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet, . . . ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst” (Alma 32:42).

NOTES

1. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 570.
2. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Gospel Teacher and His Message,” in *Charge to Religious Educators* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 54.
3. Lorenzo Snow, in Conference Report, April 1899, 52.
4. Dallin H. Oaks, “Revelation,” in *Classic Speeches: Volume One* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1994), 201.
5. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 468.
6. Gordon B. Hinckley, interview on *Larry King Live*, 8 September 1998.
7. Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, October 1970, 152.
8. Lee, in Conference Report, October 1970, 152.
9. Henry B. Eyring, in Conference Report, April 1997, 32.
10. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955), 13.
11. Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 13.
12. Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 350.
13. Neal A. Maxwell, *That Ye May Believe* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 185.
14. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places*, 351.
15. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Power of the Word,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 79.
16. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 373.

THE BOOK OF MORMON'S MESSAGE TO THE GENTILES

Terry B. Ball and Jeremy Daniel Wendt

AS THE PROPHET MORMON CHRONICLED the tragic destruction of the Nephites, he momentarily turned his attention to a latter-day people he called “Gentiles,” pleading with them, “O ye Gentiles, how can ye stand before the power of God, except ye shall repent and turn from your evil ways? . . . Therefore, repent ye, and humble yourselves before him” (Mormon 5:22, 24). Later, Mormon’s son, Moroni, also voiced concern for these Gentiles, praying “unto the Lord that he would give unto the Gentiles grace, that they might have charity” (Ether 12:36). Hundreds of years earlier the prophet Nephi expressed similar care for the spiritual welfare of the Gentiles. Recording the words of an angelic messenger, Nephi declared, “If the Gentiles repent it shall be well with them,” but “wo be unto the Gentiles if it so be that they harden their hearts against the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 14:5–6).

The anxiety and hope voiced by these prophets for the spiritual

Terry B. Ball is associate dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University. Jeremy Daniel Wendt is a doctoral candidate in computer graphics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

welfare of the Gentiles raise some important questions. Who are these Gentiles? How do the Gentiles fit into God's plans? Why did the Book of Mormon prophets speak so fervently to and about the Gentiles? Answers to these questions can be found in the Book of Mormon. Those answers constitute an important message, admonition, and warning for a latter-day covenant people.

WHO ARE THE GENTILES?

The definition of a Gentile has varied through time and among people. To the early Old Testament authors, a Gentile (from the Hebrew *goyim*, literally meaning "the nations") apparently was anyone who was not a descendant of Jacob or Israel (see Genesis 10:5). This simple definition became less useful with the scattering of Israel. We know that around 721 B.C. the Israelites living in the northern kingdom of Israel were conquered and carried away by the Assyrians, never to be heard from again in the biblical text (see 2 Kings 17:6–23). Today we refer to them as the "lost tribes." Nephi tells us what became of them: "It appears that the house of Israel, sooner or later, will be scattered upon all the face of the earth, and also among all nations. And behold, there are many who are already lost from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem. Yea, the more part of all the tribes have been led away; and they are scattered to and fro upon the isles of the sea" (1 Nephi 22:3–4).¹

After Assyria carried away the northern Israelites, those living in the southern kingdom of Judah, who were not carried away, eventually came to be known simply as "the Jews," either because they literally descended from the tribe of Judah, or because they lived in the geographical area of the political kingdom of Judah. Thus, one who was not a literal descendant of Judah could still be considered a "Jew" for geographical or political reasons. For example, Lehi and his family sometimes identified themselves as those who "came" from the Jews, and as "descendants of the Jews" (2 Nephi 30:4; see also 33:8), although they knew that genealogically they were descendants of Joseph rather than Judah (see 1 Nephi 5:14). Since the other Israelites were carried away and

lost, it seemed to the “Jews” that remained that they were the only certain or identifiable remnant of the house of Israel. Consequently, for them the paradigm for classifying people shifted from the dichotomy of “Israelite or Gentile” to that of simply “Jew or Gentile.” Moreover, the distinction was no longer a purely genealogical one, but rather a political or geographical one as well. Anyone who could not claim to be a Jew by tracing his or her lineage back to the tribe, the land or the kingdom of Judah, could be viewed as a Gentile.

The Book of Mormon authors typically viewed the world from a Jewish or Gentile perspective. For example, the title page, written by Mormon, declares that one purpose of the book is to convince “the Jew and the Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST” (see also 1 Nephi 13:42; 2 Nephi 10:16; 26:12, 33; 27:1; 30:3). The use of the simple Jew or Gentile distinction by the Book of Mormon authors naturally led them to refer to many latter-day individuals and peoples as Gentiles simply because they will not have ancestors from the land or kingdom of Judah, even though they may, in fact, be blood descendants of one of the tribes of Israel. For example, while Joseph Smith would be considered a Gentile under the Book of Mormon’s Jew or Gentile paradigm, modern revelation confirms that he had truly descended from the “loins” of Abraham through Joseph (D&C 132:30; see also D&C 113:3–6; 2 Nephi 3:7). Likewise, others who could be deemed Gentiles by the narrow Jew or Gentile designation have been assured by the Lord that they are indeed the “seed of Abraham” (D&C 103:17) and “lawful heirs, according to the flesh” to the “priesthood” that “hath continued through the lineage” of their fathers (D&C 86:8–9). Latter-day Saints understand that most members of the Church are in reality literal blood descendants of the covenant lineage of Israel, even though they “are identified with the Gentiles” (D&C 109:60) in the latter days and in the Book of Mormon. As Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained, from the Book of Mormon’s Jew or Gentile perspective, “Joseph Smith, of the tribe of Ephraim, the chief and foremost tribe of Israel itself, was the Gentile by whose hand the Book of Mormon came forth, and the members of The Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who have the gospel and who are of Israel by blood descent, are the Gentiles who carry salvation to the Lamanites and the Jews.”² Accordingly, Latter-day Saints should find the Book of Mormon’s message to the Gentiles especially significant.

HOW DO THE GENTILES FIT INTO GOD’S PLANS?

The teachings of the Book of Mormon prophets concerning the future of the Gentiles, especially just before and subsequent to the restoration of the gospel, reveal the vital role they are to play in God’s plan to redeem His children.

The Pre-Restoration Gentiles. The Book of Mormon adds great clarity to our understanding of the founding and apostasy of the early Christian church among the Gentiles prior to the restoration of the gospel. Unlike the early disciples of Christ in Old World Palestine who struggled to understand if and how the Gentiles were to be accepted into the Church, the Book of Mormon prophets knew the gospel was for all nations.³ As Lehi spoke of the things he saw in vision, he stated that after being slain, the Messiah “should rise from the dead, and should make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 10:11). In a similar vision, Nephi added that the Gentiles would receive the gospel through the writings of the Jews. The angel said, “Thou hast beheld that the book proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew. . . . Wherefore, these things go forth from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:24–25). With this knowledge, Lehi and Nephi apparently understood more about how the gospel was to be taken to the Gentiles than the early Apostles. While on the American continent, the Savior said as much: “And they [His disciples in Jerusalem] understood me not . . . that the Gentiles should be converted through their preaching. . . . They understood me not that the Gentiles should not at any time hear my voice—that I should not manifest myself unto them save it were by the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 15:22–23).

The Book of Mormon prophets also understood that after the

Gentiles received the gospel by the preaching and writings of the Jews and the ministration of the Holy Ghost, a “great and abominable church” would be founded among them. This church would slay the “saints of God,” torture them, and bind them down into captivity in its quest for power, praise, and wealth (1 Nephi 13:6, 9). Moreover, as the angel explained to Nephi, this church founded by the devil would seek to hide and pervert the true word of God:

“And after they [the words of the book or the precursor to our Bible⁴] go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb . . . thou seest the formation of that great and abominable church, . . . for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away. . . .

“Wherefore, thou seest that after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book. . . .

“ . . . Because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them” (1 Nephi 13:26, 28–29; see also 1 Nephi 14:13–14).

Nephi knew that not only would the words of Christ’s Apostles be corrupted by this great and abominable church, but also they would be taught to ignore the Holy Ghost. “They put down the power and miracles of God, and preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning” (2 Nephi 26:20).

Nephi saw in his vision how some Gentiles, anxious to escape the oppression fostered by the great and abominable church, would eventually escape and find religious freedom in the American promised land. He first described the journey of a man we identify as Christopher Columbus: “And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, . . . and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land” (1 Nephi 13:12).⁵ Then Nephi foretold of the groups that followed: “I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity” (1 Nephi 13:13).

Nephi saw that these Gentiles, after physically escaping, would “humble themselves before the Lord; and the power of the Lord was with them” (1 Nephi 13:16). That power would enable them to gain victory in the Revolutionary War. Nephi foresaw that “their mother Gentiles were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them. And I beheld that the power of God was with them [the Gentiles in America]. . . . The Gentiles that had gone out of captivity were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations” (1 Nephi 13:17–19).⁶

As these Gentiles established themselves in the promised land, the Book of Mormon prophets knew that they would smite and scatter the descendants of Lehi, just as the Gentiles had earlier scattered others of the house of Israel (see 1 Nephi 10:14; 13:14, 34; 22:7–8; 2 Nephi 26:15, 19; 3 Nephi 16:8–9; 20:27–28; Mormon 5:9, 15, 20). This scattering, they knew, was an antecedent to the Lord’s plan to restore the gospel upon the earth.

The Gentiles in the Restoration. Nephi prophesied, “The time cometh that after all the house of Israel have been scattered and confounded, that the Lord God will raise up a mighty nation among the Gentiles, yea, even upon the face of this land; and by them shall our seed be scattered. 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” (1 Nephi 22:7–8; see also 1 Nephi 21:22–23; 13:34; 2 Nephi 6:6; 21:10–16; 26:12–14; Mormon 5:20).⁷

Latter-day Saints understand that the establishment of God’s Church on the earth is a major part of this “marvelous work” the Lord would do in the latter days. The Book of Mormon teaches that, in fulfillment of prophecy, the Gentiles would be the first to receive the gospel in the last days: “And after he [Christ] has manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles [i.e. the ancient church], then he shall manifest himself unto the Gentiles and also unto the Jews [in the last days], and the last shall be first, and the first shall be last” (1 Nephi 13:42; see also 1 Nephi 10:11; 15:17; 21:6; 2 Nephi 21:10–12; Jacob 5).⁸

Nephite prophets delighted to know that their record, the Book of Mormon, would play a vital role in the Lord's work among the Gentiles to restore the gospel and the plain and precious truths fundamental to His plan to redeem His children. Nephi explained that the words his people would write would be delivered to one of the Gentiles (Joseph Smith) and that through him the Lord would bring forth the Book of Mormon to the world (see 2 Nephi 27:6–21). Nephi testified that this record would be of great worth, in that it would “establish the truth of the first [the Bible], which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them” (1 Nephi 13:40). He foresaw that the Book of Mormon would have a profound effect on the people of the earth. It would separate the repentant from the proud. Some would receive it and repent, while others would respond with scorn. To those who accepted it and helped to bring forth the Church of the Lamb, the angel of Nephi's vision promised: “They shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb” (1 Nephi 13:37; see also 2 Nephi 29:3–14).

In addition to the Bible and the Book of Mormon, the Gentiles would be the means of bringing forth other books of scripture to the descendants of Lehi and scattered Israel (see 1 Nephi 13:39–40).⁹ Latter-day Saints typically understand these other records to include the scriptures of the Restoration, such as the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and perhaps other records of the lost tribes of Israel. Nephi explained that eventually “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 my [God's] word also shall be gathered in one” (2 Nephi 29:13–14).

Perhaps the Book of Mormon prophets found their greatest hope for the future in their understanding that this glorious restitution and reunion of scripture would facilitate the restoration of “the

fulness the gospel of the Messiah” that would surely “come unto the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 15:13), who then would take it to the remnant of the descendants of Lehi and the rest of scattered Israel. We can feel the depth of Nephi’s righteous anticipation as he foresaw that the restored gospel would come “from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed—and at that day shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, . . . that they may know how to come unto him [their Redeemer] and be saved” (1 Nephi 15:13–14). That hope for the redemption of Israel and the vital role of the Gentiles in its accomplishment is expressed over and over by Book of Mormon prophets (see 1 Nephi 13:38–42; 15:13–17; 21:22–23; 22:8–12; 2 Nephi 6:6–7; 10:8–9, 18; 30:3–7, 18; 3 Nephi 16:4–5; 16:10–11; 21:1–7, 22–26; 26:8; Mormon 5:10; 7:8; Ether 12:22).

The Book of Mormon further testifies that as the faithful Gentiles fulfill their divine stewardship to take the restored gospel to the world, they will ultimately be recognized as part of the covenant family and be numbered among the house of Israel (1 Nephi 14:1–3; 2 Nephi 10:18; 30:2; 3 Nephi 16:13; 21:1–7, 22–25; 28:27, 32; 30:1–2).¹⁰ The Book of Mormon prophets saw this latter-day gathering, restoring, and redeeming of the faithful as a fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abraham, saying, “In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” (1 Nephi 22:9, see also 2 Nephi 21:10–16; 30:8; 3 Nephi 20:27–46; 21:1–7, 26, 28–29; 29:1; Mormon 5:20).

WHY DID THE BOOK OF MORMON PROPHETS SPEAK TO THE GENTILES?

Notably, the prophets Nephi and Jacob, who began the Book of Mormon record, and Mormon and Moroni, who ended it, spoke the most frequently to the Gentiles.¹¹ Perhaps because they were so recently separated from their brethren, and knowing that their descendants’ eventual restoration to Israel was so dependent on the Gentiles, Nephi and Jacob were moved to exhort the latter-day Gentiles to fulfill their part in God’s plan. As he closed his record,

Nephi spoke of the “charity” he felt for the Gentiles, but also of his great concern for them, “for none of these [the Gentiles] can I hope except they shall be reconciled unto Christ” (2 Nephi 33:9). His record warns the Gentiles that their response to the marvelous work of the restored gospel would have everlasting consequences leading them to either peace and life eternal for acceptance, or blindness and captivity for rejection (1 Nephi 14:7; see also 1 Nephi 14:5–6; 2 Nephi 28:32; 30:2). Echoing that admonition, Jacob declared, “Blessed are the Gentiles, they of whom the prophet has written; for behold, if it so be that they shall repent and fight not against Zion . . . they shall be saved” (2 Nephi 6:12). Hope and concern permeate their admonitions to the Gentiles.

Likewise, having just witnessed the spiritual and physical demise of their people, the last Book of Mormon prophets, Mormon and Moroni, pled with the Gentiles to fulfill their vital role in restoring latter-day Israel. There is a startling sense of anxiety and warning in their words. After abridging 3 Nephi, Mormon exhorted:

“Hearken, O ye Gentiles, and hear the words of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, which he hath commanded me that I should speak concerning you, for, behold he commandeth me that I should write, saying:

“Turn, all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doings, of your lyings and deceivings, and of your whoredoms, and of your secret abominations, and your idolatries, and of your murders, and your priestcrafts, and your envyings, and your strifes, and from all your wickedness and abominations, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel” (3 Nephi 30:1–2).

Later, in some of his last words, Mormon warned the latter-day Gentiles that if they persisted in apostasy, then “a remnant of the seed of Jacob” would rise up against them (Mormon 5:24). As he spoke to descendants of Lehi, the resurrected Savior issued a similar warning to the Gentiles: “If the Gentiles do not repent after the blessing which they shall receive, . . . then shall ye, who are a remnant of the house of

Jacob, go forth among them, . . . and ye shall be among them as a . . . young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he goeth through both treadeth down and teareth in pieces” (3 Nephi 20:15–16; see also Micah 5:8–9; 3 Nephi 16:9–12; 16:14–16; 21:11–21).¹² As he abridged the record of Ether, Moroni also regularly interjected a plea and warning to the Gentiles into the text. “And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done” (Ether 2:11; see also 8:23–26; 12:23–38). Certainly these prophets’ admonitions constitute one of the most important messages of the Book of Mormon to the latter-day covenant people.

CONCLUSION

The Book of Mormon’s message to and about the Gentiles is clear and poignant. The Gentiles would receive the gospel of Jesus Christ beginning in the meridian of time through the ministration of the Holy Ghost and the preaching and writing of the Jews. Later, apostasy would sweep through the Gentile churches, resulting in the formation of the oppressive and predatory great and abominable church. Some Gentiles would then flee to the American promised land, where they would scatter the descendants of Lehi, prosper, and build a great nation blessed by the hand of the Lord. The Lord would then begin to fulfill His covenant to redeem His children by restoring the fullness of the gospel among these Gentiles. The Book of Mormon, the Bible, and the scriptures of the Restoration would play a vital role in that restoration. As the gospel is restored, the Gentiles who accept the gospel will then take it to scattered Israel, restoring them to the covenants. Subsequently, these Gentiles will be recognized as part of the covenant family, be numbered among the house of Israel, and enjoy the fullness of the blessings God extends to His children. These Gentiles are warned that if they reject the blessings, responsibilities, and opportunities being offered them, they will face God’s wrath. Thus is the burden of the latter-day

covenant people called the Gentiles. As stewards of the gospel in the latter days, they are entitled to God's greatest blessings, or His condemnation, depending on what they do with their stewardship, "for of him unto whom much is given much is required" (D&C 82:3).

NOTES

1. First Nephi 21:1 suggests that the term "isles" was understood by Nephi to mean any place to which Israel had been scattered. Joseph Fielding Smith added to our understanding of what became of those tribes as he discussed the purposes for the scattering of Ephraim. Among other reasons, he declared, "It [the scattering of Ephraim] was for the purpose of blessing the people of other nations with the blood of Israel among whom Ephraim 'mixed' himself. The scattering of other Israelites answered the same purpose" (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956], 3:252). Apparently then, after being carried away from the Holy Land, all or at least part of the Ten Tribes dispersed themselves among the nations and were assimilated by or mixed with them.

2. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 233; see also D&C 109:60; 1 Nephi 13:38–40; 15:13–14; 22:7–12.

3. For a discussion of the difficulties the early church leaders faced in integrating the Gentiles into the Church, see Terry B. Ball, "Isaiah and the Gentiles," in *Covenants, Prophecies, and Hymns of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 187–88.

4. Latter-day Saints understand that this book, which "proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew" (1 Nephi 13:24), included a version of the text we now call the Bible.

5. President Ezra Taft Benson made it clear that this prophecy refers to Christopher Columbus (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998], 577).

6. President Ezra Taft Benson made it clear that this prophecy refers to the Revolutionary War (*Teachings*, 575–76).

7. In this context Nephi apparently understood that the "nourishing" which the Gentiles would perform for his descendants, and the rest of scattered Israel, would be of a spiritual nature, for the Gentiles would make known "unto all the house of Israel . . . the covenants of the Father of heaven unto Abraham" (1 Nephi 22:9; see also Isaiah 49:23).

8. The allegory of the olive tree in Jacob 5 well teaches the Gentile's place in God's plans. For a good discussion of the allegory, see Paul Y. Hoskisson, "The

Allegory of the Olive Tree,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1994), 70–104.

9. We interpret Nephi’s reference to “other books” in 1 Nephi 13:39 to include but not be limited to the Book of Mormon.

10. For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see Ball, “Isaiah and the Gentiles,” 187–90.

11. Most of the discourse to and about the Gentiles is found in 1 Nephi through Jacob and Mormon through Moroni. Very little is said to or about them in the middle books of the record, with the exception of the Savior’s discourse concerning them in 3 Nephi 16–28.

12. Elder Bruce R. McConkie understands the “remnant of Jacob” referred to in this passage to be the righteous, and the metaphor of a lion tearing to pieces has reference to the destruction of the wicked at the Second Coming (*Millennial Messiah*, 248).

"I DID LIKEN ALL SCRIPTURES UNTO US"

EARLY NEPHITE UNDERSTANDINGS OF ISAIAH AND IMPLICATIONS FOR "OTHERS" IN THE LAND

John Gee and Matthew Roper

WHILE INTRODUCING LENGTHY quotations from the prophet Isaiah, Nephi invited his readers to "likened" the words of Isaiah to their own circumstances and peculiar situation. "I did liken all scriptures *unto us*, that it might be for our profit and learning" (1 Nephi 19:23; emphasis added). "Now these are the words, and ye may liken them *unto you* and unto all men" (2 Nephi 11:8; emphasis added).

As latter-day readers of the scriptures, we rightly apply the scriptures to our own contemporary situation. In our quest for greater understanding of the scriptures, it may also at times be helpful to put ourselves in the position of those who wrote the scriptures and first listened to their messages. President Brigham Young once asked: "Do you read the Scriptures, my brethren and sisters, as though you were writing them a thousand, two thousand, or five

John Gee is the William "Bill" Gay Assistant Research Professor of Egyptology, and Matthew Roper is a resident scholar, both working for the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts at Brigham Young University.

thousand years ago? Do you read them as though you stood in the place of the men who wrote them? If you do not feel thus, it is your privilege to do so.”²¹

Sometimes in our tendency to read the Book of Mormon in our modern terms—and we certainly think this is proper and appropriate—we do not always consider what these words may have meant and signified for their ancient audience. While this is not true of all the Book of Mormon, some of the content, particularly the material from the small plates (1 Nephi–Omni), was written to both ancient and modern audiences. Nephi explained that the things which he wrote on the plates were specifically “for the instruction of *my people*, who should possess the land, and also for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord” (1 Nephi 19:3; emphasis added). Elsewhere, Nephi tells us that although written for a latter-day audience, his plates, including those in the first part of our Book of Mormon, contained “things which *were* taught among *my people*” (2 Nephi 33:1; emphasis added).

In this essay we discuss how early Nephites in the time of Nephi and Jacob may have likened the words of Isaiah to their own peculiar situation in a newly discovered land of promise. We suggest that the words of Isaiah inscribed and rehearsed by Nephi and Jacob would have been especially meaningful to Nephi’s ancient American audience if there were other non-Lehite and non-Israelite peoples in the land of promise when they arrived. First we will address the common assumption readers sometimes make that the promised land was devoid of inhabitants when Lehi’s family arrived in the land of promise. Then we will suggest how the presence of others in the land makes the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon more meaningful.

NEPHI’S NEIGHBORS

Some modern readers assume that when Book of Mormon peoples arrived they were alone in the land, yet Church leaders and other diligent students of the Book of Mormon have urged caution about making assumptions about New World peoples that go

beyond what the text actually says. In the April 1929 general conference of the Church, President Anthony W. Ivins of the First Presidency counseled the Saints: "We must be careful in the conclusions that we reach. The Book of Mormon teaches the history of three distinct peoples, or two peoples and three different colonies of people, who came from the old world to this continent. *It does not tell us that there was no one here before them. It does not tell us that people did not come after.* And so if discoveries are made which suggest differences in race origins it can very easily be accounted for, and reasonably, for *we do believe that other people came to this continent.*"² In 1952 Hugh Nibley observed: "Now there is a great deal said in the Book of Mormon about the past and future of the promised land, but never is it described as an empty land. The descendants of Lehi were never the only people on the continent, and the Jaredites never claimed to be."³ More recently John Sorenson and Brant Gardner have summarized evidence from the Book of Mormon text that is best explained in the context of non-Lehites in the land of promise.⁴ We will not repeat their arguments here, but we wish to make a few additional observations of our own.

Nephi, after telling us that Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael were angry at him because of the admonitions of the Lord (see 2 Nephi 4:13), states the following:

"And it came to pass that the Lord did warn me, that I, Nephi, should depart from them and flee into the wilderness, and all those who would go with me.

"Wherefore, it came to pass that I, Nephi, did take my family, and also Zoram and his family, and Sam, mine elder brother and his family, and Jacob and Joseph, my younger brethren, and also my sisters, *and all those who would go with me.* And all those who would go with me were those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God; wherefore, they did hearken unto my words" (2 Nephi 5:5–6; emphasis added).

Nephi tells us that at the time the Nephites and the Lamanites separated he was accompanied by his own family, Zoram, Sam, and their respective families, his younger brothers, Jacob and Joseph, and his sisters in addition to "all those who would go with me." Who

were these others, who in addition to those named by Nephi believed in the warnings and revelations of the Lord? The most likely answer seems to be that there were other people in the land who were not of Lehi's family and who were willing to follow Nephi (see 2 Nephi 5:9). Significantly, at this point in the text Nephi introduces the term "people of Nephi" for the first time in reference to his followers, a term that may suggest a larger society that now includes more than his immediate family.

At this point the term *Lamanite* first appears. Nephi states that he made preparations to defend his people, "lest by any means the people who were now called Lamanites should come upon us and destroy us; for I knew their hatred towards me and my children and those who were called my people" (2 Nephi 5:14). As demographer James Smith observes, "One reading of the latter phrase is that 'Lamanites' is a new name for the family and followers of Laman, Nephi's brother-enemy from whom Nephi fled. Another possible reading is that some people not previously called 'Lamanites' were now so called, presumably because of Laman's affiliation with them."⁵

After explaining how he and his people separated themselves from Laman, Lemuel, the sons of Ishmael, and their people, and having told how the people of Nephi became established in the land, Nephi quotes a prophecy of the Lord: "And cursed shall be the seed of *him that mixeth with their seed*; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing. *And the Lord spake it and it was done*" (2 Nephi 5:23; emphasis added). This prophecy anticipates future mixing and intermarriage with the Lamanites, but the immediacy of Nephi's personal observation that "the Lord spake it and it was done," suggests that the process was already under way at the time Nephi left or very shortly after the separation. That is, unidentified people had, at this early period, already joined with the Lamanites in their opposition to Nephi and his people and had become like the Lamanites, and Nephi saw this event as a fulfilment of the Lord's prophecy. Since dissensions⁶ from the Nephites are not mentioned until several generations later, during the time of Jarom (see Jarom 1:13), Nephi's statement about unidentified peoples intermarrying

with the Lamanites seems to indicate the presence of other non-Lehite peoples who had joined or were joining the Lamanites at the time of Nephi.

BEING NUMBERED WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL

With this background in mind and the likelihood that additional non-Lehite peoples had united with both the Nephites and Lamanites, some of Nephi and Jacob's teachings relating to Isaiah take on greater significance. After explaining that "we had already had wars and contentions" with the Lamanites (see 2 Nephi 5:34), Nephi then inserts a lengthy sermon delivered by his brother Jacob (see 2 Nephi 6–10). Jacob indicates while he had previously spoken about many things (2 Nephi 6:2), Nephi now wanted him to preach from Isaiah. In fact, Jacob says, Nephi had even selected the scriptural passages he was to discuss (see 2 Nephi 6:4). The words that Jacob was assigned to preach were prophecies of Isaiah that concern the relationship between scattered Israel and the Gentiles. Why talk about this now? Jacob at that time asked his people to liken these passages from Isaiah to their present situation. He also suggested that the application of these teachings concerned "things which *are*, and which are to come" (2 Nephi 6:4; emphasis added). Given that latter-day prophecies concerning the house of Israel and the Gentiles would be informative to the Nephites on any occasion, what relevance did it have for the early Nephites?

Jacob prophesies that in the latter days, some Jews will reject the Messiah and be destroyed, while others will believe and be saved (see 2 Nephi 6:14–15). Jacob also interprets Isaiah as referring to two distinct groups of Gentiles: those that nourish and unite with Israel (see 2 Nephi 6:12; 10:18–19)—who are called in Isaiah's terms "nursing fathers" and "nursing mothers" (see 2 Nephi 6:6)—and those who fight against Zion (see 2 Nephi 6:13; 10:16). In the latter days, both groups of Gentiles will play an active role in the drama of Israel's gathering and redemption: "Wherefore, he that fighteth against Zion, both *Jew* and *Gentile*, both bond and free, both male and female, shall perish; for they are the whore of all the earth; for

they who are not for me are against me, saith our God” (2 Nephi 10:16; emphasis added). But in likening Jacob’s teachings to themselves, Jacob’s contemporary listeners would have drawn the obvious parallel with their own situation. As a branch of scattered Israel in a covenant land they wanted to establish Zion but were opposed, hated, and persecuted by their former brethren. While Jacob spoke of the latter days, the prophecies had immediate relevance to his listeners, who would see their Lamanite persecutors as the “Jews” of Jacob’s prophecy and the “Gentiles” as those non-Lehite peoples who had now joined with the Lamanites against the people of Nephi. In his application of Isaiah to the Lehites, Jacob also explained that not all Gentiles would oppose Zion. Some Gentiles would be joint heirs with the people of Lehi in the blessings of the land. “But behold, this land, said God, shall be a land of thine inheritance, and the Gentiles shall be blessed upon the land” (2 Nephi 10:10). How would the Gentiles in the land be blessed? By being numbered among the children of Lehi.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, thus saith our God: I will afflict thy seed by the hand of the Gentiles; nevertheless, I will soften the hearts of the Gentiles, that they shall be like unto a father to them; wherefore, the Gentiles shall be blessed and numbered among the house of Israel.

“Wherefore, I will consecrate this land unto thy seed, and them who shall be numbered among thy seed, forever, for the land of their inheritance; for it is a choice land, saith God unto me, above all other lands, wherefore I will have all men that dwell thereon that they shall worship me, saith God” (2 Nephi 10:18–19).

In addition to explaining the latter-day application of Isaiah’s prophecy, Jacob’s sermon can be read as addressing the question of how Lehite Israel is to relate to non-Lehite peoples in the promised land. The answer, Jacob taught, is that they may, if they so choose, join with the people of God in seeking to build up Zion as joint inheritors of the land. Once they do so, they become Israel too and are numbered with Lehi’s seed. Some have wondered why, if other people were present in the land during Book of Mormon times, they are not mentioned more frequently in the record. This teaching,

delivered by the Nephites' first priest, would be foundational for later Nephite prophets and would likely have set a precedent for viewing all other peoples in the land, ideally in covenant terms. Previous cultural identity from the Lehite perspective would be swallowed up in this frame of reference. An example of this can be seen in the case of Nephi's righteous brother Sam. When Lehi blesses Sam he states, "Blessed art thou, and thy seed; for thou shalt inherit the land like unto thy brother Nephi. And thy seed shall be numbered with his seed; and thou shalt be even like unto thy brother, and thy seed like unto his seed; and thou shalt be blessed in all thy days" (2 Nephi 4:11). Lehi, who blessed all of his children, uses the term "numbered" only in Sam's blessing. Interestingly, when Lehite tribal designations are mentioned, there is no tribe of Sam (see Jacob 1:13; 4 Nephi 1:35–38). Why? Apparently because when one is "numbered" with a people, one takes upon himself the name and identity of that people. Gentiles, once numbered with Abraham (see Abraham 2:10), Isaac, Jacob (see 3 Nephi 21:22), Moses and Aaron (see D&C 84:34), or Lehi (see 1 Nephi 14:2; 2 Nephi 10:18–19), are thereafter identified with their covenant fathers, without respect to biological origin. From then on they are simply Israel.

One of the Isaiah passages Nephi cites is particularly interesting in this context: "For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land; and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob" (2 Nephi 24:1, quoting Isaiah 14:1). We do not doubt that such prophecies may quite properly be applied to latter-day readers of the Book of Mormon, but they need not refer to them exclusively. If we were in Nephi and Jacob's audience, how would we liken this scripture to our own situation as they invited them to do? Certainly, we would recognize, as Book of Mormon prophets do, the great mercy of the Lord in bringing us out from Jerusalem and saving us from destruction, but we would also see the Lord's hand in setting us in a new land of promise. Significantly, Isaiah's prophecy would also suggest to the ancient readers or listeners that there were "strangers" in the land who had joined or would join with them

in accepting the teachings of Nephi and could be numbered with the house of Jacob.

TEMPLES

Nephi quotes Isaiah's prophecy, "And it shall come to pass in the last days,⁷ when the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (2 Nephi 12:2–3, quoting Isaiah 2:2–3). While we have our own ways of reading this passage, the Nephites would likely have thought about their own temple, recently built at the place called Nephi, which Nephi "did construct . . . after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things" (2 Nephi 5:16). This was a temple at which Jacob taught (see Jacob 1:17; 2:11), and, as a place where teaching was done, it is a likely place at which Nephi's own teachings to his people and quotations of Isaiah were given. The place called Nephi was located at a higher elevation than Zarahemla and was one of the highest points in all the land (at least none mentioned is ever said to be higher).⁸ So these "many people" of which Isaiah prophesied would have to "go up to the mountain of the Lord." It was also a place where many people came, not only those Nephi describes as "my children and those who were called my people" (2 Nephi 5:14), and "the people who are now called Lamanites" (2 Nephi 5:14), but also those like Sherem who "came . . . among the people of Nephi" (Jacob 7:1).

THOSE WHO FIGHT AGAINST ZION

Nephi cites two long sections from the prophecy of Isaiah that deal with the destruction of the wicked. The first is the prophecy concerning the alliance of Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, against Ahaz, king of Judah (see 2 Nephi 17–22, quoting

Isaiah 7–12). The second prophecy is the Assyrian destruction of Babylon (see 2 Nephi 23–24, quoting Isaiah 13–14). Both of these passages can be seen as reflective of the political situation of the Nephites during Nephi's day.

In the first passage, an Israelite king, Pekah, has made a confederation with a non-Israelite king in an effort to depose the king of Judah and replace him with someone of their choosing (see 2 Nephi 17:1–6, quoting Isaiah 7:1–6). Isaiah prophesied that “it shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass” (2 Nephi 17:7, quoting Isaiah 7:7) and urges Ahaz to simply have faith and be faithful (see 2 Nephi 17:9, quoting Isaiah 7:9).⁹ The sign for this being established is the birth of Immanuel (see 2 Nephi 17:14–16, quoting Isaiah 7:14–16). Before the child knows the difference between good and evil, the Lord will bring another non-Israelite nation, Assyria, who will conquer both nations that are confederate against Judah (see 2 Nephi 17:17–20; 18:4–13, quoting Isaiah 7:17–20; 8:4–13), and although this nation will itself threaten Judah (see 2 Nephi 18:7–8, quoting Isaiah 8:7–8), the Lord will in turn prevent the nation from conquering Judah if they will trust in Him (see 2 Nephi 20:5–27, quoting Isaiah 10:5–27).

Apply this now to Nephi's day. Within forty years of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 5:34), perhaps after thirty years in the promised land (see 1 Nephi 17:4), Nephi notes that “we had already had wars [i.e., large-scale conflicts] and contentions with our brethren” (2 Nephi 5:34). In his ambition to gain power and assert his claims to rulership, Laman, leader of “the people who are now called Lamanites” (2 Nephi 5:14), has made war on another ruler of Israelite descent, Nephi and his people (see 2 Nephi 5:1–3, 14, 19, 34). Perhaps frightened by the superior numbers of their enemies, the people are counseled to trust in the Lord, since those who fight against Zion will end up licking the dust of the feet of the covenant people of the Lord (see 2 Nephi 6:13; 10:16). If there were others in the land, it would also help explain why many of Nephi's people had difficulty understanding Isaiah, although not all of them did (see 2 Nephi 25:1–6). Nephi's emphasis on the universal nature of God's love is even more meaningful if written and

taught to a people grappling with issues of ethnic and social diversity. “And he inviteth them all 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; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile” (2 Nephi 26:33). Nephites would understand Jews to be those who came out from Jerusalem, yet the additional reference to Gentiles and heathens would make sense to a Nephite only if there were others in the land.

MULTIPLE INTERPRETATIONS OF ISAIAH

By encouraging his people to liken the scriptures unto themselves, Nephi allows for multiple interpretations of the same passage, and it is worth noting that Nephi’s interpretations of passages from Isaiah differ from those of Isaiah’s day as well as our own. We will take only two themes to show the variation in interpretation: the temple and the destruction of Babylon.

Isaiah’s temple built in the tops of the mountains is Jerusalem. Nephi’s temple built in the tops of the mountains is the temple that his people constructed. For us, the temple built in the tops of the mountains is in Salt Lake City, although recently President Hinckley has applied this same scripture to the new Conference Center in Salt Lake City.¹⁰

For Isaiah, prophesying the year of the death of Ahaz, about 715 B.C. (see Isaiah 14:28), the utter destruction of Babylon by the Assyrians was a future event that he vividly described:

“It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures [*’ohîm* “eagle-owls”]; and owls [*b^enôt ya^anâ* “ostriches”] shall dwell there, and satyrs [*s^e’îrîm* “goats”] shall dance there” (Isaiah 13:20–21). There is only one time in antiquity that we know of when Babylon was utterly destroyed. In 694 B.C. Babylon allied with Elam under Hallushu-Inshushinak and

assassinated Ashshur-nadin-shumi, Sennacherib's son, heir to the Assyrian throne, and regent of Babylon.¹¹ In 689 B.C., after three years of siege, a furious Sennacherib took Babylon:

"The city and (its) houses,—foundation and walls, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. The wall and outer wall, temples and gods, temple-tower of brick and earth, as many as there were, I razed and dumped into the Arahtu-canal. Through the midst of that city I dug canals, I flooded its site with water, and the very foundations thereof I destroyed. I made its destruction more complete than that by a flood. That in days to come, the site of that city, and (its) temples and gods, might not be remembered, I completely blotted it out with (floods) of water and made it like a meadow."¹²

"After I had destroyed Babylon, had smashed the gods thereof, and had struck down its people with the sword,—that the ground of that city might be carried off, I removed its ground and had it carried to the Euphrates (and on) to the sea. Its dirt reached unto Dilmun [the island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf]."¹³

So thorough was Sennacherib's destruction that no evidence exists that there was any inhabitation in the area until the city was rebuilt by Esarhaddon.¹⁴ Excavation of Babylon shows a layer of "sand and clay with sherd, fragments of bricks, hearths and ash layers" immediately below the Neo-Babylonian settlement.¹⁵ No dated texts from the time between Sennacherib's destruction of Babylon and its rebuilding by Esarhaddon have come forth from Babylon, although they have come from Nippur, Borsippa, and Ur.¹⁶ After Sennacherib's assassination by his son Ardamulishshi,¹⁷ his son Esarhaddon describes the area of Babylon before he rebuilt it as "a wasteland (*namuta*)" inhabited only by birds and fish (see Isaiah 13:20), the previous inhabitants having fled.¹⁸ Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled a quarter of a century later at the end of Isaiah's life.¹⁹

For Nephi and Jacob, Babylon becomes a type of those "that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord" (2 Nephi 6:13), the latter of which he associates with his family and those of the inhabitants round about who have joined them and who have been adopted into the covenant. For Nephi and Jacob, Babylon is

taken as referring to Laman, Lemuel, and those of the Gentiles around them who have rejected the covenant.

We normally take the destruction of Babylon to refer to the destruction of the wicked at the end of time. As a “type of the world,”²⁰ “Babylon represents the world, which must eventually be overcome by covenant Israel.”²¹ As Sidney Sperry put it, “I cannot escape the belief that in [Isaiah 13–14] . . . Isaiah is dealing with the events of the latter days. As I view it, these verses are directed against the spiritual Babylon prevalent in the world of the day when Israel is being gathered and redeemed.”²² While we prefer to apply our own interpretation on events, we should realize that prophets can be inspired to apply earlier scriptures to their own time.

CONCLUSION

Nephi and Jacob quoted the Isaiah passages found in the Book of Mormon dealing with the Gentiles because they found them directly relevant to the situation they found themselves in, having to deal with the Gentiles surrounding them and because of their relationship to the covenant God made with the house of Israel. In their explication of these passages, they taught a doctrine that allowed the Gentiles to be adopted into the covenant, to become nursing fathers and mothers, and to be partakers of the blessings of the gospel. After that time the issue seems to have disappeared among the Nephites, as it does not surface in Book of Mormon times. By likening the scriptures to his people, Nephi sometimes reapplies to his day passages which Isaiah had intended for his day. We in turn follow the same pattern by applying those same scriptures to our day.

NOTES

1. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 7:333.
2. Anthony W. Ivins, in Conference Report, April 1929, 15; emphasis added.
3. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 250.

4. John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's party arrived in the land, did they find others there?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 1–34; Brant A. Gardner, "The Other Stuff: Reading the Book of Mormon for Cultural Information," *FARMS Review of Books* 13, no. 2 (2001): 21–52.

5. James E. Smith, "How Many Nephites? The Book of Mormon at the Bar of Demography," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 272.

6. "Dissension" in Joseph Smith's day referred to "disagreement in opinion, usually a disagreement which is violent, producing warm debates or angry words; . . . and the word is sometimes applied to differences which produce war" (Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* [New York: S. Converse, 1828], s.v. "dissension"). The Book of Mormon generally refers to the last definition. Thus there were "many dissensions away unto the Lamanites" (Words of Mormon 1:16), and Zoramite separation from the Nephites is referred to as "your dissension from among us" (Alma 34:2). Those flattered by Amalickiah "were led away by Amalickiah to dissensions" politically (Alma 46:6), "they dissented even from the church" (Alma 46:7), and "not long after their dissensions they became more hardened and impenitent, and more wild, wicked and ferocious than the Lamanites" (Alma 47:36). In the Book of Mormon there is no sanctity in dissent.

Jacob relates, "There came a man among the people of Nephi, whose name was Sherem" (Jacob 7:1; emphasis added), suggesting Sherem may have been an outsider rather than a Nephite.

7. It is sometimes assumed that use of the phrase *b'aharît hayamîm* "last days" applies exclusively to our own "latter days." The Hebrew phrase is "a prophetic phrase denoting the final period of the history so far as the speaker's perspective reaches; the sense thus varies with the context" (Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968], 31). We should remember that the Qumran sect also considered itself to be in the last days two thousand years ago (see Eduard Lohse, *Die Texte aus Qumran*, 4th ed. [München: Kösel-Verlag, 1986], XV, XVIII). Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 19, notes: "One indication of this is the observation of one of the foremost Catholic authorities on the Dead Sea Scrolls, in one of the first and best books ever to appear on the subject, that the correct title for the community at Qumran should be Latter-day Saints, but that the title could not be used because unfortunately it had been preempted by a 'so-called Christian sect.'"

8. See Omni 1:12, 27–28; Mosiah 20:7, 9, 15; 28:1, 5, 9; 29:3; John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book*, 2d ed. (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), 329; John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 32–34.

9. The sentence “If ye will not believe surely ye shall not be established” may also be translated (from Hebrew), “If ye have no faith, it is because ye are not faithful.”

10. See Gordon B. Hinckley, “This Great Millennial Year,” *Ensign*, November 2000, 67–71.

11. Babylonian Chronicle I.ii.26–iii.38, in A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1975), 77–82; Grant Frame, *Babylonia, 689–627 B.C.: A Political History* (Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1992), 52–53; Walter Mayer, *Politik und Kriegskunst der Assyrer* (Münster, Ugarit-Verlag, 1995), 373. Unfortunately, the inscriptions of Hallashu-Inshushinak, also known as Hallutash-Inshushinak II, do not shed any useful light on the incident (see Friedrich Wilhelm König, *Die elamischen Königsinschriften*, Archiv für Orientforschung Beiheft 16 [Graz: Ernst Weidner, 1965], 168–69).

12. Annals of Sennacherib, Bavian Inscription, lines 50–54, in Daniel D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 83–84.

13. Annals of Sennacherib, Assur Foundation Stela, lines 36–39, in Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 137.

14. Frame, *Babylonia*, 52–63; Mayer, *Politik und Kriegskunst der Assyrer*, 370–74. The Babylonian Chronicle I.iii.28 (in Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 81) refers to it as the years when “no king was in Babylon (*šarru ina Babili^{ki} là baši*).” See also Joan Oates, *Babylon*, 2d ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 119–20.

15. Frame, *Babylonia*, 55–56.

16. Frame, *Babylonia*, 61–62.

17. See Simo Parpola, “The Murderer of Sennacherib,” in *Death in Mesopotamia: XXVIe Rencontre assyriologique internationale*, ed. Bendt Alster (Copenhagen: Akademisk forlag, 1980), 171–82.

18. Esarhaddon Bab. A-G, Episodes 7–9, in Riekele Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien*, Archiv für Orientforschung Beiheft 9 (Graz: Ernst Weidner, 1956), 14–15. For the previous destruction, attributed by Esarhaddon to an unnamed king rather than his father, see episodes 3–6 on pp. 12–14.

19. It might be objected that Isaiah identifies the destruction of Babylon as being by “the Medes” (Isaiah 13:17), even though the other agents of destruction mentioned are Assyrians (see Isaiah 7:17–20; 20:4). But at the time of the conquest of Babylon in 689 B.C., Media was an Assyrian province loaded with people from Samaria (ancient Israel), and Hatti (modern Turkey) by Tiglathpileser III (744–727 B.C.), Sargon II (721–705 B.C.), and Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.), from

which large numbers of conscripts were impressed into the Assyrian army (see Bustenay Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* [Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1979], 16, 26–27, 30, 48–54, 63–65, 70, 83, 128). One should note that Sennacherib's army included 61,000 Elamite (Persian) archers and footmen (Annals of Sennacherib, Nineveh Bull Inscription 102–4, in Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 76, correcting with *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* [Chicago: Oriental Institute and Glückstadt: J. J. Augustin, 1968], A.2: 270; see also Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, 52).

On the other hand, when the Medes and the Persians under Cyrus conquered Babylon, "Cyrus moved into the capital without encountering resistance and treated Nabonidus with his characteristic leniency toward defeated kings" (A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, 2d ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977], 163). Cyrus's army fought only one battle in the greater Babylonian area in 539 B.C. and took cities like Sippar and Babylon without a fight. The buildings were not destroyed, most government officials retained their posts, and life went on much as it had before the change in government (see A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948], 49–56; Herodotus, *Histories* I.189–91; Oates, *Babylon*, 134–38).

20. David R. Seely, "Nephi's Use of Isaiah 2–14 in 2 Nephi 12–30," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 154.

21. Seely, "Nephi's Use of Isaiah 2–14," 155.

22. Sidney B. Sperry, "The Isaiah Quotation: 2 Nephi 12–24," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 1 (1995): 207–8.

GREATER VIEWS ON THE VERY POINTS OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

W. Jeffrey Marsh

BERTEL THORVALDSEN'S INSPIRING *CHRISTUS* statue depicts our Lord and Savior just as the scriptures describe Him, beckoning to us with open arms in a most pleasant manner as if saying: "Come unto me" (Matthew 11:28); "Learn of me" (Matthew 11:29); "Come, follow me" (Luke 18:22); "I am the light" (3 Nephi 18:16); "I have set an example for you" (3 Nephi 18:16); become "even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27); "Do the things which ye have seen me do" (2 Nephi 31:12). The Book of Mormon clearly declares that there is "no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord" (Mosiah 3:17). The Savior's example and teachings are "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) for those seeking eternal life.

The scriptures not only proclaim that there is only *one Savior* for all mankind; they also declare that there is only *one plan* for the salvation of all—"one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians

W. Jeffrey Marsh is an associate professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

4:5)—or, in other words, one body of eternal truths, principles, and ordinances that will enable mortals to reenter and dwell in God’s presence. This body of saving doctrine is referred to as the first principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ (see Articles of Faith 1:4). This doctrine of Christ, which was understood by the ancient prophets, has now been restored to the world in these latter days through the Book of Mormon. Thus, the Book of Mormon is not just “Another Testament” that Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer of all mankind, but it also declares that to come unto Christ we must also come to know “the very points of his doctrine,” in order to “know how to . . . be saved” (1 Nephi 15:14).

The Book of Mormon sets forth and defines the doctrine of Jesus Christ in three distinct passages which were all given by the Savior Himself (see 2 Nephi 31:2–32:6; 3 Nephi 11:31–41; 3 Nephi 27:13–21). Each of these sermons begins and ends with the Savior’s affirmation that “this is my gospel” or “this is my doctrine.” Although this doctrine is discussed or described in various other places throughout the Book of Mormon, these three sermons provide us with the clearest description of the “very points” of Christ’s saving doctrine.

The Savior explains in these Book of Mormon passages that the doctrine of Christ is of God, meaning that it originated with the Father (see 3 Nephi 11:32) and is “the only and true doctrine of the Father” (2 Nephi 31:21). Acceptance of this doctrine will lead to greater faith in both the Father and the Son (see 3 Nephi 11:35; 2 John 1:9). The Savior further testified that the Holy Ghost will confirm this doctrine to every person who desires to know of its truthfulness (see 3 Nephi 11:35–36; 2 Nephi 31:16, 18). He indicated that all the promises contained in this doctrine will be fulfilled by the Father (see 3 Nephi 27:13, 18), meaning that if we accept and live by the doctrine of Christ, we will receive eternal life and eventually inherit all the Father has.

The Book of Mormon explains that we are responsible not only to believe this doctrine but also to act upon it. The Book of Mormon declares the doctrine of Christ to be that all people, everywhere, are commanded to repent and believe in Jesus Christ (see 3 Nephi

11:32, 37; D&C 10:67), be baptized in His name by His authority in the same manner He was baptized, receive a remission of sins by the Holy Ghost (see 2 Nephi 31:17–18), and endure to the end in faithfulness (see 2 Nephi 31:20). Even the Savior Himself obeyed this doctrine, was baptized, received the Holy Ghost, and endured faithfully in order to fulfill all righteousness (see 2 Nephi 31:4–10).

We are commanded to follow His example, accept the principles (faith in Jesus Christ and repentance), and receive the ordinances (baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost) as He did. “Follow thou me,” He commands, “and do the things which ye have seen me do” and be saved (2 Nephi 31:10, 12; see also 3 Nephi 27:21). Once we have accepted this doctrine, it then becomes incumbent upon us, indeed we are commanded, to “go forth . . . and declare the words [of Christ’s doctrine] unto the ends of the earth” (3 Nephi 11:41) so that others may also receive salvation.

Why is it important for every person to understand and accept the doctrine of Christ? Was this particular doctrine of Christ taught by former prophets? What additional enlightenment does the Book of Mormon proffer about this important doctrine?

ALL MUST KNOW AND ACCEPT THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

It is impossible to know how to be saved by Jesus Christ without knowing the doctrines He taught. No other book of scripture teaches the “very points of his doctrine” (1 Nephi 15:14) with such clarity and power as does the Book of Mormon. According to the Savior, the things written in the Book of Mormon “throw greater views upon my gospel” (D&C 10:45). Three times in revelation, Joseph Smith was informed that the Book of Mormon contains “the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (D&C 20:9; see also 27:5; 42:12).

The Savior further testified that the Book of Mormon was purposely designed by Him to bring people to the “true points of my doctrine, yea, and the only doctrine which is in me” (D&C 10:62; see also 10:63). He declared that it contains “the doctrine which the

Father hath given unto me” (3 Nephi 11:32). The major authors of the Book of Mormon similarly testified that they recorded only those things they were commanded by Jesus Christ to write, so that “the children of men . . . may come unto the fountain of all righteousness [Jesus Christ] and be saved” (Ether 8:26; see also 2 Nephi 33:10–12; 3 Nephi 26:12; 30:1; Ether 4:5).

President Howard W. Hunter challenged Latter-day Saints to “come to the fountain of righteousness” by increasing their understanding of the Savior: “We must know Christ better than we know him; we must remember him more often than we remember him; we must serve him more valiantly than we serve him. Then we will drink water springing up unto eternal life and will eat the bread of life.”¹ As Elder Carlos E. Asay noted, the Book of Mormon not only testifies of Christ but also offers “the instructions . . . that mark clearly the path leading to Christ.”²

There is no salvation in false doctrine, no redeeming power in misunderstandings about Jesus Christ, His divinity, nor His mission. As he declared, our ability to inherit eternal life is directly related to our understanding of Christ and his doctrine (see 3 Nephi 27:15–17; John 17:3, 16–17). It is the same doctrine for all people in all ages. There can be no disputation concerning this doctrine as the Savior indicated during His visit to the Nephites and Lamanites in ancient America: “There shall be *no disputations* among you . . . concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been” (3 Nephi 11:28; emphasis added).

A CORRECT KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST EXISTED FROM THE BEGINNING

Since it is critical to know and have a correct understanding of the doctrine of Christ in order to achieve eternal life, all true prophets have known and taught this doctrine. The Prophet Joseph Smith observed that “if we start right, it is easy to go right all the time; but if we start wrong, we may go wrong, and it be a hard matter to get right.”³ This is especially true regarding saving doctrine. There are many opposing opinions about how salvation is obtained,

but the Savior is the source of all true doctrine and His doctrine is either revealed from heaven or remains forever unknown (see Jacob 4:8; Isaiah 55:8–9). It cannot be known in any other way. One of the key reasons the Book of Mormon has been brought forth by the Lord in these latter days is to restore a correct understanding of the plain and precious truths that the ancients had and to end the disputations over His doctrine (see 1 Nephi 13:39–40; 2 Nephi 3:11–12). Joseph of Egypt foresaw that a major accomplishment of the Book of Mormon would be to confound false doctrines and bring people to a knowledge of the Lord’s covenants by teaching what the doctrine of Christ is and why it is important to believe in and act upon it (see 2 Nephi 3:12).

Beginning with Adam and Eve, all former prophets had the doctrine of Christ revealed to them. Adam and Eve received a true knowledge of Jesus Christ and His saving doctrine at the beginning of human history (see Moses 6:53–58). The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible bears witness that Adam and Eve were taught about the atoning sacrifice and mission of Jesus Christ, that they rejoiced in knowing about “the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient,” and that they “blessed the name of God, and . . . made all these things known unto their sons and their daughters” (Moses 5:11–12).

These very same points of the doctrine of Christ have been taught in every succeeding dispensation whenever authorized servants of God were on the earth (see Moses 6:50). All true prophets understood that Jesus Christ was the Redeemer of the world (see 1 Nephi 11:27; Mosiah 3:5). There has never been any other way to salvation (see 2 Nephi 31:21). Besides Adam and Eve, Enoch also taught this same doctrine to his people. He quoted to his people the very words God had given to Adam, saying, “Hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions, and be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth, which is Jesus Christ, the only name which shall be given under heaven, whereby salvation shall come unto the children of men, ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, asking all things in his name, and whatsoever ye shall ask, it shall be given you” (Moses

6:52; see also 6:42). Noah preached the same doctrine of Christ for 120 years prior to the Flood, testifying that if his people would repent, be baptized, exercise faith in Christ, and receive the Holy Ghost, the cataclysmic flood could be prevented (see Moses 8:17, 19–20, 24). This same doctrine was renewed in Abraham’s day when he was instructed that all children eight years of age or older needed to accept the doctrine of Christ and be baptized in His name in order to be saved (see JST, Genesis 17:3–7, 11). The Apostle Paul testified that if we accept the doctrine of Christ, it will lead us to perfection (see JST, Ephesians 6:1–2). In our day these same principles are the heart and soul of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ: “We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Articles of Faith 1:4).

Such explicit faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has always been the first principle of the gospel; it is a prerequisite to salvation, not just among Old Testament peoples who lived in the Middle East but also among the Book of Mormon peoples who lived in the New World. Over five hundred years before the Messiah was born, Nephi declared, “We believe in Christ, . . . and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith; . . . and we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:24–26). About 150 years before Christ was born, the prophet Abinadi similarly taught that Christ, who would overcome all death, is the light and life of men, the only hope for their salvation (see Mosiah 16:6–8).

Thus, the Book of Mormon clearly teaches that the doctrine of Christ was known from the beginning and that the blessings of the Atonement benefited those who lived before the time of Christ. The people repented and were cleansed and sanctified by the Atonement even before it was performed. It was as if the Messiah had already come among them: “And the Lord God hath sent his holy prophets among all the children of men, to declare . . . that . . .

whosoever should believe that Christ should come, the same might receive remission of their sins, and rejoice with exceedingly great joy, even as though he had already come among them” (Mosiah 3:13; see also Mosiah 16:6).

WHAT IS THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST?

Now that we have established that belief in the doctrine of Christ is essential to salvation for all people in all ages, how does the Book of Mormon define this important doctrine?

As noted earlier, the Book of Mormon declares the doctrine of Christ to be faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Redeemer, repentance of sin, baptism by immersion under the hands of those holding the proper priesthood authority, reception of the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, and then living in faithful endurance to the end of our lives (see 2 Nephi 31:2–32:6; 3 Nephi 11:31–41; 3 Nephi 27:13–21). Christ’s doctrine as explained here seems simple enough, yet it presents one of the greatest challenges because it requires us to become like little children in order to receive it (see 3 Nephi 11:37), and because it demands a great deal of humility in order to comply with it (see 2 Nephi 31:13; 3 Nephi 11:37). Comparatively few people in the world are willing to receive and abide by this doctrine.

In describing the doctrine of Christ, the Savior testified that it is centered in His redemptive mission. A central feature to this doctrine is that Christ came to this earth by divine appointment of the Father to perform the Atonement, to be lifted up on the cross, and to be resurrected, and thus to save and redeem all mankind (see 3 Nephi 27:13). Christ willingly chose to comply with the will of His Father (see 2 Nephi 31:7) and through His death and resurrection has provided a way for all humankind to be delivered from physical and spiritual death (see 2 Nephi 31:4). Christ alone has obtained the power to draw us unto Him and bring us back into God’s presence to be judged of our works (see 3 Nephi 27:14–15).

The doctrine of Christ promises great blessings to those who obey its precepts. Those who repent and are baptized in the name

of Jesus Christ will be filled or visited with the Holy Ghost (see 3 Nephi 27:16; 11:35). They will experience a remission of sins by “fire” (2 Nephi 31:17). The Holy Ghost will then “tell” and “show” them all things they should do (2 Nephi 32:3, 5). Those who know “the true points of doctrine” (Helaman 11:23) can have daily revelations and experience peace. They are “numbered among my people,” the Savior declared (3 Nephi 21:6) and are “buil[t] upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them” (3 Nephi 11:39). They will be saved and will inherit the kingdom of God and have eternal life (see 3 Nephi 11:33; 2 Nephi 31:20). If they faithfully endure to the end, they will be held guiltless before the Father when Christ stands to judge the world (see 3 Nephi 27:16).

The doctrine of Christ is also accompanied by several serious warnings. Those who fail to accept this doctrine and choose not to act upon it can never enter the kingdom of God (see 3 Nephi 11:37–38). If they refuse baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and by His authority, they will be “damned” (3 Nephi 11:34). According to the justice of God, no unclean thing can enter into His kingdom. Only those who have “washed their garments in [Christ’s] blood, because of their faith” (3 Nephi 27:19), and have repented of all their sins, been baptized, and endure in faithfulness to the end will be allowed to dwell in God’s presence for all eternity. Failure to do so results in their being shut out from the presence of the Father forever (see 3 Nephi 27:17).

The Savior further warned that whosoever declares “more or less than this, and establish[es] it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil” (3 Nephi 11:40). The Apostle John counseled that if any come among us teaching any doctrine other than the doctrine of Christ, we are to avoid them (see 2 John 1:10). Men and women are free to believe the doctrine of Christ or not, but the Book of Mormon assures that those who accept this doctrine are choosing “liberty and eternal life” (2 Nephi 2:27).

One of the tests of mortality is our degree of willingness to receive truth. We do not have the luxury of choosing how we will be saved. There is only one plan for the salvation of all mankind. There

are no other alternatives. In a modern revelation, our Heavenly Father declared, “I am God, and have sent mine Only Begotten Son into the world for the redemption of the world, and have decreed that he that receiveth him shall be saved, and he that receiveth him not shall be damned” (D&C 49:5). In counseling with his wayward son, Alma warned Corianton not to “risk one more offense against your God upon *those points of doctrine*, which ye have hitherto risked to commit sin” (Alma 41:9; emphasis added). In like manner, if we turn away from the doctrine of Christ as explained in the Book of Mormon, we also run the risk of offending God.

We simply cannot afford to be mistaken in regard to this doctrine. The Book of Mormon, therefore, is an essential key to our salvation because it plainly teaches this doctrine. We not only need to know the Redeemer better, as President Hunter suggested, but also needs to learn the “very points of his doctrine” (1 Nephi 15:14) in order to know how to be saved, and the Book of Mormon is the instrument God provided to make that possible. Its title page states that it came forth so that we might “know the covenants of the Lord . . . and . . . [be convinced] . . . that JESUS is the CHRIST.” The Prophet Joseph Smith testified that in this respect, “the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth” (introduction to the Book of Mormon, paragraph 6).

THE KEEPER OF THE GATE

By His example, our Savior showed us the straitness of the path and the narrowness of the gate by which we all need to enter. The Book of Mormon explains that although He was holy and without sin, Christ demonstrated His humility by obeying His own doctrine—by keeping the commandments of God to be baptized, receiving the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end in faithfulness (see 3 Nephi 31:8; D&C 20:22). “Now this is the commandment,” He in turn says to us, “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).

The prophets in the Book of Mormon solemnly testified that Christ is the keeper of the gate leading to the celestial kingdom, “and he employeth no servant there” (2 Nephi 9:41). Why is He there? The Book of Mormon answers: He stands with open arms to greet us (see Mormon 6:17). “He denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; . . . all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33). “Come unto me,” He promises, “and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life” (Alma 5:34); “Come unto [me] and partake of [my] goodness” (2 Nephi 26:33).

Whether or not we will have the privilege of greeting Him at the gate of the celestial kingdom will be determined by what we choose to do with His doctrine. In a revelation to Joseph Smith, the Lord indicated that those who rebel and fight against the testimony of Jesus will come forth in the Resurrection after extensive personal suffering, without any glory, and will suffer the second death—a permanent separation from the presence of God (see D&C 76:35–38; Alma 12:16; Helaman 14:17–18). Joseph further learned that those who receive not the testimony of Jesus will inherit the telestial kingdom—the lowest degree of glory in the Resurrection (see D&C 76:99–100). The Savior also revealed that those who have the opportunity and refuse to receive the testimony of Jesus in mortality but afterward receive it—or those who receive it but are not valiant in it—will inherit the terrestrial, or second, degree of glory. But those who receive the testimony of Jesus and believe on His name and are baptized in His name, according to the commandment which He has given, will be washed clean of their sins, be sealed up to eternal life, and inherit the fulness of the Father in the highest degree of glory in the celestial kingdom (see D&C 76:50–56; Helaman 3:27–30). Thus, what we decide to do with the testimony (or doctrine) of Jesus will ultimately determine what He does with us.

The Savior has declared and the Father has promised that if we will accept the doctrine Christ taught and “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men, . . . feasting upon the word of Christ and endure to the end,” we shall have eternal life (2 Nephi 31:20). The

doctrine of Christ will show us what we need to do in order to return to God's presence. If we accept the "principles of the doctrine of Christ," we can "go on unto perfection" (JST, Hebrews 6:1). This doctrine enables us to "come unto Christ" in order to "be perfected in him" (Moroni 10:32). His beautiful and divine entreaty still stands: "Come unto me and be ye saved" (3 Nephi 12:20).

The Lord expects us to know the very points of His doctrine, and the Book of Mormon is the means He has provided to help us learn them. We can be grateful, therefore, that God has seen fit to restore the doctrine of Christ in its plainness to us.

NOTES

1. Howard W. Hunter, "What Manner of Men Ought Ye to Be," *Ensign*, May 1994, 64.
2. Carlos E. Asay, *In the Lord's Service: A Guide to Spiritual Development* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 146.
3. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 343.

THE FALL OF MAN

ONE OF THE THREE PILLARS OF ETERNITY

Todd B. Parker

ELDER BRUCE R. McCONKIE WROTE: “God himself, the Father of us all, ordained and established a plan of salvation whereby his spirit children might advance and progress and become like him. It is . . . the system that saves and exalts, and it consists of three things. These three are the very pillars of eternity itself. They are the most important events that ever have or will occur in all eternity. They are the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. . . .

“We must know how and in what manner these three eternal verities—the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement—are inseparably woven together to form one plan of salvation. No one of them stands alone; each of them ties into the other two; and without a knowledge of all of them, it is not possible to know the truth about any one of them. . . .

“But, be it remembered, the Atonement came because of the Fall. Christ paid the ransom for Adam’s transgression. If there had

Todd B. Parker is an associate professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

been no Fall, there would be no Atonement with its consequent immortality and eternal life. Thus, just as surely as salvation comes because of the Atonement, so also salvation comes because of the Fall.”¹ The purpose of this chapter is to show:

- The Fall was part of the plan of salvation since premortality.
- The Fall was a good thing.
- The Fall can be better understood in the context of the Creation.
- The Fall provided mankind a world of opposites, opportunity, and experience.
- The Fall is inseparably linked with the purposes of the Atonement.

Then we will be able to see how the Fall introduced sin, death, mortality, opposition, and the possibility of immortality and eternal life into the world.

PART OF THE PLAN FROM THE BEGINNING

The fall of Adam was a part of the Father’s plan of redemption from the very beginning. Aaron, one of the four sons of Mosiah, taught this truth to the father of King Lamoni. “And Aaron did expound unto [the king] the scriptures from the creation of Adam, laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state and also the plan of redemption, which was *prepared from the foundation of the world*, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name” (Alma 22:13; emphasis added). The phrase “from the foundation of the world” has reference to the premortal existence.

Joseph Smith also taught that the entire plan of salvation, including the fall of Adam, was known before the earth was created. “The great Jehovah contemplated the whole of the events connected with the earth, pertaining to the plan of salvation, before it rolled into existence; . . . the past, the present, and the future were and are, with Him, one eternal ‘now;’ He knew of the fall of Adam, the iniquities of the antediluvians, of the depth of iniquity that would be connected with the human family; . . . He comprehended the fall of man, and his redemption; He knew the plan of salvation;

. . . He was acquainted with the situation of all nations and with their destiny; . . . He knows the situation of both the living and the dead, and has made ample provision for their redemption.”² In other words, there was no mad scramble in heaven when Adam fell. The Fall was part of the plan from the beginning, and those present in the premortal world knew of it and accepted it even before the earth was created.³

THE FALL WAS A GOOD THING

An analysis of Adam and Eve’s retrospective reaction to the Fall, as contained in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Genesis account, clearly shows that the Fall was a good thing for them and for us. “And in that day Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh shall I see God.

“And Eve, his wife, heard all these things, and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient” (Moses 5:10–11).

Note what blessings Adam realized came to him as a result of the Fall:

1. “My eyes are open.” He became as the gods, knowing good and evil.
2. “I shall have joy.” This was unavailable prior to the Fall (see 2 Nephi 2:23).
3. “In the flesh I shall see God.” The resurrection of Jesus Christ made this possible.

Eve listed some additional blessings that resulted from the Fall:

1. “We . . . should have . . . seed.” Procreation came into the world.
2. “We . . . have known good and evil.” Choosing between opposites afforded rewards.

3. "We . . . have known . . . the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient." The Atonement would be provided.

THE FALL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CREATION

From the writings of Abraham, we know that the earth was created as a place for God's spirit children to come, obtain a mortal body, and be tested (see Abraham 3:24–26). Although the steps of the Creation are listed in the biblical account of Genesis, an explanation of the purpose and importance of the Creation comes only through latter-day revelation (see 1 Nephi 17:36; 2 Nephi 2:11–15; Moses 1:39). The Creation can be viewed as being accomplished in three phases: a celestial, spirit creation; an Edenic, paradisiacal creation; and a telestial, mortal creation. A review of these three phases of the Creation will help us better understand the context and setting of the Fall.⁴

Phase 1 of the Creation took place at a celestial level. We do not have a day-by-day account of this part of the Creation; we only know that it happened.⁵ From the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis, we learn that all things were created spiritually before they were created physically. Speaking of "every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew," the Lord said, "I, the Lord God, created all things of which I have spoken, spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth" (Moses 3:5). In the Doctrine and Covenants we learn that spirits are "in the likeness of that which is temporal; and that which is temporal in the likeness of that which is spiritual" (D&C 77:2). The temporal creations we observe on earth are like a mirror image of the premortal spirit creations. This spirit creation included the earth itself as well as plants, animals, and all other living things on it (see Bible Dictionary, "Spirit," 776).

Phase 2 of the Creation, identified as the Edenic, paradisiacal creation, followed the celestial, or spirit, creation. During this phase, things were tangible, or physical, although they were not yet mortal. Since the term *immortal* is usually used to indicate a resurrected

status, things during Phase 2 will be referred to as being “nonmortal” (see Bible Dictionary, “Flesh,” 675–76).

Lehi described this phase of the Creation and the conditions that would have prevailed upon the earth if Adam had not fallen:

“And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end.

“And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin” (2 Nephi 2:22–23).

Hence, during Phase 2, there was no death, no corruption, no aging, no blood, no pain, and no procreation.⁶ It was an Edenic, paradisiacal, nonmortal condition. Adam’s transgression, or fall, caused a shift to a telestial existence (Phase 3). The following chart may help to summarize and clarify the relationship between the Fall and the three phases of the Creation (see 2 Nephi 2:23–26).

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
<i>Spirit Creation</i>	<i>Physical/Spiritual Creation</i>	<i>Temporal Creation</i>
<i>Celestial State</i>	<i>Paradisiacal State</i>	<i>Telestial State</i>
<i>Spiritual</i>	<i>Nonmortal</i>	<i>Mortal</i>
<i>No Detailed Scriptural Account (Moses 3:5)</i>	<i>Accounts of Six Creative Periods (Genesis 1; Moses 2, 3)</i>	<i>Accounts after the Fall (Genesis 3; Moses 4, 5)</i>
	Conditions (before the Fall):	F Conditions (after the Fall):
	1. No death	A 1. Spiritual, physical death
	2. No procreation	2. Reproduction
	3. No blood (not mortal)	L 3. Blood (mortal)
	4. Innocent (not accountable)	L 4. Accountable
	5. No joy, no sin, yet no good (no alternatives)	5. Joy, good, evil, sin present choices
	6. No corruption, aging, pain	6. Corruption, aging, pain
	7. In God’s presence	7. Out of God’s presence

Confusion in understanding the Fall often comes from a misunderstanding of Phase 2. Every mortal comes from Phase 1 to Phase 3, while only Adam and Eve experienced Phase 2. We must realize that the terrestrial, Edenic era was a very different world. It was unlike anything any of us has ever experienced. We should remember that the scriptures describe another terrestrial era, the Millennium, as being far beyond our terrestrial experience (see D&C 133:45; Isaiah 64:4). Thus, it is not surprising that we do not have a complete and adequate description of what it was like in Eden. Try to imagine and describe a world in which there was no joy, no misery, no corruption, no death, and no procreation. Opposites as we know them did not exist. The common trials of mortality—pain, sorrow, guilt, and sin—were not part of life in Eden.

How different is Phase 3! There are numerous evidences in our present world that mankind is in a fallen condition. We live in a world of disease, death, corruption, and evil. Through revelation we know that mankind is the literal offspring of Deity. However, a review of history shows an astounding amount of war, hatred, inhumanity, and evil. Two alternatives present themselves: either man is not the offspring of Deity, or we are fallen. Truly, “all mankind [is] in a lost and in a fallen state” (1 Nephi 10:6). Not only man, but the entire earth lost its paradisiacal glory because of the Fall. For this reason, we believe “that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory” (Articles of Faith 1:10). During the millennial era, the whole earth will be renewed to its former Edenic glory. Truly, as Lehi said, “all things” (2 Nephi 2:23) were affected by the Fall.

THE TWO DEATHS

The prophet Jacob taught that unless there was an infinite atonement the “first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration” (2 Nephi 9:7). The “first judgment” to which he had reference was “thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17).⁷ This judgment included both spiritual and physical death. Alma taught that “the fall had brought upon all mankind a

spiritual death as well as a temporal [death]" (Alma 42:9). These two deaths brought by the Fall affect everyone and everything. A brief examination of these deaths introduced by Adam and how the Atonement unconditionally overcomes them will improve our understanding of the Fall.

Physical death. Physical death is the separation of the body and the spirit. Everyone who comes to earth and gains a body, including sons of perdition and translated beings, will suffer physical death as a result of the Fall (see 2 Nephi 9:6; 1 Corinthians 15:22). Thus, the Fall places the reality of physical death squarely before each of us. Jacob says that without an atonement our flesh would "rot" and "rise no more" (2 Nephi 9:7). Consequently, all of us should appreciate our need for redemption from death. In addition, we must recognize that death is a vital part of the "plan of happiness" (Alma 42:16). The great blessing that comes to us because of death is the Resurrection. In truth, the Resurrection comes to us because of the Fall. Jacob taught that "to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and *the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall*" (2 Nephi 9:6; emphasis added). As Elder McConkie said, "Many among us have no difficulty envisioning that the atonement is infinite and eternal and applies to all forms of life. . . . But some among us have not yet had it dawn upon them that all things fell and became mortal so they could be resurrected."⁸ How grateful we should be that the Fall provided the way for us to be resurrected! Christ's atonement unconditionally overcomes physical death for everyone through the Resurrection (see 2 Nephi 9:11–13; Alma 11:42–45; Helaman 14:15–17).

Spiritual death. The spiritual death brought about by Adam is a separation from God (see Bible Dictionary, "Death," 655). The Fall allowed us to leave God's presence and come to earth. This is the "first death" (D&C 29:41). Christ's atonement overcomes this spiritual death, or separation, brought about by Adam because all mankind will be brought back into God's presence to be judged. Nephi, Jacob, Amulek, Alma, Samuel the Lamanite, Jesus, and Moroni all taught this doctrine.⁹ For example, Samuel the Lamanite

taught, “Yea, behold, [Christ’s] death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual. But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth all mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord” (Helaman 14:16–17). Hence, the spiritual death brought about by Adam is unconditionally overcome for all mankind because they will be returned to God’s presence for judgment. If a person is then found unworthy to remain in God’s presence, he will suffer a “second death” (Helaman 14:18) and be removed from the presence of God. Thus, people are accountable only for their own actions as “men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression” (Articles of Faith 1:2).

In short, each death brought into the world by Adam is unconditionally overcome for all mankind through the Atonement. Physical death is overcome through a universal resurrection, and spiritual death is overcome through a restoration to God’s presence for a final judgment. The Fall brought about a mortal life that allows us to progress by experiencing temporal and spiritual death. However, we are ultimately responsible only for our own individual choices (see Alma 41:3–5).

AGENCY, OPPOSITION, AND EXPERIENCE

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were in a state of innocence. Although sin had not yet entered the world, they had agency (see Moses 7:32). Our first parents were introduced to the two trees in the garden to allow them to experience the use of their agency. Lehi explained:

“And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents, and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and in fine, all things which are created, it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter.

“Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for

himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other” (2 Nephi 2:15–16).

Remember that Lehi said there was “no joy” before the Fall because Adam and Eve “knew no misery” (2 Nephi 2:23). Opposition is a necessary prerequisite for man to experience true joy. Pain is required for man to appreciate pleasure. Difficulties are necessary to help us develop courage. Death is necessary to help us understand eternal life. In Genesis we read of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17). More than just intellectual understanding is involved here. The word translated as “knowledge” comes from the Hebrew *yāda’*. One meaning of this word is to “*know by experience*.”¹⁰ This implies a kind of knowledge that is gained by firsthand, intimate experience. Thus, *yāda’* is also used to describe marital intimacy, such as “Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived” (Genesis 4:1). Through the Fall Adam and Eve entered a world where they could learn to distinguish between good and evil by their own experience. Hence, we also experience firsthand a world of opposites where we “taste the bitter, that [we] may know to prize the good” (Moses 6:55). This process is a great blessing. “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11) so that “all these things shall give [us] experience, and shall be for [our] good” (D&C 122:7).

PARTAKING OF THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

To effect the change from an Edenic, paradisiacal world to a fallen, telestial world, Adam and Eve had to undergo a change of state or status. That change is recorded in scripture as the partaking of the forbidden fruit. Elder McConkie has suggested that Adam and Eve’s partaking of the fruit was figurative. “Again the account is speaking *figuratively*. What is meant by partaking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is that our first parents complied with whatever laws were involved so that their bodies would change from their state of paradisiacal immortality to a state of natural mortality.”¹¹ In a later work, Elder McConkie explained this as follows: “As to the fall, the scriptures

set forth that there were in the Garden of Eden two trees. One was the tree of life, which *figuratively* refers to eternal life; the other was the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which *figuratively* refers to how and why and in what manner mortality and all that appertains to it came into being.”¹² Although we do not fully know the details of the scriptural record concerning the forbidden fruit, in some sense the partaking of the fruit was symbolic.

TRANSGRESSION VERSUS SIN

Adam, Eve, and Lehi all refer to the Fall as a “transgression” rather than a “sin” (see Moses 5:10–11; 2 Nephi 2:22). The word *transgress* means “to step beyond or across; . . . to go beyond limits set.”¹³ The words *transportation*, *transcontinental*, and *transmigration* all connote the moving from one place to another. Adam’s “transgression” was a “crossing over” from an Edenic, terrestrial state to a fallen, telestial state. This transgression included leaving a state of paradisiacal laws and crossing over to a condition of mortal, temporal laws.

Since Adam and Eve were in a “state of innocence” (2 Nephi 2:23) prior to the Fall, their accountability was similar to that of little children. Because of their innocence, little children “are not capable of committing sin” (Moroni 8:8). King Benjamin taught that such transgressions are automatically covered by the Atonement (see Mosiah 3:16). Lehi explained that there was “no sin” (2 Nephi 2:23) in the world prior to the Fall. Hence, since Adam and Eve could not sin, their “transgression” of terrestrial law brought sin and telestial law into the world. Apparently, Joseph Smith did not believe that Adam’s transgression was a sin. “Joseph said in answer to Mr. Stout that Adam did not commit sin in eating the fruits, for God had decreed that he should eat and fall. . . . [That] he should die was the saying of the Lord therefore the Lord appointed us to fall and also redeemed us.”¹⁴

CONFLICTING COMMANDMENTS?

The first commandment given to Adam and Eve in the garden was to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis

1:28). However, the Lord also gave to Adam and Eve the command: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). These two statements made by the Lord in Genesis have become known as the “conflicting commandments.” How is it possible to reconcile these two statements?

The Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 2:17 helps clarify the Lord’s intent by adding an important phrase: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, *nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it*, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Moses 3:17; emphasis added). Surely this commandment is different from other commandments. Nowhere else does God use this same wording. For example, the Lord did not say, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” or “Thou shalt not kill” and then say, “Nevertheless thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee.” Why the unusual wording? The key may lie in the interpretation of the word *it*. When the Lord said, “I forbid it,” to what was He referring? President Joseph Fielding Smith explained: “Just why the Lord would say to Adam that he forbade him to partake of the fruit of that tree is not made clear in the Bible account, but in the original as it comes to us in the book of Moses it is made definitely clear. It is that the Lord said to Adam that *if he wished to remain as he was in the garden, then he was not to eat the fruit*, but if he desired to eat it and partake of death he was at liberty to do so.”¹⁵ The Lord was explaining to Adam the consequences associated with the use of his agency. A parenthetical addition of the consequences to the Lord’s commandments to Adam as recorded in Moses 3:16–17 may be helpful:

“Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat.” (You may use your agency to choose.)

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself.” (You may eat from the forbidden tree if you want the consequence that you will fall and man will come into mortality.)

“The day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (You will

experience the consequences of becoming mortal, leaving the garden, and experiencing death.)

Hence, Adam could not remain as he was in the garden if he partook of the fruit.

ACCORDING TO GOD'S DESIGN

The Lord ultimately intended that Adam and Eve partake of the fruit. "Adam fell that men might be" (2 Nephi 2:25). If Adam and Eve had not partaken, they would have remained in the garden, and we would still be existing as spirits in the premortal world. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that Adam did what the Lord intended him to do. "Adam did only what he had to do. He partook of that fruit for one good reason, and that was to open the door to bring you and me and everyone else into this world. . . . If it hadn't been for Adam, I wouldn't be here; you wouldn't be here; we would be waiting in the heavens as spirits."¹⁶ Similarly, President Brigham Young said: "Did [Adam and Eve] come out in direct opposition to God and to his government? No. But they transgressed a command of the Lord, and through that transgression sin came into the world. The Lord knew they would do this, and he had designed that they should."¹⁷

THE FALL AND THE ATONEMENT

Moroni declared that because of the Fall, Jesus came into the world, and because of Jesus came the redemption of mankind. "Behold, [God] created Adam, and by Adam came the fall of man. And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ, even the Father and the Son; and because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man" (Mormon 9:12–13). Moroni's statement helps us see the fundamental reason for the Fall and its relationship to the Atonement. Adam fell "that men might be" so that we "might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25) through the Atonement. The Fall provides the way for us to become like the Father and the Son and "receive a fulness of joy" (D&C 93:33). As Jacob said, "O how great the plan of our God!" (2 Nephi 9:13).

CONCLUSION

The Fall is one of the three greatest and most important events in the history of the world. Along with the Creation and the Atonement, it is one of the three pillars of eternity. The Fall was part of the Father's plan of salvation from the beginning. We exist because of the fall of Adam. Without the Fall, all mankind would still be premortal spirit children of God yet to take upon themselves mortal tabernacles and live upon this earth. The blessings of mortality, earth life, and opposition all resulted from the Fall. While death had its beginnings with the Fall, both the temporal and spiritual deaths brought by Adam provide a mortal world full of invaluable experience for God's children. Without the Fall, Jesus could not have been born. If Jesus had not been born, immortality and eternal life would not be available. As Lehi said, "But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:24–25).

NOTES

1. Bruce R. McConkie, "Christ and the Creation," *Ensign*, June 1982, 9.
2. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 220.
3. In the premortal council Lucifer proposed that he would "redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost" (Moses 4:1). This suggests that the knowledge of a fall and the need for redemption were known to God's spirit children before the creation of the earth.
4. The statements in this paragraph are taken from Robert J. Matthews, *Teaching the Doctrine of the Fall in an Old Testament Course*, CES Symposium Handout, Brigham Young University, 1995.
5. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 1:75–76.
6. See Bible Dictionary, "Fall of Adam," 670, and Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:76–77.
7. Robert J. Matthews, "The Atonement of Jesus Christ," in *Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 182.

8. Bruce R. McConkie, "The Three Pillars of Eternity," 17 February 1981. *Brigham Young University 1981 Fireside and Devotional Speeches* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1981), 31.

9. Everyone who leaves God's presence as a result of Adam's fall will return to God's presence to be judged. If one person were not brought back to God's presence, the Atonement would be incomplete.

2 Nephi 2:9–10: All men come unto God and stand in His presence to be judged.

2 Nephi 9:15, 22, 38: All are resurrected and stand before Him, even the wicked.

Alma 11:43–44: We shall stand before God. This restoration comes to all.

Alma 12:12–15, 24: All are brought before the bar. We must prepare to meet God.

Alma 42:23: The Atonement restores men to God's presence according to the law.

3 Nephi 26:4: All nations, tongues, and people shall stand before God.

Mormon 9:12–13: All are brought back into the presence of the Lord. This is wherein all men are redeemed.

10. F. Brown, S. Driver, C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 393.

11. McConkie, "Christ and the Creation," 15; emphasis added.

12. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 86; emphasis added.

13. *Websters's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. "transgress."

14. Joseph Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 63.

15. Joseph Fielding Smith, "Was the Fall of Adam Necessary?" *Improvement Era*, April 1962, 231; emphasis added.

16. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, October 1967, 121–22.

17. Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), 103.

GETHSEMANE AND GOLGOTHA

THE BOOK OF MORMON'S ILLUMINATION ON THE HOURS OF ATONEMENT

Mark Elbert Eastmond

THE MOST FOUNDATIONAL OF ALL CHRISTIAN doctrine is the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, that the Son of God came to earth as a man and at the end of His brief sojourn paid the penalty for sin. That Christ paid the horrible price is widely accepted among the many Christian sects and denominations throughout the world. Yet the nature of that price, including the ignominious way the account was settled and the reasons such payment was required, poses a formidable challenge to students of the Bible everywhere. Were it not for the preeminent role of the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ, mankind's understanding of the Atonement would be cursory and incomplete. Taken alone, the New Testament gives little detail about the atoning sacrifice beyond a chronology of events. However, within the Book of Mormon we find those events fleshed out, along with an unparalleled doctrinal explanation of *why* Christ suffered and *what* He suffered during the hours of Atonement.

Mark Elbert Eastmond is a Church Educational System preservice trainer at the Cedar City Utah Institute of Religion.

WHY CHRIST SUFFERED

Prerequisite to understanding *what* Christ suffered during His final hours is an understanding of *why* such a sacrifice was required. While these foundational truths are intimated in the Bible, from the pages of the Book of Mormon comes the Lord's clearest explanation of two laws on which hang the Atonement and ultimately our salvation.

The Law of Justice. Somewhere near your home is a courthouse. It may not be the Supreme Court building, but it likely houses a metaphor, a symbol of a principle so vital that the entire universe is governed by it and the atoning sacrifice of the Savior is wrought in response to it. Generally, it takes the form of a statue or painting of a woman. She is blindfolded and holds in her hands a set of scales. As we approach, we might see her name on her base. She is called Justice. The law or principle she represents is held by Heavenly Father in perfection and is of such great import that if He were to go contrary to it, He "would cease to be God" (Alma 42:13). Her blindfold suggests that justice must be impartially applied. The scales insinuate that justice weighs or judges everything and that even the slightest error must be balanced or corrected.

Indeed, as stated simply by the prophet Alma, "The Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance" (Alma 45:16). He cannot excuse it, ignore it, or sweep it under the rug. Every time the scales tip, perfect justice requires they be balanced, the wrong righted.

Therefore, to help us avoid the sins that would destroy our divine potential, God establishes laws (see Alma 42:22) or, more accurately, points out eternal laws which have always existed. These laws define the path we must follow to progress and become like Him and are what we commonly call the gospel, or the commandments. However, it is not enough simply to have a law, but consequences must of necessity be attached to those laws, for as Alma further enlightened us: "How could there be a law save there was a punishment?" (Alma 42:17). My oldest boy has a routine question he asks my wife and me every time a new law is laid down in our

home. The scenario generally sounds something like this: “John, don’t ever cover the baby in Vaseline again.” To which he innocently but matter-of-factly asks, “What will you do to me if I do it again?” Clearly, laws must have consequences attached or the law is of no use.¹

Additionally, beyond merely attaching consequences, the divine attribute of justice requires that for every violation to a law of God, the punishment must be *enforced*. *Every* violation, *every* time. For “justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God” (Alma 42:22).

The uplifting corollary to the punishment affixed to each law is that justice demands that for every act of obedience to God’s law there is a blessing attached. The Prophet Joseph Smith instructed: “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:20–22; see also 132:5).

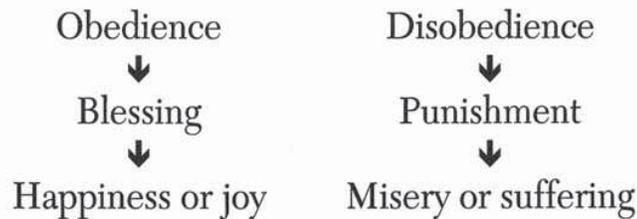
Lehi offered insight into the punishment and blessing affixed when he spoke of “the *ends* of the law” (2 Nephi 2:7; emphasis added). If we picture the law as a path we may take, then Lehi’s statement begins to come to life. I can obey the law and get one end of the path, or I can disobey and get the other end. But what are those ends? Lehi answered that question just a few verses later when he spoke of “the ends of the law which the Holy One hath given, unto the inflicting of the punishment which is affixed, which punishment that is affixed is in opposition to that of the happiness which is affixed, to answer the ends of the atonement” (2 Nephi 2:10). Therefore, Lehi says, if I disobey the law, I will receive a punishment. In addition, if I obey the law, I will receive the opposite, which would be a blessing.

The Law of Justice



He names that blessing as happiness, and in an earlier verse identifies the punishment by saying: “By the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become *miserable* forever” (2 Nephi 2:5; emphasis added). Alma the Younger added his witness to Lehi when he spoke to his wayward son Corianton “concerning the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner,” indicating that Corianton tried “to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery” (Alma 42:1).

The Law of Justice



It is that straightforward. Obedience leads to happiness, or as it is more commonly used in the scriptures, joy. Disobedience leads to misery, or suffering. There are *no* exceptions (see Helaman 13:38). The scales of justice must be perfectly and unequivocally balanced.

The haunting reality that arises from this knowledge is that every one of us has sinned and therefore merits the punishment of the law. Lehi did not hesitate to point out our crisis when he said, “Men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off” (2 Nephi 2:5; see also Alma 42:11–12). On one hand, God’s purpose of bringing about the eternal life of man (see Moses 1:39) cannot occur without the law and its attendant consequences. He must enforce the punishment or He would cease to be God, and we would continue in sin, never becoming like Him. On the other hand, every one of us has sinned and hence merits the punishment of the law. Justice *must* be satisfied—a supreme crisis indeed!

The Law of Mercy. William Shakespeare summed up our plight when he penned the line, “In the course of justice [only] none of us should see salvation.”² Fortunately, while being perfectly just, God holds another attribute in perfection: mercy. Yet because being

merciful implies being willing to forgive our shortcomings and remove the resultant punishment that justice demands, these two eternal standards appear to be at odds with one another. Justice demands full payment; mercy insists on complete forgiveness. Both laws, it seems, cannot be fully exercised. “Do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice?” asked Alma. “I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God” (Alma 42:25). Either justice must inflict the punishment and balance the scales at the expense of mercy, or mercy must be extended, leaving justice unpaid.

Fortunately, our plight was known from the very beginning, and a way was prepared from the foundation of the earth that would satisfy the demands of justice and yet allow mercy to be fully offered. There is one way both laws can be complied with, but it requires a third party. The law of mercy is beautifully simple: someone else can step in and take the place of the guilty party. He can pay the penalty that justice demands by proxy, on two conditions: He must be *willing*, and He must be *able*. In Christ, the Book of Mormon testifies, we find both. “Therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world,” Alma explained, “to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:15; see also 34:16; 2 Nephi 2:6–7).

With that clearly understood, we are ready to enter the atoning period with perception. All I need to know if I want to discover what the Savior suffered on my behalf is this: *What is the misery or suffering that justice demands of the sinner?* For through the law of mercy, He offered to take that punishment in the place of the sinner. In the words of Paul, “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). He suffered whatever type of misery or suffering that the law of justice demands a sinner should experience. Abinadi described Him as “standing betwixt them (the sinner) and justice; having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and *satisfied the demands of justice*” (Mosiah 15:9; emphasis added).

Thus, while mercy cannot rob justice, it can satisfy the demands

of justice—which, according to President Marion G. Romney, is exactly what happened in Gethsemane and the next morning on the cross: “Jesus endured the suffering required to satisfy the demands of justice, thereby making it possible for men, through faith and repentance, to be cleansed from their sins.”³

Naturally, we rejoice as the plan is unfolded to our view and the certainty of our deliverance from the grasp of justice is fathomed. Too often in our exuberance, however, we forget that mercy cannot rob justice—that simply because *we* have been spared having to pay the penalty does not mean it goes unpaid. Lehi, in blessing his son Jacob, makes a statement that many misunderstand. He said that “the way is prepared from the fall of man, and *salvation is free*” (2 Nephi 2:4; emphasis added)—free for us, perhaps, for the things that the Savior requires of us to access His atoning gift do seem minuscule when compared to the cost that justice alone would impose upon us. Yet what may come as quite a bargain for us was recompensed every whit by someone else. Indeed, as we are about to see, the merciful gift of our cleansing has come at an incomprehensibly high price.

WHAT CHRIST SUFFERED

President Joseph Fielding Smith said of the suffering of the Savior: “I think it is understood by many that the great suffering of Jesus Christ came through the driving of nails in His hands and in His feet, and in being suspended upon a cross, until death mercifully released Him. That is not the case. As excruciating, as severe as was that punishment, . . . yet still greater was the suffering which He endured in carrying the burden of the sins of the world—my sins, and your sins, and the sins of every living creature. This suffering came before He ever got to the cross, and it caused the blood to come forth from the pores of his body, so great was that anguish of His soul, the torment of His spirit that He was called to undergo.”⁴

What, then, is the payment that justice demands of the sinner—the suffering that is so intense as to cause the Son of the Eternal Father to tremble and bleed at every pore? What could, according

to President Smith, be of greater severity than the driving of cruel spikes through the flesh that the Christian world as a whole so readily focuses on? To find the answer, we must know what punishment justice imposes upon the *unrepentant sinner*. This is vital, for according to the Savior Himself, to discover what the unrepentant will suffer is to know what He suffered to free those who do repent. “For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; but if they would not repent they must suffer even as I” (D&C 19:16–17). The explanation of this suffering comes fourfold from the inspired pages of the Book of Mormon.

GUILT

For the first glimpse of what the Savior bore, King Benjamin explained: “Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth forever and ever” (Mosiah 2:38). There is clearly a type of suffering mentioned here that is misery indeed: guilt. Alma referred to it a little differently but captured the same meaning when he said, “Now, there was a punishment affixed, and a just law given, which brought a *remorse of conscience* unto man” (Alma 42:18; emphasis added). Now, I think we want to be very careful as we word this. To say that the Savior suffered guilt makes it sound as if perhaps He were sinful. This is not the case. In fact, what the Savior suffered was *our* guilt. At first glimpse, this suffering may not sound as extreme as the brutality of the Crucifixion. However, as we reflect upon the times in our lives when we have experienced guilt, the magnitude of Gethsemane begins to unfold.

As a boy of twelve, I was baby-sitting for our neighbors who had three girls, including a two-year-old. On this blistering summer day, the parents were gone for a few hours, and we had a marvelous time in their absence, eating popsicles and playing in the backyard

sprinklers. Soon the girls' father arrived home and was greeted by the excited squeals of his two oldest daughters, who ran to meet him. After a moment of romping with the older girls, he asked me where the two-year-old was. I replied that she was in the house. Just as I said it, though, it hit me that I hadn't seen her for nearly half an hour. We entered the house and called for her repeatedly, but she didn't come. Searching the house turned up no sign of her, and I remember hoping that she had heard the commotion and had slipped out front to look for her dad. But after thoroughly exploring both the front and back yard as well as the neighbors' yards, the gravity of the situation began to settle in on us. The next moments are still clear in my mind as a panicky father turned to me and said, "I left you in charge of my little girl—Where is she?!" As the soft reply "I don't know" came from my lips, the guilt literally sickened me. He instructed me to remain with the girls while he went in the car to look for her. He was gone for an eternity—twenty minutes.

I have had a few instances of physical suffering in my life. I have been so sick with the flu that I couldn't arise from my bed. I have experienced burns, broken bones, electric shock, and even the pain of having two of my fingers severed by the blades of a lawn mower that I was brilliantly working on with the engine still running. Each of these events was painful. All were barely tolerable, and none of them would I ever choose to repeat. Nevertheless, while I sat there that day waiting for his return, with a thousand thoughts running through my head of where she might be or what might have happened to her, I would have traded all of those things in an instant for the anguish I was feeling. Even as he returned and assured me of his forgiveness, having found her wandering happily down the street several blocks away, the pain didn't leave. I had acted irresponsibly, and I knew it. No degree of reassurance could ease the turmoil I was feeling.

Guilt is emotional. It is mental. It is spiritual. It is physical. We have all felt the sickening ache in the bottom of our stomach combined with the all-encompassing mental torment that wreaks havoc upon our emotions and our ability to think of anything else. Let us suppose that in the premortal council, we were told that we would

have to experience suffering while on earth. We could choose to suffer either as Job, with the boils and the worms and such, or to suffer as David, who in the face of all he knew of God, committed adultery and murder. I would guess most of us could make that choice immediately. Give me Job any day! Bring on the boils. Why? Because there is no pain, no misery, no agony worse than pure, unrationalizable guilt.

The prophet Alma gave a potent description of this while speaking to his son Helaman about his sinful rebellion as a youth. Recounting the bitter feelings of guilt that came upon him, he explained: "I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins. Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments. Yea, I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in so fine so great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror" (Alma 36:12–14). Notice that to help express his suffering to his son, Alma compared what he was feeling to being "racked" and "harrowed." A rack is an ancient torture device in which the prisoner is tied hand and foot and then slowly stretched as the ropes are tightened. One would be left with the pains of being slowly ripped apart, a very vivid depiction of guilt. Those who have worked on a farm are aware that a harrow is a heavy frame with several spikes that is dragged by a horse or tractor through the soil to break it up. Alma then, describes his pain as if he, not the dirt, were the one being torn up by those heavy spikes—not a very pleasant description.

Considering that this is merely *one man's* guilt, the suffering of the Savior becomes unfathomable, yet paradoxically we can understand what He went through to the degree in which we have suffered guilt in our lives. "I believe," said Elder J. Richard Clarke, "to use an insurance phrase, we must pay the deductible. We must experience sorrow enough, suffering enough, guilt enough so we are conscious and appreciative of the heavier burden borne by the

Savior.”⁵ Two very poignant truths arise here. First, that we can, to a very small degree, actually relate to His suffering. Second, that any suffering for sin we experience in this life is minuscule compared to His and does not satisfy the demands of justice. It only “pays the deductible.” If not for Christ, the pains of guilt that we would ultimately suffer throughout eternity would be infinitely greater than can be experienced in mortality. “Throughout the repentance process we have feelings of regret, remorse, and guilt, which cause us to suffer,” taught Elder Ronald E. Poelman. “However, our individual suffering does not satisfy the demands of justice which follow disobedience to divine law. We cannot pay the price for our sins.”⁶

If this were the only consequence that justice demands of the sinner, it would be towering indeed. However, according to the prophet Alma, there are yet other demands beyond the burden of guilt.

CUT OFF FROM THE PRESENCE OF GOD

“Therefore God gave unto [men] commandments,” Alma taught, “after having made known unto them the plan of redemption, that they should not do evil, the penalty thereof being *a second [or spiritual] death*” (Alma 12:32; emphasis added). The second penalty that justice demands of the sinner, then, is that of being cut off from the presence of God, often termed spiritual death. Speaking of this point, Elder Richard G. Scott said, “I testify that except for the Atonement of the Holy Redeemer, the demands of justice would prevent every soul born on earth from returning to the presence of God, to partake of His glory and exaltation, for all make mistakes for which we cannot personally appease justice.”⁷

Due to Adam’s violation of the law in Eden, we have all inherited this decree in some measure as we are here in mortality and cut off from the presence of the Father. “And thus we see,” Alma explained, “that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them forever to be *cut off from his presence*” (Alma 42:14; emphasis added). Beyond

Adam's transgression, all of us have sinned on our own. Thus, the penalty of being cut off from the Father would be a permanent condition in the eternities and is manifest to us in part on earth as we are cut off from the Holy Ghost when we sin (see Mosiah 2:36). As we repent, we can regain access to God's influence through the Holy Ghost.

That the Savior experienced the suffering incumbent with this penalty as He took our place upon the scales of justice is shown only once in the Bible, but it speaks volumes: "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). Which one of us can imagine the extent of anguish that would provoke such a cry from the Savior? He had successfully endured the scourging and the crown of thorns with no recorded outcry. The nails had already been driven through the flesh of His wrists and feet. He had been subjected to inhumane cruelty and mocking by those who were His own. Through it all, He had maintained both composure, and as best as we can tell from the biblical account, near silence. But this was something more—an aloneness and utter spiritual void that goes beyond physical suffering and which Christ had never experienced until He stood proxy for us. Said Elder James E. Talmage of that cry: "It seems, that in addition to the fearful suffering incident to crucifixion, the agony of Gethsemane had recurred, intensified beyond human power to endure. In that bitterest hour the dying Christ was alone, alone in most terrible reality. That the supreme sacrifice of the Son might be consummated in all its fulness, the Father seems to have withdrawn the support of His immediate Presence."⁸

Elder Neal A. Maxwell added: "In a messianic psalm David spoke about Jesus' heartbreaking circumstances, including His being totally alone in the awful process! 'Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none . . . (Psalm 69:20). Jesus always deserved and always had the Father's full approval. But when He took our sins upon Him, of divine necessity

required by justice He experienced instead ‘the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God’ (D&C 76:107).”⁹

That being cut off from the Father brought great pain upon the Savior is evidenced in His own words in a revelation given to Joseph Smith and Martin Harris, reminding them of a particularly painful time in their own lives: “I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; but if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink” (D&C 19:16–18). Then, after expounding to us the depth of His suffering, He tells us a little of what caused such “exquisite” torment (D&C 19:15): “Wherefore, I command you again to repent . . . lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken, of which *in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree you have tasted at the time I withdrew my Spirit*” (D&C 19:20; emphasis added).

According to the Savior, Joseph Smith and Martin Harris, to whom this revelation was given, experienced the “least degree” of what He suffered during the time the Lord’s Spirit was withdrawn from them. The Lord is referring directly here to the incident in which the 116 pages of manuscript from the Book of Mormon were stolen and for a time the channels between them and the Lord were cut off.¹⁰ A description of this time in the Prophet’s life is particularly enlightening, since the Lord Himself compared it to His own suffering.

Joseph’s mother, Lucy Mack Smith, says of the occasion: “I well remember that day of darkness, both within and without. To us, at least, the heavens seemed clothed with blackness, and the earth shrouded with gloom. I have often said within myself, that if a continual punishment, as severe as that which we experienced on that occasion, were to be inflicted upon the most wicked characters who ever stood upon the footstool of the Almighty—if even their punishment were no greater than that, I should feel to pity their condition.”¹¹ That, according to the Savior, is the *smallest*, even the *least*

degree, of what He carried for you and for me. And we have as yet explored only half of the penalty which justice requires be met.

SUBJECT TO THE BUFFETINGS OF SATAN

In addition to the suffering of guilt and being cut off from the presence of the Lord, a third demand of justice is spoken of in the Book of Mormon. It is clear, it is repeated, and it would obviously be the fate of all who violate the law, yet the depth or particulars are mercifully beyond our imagination as to meaning or details. "Prepare your souls for that glorious day when justice shall be administered," says the prophet Jacob, "that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness, and be constrained to exclaim: . . . I know my guilt; I transgressed thy law, and my transgressions are mine; and *the devil hath obtained me, that I am a prey to his awful misery*" (2 Nephi 9:46; emphasis added). In some way inexplicable to us, those who violate the law become prey to Satan and subject to his buffetings. We know this is the case as far as the sons of perdition are concerned. But with a Book of Mormon view of the law of justice, we realize that save the law of mercy and its attendant atonement, *we are all cast out as sons of perdition!* "For behold," said Amulek, "if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, [*or if there were no power of repentance!*] behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked" (Alma 34:35; see also 2 Nephi 9:9). It is unimaginable that in addition to bearing the load of guilt for all the world, and doing so alone, without the presence of the Father, in some way unknown to us, He was subjected to the cruelty of Satan while meeting justice's demands for us.

What He suffered to meet this demand is not even speculated. That He did so is said best by President Boyd K. Packer: "He, by choice, accepted the penalty for all mankind for the sum total of all wickedness and depravity. . . . In choosing, He faced the awesome power of the evil one who was not confined to flesh nor subject to

mortal pain. That was Gethsemane!”¹² Elder James E. Talmage adds: “In that hour of anguish Christ met and overcame all the horrors that Satan, ‘the prince of this world’ could inflict. The frightful struggle incident to the temptations immediately following the Lord’s baptism was surpassed and overshadowed by this supreme contest with the powers of evil.”¹³

What is meant by facing Satan’s “awesome power” and “all of the horrors which he could inflict” is beyond comprehension. We do know that he had not power to infuse sin or actual evil into the Savior, for Christ said as much before He entered the garden: “Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (John 14:30). We also know that Satan hates no soul ever born upon this sphere more than Jesus, and whatever “the very jaws of hell” which gaped open wide after Christ refers to (see D&C 122:7–8), he would not spare Jesus nor hold back his rage from Him in the least degree in the realm in which he was allowed.

Christ, then, bore the combined weight of guilt for the sum of all human sin, suffered the pain incident to spiritual death as He was cut off from the Spirit and the Father, and in such a state was subject to the vilest of tortures as the powers of the evil one were unleashed upon Him. Imagine what would happen to you or me if we tried to endure such a load. When Alma the Younger bore just the agony from his own sins, the experience resulted in three days of unconsciousness and oblivion. Multiply that by you and me and by each of Heavenly Father’s children, and we begin to grasp the significance of King Benjamin’s prophecy of that fateful night: “And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, *even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death*; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and abominations of his people” (Mosiah 3:7; emphasis added). Were you or I to have experienced such a torment, we surely would have died. There simply comes a point when the human organism can suffer no longer, when the mind relinquishes consciousness and the body simply shuts off from sheer

pain. How was it that the Savior walked out of Gethsemane's gate alive?

The answer lies in His miraculous birth. Born the son of Mary and the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh, He inherited traits from each which gave Him the ability to fulfill His promise made to us in the premortal council. From His mortal mother, He inherited the ability to suffer pain. From His immortal Father, He inherited the ability to suffer an infinite amount of pain and not die. Through Mary He received the capacity to suffer death, but being the literal Son of God, He could choose at what moment, if at all, that death would take place. "For as the Father hath life in himself," said Jesus, "so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26). On another occasion, He added: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:17-18).

Therefore, while death would have been a merciful relief and the thought of it sweet beyond our understanding to His mind, He *chose* to remain in misery, to continue with the tortuous experience. One cannot help but ask why. Yet even as we ask, deep down we know the answer, and it humbles us to the very core. He was not finished yet. When His mind convulsed in pain and every fiber of His body yearned for death, He *chose* to continue living, to continue suffering because the full ransom had not yet been exacted, the scales of justice were not balanced. Perhaps my sins still hung in the balance, perhaps yours. And He would not shrink or allow the deliverance of death until He had drained the bitter cup to the very dregs.

The prophet Isaiah and later the condemned Abinadi gave us a very personal glimpse into that decision, telling us that when Christ would "make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed" (Isaiah 53:10; compare also Mosiah 15:10). Abinadi told us that His "seed" are the righteous who exercise faith in the prophets and in Christ's redeeming power (see Mosiah 15:11). Can you envision the Savior in His greatest time of distress, when His spoken fear is that He might shrink from the bitter cup that brims before Him, being allowed to see those who would be ransomed by His suffering? "In

the garden and on the cross,” said Elder Merrill J. Bateman, “Jesus saw each of us and not only bore our sins, but also experienced our deepest feelings so that he would know how to comfort and strengthen us.”¹⁴ Surely in His capacity as a God, in a way impossible for mortal minds to conceive, He was able to fathom you and me as He bore our sins. And that gave Him the strength to endure that which could not be endured, to continue living that He might continue suffering until the full debt was satisfied for each of us. Then, and only then, would He allow himself to succumb to the merciful release of death, which brings us to our fourth and final demand of justice.

PHYSICAL DEATH

The final demand of justice is unique. It is so because this penalty would come upon all mankind, not because of our own sins but from Adam’s violation of the law given him in Eden. Jacob explained that if not for the Atonement “the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more” (2 Nephi 9:7). Thus, the penalty of death was pronounced for the law given in Eden. “Those scriptural words, ‘Thou mayest choose for thyself,’” said President Packer, “introduced Adam and Eve and their posterity to all the risks of mortality. In mortality men are free to choose, and each choice begets a consequence. The choice Adam made energized the law of justice, which required that the penalty for disobedience would be death.”¹⁵ President Joseph F. Smith added his witness that the Savior’s death served proxy for our own eternal physical death and satisfied justice for Adam’s violation: “For death was the penalty of the law transgressed, which man was powerless to avert, that [mandate] of God being, ‘In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die,’ and this penalty was to follow upon all flesh, all being as helpless and dependent as he was in this matter. Their only hope of redemption from the grave and the power of death was in the Savior whom God had promised, who should suffer death, . . . thereby

opening the way for all who should follow him in the regeneration, to come forth to life again, redeemed from the penalty of the law.”¹⁶

Thus, the voluntary suffering of death by the Savior satisfied the demands of justice for Adam’s transgression. Since we are not responsible for the consequences of the law Adam violated, the payment for this demand comes unconditionally to us all.

Crucifixion was beyond doubt one of the most cruel and lingering forms of death by torture. For the Roman centurions, trained by decades of experience, the process had become a science. The large spikes driven through carefully chosen locations in the flesh, crushed and severed both nerves and tendons but inflicted no fatal wound. While the victim’s blood would certainly be spilt, it would not be enough to result in death. Instead, the unnatural posture of the body made breathing extremely difficult, forcing one to strain upwards on the nails of the feet to draw air. As inflammation, muscular spasms, and throbbing pain made this increasingly difficult, death by slow suffocation or sheer exhaustion was not uncommon. Often the crucified lived in escalating torment for long hours and occasionally for days before succumbing.

As horrid as such a death obviously was, the Savior never focuses upon the misery of His crucifixion. Truth be told, it was not the greatest weight He bore. Far greater than the searing distress of the long crucifixion process was the agony of body and spirit we have already discussed and through which He had already passed. Would, then, the crucifixion be easy for Him—something which by comparison to the previous night would be a mere formality?

On the contrary. While enduring the atrocities of the cross, it appears “if we interpret the holy word aright,” said Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “that all of the anguish, all of the sorrow, and all of the suffering of Gethsemane recurred during the final three hours on the cross.”¹⁷ Is it any wonder that darkness blackened the globe for those three hours and even nature itself trembled as its God and Creator writhed in a physical, spiritual, and mental torment of crucifixion’s pain, overflowing with Gethsemane’s anguish of soul?

After lingering until the uttermost farthing of our debt had been

settled, the words “I thirst” fell from His parched lips. A soldier quickly rushed and filled a sponge with vinegar mingled with gall, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. Many have said this was an act of compassion as the vinegar and gall acted as an analgesic, numbing the person to the pain. Others suspect this was a further, pitiful blow in a day of torture and ridicule. Whatever the soldier’s purpose, it is the symbolism of it all that is not lost on us. How ironic that the last taste upon the lips of Him who had drained the bitter cup to the last drop was bitterness.

Having taken the vinegar and realizing that the offering was fully sufficient, He cried to the Father, “It is finished!” “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (John 19:30; Luke 23:46). Having done so, He bowed His head and voluntarily gave up His life.

“The debt is paid,” said President John Taylor, “the redemption made, the covenant fulfilled, justice satisfied.”¹⁸ “It is finished; it is finished! The Lamb of God hath overcome and trodden the wine-press alone, even the wine-press of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God” (D&C 88:106).

The scales are balanced.

EXTRA SUFFERING NOT REQUIRED BY JUSTICE

The Savior, then, suffered through the cumulative load of guilt, being cut off from the presence of the Lord and His Spirit, the buffetings of Satan, and ultimately death. He suffered until the demands of justice were satisfied, even though it was beyond human capacity to endure. An additional truth offered only in the Book of Mormon is that Christ voluntarily accepted suffering beyond what was necessary to meet the demands of justice. Alma enlightens us that He also took upon him the pains, sickness, and infirmities of His people, “that He may know *according to the flesh* how to succor His people” (see Alma 7:11–12; emphasis added). This added burden allows Him to be a Savior with power to strengthen as well as to save. Having experienced the pains caused by sin as well as those that stem from mortality’s hardships, He stands prepared to comfort us with comprehension and compassion.

CONCLUSION

“Our salvation depends on believing in and accepting the Atonement,” declared President James E. Faust. “Such acceptance requires a continual effort to understand it more fully. . . . Any increase in our understanding of His atoning sacrifice draws us closer to Him.”¹⁹

Is it any wonder, then, that a man will get nearer to God by abiding by the precepts of the Book of Mormon than by any other book? (see the Introduction to the Book of Mormon). Left to the Bible alone, the plain and precious doctrines of Christ’s supernal offering would be beyond the reach of our understanding. Yet from the Book of Mormon flow the foundational teachings which illuminate both the purpose and the price of the most important event in the history or destiny of man. With the poet Eliza R. Snow, we declare: “How great, how glorious, how complete / Redemption’s grand design / Where justice, love, and mercy meet / In harmony divine!”²⁰

NOTES

1. This truth could be quickly proven in our own society by retaining speed limits but removing every penalty for driving faster than the limits! Immediately speed limit signs would hold their greatest value in their ability to break up the view of sagebrush from the car window.

2. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, act 4, scene 1, lines 199–200.

3. Marion G. Romney, “Repentance,” *Ensign*, November 1980, 47.

4. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, April 1944, 49–50.

5. J. Richard Clarke, “The Lord of Life,” *Ensign*, May 1993, 10.

6. Ronald E. Poelman, “Divine Forgiveness,” *Ensign*, November 1993, 85.

7. Richard G. Scott, “Jesus Christ, Our Redeemer,” *Ensign*, May 1997, 53.

8. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1962), 661.

9. Neal A. Maxwell, *Lord, Increase Our Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 13.

10. For a full account of the story, see Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. 2d ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–51), 1:20–23.

11. Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, ed. Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 132.
12. Boyd K. Packer, "Atonement, Agency, Accountability," *Ensign*, May 1988, 69.
13. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 613.
14. Merrill J. Bateman, "The Power to Heal from Within," *Ensign*, May 1995, 14.
15. Packer, "Atonement, Agency, Accountability," 71.
16. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 202–3.
17. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 4:232 n.22.
18. John Taylor, *The Gospel Kingdom* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 114.
19. James E. Faust, "The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope," *Ensign*, November 2001, 18.
20. Eliza R. Snow, "How Great the Wisdom and the Love," *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 195.

THE DOCTRINE OF MERIT

THE BOOK OF MORMON ON THE WORK OF GRACE

Robert L. Millet

BECAUSE THE MERITS AND MERCY of God are so central to an understanding and appreciation of the Atonement as taught in the Book of Mormon, I have chosen to focus on them at some length. I am persuaded that to ignore or to misunderstand this dimension of the Master's plan of redemption has both doctrinal and practical implications—it affects what we teach and believe, as well as how we approach life. This is a discussion about grace. It is also a discussion about works. It is in fact a discussion about how grace works, about the goodness and condescension of a benevolent God, and about the good works that flow from the heart of a man or woman who has truly been changed by the merits and mercies of Christ.

LOST AND FALLEN

In a revelation given to Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon is described as “a record of a fallen people” (D&C 20:9). It is certainly

Robert L. Millet is the Richard L. Evans Professor of Religious Understanding and former dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University.

a narrative history of the rise and fall of two great civilizations, a sobering chronicle of how pride and secret combinations usher nations into destruction. It is also an ever-present reminder that without divine assistance and the regenerating powers of the atonement of Christ, men and women remain forevermore lost and fallen creatures.¹ The plight and the promise, the malady and the medication, the Fall and the Atonement—this is the overriding and undergirding message of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is redemptive theology at its best.

The Latter-day Saint view of the Fall is remarkably optimistic. We believe that Adam and Eve went into the Garden of Eden to fall and that their fall was as much a part of the foreordained plan of the Father as was the very Atonement. We believe in the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith, that “Adam was made to open the way of the world,”² that the Fall was a move downward but forward in the eternal scheme of things, and that it “brought man into the world and set his feet upon progression’s highway.”³ We do not believe that men and women are, by virtue of the Fall, depraved creatures. We do not believe that men and women are so inclined to evil that they do not even have the capacity to choose good on their own. We do not believe, with much of the Christian world, that because of the Fall little children are subject to an “original sin.” “When our spirits took possession of these tabernacles,” President Brigham Young observed, “they were as pure as the angels of God, wherefore total depravity cannot be a true doctrine.”⁴

There was, however, a fall, and it does have universal consequences. President Ezra Taft Benson observed: “Just as a man does not really desire food until he is hungry, so he does not desire the salvation of Christ until he knows why he needs Christ. No one adequately and properly knows why he needs Christ until he understands and accepts the doctrine of the Fall and its effect upon all mankind.”⁵ The Fall and the Atonement are a package deal; one brings the other into existence, and I am not aware of any discussion of the Atonement in the Book of Mormon that is not accompanied, either directly or by implication, with a discussion of the Fall. We do not appreciate and treasure the medicine until we appreciate the

seriousness of the malady. One cannot look earnestly and longingly to the Redeemer if he or she does not sense the need for redemption. Jesus came to earth to do more than offer sage advice. He is not merely a benevolent consultant, a spiritual adviser. He came to save us.

In what seems to be the very first reference in the Book of Mormon to the Fall, Nephi taught that “six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world. And he also spake concerning the prophets, how great a number had testified of these things, concerning this Messiah, of whom he had spoken, or this Redeemer of the world. Wherefore, all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer” (1 Nephi 10:4–6; compare Alma 42:6). I am fascinated with the two words so descriptive of mortals—*lost* and *fallen*. Truly, as Isaiah declared (and as Abinadi quoted), “All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way” (Mosiah 14:6; compare Isaiah 53:6). The Good Shepherd thus comes on a search and rescue mission for all of His lost sheep. He who never took a moral detour or a backward step thus reaches out and reaches down to lift us up. We are lost in the sense that we do not know our way home without a guide, in the sense that we are alienated from God and separated from things of righteousness. We are fallen in the sense that we have chosen, like our Exemplar, to condescend and enter a telestial tenement; in the sense that our eternal spirit has taken up its temporary abode in a tabernacle of clay; in the sense that we must be lifted up, quickened, and resuscitated spiritually if we are to return to the divine presence.

To say that we do not inherit original sin through the Fall is not to say that we do not inherit a fallen nature and thus the capacity to sin. Fallenness and mortality are inherited; they come through conception (see Moses 6:55). They come to us as a natural consequence of the second estate we call earth life. Lehi explained to Jacob that following the Fall, God “*showed unto all men that they were lost, because of the transgression of their parents*” (2 Nephi

2:21; emphasis added; compare Mosiah 16:3–5). In a similar vein, the brother of Jared called upon Jehovah to touch the sixteen stones and prayed: “O Lord, thou hast said that we must be encompassed about by the floods. Now behold, O Lord, and do not be angry with thy servant because of his weakness before thee; for we know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that *we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually*” (Ether 3:2; emphasis added).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “Adam fell. . . . In this state all men sin. All are lost. All are fallen. All are cut off from the presence of God. All have become carnal, sensual, and devilish by nature. Such a way of life is inherent in this mortal existence.”⁶ Similarly, President Brigham Young noted that a critical and doubting disposition concerning the work of the Lord “arises from the power of evil that is so prevalent upon the face of the whole earth. It was given to you by your father and mother; it was mingled with your conception in the womb, and it has ripened in your flesh, in your blood, and in your bones, so that it has become riveted in your very nature.”⁷ On another occasion he explained: “There are no persons without evil passions to embitter their lives. Mankind are revengeful, passionate, hateful, and devilish in their dispositions. This we inherit through the fall, and the grace of God is designed to enable us to overcome it.”⁸

We can grow in spiritual graces to the point wherein we have no more disposition to do evil but to do good continually (see Mosiah 5:2) and wherein we cannot look upon sin save it be with abhorrence (see Alma 13:12; see also 2 Nephi 9:49; Jacob 2:5). We can, like Nephi, delight in the things of the Lord (see 2 Nephi 4:16). But as long as we dwell in the flesh, we will be subject to the pulls of a fallen world. “Will sin be perfectly destroyed?” President Brigham Young asked. “No, it will not, for it is not so designed in the economy of heaven. . . . Do not suppose that we shall ever in the flesh be free from temptations to sin. Some suppose that they can in the flesh be sanctified body and spirit and become so pure that they will never again feel the effects of the power of the adversary of truth. Were it possible for a person to attain to this degree of perfection in the

flesh, he could not die neither remain in a world where sin predominates. . . . I think we shall more or less feel the effects of sin so long as we live, and finally have to pass the ordeals of death.”⁹

An angel explained to King Benjamin that “men drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children, and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent. For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:18–19). The natural man is an enemy to God in that he (or she) is operating on another agenda than God’s, is doing everything in his or her power to bring to pass their own whims and wishes, and in general has placed his or her will above that of the Captain of our souls. President Brigham Young taught that “the natural man is at enmity with God. That fallen nature in every one is naturally opposed, inherently, through the fall, to God and to His Kingdom, and wants nothing to do with them.”¹⁰ Such persons are thereby operating at cross-purposes to the Father’s plan for the salvation and redemption of His children and thus prove to be their own worst enemy. “All men that are in a state of nature,” Alma observed, “or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness” (Alma 42:11).

OUR ONLY HOPE: HIS MERITS

Our hope and trust cannot be in ourselves, no matter how impressive our credentials or how stunning our achievements. We are mortal, and our imperfections and limitations are only too obvious. Nor must our trust or our hope be in man-made programs, procedures, lists, formulas, or laws of spiritual success. As my friend Sheri Dew, former counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, pointed out, “The Savior isn’t our last chance; He is our only

chance. Our only chance to overcome self-doubt and catch a vision of who we may become. Our only chance to repent and have our sins washed clean. Our only chance to purify our hearts, subdue our weaknesses, and avoid the adversary. Our only chance to obtain redemption and exaltation. Our only chance to find peace and happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come. . . .

“The Lord knows the way,” Sister Dew continued, “because He *is* the way and is our only chance for successfully negotiating mortality. His Atonement makes available all of the power, peace, light, and strength that we need to deal with life’s challenges—those ranging from our own mistakes and sins to trials over which we have no control but we still feel pain.”¹¹

We come unto Christ not alone to be taught but to be transformed. He is not only our Example but also our Change Agent and our Benefactor. Jesus is not only a convenient resource; He is the vital and indispensable element in our quest for happiness here and eternal reward hereafter. There is no hope and no possibility of reconciliation with the Father except through the Savior. The Atonement is that divine act of mercy and grace and condescension by which our Father and God opens the door to reunion. In and through Adam, we partake of mortality and death. In and through Christ our Mediator and Intercessor, we partake of immortality and the abundant life. By means of the Atonement, the finite is reconciled to the Infinite, the incomplete to the Complete, the unfinished to the Finished, the imperfect to the Perfect. The Atonement, as an act of grace, demonstrates the love of the Father for His children. Jesus Christ, who lived a sinless and perfect life, claims of the Father “his rights of mercy which he hath upon the children of men” (Moroni 7:27). The Book of Mormon is a powerful invitation to come unto Christ and be changed. Indeed, one who chooses Christ chooses to be changed. The plan of salvation is not just a program bent on making bad men good and good men better, though it certainly does that; rather, it is a system of salvation that seeks to renovate society and transform the whole of humankind.

The Book of Mormon teaches that we are saved by merit, but not by our own merit. “*Since man had fallen,*” Aaron explained to

the father of Lamoni, “*he could not merit anything of himself*; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance, and so forth” (Alma 22:14; emphasis added). This requires a bit of explanation. Of course, we are expected to receive the ordinances of salvation, work faithfully in the kingdom, perform acts of Christian service, and endure faithfully to the end. Of course, we are required to do the works of righteousness. These things are necessary—they evidence our covenant with Christ to follow Him and keep His commandments. They are *necessary*, but they are not *sufficient*.

Through the Church, we receive the ordinances of salvation. Through the Church, we sing and preach and rejoice. Through the Church, we learn to love and serve one another, to contribute to the edification and growth of the “body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12), to officiate in a system of organized sacrifice. But our hope for salvation is not in a system, not in an organization, not in a program, inspired and God-ordained though it may be. Our hope is in Christ, the Person. In a world that offers flimsy and fleeting remedies for mortal despair, Jesus comes to us in our moments of need with a “more excellent hope” (Ether 12:32). What Jesus Christ *has* done speaks volumes concerning what He *can* do and what He *will* do for us.

Peace and strength here, and salvation and eternal life hereafter, come through the merits of Christ. Lehi explained to his son Jacob: “Wherefore, I know that thou art redeemed . . .” (2 Nephi 2:3). Why was he redeemed? We know that he was faithful, just like his brother Nephi. We know that he saw the Lord, just as Nephi and Isaiah had (see 2 Nephi 11:3). But even though Jacob was an obedient man who hearkened to the words of God and His servants, that isn’t why he was redeemed. Note the full sentence: “Wherefore, I know that thou art redeemed, *because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer*” (2 Nephi 2:3; emphasis added). Odd, isn’t it? Jacob was bound for glory because of the goodness of Jesus!

Lehi went on to teach Jacob that “there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8). A converted *Lamanite* king exulted to his people “that [God] hath granted unto

us that we might repent of these things, and also that he hath forgiven us of those our many sins and murders which we have committed, *and taken away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son*" (Alma 24:10; emphasis added). Samuel the Lamanite likewise called upon the sinful Nephites to believe on the name of Jesus Christ: "And if ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby *ye may have a remission of them through his merits*" (Helaman 14:13; emphasis added). Truly, we go into the world and preach the message of salvation to our brothers and sisters "that they may believe the gospel and *rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ*, and be glorified through faith in his name, and that through their repentance they might be saved" (D&C 3:20; emphasis added).

Faith is the complete trust, confidence in, and reliance upon the perfect merits, tender mercy, and endless grace of Jesus Christ for salvation. It is a gift of the Spirit (see Moroni 10:11), a divine endowment that affirms to the human heart the identity and redemptive mission of the Savior. It is only through exercising faith in the name of Jesus Christ—meaning His power or authority, His atoning mission and work—that salvation comes to the children of men (see Acts 4:12; 2 Nephi 9:24; Mosiah 3:17; 26:22; Alma 22:13; Helaman 14:13). In the words of Amulek, the atonement of Christ "bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance" (Alma 34:15).

Elder Orson Pratt wrote that "the grace and faith by which man is saved, are the gifts of God, having been purchased for him not by his own works, but by the blood of Christ. Had not these gifts been purchased for man, all exertions on his part would have been entirely unavailing and fruitless. Whatever course man might have pursued, he could not have atoned for one sin; it required the sacrifice of a sinless and pure Being in order to purchase the gifts of faith, repentance, and salvation for fallen man. Grace, Faith, Repentance, and Salvation, when considered in their origin, are not of man, neither by his works; man did not devise, originate, nor adopt them; superior Beings in Celestial abodes, provided these gifts, and revealed the conditions to man by which he might become a partaker of them. Therefore all boasting on the part of man is

excluded. He is saved by a plan which his works did not originate—a plan of heaven, and not of earth.”¹²

In his enlightening and inimitable style, C. S. Lewis stated: “At first it is natural for a baby to take its mother’s milk without knowing its mother. It is equally natural for us to see the man who helps us without seeing Christ behind him. But we must not remain babies. We must go on to recognise the real Giver. It is madness not to. Because, if we do not, we shall be relying on human beings. And that is going to let us down. The best of them will make mistakes; all of them will die. We must be thankful to all the people who have helped us, we must honour them and love them. But never, never pin your whole faith on any human being: not if he is the best and wisest in the whole world. There are lots of nice things you can do with sand; but do not try building a house on it.”¹³

HIS ENABLING POWER

Without trust in the Lord, without recognizing our limits and learning to lean upon the merits of Christ, we will probably either work ourselves into a frenzy of spiritual and physical exhaustion or else find ourselves doing all the right things but feeling little pleasure in doing so. So often we end up going through the motions. There is a better and higher motivation, however, one that is above and beyond self-discipline, well beyond sheer willpower and dogged determination. It is a motivation born of the Spirit, one that comes to us as a result of a change of heart. Through the atonement of Christ, we can do more than enjoy a change of behavior; we come to have our *nature* changed.

“The Lord works from the inside out,” President Benson testified. “The world works from the outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ takes the slums out of people, and then they take themselves out of the slums. The world would mold men by changing their environment. Christ changes men, who then change their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature.” President Benson added: “Yes, Christ changes men, and changed men can change the

world. Men changed for Christ will be captained by Christ. . . . Finally, men captained by Christ will be consumed in Christ.”¹⁴

Consider a strange analogy. Imagine that you are standing in a baptismal font filled with water up to your waist. A person in authority walks up to the font carrying a large container. He empties the container, and you now have one hundred ping-pong balls floating in the font with you. The man speaks: “Brother Millet, I hold the keys to your salvation. I’ll make a deal with you: if you can submerge all one hundred ping-pong balls at the same time, your salvation in the highest heaven is secured.” You reflect on the task for a moment and then respond: “I’ll take the offer. Just give me a few moments.” You think to yourself: “This should be a snap! I’m capable, competent, coordinated, and in excellent physical condition. I can do it!” And you begin. You manage to submerge ten, then twenty, then thirty, using only your two hands. Then several of those balls pop up. “That’s okay,” you think. You were only using your hands anyway. You now go about the task in a serious way, using your arms and elbows and chin and legs and feet. Sixty, seventy, eighty, then pop! Out come ten formerly submerged balls. “That’s all right,” you say to yourself. “Don’t panic. I can do this. I’ve certainly handled tougher situations than this.” Over and over and over again, you attempt to do what eventually appears to be the impossible.

In a sense, my sins are like those ping-pong balls. I can go about the task of overcoming them one by one, one sin at a time. I can initiate a Benjamin Franklin approach to repentance, work on a vice (or a virtue) for a season and then move on to the next one. But, to be honest, I don’t have that much time in this life—or energy. So, also, with performing my many assignments or doing all that is expected of me: I can grit my teeth, tighten my grip on the iron rod until my knuckles go white, and hold on for dear life. I can do my job with tenacity and willpower and personal discipline. Now, to be sure, a certain amount of discipline is associated with discipleship; the Lord expects us to give Him our best shot. But I am convinced that He does not expect us to do all of this by ourselves. He has offered to help us, to strengthen us, to enable and empower us.

That's a pretty generous offer, and we would be foolish to refuse or ignore it.

The grace of God is not just that final, divine boost into celestial glory that a gracious Father and benevolent Savior provide at the time of judgment. We will, to be sure, require all the help we can get in order to be prepared to go where God and angels are, and feel comfortable there; at the same time, grace is something we have access to every hour of every day of every year. "True grace," as John MacArthur has explained, "is more than just a giant freebie, opening the door to heaven in the sweet by and by, but leaving us to wallow in sin in the bitter here and now. Grace is God presently at work in our lives."¹⁵ It is through the grace of God "that individuals, through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, *receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means.* This grace is *an enabling power* that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts."¹⁶ The Lord provides for His followers a strength, an energy, a living power. It is by this means, by this new life in Christ, that we do what we could not do on our own.

While serving as a priesthood leader many years ago, I had occasion to work with a young man who was struggling with same-sex attraction. He had violated his temple covenants but sincerely wanted to change. Church disciplinary measures were taken, and he began to work toward change. He spoke often of how difficult it was for him to be active in the Church, to attend all the activities, and in general to be a typical Latter-day Saint when he felt so very atypical. He committed to avoid inappropriate sexual activity but wrestled with his same-sex attraction. One day he asked me: "If I do the things you have asked me to do—go to Church, read the scriptures, fast and pray, plead for divine help, receive priesthood blessings when necessary, and be chaste—can you assure me that the Lord will take away these desires, these attractions? Can you promise me they will go away?" It was a tough question.

As I recall, I said something like this: "I know that the Lord can indeed change you, change your heart. I know that He can do that

instantaneously if He chooses to do so. I know that the power of change is in Jesus Christ, and that dramatic and rapid change can take place. I do not know, however, whether the Lord will change you right away. I know this: If you do what you have been asked to do, and if you do it regularly and consistently, from now on, God will change you, either here or hereafter. You may be required to deal with these feelings until the day you die. But I can promise you two things—first, these feelings will eventually be transformed; and second, if God does not choose to bring about a major change in your nature in this life, he will strengthen and empower you to deal with the temptations you will face. You don't need to face this on your own."

I shared with my young friend a few scriptures that have special meaning to me. I reminded him that the celestial kingdom is the eternal abode of those who "overcome by faith" (D&C 76:53). I then turned to the Book of Mormon and read Alma's counsel to his faithful son Helaman: "Preach unto them repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ; teach them to humble themselves and to be meek and lowly in heart; teach them to *withstand every temptation of the devil, with their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Alma 37:33; emphasis added). Truly, Christ is our Advocate, the One who knows "the weakness of man, and how to succor them who are tempted" (D&C 62:1). The devil doesn't need to get us to steal or lie or smoke or be immoral—he merely needs to suggest that we understate, undersell, and underestimate the powers, appropriateness, and relevance of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Prince of Peace was sent to "bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound" (Isaiah 61:1). The Lord Jehovah, who is Jesus Christ, is the Great Physician, the One sent of the Father to heal our wounds, to dry our tears, to settle our souls. We live in a fallen world, a world of pain and trauma and tragedy, a world where bad things do indeed happen to good people. We live in a world where our goodwill is spurned, our noble desires are questioned, our benevolent deeds are rebutted. Life hurts—a lot. Sin on our part is only one way—albeit a major way—by which we are wounded in

mortality. Very often others' sins against us result in pain and agony of soul. Abuse in its many ugly forms takes a terrible toll on human feelings of worth. Harshness, rudeness, callousness, and insensitivity—these are but a few ways by which Satan wins a battle through man's inhumanity to man. Thus, each of us wrestles not only with sin and repentance but also with feelings of inadequacy, feelings of loneliness, bitterness, jealousy, or betrayal.

Alma explained that the Redeemer would "go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:11–12).

This scripture points us to the Messiah's power to lift us, lighten our burdens, and cradle us midst any care. It highlights the fact that Christ's empathy was made perfect through His participation in pain, our pain as well as His. Though Jehovah knew all things cognitively, there were some things He could only know experientially, some things He would be required to go through personally in order to be able to assist us, personally, in our passage through the second estate (see Alma 7:13).

I have been inspired over the years in working with those saintly persons who are seeking to recover from abuse, desertion, or betrayal. I have had reaffirmed, from witnessing their vexations of the soul, the eternal verity that mortals can do only so much in their feeble efforts to right the wrongs of this life. I have been deeply touched as I have beheld a miracle in process—their growing capacity to forgive. In our first meeting, there might have been much of bitterness and even of hatred expressed. As time passes, however, and as the Spirit of the Lord begins to work marvelous wonders in the human heart, I hear the offended one say things like: "Well, I don't hate him (or her) anymore. I don't want to be his closest friend, but I don't hate him. I can't." Then later I hear the following: "I am

still troubled by what happened, but I no longer have bitter feelings toward this person.” And then I hear: “I hope things work out for him. I deeply hope he can get his act together and straighten out. I want him to be happy.” What a stunning illustration of a rebirth of the soul! Darkness and despair are replaced by light and peace. Doubt is replaced by confidence. Rancor is replaced by tenderness and magnanimity. Such a power, the power to take away the pain, turn away the anger, and put away the past—such a power is not of this earth.

We as mortals simply do not have the power to fix everything that is broken. Complete restitution, as we know it, may not be possible. President Boyd K. Packer explained that “sometimes you *cannot* give back what you have taken because you don’t have it to give. If you have caused others to suffer unbearably—defiled someone’s virtue, for example—it is not within your power to give it back. . . .

“If you cannot undo what you have done, you are trapped. It is easy to understand how helpless and hopeless you then feel and why you might want to give up, just as Alma did.

“The thought that rescued Alma, when he acted upon it, is this: Restoring what you cannot restore, healing the wound you cannot heal, fixing that which you broke and you cannot fix is the very purpose of the atonement of Christ.

“When your desire is firm and you are willing to pay ‘the uttermost farthing’ (see Matthew 5:25–26), the law of restitution is suspended. Your obligation is transferred to the Lord. He will settle your accounts.”¹⁷

This strength, this enlivening influence, this spiritual change about which we have been speaking, does not come to us just because we work harder or longer hours. It comes as a result of working smarter, working in conjunction with the Lord God Omnipotent. Elder Gene R. Cook pointed out that “if we can obtain the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that divine enabling power to assist us, we will triumph in this life and be exalted in the life to come. . . . I bear witness that if we will seek the grace of God, He will come to our aid and the aid of our loved ones in times of

need.”¹⁸ President Brigham Young likewise testified: “My faith is, when we have done all we can, then the Lord is under obligation, and will not disappoint the faithful; He will perform the rest.”¹⁹

THE DELICATE BALANCE

Latter-day Saints have often been critical of those who stress salvation by grace alone, while we have often been criticized for a type of works-righteousness. The gospel is in fact a gospel covenant—a two-way promise. The Lord agrees to do for us what we could never do for ourselves—to forgive our sins, to lift our burdens, to renew our souls and re-create our nature, to raise us from the dead and qualify us for glory hereafter. At the same time, we promise to do what we *can* do: receive the ordinances of salvation, love and serve one another (see Mosiah 18:8–10), and do all in our power to put off the natural man and deny ourselves of ungodliness (see Mosiah 3:19; Moroni 10:32). We know, without question, that the power to save us, to change us, to renew our souls, is in Christ. True faith, however, always manifests itself in *faithfulness*. “When faith springs up in the heart,” President Brigham Young taught, “good works will follow, and good works will increase that pure faith within them.”²⁰

Latter-day Saints believe, with their Christian brothers and sisters, that salvation is a gift (see D&C 6:13; 14:7), but we also emphasize that a gift must be received (see D&C 88:33). One’s receipt of the ordinances of salvation and one’s efforts to keep the commandments are extensions and manifestations of true faith. In an effort to establish the appropriate balance, I feel that it would be a worthwhile experience to list a few of the scriptural passages that affirm the need for works and that attest that men and women will be judged by God according to their works. This is certainly a key message in the Bible (e.g., Psalm 62:11–12; Proverbs 24:12; Jeremiah 17:10; Matthew 7:21; 16:27; Acts 10:34–35; Romans 2:6, 13; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Titus 3:8; James 1:22; 2:19–20, 26; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 John 3:18; Revelation 20:12).

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been given for the purpose of “proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true” (D&C 20:11). Note the following confirmatory passages concerning the vital place of good works:

“The day should come that they must be judged of their works, yea, even the works which were done by the temporal body in their days of probation” (1 Nephi 15:32).

“Yea, they are grasped with death, and hell; and death, and hell, and the devil, and all that have been seized therewith must stand before the throne of God, and be judged according to their works” (2 Nephi 28:23).

“And now I have spoken the words which the Lord God hath commanded me. And thus saith the Lord: They shall stand as a bright testimony against this people, at the judgment day; whereof they shall be judged, every man according to his works, whether they be good, or whether they be evil” (Mosiah 3:23–24).

“Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?” (Alma 5:15; compare Mosiah 16:10).

“Therefore, prepare ye the way of the Lord, for the time is at hand that all men shall reap a reward of their works, according to that which they have been—if they have been righteous they shall reap the salvation of their souls, according to the power and deliverance of Jesus Christ; and if they have been evil they shall reap the damnation of their souls, according to the power and captivation of the devil” (Alma 9:28).

“Therefore the wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death; for behold, the day cometh that all shall rise from the dead and stand before God, and be judged according to their works” (Alma 11:41; see also 12:12).

“He [Jesus] shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection, that all men shall stand before him, to be

judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works” (Alma 33:22; see also 36:15).

“And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good” (Alma 41:3).

“Whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come; but in the last day it shall be restored unto him according to his deeds” (Alma 42:27).

“The great and last day, when all people, and all kindreds, and all nations and tongues shall stand before God, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil” (3 Nephi 26:4).

“And for this cause I write unto you all, 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” (Mormon 3:20).

So on the one hand, Latter-day Saint scripture and prophetic teachings establish the essential truth that salvation is free and that it comes by grace, through God’s unmerited favor. On the other hand, ancient and modern prophets set forth the equally vital point that works are a necessary though insufficient condition for salvation. We will be judged according to our works, not according to the merits of our works, but to the extent that our works manifest to God who and what we have *become*.

One writer offered a parable that might prove helpful in understanding a Latter-day Saint perspective on this vital matter: “A man is wandering in a hot and barren waste, and about to die of thirst, when he is caused to look up at the top of the hill where he sees a fountain of water in a restful setting of green grass and trees. His first impulse is to dismiss it as a mirage sent to torture his weary soul. But, being wracked with thirst and fatigue, and doomed to certain destruction anyway, he chooses to believe and pursue this last hope. As he drives his weary flesh to the top of the hill, he begins to

see evidence of the reality of his hope; and, renewing his efforts, struggles on to the summit where he wets his parched lips, cools his fevered brow, and restores life to his body as he drinks deeply from the fountain. He is saved!”

The author of the parable then offers these comments by way of interpretation: “What saved him? Was it the climb up the hill? Or was it the water? If he had remained at the foot of the hill either because of disbelief or lack of fortitude, his only means of salvation would have remained inaccessible. On the other hand, if he had climbed to the top and found he had labored in vain, he would have been worse off, if possible. . . .

“The climb up the hill represents obedience to the gospel (faith in Christ, repentance, baptism of water, baptism of the Spirit, and endurance to the end); the water is that same eternal drink which Jesus offered the woman at the well. It is the atonement of Christ which is supplied as an act of grace.”²¹

In reality, and as we have emphasized already, when coupled with true faith and its attendant actions the work of salvation of the human soul is a product of divine grace. C. S. Lewis explained: “Christians have often disputed as to whether what leads the Christian home is good actions, or Faith in Christ. . . . You see, we are now trying to understand, and to separate into water-tight compartments, what exactly God does and what man does when God and man are working together.”²²

What does it mean, therefore, to “work out our own salvation”? (Philippians 2:12). Certainly not to attempt to do it by ourselves, for the divine word is sure and clear—such is impossible. Certainly not to accept Christ and His gospel and then live however we choose, utterly disregarding the standards of Christian discipleship—such is an offense to God, and we will answer for the same on the day of judgment. No, it means to pray and trust in the Lord God as though everything depended upon Him, and also to work and labor as though everything depended upon Him! If I rely *wholly* upon the merits of Christ (see 2 Nephi 31:19), how much do I rely upon myself to be saved? If I rely *alone* upon the merits of Christ (see Moroni 6:4), how much do I rely upon myself to be saved? The

answer to both questions is a resounding “NONE.” This is not a matter of self-confidence; it is a matter of confidence in Christ. I have a role in my own salvation, but peace and assurance and hope come because of what Jesus the Redeemer has done and will do to qualify me for life with Him one day. Thus, the grace of God, provided through the intercession of the Savior, is free yet expensive; it is costly grace, “costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. . . . Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son, . . . and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is *grace* because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us.”²³

On the last page of the Book of Mormon, Moroni writes: “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and *if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you*” (Moroni 10:32; emphasis added). For us to enjoy the strength, enabling power, and purifying influence of the mighty arm of God, we must do all in our power to receive it. Thus, we reach and stretch to take the hand of the Almighty. We open our hands and our hearts to the proffered gift. We strive with all our souls to love our Maker and avoid those unholy attitudes and behaviors and places and influences that distance us from the Holy One. Then His grace is sufficient for us.

In a word, I am incomplete or partial, while Christ is whole or complete. As I come unto Christ by covenant, we (Christ and I) are complete. I am unfinished, while Christ is finished. Through “relying alone” upon the merits of the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2; compare Moroni 6:4), I become finished or fully formed. I am imperfect, while Christ is perfect. Together we are perfect. Those who come unto Christ become perfect *in Him* (see Moroni 10:32). Those who inherit the celestial kingdom are just men and just women who have been “*made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood*” (D&C 76:69; emphasis added).

Because we are human—because we are weak and mortal and tired—we will probably never reach the point in this life when we have done “all we can do.” Too many of us misread 2 Nephi 25:23 and conclude that the Lord can assist us only *after*, meaning following the time that, we have done “all we can do.” In fact, the Lord can and does help us all along the way. I think Nephi is trying to emphasize that no matter how much we do, it simply will not be enough to guarantee salvation without Christ’s intervention. Restating Nephi, “Above and beyond all we can do, notwithstanding all we can do, it is by the grace of Christ that we are saved.” And what is true of our ultimate salvation is true of our daily walk and talk, of our personality and our passions. Above and beyond all efforts at self-control, behavior modification, or reducing our sins to manageable categories, “everything which really needs to be done in our souls can only be done by God.”²⁴

There is yet another way to look at 2 Nephi 25:23. After the conversion of thousands of Lamanites by the sons of Mosiah, the brother of Lamoni, named Anti-Nephi-Lehi, counseled with his people, those, you remember, who had made a covenant not to take up weapons against their brethren in war. Note his words:

“And I also thank my God, yea, my great God, that he hath granted unto us that we might repent of these things, and also that he hath forgiven us of those our many sins and murders which we have committed, and taken away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son.

“And now behold, my brethren, since it has been *all that we could do*, (as we were the most lost of all mankind) *to repent of all our sins* and the many murders which we have committed, and to get God to take them away from our hearts, for *it was all we could do to repent sufficiently before God that he would take away our stain*—

“Now, my best beloved brethren, since God hath taken away our stains, and our swords have become bright, then let us stain our swords no more with the blood of our brethren” (Alma 24:8–12; emphasis added).

There is a very real sense in which “all we can do” is come

before the Lord in reverent humility, confess our weakness, and plead for His forgiveness, for His mercy and grace. It occurred to me recently that life is repentance, that progression and improvement and growth and maturity and refinement are all forms of repentance, and that the God-fearing live in a constant state of repentance.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is intended to liberate us, to lift and lighten our burdens. If it is not doing that in our personal lives, then perhaps our approach and understanding, our orientation—not necessarily the quantity of work to be done—may need some adjustment. *Balance*—that is the key. I have come to sense the need to balance a type of “divine discontent”—a healthy longing to improve—with what Nephi called a “perfect brightness of hope” (2 Nephi 31:20)—the Spirit-given assurance that in and through Jesus Christ we are going to make it.

CONCLUSION

I know of the power that is in Christ, power not only to create the worlds and divide the seas, but also to still the storms of the human heart, to right life’s wrongs, to ease and eventually even remove the pain of scarred and beaten souls. There is no bitterness, no anger, no fear, no jealousy, no feelings of inadequacy that cannot be healed by the Great Physician. He is the Balm of Gilead. He is the One sent by the Father to “bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1). True followers of Christ learn to trust in Him more, and less in the arm of flesh. They learn to rely on Him more, and less on man-made solutions. They learn to surrender their burdens to Him more. They learn to work to their limits and then be willing to seek that grace or enabling power that will make up the difference—that sacred power that makes all the difference!

As Moroni has instructed us, when we come unto Christ and seek, all through our lives, to deny ourselves of ungodliness and give ourselves without hindrance to God, “then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ”—

whole, complete, fully formed—“and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God” (Moroni 10:32). That is, those who completely surrender and submit to the Almighty cannot deny—block, stop, or prevent—the power of God from coming into their lives. Because of who Christ our Lord is and what He has done, there is no obstacle to peace and joy here or hereafter too great to overcome. Our souls may find rest.

NOTES

1. See William R. Bradford, in Conference Report, October 1983, 100–101.
2. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 12.
3. Orson F. Whitney, in *Cowley and Whitney on Doctrine*, comp. Forace Green (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963), 287.
4. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 10:192.
5. Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 33.
6. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 244.
7. Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 2:134.
8. Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 8:160.
9. Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:173.
10. Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 12:323.
11. Sheri L. Dew, in Conference Report, April 1999, 84–85.
12. Orson Pratt, “The True Faith,” in *A Series of Pamphlets* (Liverpool: R. James, 1852), 3–9; see also *Orson Pratt's Works* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Parker Pratt Robinson, 1965), 51.
13. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 165.
14. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, October 1985, 4–6.
15. John F. MacArthur, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 32.
16. Bible Dictionary, “Grace,” 697; emphasis added.
17. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 1995, 22–23; emphasis in original.

18. Gene R. Cook, in Conference Report, April 1993, 98, 100.
19. Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:91.
20. Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 3:155.
21. Glenn L. Pearson, *Know Your Religion* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961), 92–93.
22. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 131–32.
23. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 47–48.
24. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 166.

JESUS CHRIST AS FATHER IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

Andrew C. Skinner

THE BOOK OF MORMON TESTIFIES OF THE divinity, majesty, and power of Jesus Christ like no other writing. In the Book of Mormon we are presented with the most complete picture of the roles, functions, offices, and titles of Jesus of any ancient record on earth—perhaps even of any scripture, ancient or modern. These roles and titles are as sweeping as they are awe-inspiring. Some of the major ones discussed by Book of Mormon prophets include Creator, Redeemer, Savior, Intercessor, Advocate, Judge, Only Begotten Son, Good Shepherd, and Lord of Hosts. However, no aspect of the Savior’s divinity is more significant nor taught with greater power and consistency in the Book of Mormon than that of Father. It is a concept that is taught both explicitly and implicitly in several different passages. The undergirding and overarching doctrine of the fatherhood of Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon is an important and singular validation of the book’s correctness and professed purpose of standing as another testament of Jesus Christ. It is

Andrew C. Skinner is dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University.

a testimony of the book's ability to clarify doctrinal precepts. It is a witness of the book's expanded understanding of the person and work of Christ—who He really is and what He actually does. The Book of Mormon's consistent presentation of the doctrine of the fatherhood of Jesus Christ is inextricably linked to the Savior's self-witness that He is "the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth" (3 Nephi 11:14).

Thus, the discussions in the Book of Mormon about Christ's role as Father are really a summary of all of His other roles, offices, functions, and titles. They help us appreciate more fully and immediately the incomparable greatness of the Being we know from the Bible as Jesus of Nazareth. We now turn to the specific ways the Book of Mormon teaches that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is also the Father.

AS THE CREATOR

The Book of Mormon teaches that Jesus Christ is justly called the Father by reason of His role as the Creator of all things, the Father of heaven and earth. King Benjamin makes this point very clear in his great Christ-centered sermon wherein he prophesied of the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to this earth. The prophet-monarch said:

"For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases. . . .

"And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary" (Mosiah 3:5, 8).

Several doctrinal concepts emerge as we parse these verses. Jesus Christ was God before He came to earth as a mortal. In His premortal state He was the Lord Omnipotent, the eternally existing

One who reigned with all power but chose to come down from His exalted position to take up a “tabernacle of clay” in order to experience life with the sick and afflicted in this fallen world.

Here King Benjamin is restating, in his own words, the uniquely Latter-day Saint doctrine of the condescension of God, which derives directly from the Book of Mormon. This doctrine, revealed to King Benjamin by an angel (see Mosiah 3:2), was revealed many hundreds of years earlier, also by an angel, to Nephi, son of Lehi: “And the angel said unto me [Nephi] again: Look and behold the condescension of God! . . . And I beheld that he went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory. . . . And I beheld multitudes of people who were sick, and who were afflicted with all manner of diseases, and with devils and unclean spirits; and the angel spake and showed all these things unto me. And they were healed by the power of the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 11:26, 28, 31).

These mighty miracles, foretold by both Nephi and King Benjamin and performed in actuality by Jesus of Nazareth, were but an extension of the Savior’s godly powers used in premortality to create all things—the heavens and the earth. Other scriptural texts and prophetic utterances teach us that we may regard this vast creative activity as literal, not metaphorical. To the prophet Moses, for example, it was given to know that Jesus, under the direction of God the Father (whom we often refer to as Elohim), created innumerable worlds like our own:

“And behold, the glory of the Lord was upon Moses, so that Moses stood in the presence of God, and talked with him face to face. And the Lord God said unto Moses: For mine own purpose have I made these things. Here is wisdom and it remaineth in me.

“And by the word of my power, have I created them, which is mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth.

“And worlds without number have I created; and I also created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten” (Moses 1:31–33).

Because Jesus Christ in very deed formed *millions* of planets and solar systems like the one on which we now reside, it is no exaggeration to say, as King Benjamin did, that Jesus Christ was the

creator of all things from the beginning. Remember, the prophet Enoch learned that even the staggering figure of “millions of earths” is so small, relatively speaking, to the number that actually exist that it cannot begin to serve as a starting point for finite mortal minds to count the total number of Christ’s creations (see Moses 7:30). Thus, Jesus is rightfully regarded as the Father of heaven and earth, which is a truth that continued to be taught by prophets throughout the Book of Mormon.

- Abinadi, for example, called the earthly Messiah “the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth” (Mosiah 15:4).

- Amulek declared Christ to be “the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth, all things which in them are” (Alma 11:39).

- Samuel the Lamanite said he had climbed upon the city walls to preach so that the people “might know of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning” (Helaman 14:12).

- And Moroni testified of Christ’s cosmological fatherhood when he spoke the very words of Jesus Christ, who declared that in the day that people “shall exercise faith in me, saith the Lord, even as the brother of Jared did, that they may become sanctified in me, then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations, saith Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of the heavens and of the earth, and all things that in them are” (Ether 4:7).

Some passages in the Book of Mormon also speak of Jesus Christ as the creator of humankind (see Mosiah 26:23; Alma 5:15; Ether 3:16). While this is true in the sense that He created the habitations and environments that make it possible for human beings to exist, it is also accurate to say that there is one area of creation in which the premortal Jesus Christ did not act directly as the primal maker or organizer—the procreation of spirit children. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has provided a helpful framework for our thinking regarding Jesus’ role as Father of creation. He said:

“In the ultimate and final sense of the word, the Father is the Creator of all things. That he used the Son and others to perform many of the creative acts, delegating to them his creative powers,

does not make these others creators in their own right, independent of him. He is the source of all creative power, and he simply chooses others to act for him in many of his creative enterprises. But there are two creative events that are his and his alone. First, he is the Father of all spirits, Christ's included; none were fathered or created by anyone else. Second, he is the Creator of the physical body of man. Though Jehovah and Michael and many of the noble and great ones played their assigned roles in the various creative events, yet when it came time to place man on earth, the Lord God himself performed the creative acts. 'I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them' (Moses 2:27)."¹

AS JEHOVAH—ISRAEL'S PARENT, GOD, AND LAWGIVER

Another way in which Jesus Christ is regarded as the Father in the Book of Mormon concerns His premortal role as ancient Israel's paternal guardian and lawgiver, the great Jehovah. To the people of ancient times, Jehovah revealed His paternal or fatherly relationship to Israel when He declared to Moses, "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord [Hebrew YHWH or Jehovah], Israel is my son, even my firstborn" (Exodus 4:22). To the prophet Jeremiah He was even more explicit: "At the same time, saith the Lord, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. . . . For *I am a father* to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn" (Jeremiah 31:1, 9; emphasis added).

This, of course, is the very same Jehovah who brought the children of Israel out of bondage and gave to them His laws and covenants through the prophet Moses: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:2-3). What follows after this declaration in the book of Exodus is the Covenant Code, or the commandments and covenants that constitute the system known as the law of Moses given by Jehovah at Mount Sinai to the nation of Israel. Furthermore, this same Jehovah

is the very God who appeared to the Nephites many centuries later in America as the resurrected Savior. This fact is confirmed by the testimony of Jesus Christ Himself as recorded in 3 Nephi:

“And it came to pass that when Jesus had said these words he perceived that there were some among them who marveled, and wondered what he would concerning the law of Moses; for they understood not the saying that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new.

“And he said unto them: Marvel not that I said unto you that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new.

“Behold, I say unto you that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses.

“Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfil the law; therefore it hath an end. . . .

“Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life” (3 Nephi 15: 2–5, 9).

Thus, by virtue of the fact that Jesus is Jehovah-come-to-earth, as the Book of Mormon makes clear, and that Jehovah declared Himself to be ancient Israel’s cultural and spiritual parent, her guardian and source of law as well as light, we see again that Jesus is rightly regarded as Father in the Book of Mormon.

AS JEHOVAH—SENDER OF JESUS

The Book of Mormon also contains the truly unique doctrine and perspective that Jesus, acting in His role as Jehovah, was actually the Father spoken of in ancient times who sent Jesus to earth to fulfill His mortal probation. Or, in other words, the Book of Mormon teaches that the premortal Jesus declared the inevitability of His own mortal probation. Lest someone accuse this statement of sounding like meaningless double-talk, we may appeal to an important Book of Mormon text to illustrate the point. On the day before the Savior’s physical birth into mortality, Nephi prayed mightily unto God and received a momentous response to his plea:

“But there were some who began to say that the time was past for the words to be fulfilled, which were spoken by Samuel, the Lamanite.

“And they began to rejoice over their brethren, saying: Behold the time is past, and the words of Samuel are not fulfilled; therefore, your joy and your faith concerning this thing hath been vain. . . .

“Now it came to pass that when Nephi, the son of Nephi, saw this wickedness of his people, his heart was exceedingly sorrowful.

“And it came to pass that he went out and bowed himself down upon the earth, and cried mightily to his God in behalf of his people, yea, those who were about to be destroyed because of their faith in the tradition of their fathers.

“And it came to pass that he cried mightily unto the Lord all that day; and behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying:

“Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world, to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets.

“Behold, I come unto my own, to fulfil all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world, and to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given” (3 Nephi 1:5–6, 10–14).

These verses teach profound principles. At a time of lethal persecution against the Saints of God, Nephi petitioned the Lord for redress because the wicked thought they had proof that the prophecies of Christ’s first coming in the flesh were false traditions. As it turns out, Nephi offered this mighty prayer on the day before the actual mortal birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. The Lord answered Nephi’s plea and promised that the ultimate sign of the impending nativity would be given that very night and that Jesus would come into the world the following day. Here we learn that the Lord always fulfills His word, though it is according to His timetable and not ours.

But this is not all. At least three other points are worthy of notice as we contemplate the doctrine of the fatherhood of Christ. First, it is significant that the premortal Jesus answered Nephi's prayer, for the premortal Jesus is none other than the great Jehovah, the very giver of the prophecies about the first and second comings of the Messiah pronounced since the foundation of the world. Jehovah says to Nephi, in effect, that He will give the ultimate sign of His own mortal birth and that He will enter the world as the earthly Jesus.

Second, it makes perfect sense that Jehovah would answer Nephi's petition because Jehovah has been the God of this earth from the beginning. President Joseph Fielding Smith explained this when he stated: "All revelation since the fall has come through Jesus Christ, who is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. In all of the scriptures, where God is mentioned and where he has appeared, it was Jehovah who talked with Abraham, with Noah, Enoch, Moses and all the prophets. He is the God of Israel, the Holy One of Israel; the one who led that nation out of Egyptian bondage, and who gave and fulfilled the Law of Moses (1 Nephi 19:10; 3 Nephi 11:10, 14; 15:2-9). The Father [Elohim] has never dealt with man directly and personally since the fall, and he has never appeared except to introduce and bear record of the Son."

President Smith further noted that "the Father [Elohim] has honored Christ by placing his name upon him, so that he can minister in and through that name *as though he were the Father*; and thus, so far as power and authority are concerned, *his words and acts become and are those of the Father*."²

Thus, when the Lord Jehovah spoke or appeared to humans in ancient times, He did so as the Father. When He gave revelation to His prophets about the mortal mission of Jesus Christ—even though He was speaking of Himself—He did so as the Father, using the perspective of God the Father (Elohim) and speaking of Jesus as though Jesus were another party. This principle is called divine investiture of authority, meaning that "the Father-Elohim has placed his name upon the Son [Jesus Christ], has given him his own power and authority, and has authorized him to speak in the first

person as though he were the original or primal Father.”³ This principle is clearly demonstrated in certain sections of the Doctrine and Covenants wherein the Lord is found to be speaking as both Jesus Christ and God the Father—Elohim in the same revelation (see as the best examples D&C 29:1, 42; 49:5, 28).

Third, enlightened by a basic understanding of the historical and doctrinal backdrop of Nephi’s petition on the eve of the Savior’s birth into mortality, we may more fully comprehend the exact wording of the Lord’s response to Nephi when He said, “I come unto my own, to fulfil all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world, and to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh” (3 Nephi 1:14). In other words, the Lord’s words to Nephi indicate the following:

1. He was speaking from the perspective of both of His roles or titles as Jehovah *and* Jesus.

2. He was declaring that His mortal lineage would be through the house of Israel—“I come unto my own”—the very group or family for whom He acted as Father in His role as Jehovah, just as He earlier declared in Exodus 4:22: “Israel is my son, even my first-born.”

3. As the earthly Jesus, He would fulfill all the prophecies and principles about the Messiah and about the plan of salvation that He, in His role as Jehovah, revealed to His prophets from the foundation of the world.

4. In coming to earth as Jesus the Messiah, He would be fulfilling the will of Himself when He acted in the role of the Father-Jehovah as He said, “To do the will . . . of the Father because of *me*.” He, Jehovah, would come into the world as the Messiah because that is what He wanted to do when acting as Jehovah. But in reality, by carrying out what He had proposed for Himself, when acting as Jehovah, He was also carrying out the aims and desires of His own Father-Elohim (see Moses 4:1–4).

5. Once on earth as Jesus the Messiah, He would also fulfill His own will or desire to act as the dutiful and obedient Son of God

(Elohim) as He further said, “To do the will . . . of the Son because of my flesh.”

We can now see that the Lord’s response to Nephi was not double-talk, but representative of the Savior’s varied and separate roles and responsibilities. He was speaking as Jehovah the Father. And He was speaking as the Son of God, Jesus Christ, under the direction of His own literal Father, Elohim. This makes logical sense, for if God the Father–Elohim placed upon His Son the right and responsibility to act and speak as He (Elohim) acts and speaks through the principle of divine investiture of authority, then our Lord must, of necessity, be the Father. Jehovah must speak as the One who sent Jesus Christ to earth. And yet, once on earth Jehovah the Father must act as the Son precisely because His mortal tabernacle was born of the union between a divine Father and a mortal mother, and He was literally the Son of Elohim.

This pattern displayed so clearly in the Book of Mormon helps us to understand other passages of scripture in the standard works. Note, for example, the language of Psalm 110:1 quoted by the Savior in an episode reported in Matthew 22:41–45.

“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, “Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David.

“He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying,

“The Lord [Jehovah] said unto my Lord [Jesus], Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?

“If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?

With the understanding of Jesus’ premortal roles and titles in mind, the Savior’s purpose in using Psalm 110 becomes so much clearer to us. He was telling the Pharisees that He was both Messiah and Lord Jehovah.

Also, note the language of Isaiah’s greatest messianic prophecy in Isaiah 53 and later quoted by the prophet Abinadi: “The Lord [Jehovah] hath laid on him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all” for “it pleased the Lord [Jehovah] to bruise him [Jesus]; he [Jehovah] hath put him [Jesus] to grief” (Isaiah 53:6, 10; see also Mosiah 14:6, 10).

It should not be hard for us to understand that it is not only acceptable but necessary that our Lord speak as both the Father and the Son. He is both Jehovah and Jesus Christ, and He sometimes communicates from the perspective of both roles. This is the essence of His declaration to the brother of Jared: “And whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good is of me; for good cometh of none save it be of me. I am the same that leadeth men to all good; he that will not believe my words will not believe me—that I am; and *he that will not believe me will not believe the Father who sent me. For behold, I am the Father, I am the light, and the life, and the truth of the world* (Ether 4:12; emphasis added).

Thus, Jesus is the Father by virtue of the fact that, as Jehovah, He was saying that, in a sense, He was sending Himself into the world to be our Messiah and Redeemer. The Book of Mormon makes it clear that He was conscious of the fact that He was speaking as the Father.

THE FATHER ACCORDING TO ABINADI

The prophet Abinadi delivered one of the most profound and best known sermons on the mission and ministry of the Messiah, including the doctrine of the fatherhood of Christ. Addressing the priests of Noah, Abinadi presents in his opening statements many of the seminal features of Christ’s true identity as the Father *and* the Son—ideas with which we are already familiar.

“And now Abinadi said unto them: I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people.

“And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—

“The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son—

“And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth.

“And thus the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit, or the Son to

the Father, being one God, suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people” (Mosiah 15:1–5).

With penetrating clarity Abinadi first testified that the forthcoming Redeemer was none other than God Himself, He whom the people knew and worshiped as Jehovah (15:1). This is another restatement of the doctrine of the condescension of God articulated previously by Nephi and King Benjamin.

Next, Abinadi teaches the principle of the subjection of Jehovah to the buffetings of the flesh precisely as a result of His taking up a physical body in this fallen world. Through the birth process He would become the Son of God in the flesh, and in so doing would subject Himself to the will of the Father (15:2). The will of the Son was swallowed up in the will of the Father, as Abinadi declared a few verses later (15:7).

At this point Abinadi reveals to his audience a most significant aspect of Christ’s identity and role. Because Jehovah’s earthly body would be conceived by the power of God (Elohim) and thus Jehovah would become God’s literal Son in the flesh, He would become the Father and the Son. He would possess within Himself the powers, attributes, and literal physical makeup possessed by Elohim. Genetically He would assume the identity of His Father and thus become just like the Father physically but be born as a son. He would receive the same powers inherent in His Father and would be capable of doing the same things His Father could do, yet He would also be considered the Son.

This is the very reason behind Jewish antagonism to Jesus’ statements after He had healed the disabled man by the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. The Jews knew that putting forth a claim of divine sonship in the flesh also implied being equal with God, physically as well as spiritually. Here they got it right, for divine sonship also meant that Jesus was the same as God the Father, at least in terms of power, endowments, and makeup. And, as the following verses indicate, Jesus was intent on leaving no room for doubt:

“Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not

only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.

“Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

“For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. . . .

“For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;

“And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man” (John 5:18–20, 26–27).

Thus, Jesus is rightly regarded as both the Father and the Son because of His genetic makeup and endowments of divine power. Abinadi taught the truth just as others have since then. In a modern revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Savior Himself explained that He is “the Father because he [Elohim] gave me of his fulness, and the Son because I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle, and dwelt among the sons of men” (D&C 93:4). This is very helpful commentary to study alongside Abinadi’s discourse.

Abinadi rounded out the first part of his discourse on the nature of Christ by testifying that Christ the Father and Christ the Son are in reality one God who manifests or fulfills different aspects of His eternal mission at different times. Abinadi also testified that the eternal being who came to earth as the Messiah was indeed the creator or Father of the heavens and the earth.

THE FATHER THROUGH SPIRITUAL REBIRTH

The Book of Mormon is really our single most important witness of Christ’s role as spiritual Father. This aspect of His fatherhood results from the opportunity He offers to all humankind to become His sons and daughters through spiritual rebirth. This rebirth comes through the Savior’s atonement, that singular gift of

redemption which makes it possible for us to enter His family. King Benjamin explained the process in these words: “And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters” (Mosiah 5:7).

Similarly, the Lord Himself declared that “as many as received me, gave I power to become my sons; and even so will I give unto as many as will receive me, power to become my sons [and daughters]” (D&C 39:4). All those who accept the gospel by covenant, participating in the ordinances of rebirth, enter the family of Jesus Christ. They receive both the name of their new family as well as the family inheritance, its blessings, and its obligations. “And it shall come to pass that whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God, for he shall know the name by which he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ” (Mosiah 5:9).

The prophet Alma taught that it is required of all men and women to enter the family of Christ and become His sons and daughters through rebirth into the kingdom of God:

“For, said he, I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit.

“And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters;

“And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God” (Mosiah 27:24–26).

The process of rebirth, or the second birth, parallels our first birth into this world. Jehovah, the premortal Jesus, taught this to our first parents in a profound way. Note not only the connection He makes between the first and second births, but also the way in which He speaks of Jesus in the third person—a being separate and apart from His current role as the Father:

“Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere,

must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence; for, in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous Judge, who shall come in the meridian of time.

“Therefore I give unto you a commandment, to teach these things freely unto your children, saying:

“That by reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory” (Moses 6:57–59).

CONCLUSION

There is no question that Elohim is our Father, the Father of the spirits of all human beings including Jehovah or Jesus Christ (see Numbers 16:22; Hebrews 12:9). He is the creator of our spirit bodies, the first member of the Godhead, and the ultimate object of our worship and adoration. But it is also true that Jesus Christ is the Father, as well, in several different ways.

Jesus Christ is the Father by reason of His being the creator of heaven and earth—millions of earths like this one. He is Jehovah, Israel’s cultural and spiritual Father and lawgiver. As Jehovah, He sent Himself to earth to become the mortal Messiah—Jesus Christ. He is the Father of our salvation and redemption, our spiritual rebirth, our exaltation and eternal progression. Elohim has literally given His Son Jesus Christ His own attributes and powers. “This is a matter of [the] Eternal Parent investing him with power from on high so that he [Jesus] becomes the Father because he exercises the power of that Eternal Being.”⁴ Such insight gives new and deeper meaning to the Savior’s many statements in the Book of Mormon

that He and His Father are one. They are indeed. One has been invested with the powers and characteristics of the other.

The Book of Mormon was given to us to help us comprehend the magnitude of Christ's greatness, and this record is the most correct and profound tutor and witness of the doctrine of the fatherhood of Jesus Christ in all the world.

NOTES

1. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 63.
2. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 1:27, 29–30; emphasis added.
3. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 63.
4. McConkie, *Promised Messiah*, 371.

CHRIST AND DIVINE PARENTHOOD IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

Brett L. Holbrook

IN APRIL OF 1830 THE LORD TESTIFIED that the Book of Mormon contains “the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (D&C 20:9). A foundational teaching of the gospel is that through the plan of redemption not only can we dwell again with our Heavenly Father, but we can become as He is. President Spencer W. Kimball stated, “The teachings of Christ that we should become perfect were not mere rhetoric. He meant literally that it is the right of mankind to become like the Father and like the Son, having overcome human weaknesses and developed attributes of divinity.”¹ Growth and progress are the purposes of our mortal existence, as President Kimball declared: “You are sent to this world with a very serious purpose. You are sent to school, for that matter, to begin as a human infant and grow to unbelievable proportions in wisdom, judgment, knowledge, and power.”² Some of those qualities and characteristics we need to develop deal with family relationships and are best exemplified in the Book of Mormon.

Brett L. Holbrook is a Church Educational System Coordinator in Newport Beach, California.

In our existence prior to coming to earth, we were children in our Heavenly Father's family. Here on earth is the first opportunity we have to become parents in a family relationship. That family relationship can continue after this life and into eternity through the sealing ordinances of the priesthood in holy temples. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that those who obtain exaltation "will continue to increase and have children in the celestial glory."³ President Brigham Young further clarified, "The Lord has bestowed on us the privilege of becoming fathers of lives. What is a father of lives, as mentioned in the Scriptures? A man who has a posterity to an eternal continuance."⁴ In becoming a parent either in mortality or in the eternal worlds, we need to acquire the divine attributes of parenthood that our heavenly parents possess.

How do we learn to be that divine parent while here on earth? President Ezra Taft Benson said our Heavenly Father is the greatest example we have as a pattern for parenthood.⁵ The best window we have for viewing the Father's attributes is through His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. As the Savior declared, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). The Prophet Joseph Smith pointed out, "The Saviour most clearly show[ed] unto us the nature of salvation, and what he proposed unto the human family when he proposed to save them—that he proposed to make them like unto himself, and he was like the Father, the great prototype of all saved beings."⁶ Jesus asked and answered, "What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27). Understanding that Christ is the embodiment of the Father's attributes that we need to acquire, it is His example we are to follow. How can Jesus be the example for us to emulate as a parent? The Book of Mormon clearly shows the Lord as a divine parent and gives examples of others who are striving to partake in that aspect of His divinity.

CHRIST AS A DIVINE PARENT

In the Book of Mormon, Christ is directly called the Father forty-one times⁷ and indirectly numerable times. Regarding this

title, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland stated, “There are ways in which Christ is so united with his Father that in some assignments he rightfully plays a fatherly role and rightfully bears the title of Father in doing so.”⁸ These roles in which Jesus is rightfully called Father are as the creator of all things, as the author of salvation, and by divine investiture of authority.⁹ All these roles are pivotal in the plan of salvation, but His designation as the author of salvation, where He becomes the Father of the covenant, is especially instructive for parents. “This fundamental—and admittedly deep—doctrine of the Son-as-Father,” declared Elder Holland, “is illuminated more definitively in the Book of Mormon than in any other revelation ever given to man.”¹⁰

King Benjamin taught his people who entered into a covenant with the Lord that “because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith in his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters” (Mosiah 5:7). In our covenant relationship with the Lord, we become His children and He our Father. In Abinadi’s commentary on Isaiah 53, he testifies that Jesus is both “the Father and the Son” (Mosiah 15:2) and that “when his soul has been made an offering for sin he shall see his seed” (Mosiah 15:10). He then explains that those who “believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins, I say unto you, that these are his seed, or they are the heirs of the kingdom of God. For these are they whose sins he has borne; these are they for whom he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions. And now, are they not his seed?” (Mosiah 15:11–12). When one enters into that covenant with the Lord, they become His seed, or His children and posterity in the covenant.

Jesus also explained this covenant parent-child relationship we have with Him to the brother of Jared: “Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe

on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters” (Ether 3:14). When one partakes in this covenant and goes through a spiritual rebirth, we are born unto Christ in the new relationship. Alma explained that all of us “must be born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters” (Mosiah 27:25). Mormon wrote to his son, Moroni, “If ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ” (Moroni 7:19). Even in ancient Israel, those who made a covenant with Jehovah were termed “the children of the covenant” (3 Nephi 20:26; see also 2 Nephi 6:12; 29:1). Nephi records the beautiful lines of Isaiah that encapsulate this aspect of the Lord’s relationship with us: “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” (1 Nephi 21:15). In this parent-child relationship, we can look toward the Savior and how He works with His covenant children as an example of divine parenthood. The Savior’s parenting by covenants and by teaching are two aspects addressed here.

PARENTING BY COVENANTS

As the Father of this covenant with us, it is evident that Jesus works by covenants. Even in the great premortal council, Jesus as the Son made His own covenant with His Father in relationship to His role in the plan of salvation. President John Taylor described the scene in that council: “The well beloved Son then addressed the Father, and instead of proposing to carry out any plan of his own, knowing what His Father’s will was, said, ‘Thy will be done;’ ‘I will carry out thy plans and thy designs, and, as man will fall, I will offer myself as an atonement according to thy will, O God. Neither do I wish the honor, but thine be the glory;’ and a covenant was entered into between Him and His Father, in which He agreed to atone for the sins of the world; and He thus, as stated, became the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world.”¹¹ Moroni closes his account by testifying of the role the Atonement plays in this

covenant, that we are “sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:33). Because of that promise obtained from the Father, Jesus is able to work out our salvation and make intercession for us. As our advocate, He obtains a promise from the Father that by His Atonement and merits, offered on our behalf, we can be justified. Mormon wrote to his son that this is our hope, “to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise” (Moroni 7:41).

The role of the Savior interceding on our behalf under this covenant with the Father is witnessed throughout the Book of Mormon. We are told that the Messiah “shall make intercession for all” (2 Nephi 2:9), that He “standeth up to plead” (2 Nephi 13:13) and “pleadeth the cause of his people” (2 Nephi 8:22; see also Jacob 3:1). It is the Father who gives “the Son power to make intercession” (Mosiah 15:8), and Jesus “advocateth the cause of the children of men” (Moroni 7:28). No one can then “dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8). It is “relying wholly upon the merits of him” (2 Nephi 31:19; see also Moroni 6:4) that saves us, as we only receive a remission of sins “through his merits” (Helaman 14:13). Christ has the power to make intercession for us based upon His merits, and He in turn covenants with us so that we can apply His redeeming blood. It is through this covenant that He becomes the Father of the covenant and of us, His children.

A prime example as to how Jesus intercedes on our behalf as the Father of the covenant is in His visit to the Americas in 3 Nephi. In chapter 17 Jesus prays to the Father in behalf of the multitude, and the people “heard him pray for us unto the Father” (3 Nephi 17:17). In chapter 19 He prays for His disciples: “Father, I pray unto thee for them, and also for all those who shall believe on their words” (3 Nephi 19:23; see also 19:28). He prays “for those whom thou hast given me out of the world, because of their faith, that they may be purified in me” (3 Nephi 19:29). They are those who by covenant become His children for whom He can intercede. As the intercessor

with Heavenly Father, Jesus asks them to pray to the Father in His name (see 3 Nephi 27:28). Using Jesus as an example, can we intercede on behalf of our children through covenants?

One of the great teachings in the Book of Mormon is how promises of intercession can be obtained from the Lord, our Father in the covenant. The prophet Lehi taught in the first three chapters of 2 Nephi, given in the New World, the pattern of how promises come by covenants and benefit posterity. In chapter 1, the promised land is used as an example as to how covenants work. Father Lehi spoke to his family “concerning the land of promise, which they had obtained” (2 Nephi 1:3), a promise he had obtained earlier (see 1 Nephi 5:5). He then explains that the promise was obtained by way of a covenant with the Lord, and the promise would be passed on to his children (see 2 Nephi 1:5). The conditions of the covenant are then set forth in clear “if-then” covenant language, with connected blessings and consequences (see 1:7). He then emphasizes personally how “I, Lehi, have obtained a promise” (1:9) by way of covenant. He also expresses his fears that some of his children may be “cut off” (1:17) by not keeping the covenant, that by their choices they may be “cut off from [the Lord’s] presence” (1:20).

In chapter 2 of 2 Nephi, Lehi teaches the role of agency and choice in the plan of salvation to not only Jacob, but also all of his sons (see 2:1, 14, 28, 30). He teaches that “the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself” (2:16), and that “they are free to choose” (2:27). Lehi also emphasizes that he is speaking these things with “none other object save it be the everlasting welfare of your souls” (2:30). Finally, in chapter 3, Father Lehi speaks to his youngest son, Joseph, and tells him of his namesake, Joseph who was sold into Egypt, “and great were the covenants of the Lord which he made unto Joseph” (2 Nephi 3:4). Lehi outlines how ancient Joseph “obtained a promise of the Lord” that out of his posterity the Lord “would raise up a righteous branch” (3:5). The Lord told ancient Joseph that his posterity would be brought “to the knowledge of the covenants” (3:7) and that His word would go “unto the seed of thy loins” (3:11). Ancient Joseph prophesies

regarding “this promise, which I have obtained of the Lord, of the fruit of my loins” (3:14). The effects of this promise on his posterity will be “as if the fruit of thy loins had cried unto them from the dust” (3:19). After explaining the covenant and promise that ancient Joseph had obtained for the benefit of his posterity, Lehi tells his son Joseph, “Wherefore, *because of this covenant* thou art blessed” (3:23; emphasis added). Interceding on behalf of his children and posterity, ancient Joseph obtained a promise from the Lord for them. The fact that the Book of Mormon would come forth in the latter days to the seed of Joseph is an example of how covenants can affect one’s posterity.

The doctrine of interceding on behalf of one’s children through covenants was taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith: “When a seal is put upon the father and mother, it secures their posterity, so that they cannot be lost, but will be saved by virtue of the covenant of their father and mother.”¹² Is it automatic that the posterity will then receive a celestial glory? Why did ancient Joseph’s covenant, which was to “all his seed” (2 Nephi 4:2), not have the same blessing and effect for Laman? It is because of the role of agency outlined by Lehi in 2 Nephi chapter 2. Even with those covenants, we still have our agency and choice to respond by obedience or not. President Joseph Fielding Smith warns that “all children born under the covenant belong to their parents in eternity, but that does not mean that they, because of that birthright, will inherit celestial glory. The faith and faithfulness of fathers and mothers will not save disobedient children.”¹³

What do the covenants do then to help one’s children? The effect of the covenant is to seek after them, to “cry from the dust; yea, even repentance,” to “make strong in their faith, unto the remembering of my covenants” (2 Nephi 3:20–21). As described by Elder Orson F. Whitney, “Though some sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold.”¹⁴ The key is if they will “hearken unto the words” (2 Nephi 3:23) and respond by obedience. Agency is a factor, and Alma later records “the promises of the Lord [are] extended unto them on the conditions of repentance” (Alma 17:15). President

James E. Faust testified, “Children of eternal sealings may have visited upon them the divine promises made to their valiant forebears who nobly kept their covenants. Covenants remembered by parents will be remembered by God. The children may thus become the beneficiaries and inheritors of these great covenants and promises. This is because they are the children of the covenant.”¹⁵ The power of those promises obtained by covenant can help lead them to salvation.

The promises obtained by ancient Joseph are referred to elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (see 2 Nephi 9:53; 25:21) and also obtained by others. Lehi and Nephi both obtained them (see 2 Nephi 29:2), as did Jacob, who declared that through the promise “our children shall be restored” (2 Nephi 10:2). Enos used the same pattern to obtain the promise: pray and labor so the Lord will grant desires by their faith (see Enos 1:12), and afterward he declared, “He covenanted with me” (Enos 1:16). Moroni stated the process: “It is by faith that my fathers have obtained the promise” (Ether 12:22).

The Book of Mormon records other examples of those who prayed for and obtained promises from the Lord on behalf of their children. Alma the Elder prayed and pled for the Lord to intercede on behalf of his wayward son Alma. The Lord responded by sending an angel (see Mosiah 27:14). That angel helped to “feel” after wayward Alma and call him to repentance, and he responded. King Mosiah inquired of the Lord and obtained a promise from Him on behalf of his missionary sons that they would be safe among the Lamanites (see Mosiah 28:6–7). Those promises had a direct effect on Mosiah’s son Ammon, for in dangerous circumstances he was protected by that covenant (see Alma 17:35–37; 19:23). In the Book of Mormon, parents’ hearts and desires turn toward their children and posterity, and they seek for their welfare. Through our covenants and faith, we can obtain promises from the Lord and bless our children and intercede on their behalf.

PARENTING BY TEACHING

Another aspect of the Savior’s divine nature that parents can learn from the Book of Mormon is His teaching. We learn not just

from the fact that He taught but also from the way in which He taught. The Lord's pattern is to teach and instruct so that His children can then use their agency wisely. He does this not only by telling us what we should do but by teaching doctrines and principles so we know why we should do it. In fact, the Lord expects us to follow His way and keep His commandments only "after having made known unto them the plan of redemption" (Alma 12:32). The Book of Mormon testifies that it is "the Lord thy God who teacheth thee to profit" (1 Nephi 20:17), for "the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do" (2 Nephi 32:3). Many times the Savior teaches directly by His words, or voice, to His children in the covenant.¹⁶ By direct communication, Nephi "was instructed of the Lord" (1 Nephi 17:18), as was Isaiah (see 2 Nephi 18:11) and the brother of Jared (see Ether 2:16). Alma testifies that "the Lord doth counsel in wisdom" (Alma 29:8), and the Lord told Nephi that blessed are those who "lend an ear unto my counsel" (2 Nephi 28:30). As a loving parent, the Lord speaks to, instructs, and counsels His children.

When teaching, the Savior also "shows" His children. Through visions, demonstration, metaphor, and example, He gives them a way to visualize and see what He means. As the Book of Mormon opened, Lehi was taught by the Lord and "saw and heard much" (1 Nephi 1:6), was "carried away in a vision" (1:8), and prophesied according to what "he had both seen and heard" (1:18). In the great vision of the tree of life given by the Lord, Lehi was taught visually and stated, "I cast my eyes round about" (8:13; see 8:26). He "looked to behold" (8:14), and there was much he "saw in a vision" (8:36). In that vision, the Lord used a variety of symbols and objects to teach including the tree, the rod of iron, the river of water, and the great building (see 1 Nephi 8). When Nephi desired to see the same things and had his own vision from the Lord, it was also a sensory experience. In his vision (see 1 Nephi 11–14), some form of the words *see*, *look*, and *behold* occurs more than 175 times.¹⁷ When Nephi was commanded to construct a ship, he "did build it after the manner which the Lord had shown unto me" (1 Nephi 18:2), and he would later testify that the Lord "hath given me knowledge by

visions” (2 Nephi 4:23). Jacob stated that “the Lord has shown me” those at Jerusalem (6:8), that “it has been shown unto me” those who perished (10:2), and Nephi, son of Helaman, declared he was an “eye-witness” to “know concerning the ministry of Christ” (3 Nephi 7:15). In the great vision given to the brother of Jared, the Lord “showed unto the brother of Jared all the inhabitants of the earth” and “withheld them not from his sight” (Ether 3:25). Moroni testified that “the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things” about the latter days, and “Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me” (Mormon 8:34–35). In all these examples, the Lord taught visually to His covenant children by “showing” and using symbols and imagery.

The Lord showed His covenant children the right way most effectively by His example. Nephi taught that the reason Jesus was baptized was to “set the example before them” (2 Nephi 31:9). When the Savior appeared to the Nephites, He immediately allowed them to have a sensory knowledge of Him by feeling and seeing the prints in His hands and feet. The multitude “did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety” (3 Nephi 11:15). He then showed them “after this manner ye shall baptize” (11:27) and “after this manner therefore pray ye” (13:9), demonstrating not just by word but by example what they were to do. In giving instructions on the sacrament, He said, “This shall ye always observe to do, even as I have done” (18:6). He again told them, “As I have prayed among you even so shall ye pray” (18:16), and they were to do “that which ye have seen me do” (18:24).

He also gave each of them the opportunity to be taught individually in addition to being taught in groups. When the multitude came forth to feel the prints in his hands, they did so “one by one” (3 Nephi 11:15) so they could witness for themselves. When He blessed the children, He did so “one by one” (17:21), and angels descended so that all could see “every man for himself” (17:25). In teaching and ordaining His disciples, He did so “one by one” (18:6) and personally interviewed them “one by one” (28:1) to know their desires. The Lord teaches not only by words but by “showing” and example, and He does so on an individual basis.

Others have written regarding the way parents in the Book of Mormon have taught,¹⁸ but some examples of the consistency, content, and method of their teaching will suffice here. Righteous parents taught their children; Nephi pointedly begins the Book of Mormon record with these words: “I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father” (1 Nephi 1:1). Enos salutes his father, Jacob, with the statement that “my father . . . was a just man—for he taught me in his language, and also in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Enos 1:1). King Benjamin caused his sons to “be taught in all the language of his fathers, that thereby they might become men of understanding; and that they might know concerning the prophecies” (Mosiah 1:2). He also “taught them concerning the records” that they might have known the commandments and not “suffered in ignorance” (1:3). In the Book of Mormon, approximately 20 percent of the writings about Alma’s ministry deal with his teachings to his sons (see Alma 36–42).¹⁹ The bulk of that instruction to his wayward son Corianton dealt with understanding doctrinal issues and the plan of salvation. The faithfulness of the two thousand stripling warriors was due to the fact that “they had been taught to keep the commandments” (Alma 53:21). Taught by whom? “They had been taught by their mothers” (56:47), and they did obey the words “that their mothers had taught them” (57:21). There were many things about repentance and the power of the Redeemer that “Helaman taught to his sons” (Helaman 5:13), from which “they went forth, keeping the commandments of God” (5:14). Mormon taught his newly called missionary son, Moroni, by way of letters that gave instruction and doctrine (see Moroni 8:1; 9:1). These parents in the Book of Mormon took upon themselves the responsibility of teaching and instructing their children.

Not only did Book of Mormon parents teach, but they gave their children individual attention in their instruction. Lehi taught his sons collectively (see 2 Nephi 1:19), but he also individually addressed Nephi (see 1 Nephi 3:2), Jacob (see 2 Nephi 2:1), Joseph (see 3:1), Laman (see 4:3), Lemuel (see 4:8–9), Sam (see 4:11), and their families. Alma addressed each of his sons on an individual basis, directing counsel to Helaman (see Alma 36–37), Shiblon (see

Alma 38), and Corianton (see Alma 39–42). Parents have been commanded by the Lord in this dispensation to teach their children the doctrines of the gospel (see D&C 68:25), and that has been reiterated by the First Presidency: “We call upon parents to devote their best efforts to the teaching and rearing of their children in gospel principles.”²⁰ Too many parents allow their children to make decisions without instructing them in gospel principles for fear of offending them. President Heber J. Grant declared: “I have heard men and women say that they were going to let their sons and daughters grow to maturity before they sought to teach them the principles of the gospel, that they were not going to cram the gospel down them in their childhood. . . . It is folly to imagine that our children will grow up with a knowledge of the gospel without teaching. . . . Parents are deceiving themselves in imagining that their children will be born with a knowledge of the gospel.”²¹

As Enos wrestled over his sins, it was “the words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life” that sank deep into his heart (Enos 1:3). Alma the Younger was in even deeper despair, and the thought that saved him was when he “remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world” (Alma 36:17). The gospel knowledge children gain and base their decisions on is greatly affected by whether or not parents teach and by what they teach.

In addition to teaching by their words, righteous parents in the Book of Mormon helped their children visualize and see to understand. Lehi taught his boys by use of metaphor and image as he compared Laman to a river and Lemuel to a valley (see 1 Nephi 2:9–10). In relating his vision of the tree of life, Lehi described the various symbols and objects the Lord showed him (see 1 Nephi 8). He also taught his children about the house of Israel by using the scriptural metaphor of an olive tree (see 1 Nephi 10:12–14). Lehi’s sons Nephi and Jacob wrote the words of Isaiah, full of metaphors, symbols, and visuals, and Nephi stated, “I will send them forth unto all my children” (2 Nephi 11:2). The secret convert among the Lamanites, Abish, attributed her conversion to the “vision of her

father” (Alma 19:16) that she was undoubtably taught. Other fathers in the Book of Mormon used imagery to expand the view and understanding of their children. Alma, for example, used the Liahona as a symbol to teach his son Helaman about following the words of Christ (see Alma 37:38–45). Helaman in turn instructed his sons by using a rock to visualize the strength of a foundation built upon Christ (see Helaman 5:12). The imagery used by righteous parents enabled their children to visualize gospel principles and deepen understanding.

Besides using words and objects to help their children see, these righteous parents used their lives as examples to follow. Nephi followed the same pattern that his father Lehi had shown him to know for himself the things his father taught,²² and Nephi also followed his father’s example in keeping the records of the people (see 1 Nephi 6:1). Even through periods of little-known Nephite history, the records were kept and passed on according to the commandments and example of the fathers (see Jarom 1:1, 15; Omni 1:1, 3, 9). King Mosiah followed his father’s righteous example, “that he might do according to that which his father had done in all things” (Mosiah 6:7). The two thousand stripling warriors were true to their covenants (see Alma 53:16–21) as they had learned from the covenant faithfulness of their parents (see 24:17–23). When Helaman filled the judgment seat righteously, “he did walk after the ways of his father” (Helaman 3:20). President Howard W. Hunter declared, “The greatest training that can be given to a child is that which comes from the example of parents. Parents need to set the example for young people to follow.”²³ Poor examples that parents set can have the opposite, detrimental effect, as when Jacob reminded some fathers of their “children, how that ye have grieved their hearts because of the example that ye have set before them” and that “because of your filthiness, [ye] bring your children unto destruction” (Jacob 3:10). President Joseph F. Smith advised: “Don’t do anything yourselves that you would have to say to your boy, ‘Don’t do it.’ Live so that you can say, ‘My son, do as I do, follow me, emulate my example.’ That is the way fathers should live, every one of us; and it is a shame, a weakening, shameful thing for any

member of the Church to pursue a course that he knows is not right, and that he would rather his children should not follow.”²⁴ The righteous examples of parents found in the Book of Mormon greatly influenced their children.

CONCLUSION

Parents in the Book of Mormon taught their children and worked by covenants to help them. These aspects of parenting were modeled by the Savior Himself, who is an example of divine parenthood in His role as Father of the covenant. The Book of Mormon has many other attributes of the Lord that pertain to parenting and deserve exploring—for example, His mercy and forgiveness, His tireless labors and nourishing, and His techniques for gathering in those who are lost. Most of all, consider His love for His children, which is the driving force behind His efforts. Jesus truly represents the Father and shows us our example of parenting. Elder Hugh B. Brown stated: “The Son was in his express image. He revealed a compassionate Father, a divine Parent, one in whom were incorporated the attributes of justice, judgment, mercy and truth. He revealed a God of love, of forgiveness, and understanding.”²⁵ It is that express image of a divine parent that we strive to emulate as we prepare for the eternities. It is a foundational teaching of the gospel to become like our heavenly parents, and the Book of Mormon shows us the attributes of divine parenthood.

NOTES

1. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 26.

2. Kimball, *Teachings*, 31.

3. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 301. Those who obtain exaltation shall have “an increase” (D&C 131:4), a “continuation of the seeds forever and ever” (D&C 132:19), or “continuation of the lives” (D&C 132:22).

4. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 8:63.

5. Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 503.
6. Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 7:16.
7. Susan Easton Black, *Finding Christ through the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 20–21.
8. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 183.
9. See James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 5:26–34.
10. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant*, 183.
11. John Taylor, *The Mediation and Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1882), 97.
12. Smith, *Teachings*, 321.
13. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 2:91.
14. Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, April 1929, 110; quoted by Boyd K. Packer, “Our Moral Environment,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 68. Joseph Fielding Smith also testified that those born under the covenant “may receive greater guidance, a greater protection, a greater inspiration from the Spirit of the Lord” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:90).
15. James E. Faust, “The Greatest Challenge in the World—Good Parenting,” *Ensign*, November 1990, 35.
16. He speaks by voice to Lehi (see 1 Nephi 16:9; 18:5), Nephi, son of Lehi (see 2 Nephi 31:12), Isaiah (see 2 Nephi 16:8), Jacob (see Jacob 7:5), Enos (see Enos 1:5–8), Alma the Elder (see Mosiah 24:13; 26:14), Alma the Younger (see Mosiah 27:25), Ammon (see Alma 20:2), Nephi, son of Helaman (see Helaman 10:3), Samuel (see Helaman 13:3), Nephi, son of Nephi (see 3 Nephi 1:12), Mormon (see Mormon 3:14), the brother of Jared (see Ether 2:14), and others.
17. Gerald N. Lund, “The Mysteries of God Revealed by the Power of the Holy Ghost,” in *First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 153.
18. See E. Douglas Clark and Robert S. Clark, *Fathers and Sons in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991).
19. Clark and Clark, *Fathers and Sons*, 133.
20. Letter from the First Presidency, 11 February 1999, *Ensign*, June 1999, 80.
21. Heber J. Grant, *Gospel Standards*, comp. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1969), 155.
22. Lehi hears the word from the Lord’s servants (see 1 Nephi 1:4), prays to the Lord with all his heart (see 1 Nephi 1:5), receives his own witness (see 1 Nephi

1:6–14), and goes forth to tell others (see 1 Nephi 1:18). Nephi hears the words from his father, prays to the Lord with great desire, receives his own witness (see 1 Nephi 2:16), and goes to tell others (see 1 Nephi 2:17–18). Nephi repeats this pattern again in relation to understanding his father's vision of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 10:17; 11:1–14:30; 15:11–36). Lehi's grandson Enos followed the pattern as he heard the words of his father (Enos 1:3), prays to the Lord with diligence (see Enos 1:4, 12), receives his own witness (see Enos 1:5–10, 13), and goes to tell others (see Enos 1:19).

23. Howard W. Hunter, *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 146.

24. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 285.

25. Hugh B. Brown, in Conference Report, April 1955, 80–81.

CAPTIVITY AND LIBERTY IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

John A. Tvedtnes

THE CONTRAST OF CAPTIVITY AND LIBERTY is a common theme in the Book of Mormon. Significantly, the Hebrew terms behind words like *deliverance* and *redemption* are used in the Bible as both sociopolitical and religious terms,¹ and the Lord is said to deliver people from both their mortal enemies and the devil. The dual application of these terms to the condition of human beings makes it possible for Book of Mormon writers to liken temporal captivity and liberty to spiritual captivity and rescue. This, in part, explains the Nephite record keepers' emphasis on the cyclical nature of their history and teaches that disobedience brings captivity while obedience brings freedom.

Lehi prophesied that Jerusalem would be destroyed and that many of its inhabitants would be carried away captive into Babylon (see 1 Nephi 1:13). Lehi's son Nephi also wrote that "the day must surely come that they must be destroyed, save a few only, who shall be led away into captivity. Wherefore, the Lord commanded my

John A. Tvedtnes is a senior resident scholar at the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts at Brigham Young University.

father that he should depart into the wilderness” (1 Nephi 17:43–44).

The Lord’s deliverance of Lehi and his family from the coming Babylonian invasion resembles the deliverance of the Israelites from captivity at the time of Moses. Nephi admonished his brothers, “Let us be strong like unto Moses; . . . the Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 4:2–3; see also 17:23–25; 19:10). Nephi also prophesied that the Lord would “bring [Israel] 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).

Of those whom the Lord would bring to the New World, Lehi prophesied that “if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity; for if iniquity shall abound cursed shall be the land for their sakes, but unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever” (2 Nephi 1:7).²

Lehi was the first Book of Mormon prophet to tie the captivity and deliverance of Judah to the coming of the Messiah, saying, “That after they should be destroyed, even that great city Jerusalem, and many be carried away captive into Babylon, according to the own due time of the Lord, they should return again, yea, even be brought back out of captivity; and after they should be brought back out of captivity they should possess again the land of their inheritance. Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world” (1 Nephi 10:3–4).

Lehi cited a prophecy of his ancestor Joseph to the effect that “the Messiah should be made manifest unto [his posterity] in the latter days, in the spirit of power, unto the bringing of them out of darkness unto light—yea, out of hidden darkness and out of captivity unto freedom” (2 Nephi 3:5).

NEPHI'S VISION OF CAPTIVITY AND DELIVERANCE

Nephi's use of the captivity theme resembles his father's because they shared a common revelatory experience. When Nephi asked the Lord to confirm his father's vision of the tree of life, the Lord responded by sending an angel who explained the vision and showed him many other things regarding the future of Lehi's posterity and others who would interact with them. The angel told him of an abominable church "which slayeth the saints of God, yea, and tortureth them and bindeth them down, and yoketh them with a yoke of iron, and bringeth them down into captivity" (1 Nephi 13:5; see also 13:9).

As the vision progressed, Nephi saw Gentiles who "went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters" (1 Nephi 13:13; see also 13:16, 19, 29) and came to the New World. He learned that these "Gentiles which have gone forth out of captivity" possessed a book (the Bible) from which parts had been removed, causing them to "stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them" (1 Nephi 13:29; see also 13:30). He wrote of "the captivity of the devil" (1 Nephi 14:4), tied to the "great and abominable church, which was founded by the devil and his children" (1 Nephi 14:3). The Lord will rescue people from this church after which "they shall be no more brought down into captivity" (1 Nephi 14:2).

"For the time cometh, saith the Lamb of God, that I will work a great and a marvelous work among the children of men; a work which shall be everlasting, either on the one hand or on the other—either to the convincing of them unto peace and life eternal, or unto the deliverance of them to the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds unto their being brought down into captivity, and also into destruction, both temporally and spiritually, according to the captivity of the devil, of which I have spoken" (1 Nephi 14:7).

CAPTIVITY OF THE DEVIL

Near the end of his life, Lehi expressed a fear that his own posterity might be "led according to the will and captivity of the devil" (2 Nephi 1:18) and gave them instructions "that [they] may not

come down into captivity” (2 Nephi 1:21). He noted that because of the Atonement, “men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil” (2 Nephi 2:27).

Jacob, another of Lehi’s sons, took up the theme of deliverance from the devil’s captivity: “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.

“And because of the way of deliverance of our God, the Holy One of Israel, this death, of which I have spoken, which is the temporal, shall deliver up its dead; which death is the grave.

“And this death of which I have spoken, which is the spiritual death, shall deliver up its dead; which spiritual death is hell; wherefore, death and hell must deliver up their dead, 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; and it is by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel. O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel!” (2 Nephi 9:10–12).

Lehi and his sons may have borrowed the concept from Isaiah 5:13–14, which is quoted in 2 Nephi 15:13–14: “Therefore, my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge; and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. Therefore, hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it.”

Mormon similarly wrote of the captivity of the devil, saying that “the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell” (Alma 30:60).

Speaking of the wicked, Alma told his son Corianton that “the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house—and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of

their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil. Now this is the state of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness” (Alma 40:13–14). On the other hand, the righteous “are redeemed of the Lord; yea, these are they that are taken out, that are delivered from that endless night of darkness” (Alma 41:7). Alma cautioned his son, “Suffer not the devil to lead away your heart” (Alma 39:11).

Amulek, who served as Alma’s missionary companion in the wicked city of Ammonihah, warned the people to repent while in mortality, after which “cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed.” He warned the unrepentant that the “same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.

“For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked” (Alma 34:33–35).³

WICKED KINGS AND CAPTIVITY

The Book of Mormon also notes that captivity sometimes resulted from the wickedness of kings.⁴ Alma fled the city of Lehi-Nephi with his converts and settled in a city they named Helam. When the people besought him to be their king,⁵ Alma reminded them that he had been “caught in a snare” of iniquity (Mosiah 23:9). He described the situation they had fled, saying that they had “been oppressed by king Noah, and [had] been in bondage to him and his priests, and [had] been brought into iniquity by them; therefore ye were bound with the bands of iniquity. And now as ye have been delivered by the power of God out of these bonds; yea, even out of the hands of king Noah and his people, and also from the bonds of iniquity, even so I desire that ye should stand fast in this liberty wherewith ye have been made free, and that ye trust no man to be a king over you” (Mosiah 23:12–13).

Alma stressed the captivity brought by sin by using the term “bands” or “bonds of iniquity” here and elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 27:29; Alma 41:11), and Mormon later borrowed the term (see Mormon 8:31; Moroni 8:14). Later generations of Nephites remembered Alma’s admonition to “stand fast in this liberty wherewith ye have been made free,” which was twice cited by Pahoran in his letter to Moroni (see Alma 61:9, 21).

Recounting the history of Alma’s time, Mormon noted that his people again “were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God, yea, even the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob. And it came to pass that he did deliver them” (Mosiah 23:23–24). The Lamanites and Amulonites oppressed Alma’s people, forbidding them even to pray to God. During this time of oppression, the Lord promised that He would “deliver them out of bondage” (Mosiah 24:13; see also 24:14–17). The Lord caused the Lamanites to fall into a deep sleep, “and Alma and his people departed into the wilderness” (Mosiah 24:20). Pausing in a valley, “they poured out their thanks to God because he had been merciful unto them, and eased their burdens, and had delivered them out of bondage; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it were the Lord their God” (Mosiah 24:21).

When Alma’s people arrived in the land of Zarahemla, their brethren welcomed “those that had been delivered out of bondage [and] they were filled with exceedingly great joy” (Mosiah 25:8). The refugees who came with Alma were reunited with the people of Limhi, whom Alma reminded that they had also “been delivered out of bondage, that they should remember that it was the Lord that did deliver them” (Mosiah 25:16). This Nephite colony had been brought into Lamanite bondage because of their sins (see Mosiah 7:15, 20–22; 8:7; 9:10–12; 11:21–23; 12:2; 20:22; 21:13–15). Limhi promised them that the Lord, who had delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage and Lehi from Jerusalem, would rescue them as well (see Mosiah 7:19–20, 33; 21:36–22:4; see also Alma 1:8).

Near the end of his reign, King Mosiah introduced a more democratic system of government, whereby the people could choose their own leaders, known as judges. He declared, “And now

I desire that this inequality should be no more in this land, especially among this my people; but I desire that this land be a land of liberty, and every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike” (Mosiah 29:32; see also 29:39–41).⁶ The responsibility of the judges was “to judge righteously, and to keep the peace and the freedom of the people, and to grant unto them their sacred privileges to worship the Lord their God” (Alma 50:39).

Mosiah’s actions were prompted by two things that had recently come to his attention. One was the fact that the Nephites, who had recently arrived from the land of Nephi, had been led astray by King Noah. Addressing the people, Mosiah said:

“Yea, remember king Noah, his wickedness and his abominations, and also the wickedness and abominations of his people. Behold what great destruction did come upon them; and also because of their iniquities they were brought into bondage.

“And were it not for the interposition of their all-wise Creator, and this because of their sincere repentance, they must unavoidably remain in bondage until now.

“But behold, he did deliver them because they did humble themselves before him; and because they cried mightily unto him he did deliver them out of bondage” (Mosiah 29:18–20).

The second factor in the decision to abolish the monarchy was Mosiah’s recent translation of the Jaredite record known as the book of Ether.⁷ When the first generation of Jaredites asked that a king be chosen to govern the people, “the brother of Jared said unto them: Surely this thing leadeth into captivity” (Ether 6:23). A major theme in the book of Ether is the captivity in which vanquished kings were forced to serve (see Ether 7:5, 7; 8:3; 10:14, 30; 11:9, 18, 23; 13:23).

The establishment of a more democratic government among the Nephites was not universally accepted. From time to time, there arose dissenters who wanted to replace the judges with a king. The Book of Mormon stresses that their actions would have brought the Nephites into bondage and deprived them of their liberty (see Alma 8:15–18; 43:4–8, 29; 46:28, 35; 48:4; 49:25–26; 50:28–32; 51:5–8,

13–21; 59:13; 60:16, 27, 30; 61:2–17; 62:2–11; Helaman 1:1–8; 3 Nephi 2:12; 3:2; 6:30).

DELIVERANCE FROM ONE'S ENEMIES

The Book of Mormon frequently notes the deliverance of the Nephites from their enemies, the Lamanites, usually during wartime.⁸ King Benjamin stressed that it was the Lord who delivered them (see Mosiah 1:14; 2:31–33).⁹ He noted that this deliverance came from obedience, saying, “As ye have kept my commandments, and also the commandments of my father, and have prospered, and have been kept from falling into the hands of your enemies, even so if ye shall keep the commandments of my son, or the commandments of God which shall be delivered unto you by him, ye shall prosper in the land, and your enemies shall have no power over you” (Mosiah 2:31). He then warned them not to obey the evil spirit (see Mosiah 2:33).

Other Nephites also noted that God had delivered them from the Lamanites. Zeniff, who led a group of people back to their ancient homeland in the land of Nephi, was able to repel attacking Lamanites and attributed the deliverance of his people to the Lord (see Mosiah 9:17). Though the Lamanites ultimately subdued the Nephite colony, more immediate bondage came through Zeniff's wicked son, Noah. In his day, the Lord sent the prophet Abinadi to warn that if the people did not repent, “I will deliver them into the hands of their enemies; yea, and they shall be brought into bondage; and they shall be afflicted by the hand of their enemies” (Mosiah 11:22). He warned that “except this people repent and turn unto the Lord their God, they shall be brought into bondage; and none shall deliver them, except it be the Lord the Almighty God. Yea, and it shall come to pass that when they shall cry unto me I will be slow to hear their cries; yea, and I will suffer them that they be smitten by their enemies” (Mosiah 11:23–24). He also spoke of the “bands of death” that would be broken by the Lord through His resurrection (Mosiah 15:8–9, 20, 23; 16:7).

During the lengthy series of wars between the Nephites and

Lamanites, Mormon informs us that the Nephites were fighting for freedom from bondage, including the freedom to worship the Lord (see Alma 43:9–10, 29–30, 45–50; 44:5; 46:10; 48:10–11; 51:6; 53:17; 58:40–41; 60:36; 61:9, 14; 62:5; see also 3 Nephi 2:12). Moroni prepared a banner, the title or standard of liberty, which reminded the Nephites of the blessings of liberty they enjoyed (see Alma 46:12–24, 36; 51:20; 62:4). The people acknowledged it was the Lord who delivered them from their enemies (see Alma 45:1; 46:7; 50:22; 56:47; 58:11–12; 61:12–13).¹⁰

During one of the battles, Moroni said to the Lamanites, “Behold, we have not come out to battle against you that we might shed your blood for power; neither do we desire to bring any one to the yoke of bondage. But this is the very cause for which ye have come against us; yea, and ye are angry with us because of our religion” (Alma 44:2; see also 49:7). He warned them to lay down their arms, saying, “And now, if ye do not this, behold, ye are in our hands, and I will command my men that they shall fall upon you, and inflict the wounds of death in your bodies, that ye may become extinct; and then we will see who shall have power over this people; yea, we will see who shall be brought into bondage” (Alma 44:7). Indeed, it was Moroni’s practice to release any captured Lamanites who promised to never again attack the Nephites (see Alma 44:8–11, 14–15, 19–20; 46:35; 62:15–17; Helaman 1:33; 3 Nephi 5:4–5; 6:3).¹¹ Subsequent Nephite generations followed this practice with captured Gadianton robbers (see 3 Nephi 5:4).

THE DELIVERANCE OF ALMA

The concept of God’s deliverance of His people in both spiritual and temporal matters was championed by Alma, the son of Alma. The terms he used to describe sociopolitical oppression and the Lord’s intervention to rescue His people from their oppressors were also used to describe man’s captivity by the devil and deliverance by God. Alma did not initially follow his father’s lead. Instead, he and his friends, the sons of King Mosiah, rebelled against the teachings of their youth, trying to destroy the religion of their

fathers. An angel appeared to them and told Alma, “Go, and remember the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam, and in the land of Nephi; and remember how great things he has done for them; for they were in bondage, and he has delivered them. And now I say unto thee, Alma, go thy way, and seek to destroy the church no more, that their prayers may be answered, and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off” (Mosiah 27:16).

Alma fell into a comalike state, during which he envisioned himself in eternal torment until he called on Christ to rescue him (see Alma 36:12–23). After three days, he awoke and testified, “My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more” (Mosiah 27:29). His use of the term “bonds of iniquity” suggests a very real bondage, not of the body, but of the spirit. When he later described the scene to his son Helaman, he said that he was “in the gall of bitterness, and [was] encircled about by the everlasting chains of death” (Alma 36:18), here substituting “chains” for “bonds.”

Following this remarkable experience, Alma made it a point to obey the angel’s instructions to “remember the captivity of thy fathers” (Mosiah 27:16). He declared, “Yea, and I also remember the captivity of my fathers; for I surely do know that the Lord did deliver them out of bondage, and by this did establish his church; yea, the Lord God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did deliver them out of bondage. Yea, I have always remembered the captivity of my fathers; and that same God who delivered them out of the hands of the Egyptians did deliver them out of bondage” (Alma 29:11–12).¹² He admonished his eldest son, Helaman, “I would that ye should do as I have done, in remembering the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and he surely did deliver them in their afflictions” (Alma 36:2). He added:

“And I have been supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions; yea, God has delivered

me from prison, and from bonds [see also Alma 14:28], and from death; yea, and I do put my trust in him, and he will still deliver me.

“And I know that he will raise me up at the last day, to dwell with him in glory; yea, and I will praise him forever, for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea; and he led them by his power into the promised land; yea, and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time.

“Yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; and he has also, by his everlasting power, delivered them out of bondage and captivity, from time to time even down to the present day; and I have always retained in remembrance their captivity; yea, and ye also ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done, their captivity” (Alma 36:27–29).

To Alma and other Book of Mormon prophets, it was important to remember the Lord’s deliverance of His people throughout history—something that could be learned only through study of the scriptures.¹³ They considered the Lord to be the Redeemer or Deliverer, whose saving efforts involved the rescue of His people from temporal bondage as well as from death (see Alma 62:50). This became Alma’s principal theme during his ministry. Thus, to the people in Zarahemla, he taught that those Nephites who followed his father “were delivered out of the hands of the people of king Noah, by the mercy and power of God. And behold, after that, they were brought into bondage by the hands of the Lamanites in the wilderness; yea, I say unto you, they were in captivity, and again the Lord did deliver them out of bondage by the power of his word.” Alma then asked penetrating questions about his listeners’ faith in the Lord’s deliverance: “And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, you that belong to this church, have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers?¹⁴ Yea, and have you sufficiently retained in remembrance his mercy and long-suffering towards them? And moreover, have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell?”

“Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the

midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word; yea, they were encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them. . . .

“And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? I say unto you, Yea, they were loosed” (Alma 5:4–7, 9).¹⁵

Later, during his missionary efforts in the city of Ammonihah, Alma asked the people, “Do ye not remember that our father, Lehi, was brought out of Jerusalem by the hand of God? Do ye not remember that they were all led by him through the wilderness? And have ye forgotten so soon how many times he delivered our fathers out of the hands of their enemies, and preserved them from being destroyed, even by the hands of their own brethren?” (Alma 9:9–10). He reminded them that they had “been delivered of God out of the land of Jerusalem, by the hand of the Lord; [had] been saved from famine, and from sickness, and all manner of diseases of every kind; and they [had] waxed strong in battle, that they might not be destroyed; [had] been brought out of bondage time after time, and [had] been kept and preserved until now” (Alma 9:22). After describing their redemption from mortal bondage and dangers, Alma turned to spiritual matters, noting that “if they have been righteous they shall reap the salvation of their souls, according to the power and deliverance of Jesus Christ; and if they have been evil they shall reap the damnation of their souls, according to the power and captivation of the devil” (Alma 9:28).

Following Alma’s discourse, his companion, Amulek, took up the same theme, saying that the wicked lawyers were “laying the foundations of the devil; for ye are laying traps and snares to catch the holy ones of God” (Alma 10:17).¹⁶ He asked, “Why hath Satan got such great hold upon your hearts? Why will ye yield yourselves unto him that he may have power over you, to blind your eyes, that ye will not understand the words which are spoken, according to their truth?” (Alma 10:25).

A lawyer named Zeezrom unsuccessfully tried to trap Amulek in his words. Alma declared that this was Satan’s plan, a “snare of

the adversary, which he has laid to catch this people, that he might bring you into subjection unto him, that he might encircle you about with his chains, that he might chain you down to everlasting destruction, according to the power of his captivity” (Alma 12:6). He then explained that the wicked “are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell” (Alma 12:11). He taught that the Lord “has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance” but that the wicked “shall be chained down to an everlasting destruction, according to the power and captivity of Satan” (Alma 12:15, 17).

SUMMARY

The mortal trials and tribulations suffered by the Nephites became a type of the sufferings of the wicked in the world to come. From the Book of Mormon, we learn that disobedience to God’s commandments brings spiritual captivity and can result in physical bondage as well. On the other hand, obedience brings liberty here and in the hereafter. Adam’s disobedience brought about both a physical and a spiritual death (see 2 Nephi 2:5–7; Alma 12:16; 42:2–14; D&C 29:40), which Jacob termed death and hell. The atonement of Christ brings us release from these two deaths by providing a physical resurrection and a deliverance of our spirits from bondage (see 2 Nephi 9:12–13; Helaman 14:15). Lehi summed it up this way:

“Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.

“And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit;

“And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom” (2 Nephi 2:27–29).

We have, then, a choice between the path of righteousness and freedom and the path of wickedness and captivity. Of all creatures on the earth, only we humans are capable of becoming “devils, angels to a devil,” as Jacob said (2 Nephi 9:9; see Jacob 3:11), or gods, or anything in between. May God help us to choose His plan of happiness and freedom and, through our example and teachings, help others do the same.

NOTES

1. See the discussions in Corbin T. Volluz, “Cry Redemption: The Plan of Redemption as Taught in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 148–69; and Jennifer Clark Lane, “The Lord Will Redeem His People: Adoptive Covenant and Redemption in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1993), 39–62.

2. The Jaredite prophet Ether said of the New World, “Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written” (Ether 2:12).

3. For a discussion, see John A. Tvedtnes and Matthew P. Roper, “Do Not Procrastinate the Day of Your Repentance,” *Insights*, October 2000.

4. When Lamoni was allowed by his father, who was king over all the Lamanites, to be free from his suzerainty, Lamoni’s people became free under a righteous king (see Alma 21:21–23).

5. Nephi had also denied his people’s request that he serve as king (see 2 Nephi 5:18).

6. During the democratic rule by judges, dissenters from the Nephite religion sometimes argued that the civil and religious leaders were keeping the people “in bondage” (see Alma 30:23–28; 31:17).

7. For a discussion, see John A. Tvedtnes, “King Mosiah and the Judgeship,” *Insights*, November 2000.

8. For a discussion, see “In the Strength of the Lord,” chapter 34, in John A.

Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999).

9. The Lamanites typically made captives of Nephites, even during times of peace (see Alma 17:20).

10. Some of the Lamanites also believed that “the Great Spirit . . . had ever delivered [the Nephites] out of their hands” (Alma 19:27).

11. For a discussion, see “Oaths in the Book of Mormon,” chapter 33, in Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book*.

12. Alma’s son Shiblon had also been “in bonds,” from which the Lord delivered him (see Alma 38:4).

13. See the discussion in Louis C. Midgley, “To Remember and Keep: On the Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book,” in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 95–137.

14. A generation later, chief captain Moroni, evidently relying on the teachings of Alma, wrote, “Have ye forgotten the commandments of the Lord your God? Yea, have ye forgotten the captivity of our fathers? Have ye forgotten the many times we have been delivered out of the hands of our enemies? Or do ye suppose that the Lord will still deliver us, while we sit upon our thrones and do not make use of the means which the Lord has provided for us?” (Alma 60:20).

15. The “bands of death” are also mentioned in Alma 4:14; 7:12; 11:41–42; 22:14 and derive from the Old Testament (Psalms 73:4; 107:14).

16. The concept of Satan’s traps and snares is common in the scriptures and other ancient Jewish and Christian literature but cannot be discussed here.

FAITH UNTO REPENTANCE

THE FULNESS OF THE SIMPLE WAY

Jennifer C. Lane

*T*HE BOOK OF MORMON REPEATEDLY warns against rejecting a simple path to salvation. Let us look very briefly at a few of these warnings. Nephi taught his brothers about the bronze serpent lifted up by Moses, saying that “after they were bitten he prepared a way that they might be healed; and the labor which they had to perform was to look; and because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished” (1 Nephi 17:41). We see here that being healed by looking can be simply too easy to believe. The same problem is evident in Alma’s description to the poor Zoramites: “A type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live. . . . But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them” (Alma 33:19–20). Here again we learn that the Israelites’ being healed was only dependent on their having the faith to look. They

Jennifer C. Lane is an adjunct assistant professor at Brigham Young University—Hawaii.

did not look “because they did not believe that it would heal them.” The simpleness of the way was a stumbling block.

In the book of Helaman, Nephi explained that the image of the bronze serpent is a parallel to Christ’s atonement. “Yea, did he [Moses] not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be lifted up who should come” (Helaman 8:14). Nephi teaches that it is in looking to Christ that we will live. “And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, might live, even unto that life which is eternal” (Helaman 8:15).

In our own days we have also received warnings against relying on our abilities rather than looking to Christ. In 1988, Elder Oaks warned of one trend in contemporary Christian thought that emphasizes being “reconciled to God entirely through [one’s] own righteousness.” He then asked, “Are Latter-day Saints susceptible to such heresies? The Apostle Paul wrote that we should ‘work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling.’ (Philippians 2:12.) Could that familiar expression mean that the sum total of our own righteousness will win us salvation and exaltation? Could some of us believe that our heavenly parentage and our divine destiny allow us to pass through mortality and attain eternal life solely on our own merits? On the basis of what I have heard, I believe that some of us, some of the time, say things that can create that impression. We can forget that keeping the commandments, which is necessary, is not sufficient.”¹

The Book of Mormon testifies of the good news that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, but it also clarifies this central principle of the gospel by teaching that “if [we] believe on his name [we] will repent of all [our] sins” (Helaman 14:13). The Book of Mormon dissolves the false dichotomy between faith and works. Its doctrine of faith unto repentance shows us how we can and must focus on faith in Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon teaches the doctrine of faith unto repentance by both precept and example, showing that the “fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ” is truly the simple way (D&C 20:9).

The Book of Mormon further testifies of the simple way by teaching that we can only be saved through Christ. We learn that we are in “in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save [we] should rely on this Redeemer” (1 Nephi 10:6). The Book of Mormon explains that we can choose between good and evil and that God’s law shows us which way to go, but at the same time it stresses that our individual efforts inevitably fail and we end up being cut off from God. Lehi explains our need to rely on Christ, saying that “by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. . . . and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever” (2 Nephi 2:5). He makes it clear that “there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8).

By emphasizing our fallen state, the Book of Mormon teaches that our faith cannot be in our ability to obey the law by ourselves but in Christ and His atonement. Abindai explains that “salvation doth not come by the law alone; and were it not for the atonement . . . they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses” (Mosiah 13:28, 32). The Book of Mormon makes our dependence on Christ clear, but it also stresses that choosing Christ is up to us. It clarifies what it means to rely on Christ, be saved by faith in Christ, and it teaches the intrinsic and organic connection between our faith and our actions. My focus in this chapter will be the repentance, or change of heart, that faith in Christ will produce in us. I will first discuss the Book of Mormon doctrine of faith unto repentance and then look at Book of Mormon examples of how faith produces the change of heart which leads to repentance.

FAITH UNTO REPENTANCE: A BOOK OF MORMON DOCTRINE

In the Book of Mormon, the fulness of the doctrine of faith is clearly and simply expressed. I will examine the doctrine as taught by Samuel the Lamanite, Alma the Younger, and Mormon. The most basic expression of what faith produces is found in the teachings of

Samuel the Lamanite. From his place on the city wall, he taught the hardened Nephites, “If ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins” (Helaman 14:13). Samuel explains that if we have faith then we will repent—the two are inseparable. This “if-then” relationship also makes clear that if we do not repent it is because we do not have faith in Christ, we do not “believe on his name.” Our choice to believe on the atonement of Christ gives us the desire to change “that thereby ye may have a remission of them [your sins] through his merits” (Helaman 14:13). Faith in Christ produces repentance.

Alma the Younger develops the connection of faith and repentance by explaining that we must exercise faith unto repentance. This doctrine expands on the teaching of Samuel the Lamanite, in that it is belief in Christ, not ourselves, that will produce this change in us. Alma testifies that, through the Atonement, Christ “shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name” (Alma 34:15). Just like Samuel the Lamanite, Alma also focuses on believing “on His name.” Believing on Christ’s name may look too easy to qualify us for salvation, but we can understand the process better when we see that Christ’s name refers to His nature and His ability to change us through the power of the Atonement.² When we have faith in His name and His power, we experience a change of heart.

Alma explains that Christ suffered for us in order to bring “about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance” (Alma 34:15). The “means” for faith unto repentance comes from Christ’s atonement. It is a means for a change of action, a change of feeling, and a change of nature. It is not faith in ourselves, but confidence and faith in His deliverance.³ We do not have the means within ourselves to produce the profound change of repentance.

While stressing that we cannot save ourselves, Alma also clarifies that Christ does not act upon us, choosing us despite ourselves. Our response to the Atonement is the deciding factor. To describe this response, Alma uses the term “exercise,” suggesting an action or choice. Alma teaches that “he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice” (Alma 34:16). Faith here is not something you have as much as something that you do.⁴ We have been offered mercy, but we have to choose to

accept it. God will not force it upon us. Choosing mercy is choosing to believe on Christ's name and His power to redeem us. This choice is the simple way, and it is the only way. Alma explains that "only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption" (Alma 34:16). As we believe on His name, we will repent of our sins. As we do so, we are saved, not in our sins, but from our sins (see Helaman 5:10; Alma 11:34, 37). Through faith unto repentance, we gain access to mercy and the plan of redemption.

Alma exhorts us to follow this simple way, saying, "Exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you" (Alma 34:17). Alma explains that calling upon His holy name is how we exercise faith unto repentance. It is not hard; it just takes faith and a contrite heart (see Helaman 8:14–15). With faith unto repentance, we will "call upon his holy name" for mercy (Alma 34:17). We act upon our faith and ask for His help. This is how salvation comes to those who believe on His name (see Alma 34:15).

The doctrine of faith unto repentance is further clarified in the teaching of the prophet Mormon in Helaman chapter 3. Like both Samuel the Lamanite and Alma the Younger, Mormon emphasizes the need to "call upon His holy name." He teaches that "the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name" (Helaman 3:27). With faith and a contrite heart, we put our trust in Christ's power to save us, call upon His holy name, and recognize our need for help. In Mormon's words, we call "in the sincerity of [our] hearts" (Helaman 3:27). A parallel to calling upon His name is found the next verse: "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" (Helaman 3:28). This parallel explains that if we believe, we will call to Him; we will exercise our faith in Him. Mormon teaches that calling upon His name will open "the gate of heaven," and the Book of Mormon illustrates how this simple doctrine works in the lives of individuals and groups. Having reviewed how the doctrine of faith

unto repentance was taught, I will now turn to examples illustrating how it was lived.

FAITH UNTO REPENTANCE:
BOOK OF MORMON EXAMPLES

The Book of Mormon gives repeated examples of what faith produces as people call upon Christ's name for mercy. I will review the process of faith unto repentance in the lives of Alma the Younger, his father, Alma, the people of King Benjamin, the people of Ammon, and the Nephites in the era shortly before the coming of Christ. These examples illustrate how faith in Christ's atonement produces repentance in the lives of individuals and groups of people. This repentance can be seen both in choosing to turn to God as well as continuing on that path over time.

The Book of Mormon picture of repentance matches the Old Testament and New Testament sense of the word as a change of heart, mind, and action.⁵ In Hebrew the verb translated "repent" means to turn, and in Greek the term describes a change of mind and heart. The Book of Mormon illustrates how repentance can be seen as both turning to God in calling upon the name of Christ and producing a change of heart by faith unto repentance.

One of the classic experiences of faith unto repentance is Alma the Younger's conversion. In the Book of Mormon we have three different accounts of his choice to "call upon [Christ's] holy name" (Alma 34:17). In Mosiah chapter 27, Alma's first words after he awakens are: "I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord" (Mosiah 27:24). The process of faith unto repentance is more fully described in the retrospective account in Alma 36. In this chapter we see that Alma's faith unto repentance produces both a freedom from guilt and a change of heart.⁶

To his son Helaman, Alma describes how he exercised faith by calling on the name of Christ for mercy: "I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me" (Alma 36:18). He then describes the forgiveness aspect of repentance, saying that "when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more" (Alma 36:19).

Alma's faith also produced a change in his heart so that "from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance" (Alma 36:24). Alma's repentance is shown here to be both a freedom from guilt and a change of nature resulting from his choice to exercise faith in the atonement of Christ.

Alma gives another witness of this process of faith unto repentance in his testimony to his son Shiblon. He recounts that "never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins. But behold, I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul" (Alma 38:8). Alma explains "that there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ" (Alma 38:9). This is Alma's testimony that Christ is the only way and that crying unto Him for mercy leads to deliverance.

Another important and pivotal example of faith unto repentance as a change of heart can be found in the story of the conversion of Alma the Younger's father, Alma. In the passages about Alma we again see how a change of heart comes from faith in Christ and His atonement, not our own willpower. The power of the simple way is related as Alma the Younger is teaching the people of Zarahemla. He refers back to the experiences of the previous generation and reminds the people that "according to his [Alma's] faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart" (Alma 5:12). Alma then tells how his father's faith unto repentance led to a change of heart in those he taught by the waters of Mormon: "And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved" (Alma 5:13). Just as Alma the Younger had been changed by faith in Christ and shared that experience with others, the identical experience of a previous generation testifies of the simpleness of the way.

Another group that was brought to repentance through their faith in Christ was the people of King Benjamin. These chapters of the Book of Mosiah contain what is perhaps the most clearly

described effect of faith unto repentance for a group of people. In this account we see again how the exercise of faith in Christ brings a repentance that includes both forgiveness and a change of heart. In addition, these chapters clearly illustrate the role of the Spirit of the Lord in bringing this change through the atoning blood of Christ.

The process began when, after hearing the teaching of King Benjamin and recognizing their fallen state, the people cried aloud, “O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ” (Mosiah 4:2). In response to their exercise of faith unto repentance, the Holy Spirit came, and “they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ” (Mosiah 4:3). King Benjamin continued to teach them, and they further described the sanctifying change of heart that was brought about by their faith: “The Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). Faith in Christ’s atonement brought this people to a repentance that included both forgiveness and a mighty change of heart.

Another description of faith unto repentance as a change of heart can be seen in the experience of the people of Ammon, also known as the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. The dramatic and lasting change they experienced also illustrates how faith leads to the choice to “call upon His holy name.” Ammon taught King Lamoni about the Fall and the plan of redemption and, recognizing his fallen state, King Lamoni exercised his faith unto repentance, saying, “O Lord, have mercy; according to thy abundant mercy which thou hadst had upon the people of Nephi, have upon me, and my people” (Alma 18:41). After having fallen to the earth and later reviving, King Lamoni shared his experience of a change of heart with his people. Yet again the people’s faith produced repentance: “As many as heard his [King Lamoni’s] words believed, and were converted unto the Lord” (Alma 19:31). The people’s belief was an exercise of faith that brought forth the fruit of repentance.

This passage also offers us an interesting parallel of belief and unbelief. Those who were converted were not changed merely because they happened to hear. Instead, their “hearing” King Lamoni suggests a choice because there were also others who “would not hear his words” and “went their way” (Alma 19:32). “Hearing” the words of testimony is, like believing, a matter of faith and choice. Those who chose to hear and to believe were converted. They declared “that their hearts had been changed; that they had no more desire to do evil” (Alma 19:33). Faith unto repentance produced a mighty change of heart.

While most of these accounts focus on a particular moment in time, the Book of Mormon both shows and teaches that faith unto repentance is a sustained process. Faith always drives the process of repentance, and it is a lifelong endeavor. The need for sustained faith to produce repentance can be seen in Alma the Younger’s analogy of the tree that grows from the seed of faith in Christ’s atonement (see Alma 33:20–23). He explains that “if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life” (Alma 32:41). Nourishing the tree is done “by your faith.” That faith is, however, exercised with diligence and patience because the process of growing up unto everlasting life is a lifelong process.

This diligence and patience in exercising faith was illustrated by the Nephites in an unusually successful period of humility. In Alma chapter 62 we find a description of a time in which Nephite prosperity did not lead them to pride. They “were not lifted up in the pride of their eyes; neither were they slow to remember the Lord their God; but they did humble themselves exceedingly before him” (Alma 62:49). They remembered their fallen state by acknowledging that they had been delivered, and they exercised their faith by praying “unto the Lord their God continually” (Alma 62:51). Repentance was continual because faith was continual. The diligence and patience of calling upon His name is shown here to be a never-ceasing process.

The same long-term exercise of faith unto repentance is illustrated by some of the Nephites at a time of great division among the people. Many members of the Church were prideful and persecuted their brethren (see Helaman 3:33–34). Those who remained humble did so through their choice to exercise their faith unto repentance. We see that “they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God” (Helaman 3:35). Their continued dependence on Christ produced in them a change of heart. Their prideful brethren may have at one time exercised faith unto repentance, but, as Alma asks, “If ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?” (Alma 5:26). It is easy to feel as though our spiritual progress is a result of our own strength and wisdom, that it has been achieved through our willpower rather than our faith unto repentance. Christ warns us that “ye must watch and pray always lest ye enter into temptation; for Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. Therefore ye must always pray unto the Father in my name” (3 Nephi 18:18–19). Calling upon the name of Christ allows us to grow stronger in our humility and firmer in the faith of Christ. Faith unto repentance requires that we continually choose to look and live.

CONCLUSION

Through these and many other examples, the Book of Mormon illustrates the simple way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It teaches the fulness of the gospel by clarifying the connection between real faith in Christ and repentance. Faith is not merely a mental or verbal acknowledgment of Christ. True faith will lead us to call upon the name of Christ for mercy. This is not a call to be saved *in* our sins, but *from* our sins (see Helaman 5:10). As we exercise our faith in Christ, we experience repentance which includes

both forgiveness and a change of heart. The Book of Mormon also makes clear that repentance is inseparably connected to baptism, obedience, and sanctification (see Moroni 8:25–26). When we have faith, we will repent; and when we repent, we will obey and follow Christ.

These changes in behavior directly stem from our faith in Christ and His atoning sacrifice. President Boyd K. Packer has emphasized that “the study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than talking about behavior will improve behavior.”⁷ The key doctrines of the Fall and the Atonement are taught more clearly in the Book of Mormon than in any other book of scripture. President Ezra Taft Benson explained that “in the Book of Mormon we will find the fulness of those doctrines required for our salvation. And they are taught plainly and simply so that even children can learn the ways of salvation and exaltation.”⁸ I believe that one of these plain and simple doctrines taught in the Book of Mormon is the fulness of what it means to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. With the Book of Mormon’s clarification of the doctrine of faith unto repentance, we can wholeheartedly embrace being saved by faith, confident that our focus on developing faith in Christ will produce repentance and bring forth the fruit of eternal life.

Through the Book of Mormon we learn that we need a Savior and that when we exercise faith in His redemption, we will repent. When we truly understand both our lost and fallen condition and His redeeming power, we can begin to exercise our faith. We are then in a position to call upon His name for help to make changes in our life. These changes are not easy, and they come gradually over time. As we “fast and pray oft,” we will “wax stronger and stronger in [our] humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ” (Helaman 3:35). Our faith unto repentance will lead to a mighty change of heart, “yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of [our] hearts, which sanctification cometh because of [our] yielding their hearts unto God” (Helaman 3:35). Christ came to save us from our sins. When we truly believe that He can loose our bonds, we will exercise our faith and step out of captivity. Like the Israelites in

the wilderness, when we have faith to look upon the Son of God, we will find a healing power that will lift us up to life eternal.

NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, "What Think Ye of Christ?" *Ensign*, November 1988, 66–67. This hesitation to emphasize faith and salvation through Christ has changed during the last two decades. In later comments Elder Oaks documented the problem and noted that a change of focus within the Church has come and will come from President Benson's call for a renewed emphasis on the Book of Mormon (see Dallin H. Oaks, "Another Testament of Jesus Christ," *Ensign*, March 1994, 60–67).

2. On the ancient Near Eastern connection of name and nature, see Bruce H. Porter and Stephen D. Ricks, "Names in Antiquity: Old, New, and Hidden," in *By Study and also by Faith*, vol. 1, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1990), 501–4. A discussion of the connection of Christ's name and His atonement can be found in Elder Neal A. Maxwell's *Lord, Increase Our Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 9–17. He observes, "Without full faith in Jesus as mankind's rescuing Messiah, we also will lack faith in His capacity to rescue us individually and to help us daily" (10).

3. The difference is illustrated in this comment by Elder A. Theodore Tuttle: "We're not going to survive in this world, temporally or spiritually, without increased faith in the Lord—and I don't mean a positive mental attitude—I mean downright solid faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the one thing that gives vitality and power to otherwise rather weak individuals" ("Developing Faith," *Ensign*, November 1986, 73).

4. In the *Lectures on Faith* we learn that faith is a "principle of action" (Joseph Smith, comp., *Lectures on Faith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985], 3).

5. See Bible Dictionary, s.v. "Repentance." For an additional discussion of vocabulary see, for example, David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. "Repentance."

6. This distinction of the freedom from guilt and the change of heart can be seen as justification, the immediate result of being forgiven, and sanctification, the long-term process of being made holy and having a change of nature. A recent discussion of justification and sanctification can be found in Elder D. Todd Christofferson's article "Justification and Sanctification," *Ensign*, June 2001, 18–25.

7. Boyd K. Packer, "Washed Clean," *Ensign*, May 1997, 9.

8. Ezra Taft Benson, "The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion," *Ensign*, November 1986, 6. President Benson noted that "the Lord Himself has

stated that the Book of Mormon contains the ‘fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ’ (D&C 20:9).” He explained that ‘ful’ is “does not mean it contains every teaching, every doctrine ever revealed. Rather, it means that . . . the Book of Mormon offers so much that broadens our understandings of the doctrines of salvation. Without it, much of what is taught in other scriptures would not be nearly so plain and precious” (“The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November 1986, 6). This is particularly true in understanding the connection of faith and repentance.

HEDONISM, ASCETICISM, AND THE GREAT PLAN OF HAPPINESS

Daniel K Judd

NOT ONLY DOES THE BOOK OF MORMON contain “the fulness of the gospel” (1 Nephi 15:13), including “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8), but within the contents of this sacred volume of scripture are also found prophetic warnings of false doctrines, counterfeit philosophies, and detailed descriptions of the messages as well as the methods of anti-Christ. Included among many such warnings by ancient prophets are the words of Joseph, the son of the patriarch-prophet Jacob. Joseph prophesied that in the latter days the Book of Mormon would “grow together” with the Bible to “the confounding of false doctrines and laying down contentions, and establishing peace” (2 Nephi 3:12; see also JST, Genesis 50:31). President Ezra Taft Benson augments Jacob’s description: “The Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ. It confounds false doctrines and lays down contention (see 2 Nephi 3:12). It fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day. The type

Daniel K Judd is chair of the Department of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University.

of apostates in the Book of Mormon are similar to the type we have today. God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time.”¹

A number of false doctrines, including such deceptive philosophies as *intellectualism* and *materialism* (see 2 Nephi 9:28–30), *dogmatism* (see Alma 30:7), *pluralism* (see Alma 1:4), *empiricism* (see Alma 30:15), *psychologism* (see Alma 30:16), *humanism* (see Alma 30:17), *relativism* (see Alma 30:17), and *nihilism* (see Alma 30:18), to name only a few, are described within the pages of the Book of Mormon. While these counterfeit philosophies have been identified and discussed in some detail by latter-day prophets and scholars alike,² the contents of this chapter are intended to explicate another false philosophy and practice that has not received as much scholarly attention as those aforementioned. As the title suggests, this chapter will focus on the philosophy of *hedonism*—the idea that “pleasure or happiness is the sole or chief good in life.”³ Inasmuch as “the father of lies” (2 Nephi 9:9) has created a sophisticated system of counterfeit doctrines and deceptive practices related to hedonism, the converse philosophy of *asceticism*, the idea that extreme self-denial can lead to spiritual and intellectual strength, will also be discussed.

Consistent with the premise that “most of the vices and errors of the world are distortions of truths,”⁴ this chapter will also discuss the true doctrine of happiness of which hedonistic and ascetic philosophies are distortions. Scripture, particularly the Book of Mormon, the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, and the words of latter-day prophets, will be used to assist the reader in more clearly understanding the dangers of hedonism and asceticism and how these pernicious philosophies differ from the joy and happiness articulated in the Book of Mormon.

While the term *hedonism* is not specifically used in the Book of Mormon, a study of the scriptural text from the writings of Nephi through Moroni reveals that it was a philosophy and practice embraced by the inhabitants of the ancient Americas that profoundly

contributed to their eventual demise. The study of the words of prophets, analysis of research literature, and observation of the popular media reveal that the philosophy and practice of hedonism has persisted to the present and still consumes much of contemporary culture.⁵ Not only is the philosophy of hedonism demonstrated in mankind's lust for wealth and other material possessions, it also includes the placing of man's pursuit of happiness above all else, including the worship of God.

THE DOCTRINE OF OPPOSITION

The necessity of opposites is a principle that provides profound insight into understanding the counterfeit philosophy of hedonism and the true doctrine of happiness. The prophet Lehi taught his son Jacob that happiness can only be found in the context of its opposite—misery: “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my first-born in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility” (2 Nephi 2:11).

The context for this statement is significant. At least in part, Lehi is helping Jacob comprehend what modern philosophers have described as “the problem of evil,” or phrased differently, “why bad things happen to good people.” From earlier in Lehi's discourse, we learn that both he and his son Jacob had experienced opposition of varying kinds. As a child, Jacob had “suffered afflictions and much sorrow, because of the rudeness of [his] brethren” (2 Nephi 2:1). In modern vernacular, Jacob was a victim of abuse at the hands of his brothers. While we know that Lehi's afflictions included rebellious children (see 2 Nephi 1:17), Sariah's complaints (see 1 Nephi 5:2–8), his own murmuring (see 1 Nephi 16:20), and perhaps the ailments of age (see 2 Nephi 1:14), Lehi described his personal challenges simply as “tribulation in the wilderness”

(2 Nephi 2:1). After acknowledging his personal trials as well as Jacob's afflictions, Lehi offered hope to his son and all who desire happiness but suffer tribulation and affliction: "Nevertheless, Jacob, my first-born in the wilderness, thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain. Wherefore, thy soul shall be blessed, and thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother, Nephi; and thy days shall be spent in the service of thy God. Wherefore, I know that thou art redeemed, because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer; for thou hast beheld that in the fulness of time he cometh to bring salvation unto men" (2 Nephi 2:2-3).

Lehi's counsel contained several important truths that were directly applicable not only to Jacob but also to all who face affliction or suffer tribulation. Lehi taught that (1) God would bring good from the evil Jacob had experienced, (2) Jacob would live safely with Nephi, (3) his life would be spent in God's service, and most importantly, (4) his healing and redemption would come through the atonement of Christ. The mention of Lehi's tribulation, the more detailed description of Jacob's afflictions, and the promise of redemption through the Redeemer are personal illustrations of the broader doctrines of the Fall and the Atonement taught later in the same discourse: "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given" (2 Nephi 2:25-26).

Lehi taught Jacob that just as the fall of Adam and the atonement of Christ were necessary in God's eternal plan, so were the afflictions and sorrows he had suffered if he ever hoped to experience the joy spoken of in scripture. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has written: "Life was made for struggle; and exaltation, success, and victory were never meant to be cheap or to come easily. The tides of life often challenge us. To

understand why it has to be this way, we should maintain our understanding, our faith, and our courage by a constant rereading of Second Nephi, chapter two, the substance of which is set forth in this excerpt: ‘For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things’ (2 Nephi 2:11).⁶ Lehi’s counsel to Jacob eloquently explains the necessity of trials, tribulations, and afflictions in coming to understand the “nature of happiness” (Alma 41:11).

HAPPINESS AND JOY VERSUS ASCETICISM

In another discourse from father to son, the prophet Alma provided a powerful description of the contrast between the pain he experienced because of his own sins and the joy he obtained through Christ: “Yea, I say unto you, my son [Helaman], that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy” (Alma 36:21). One does not have to experience the pain of sin in order to experience the joy described by Alma, but one cannot truly know and comprehend joy without first experiencing some kind of misery or sorrow. Lehi taught Jacob that if Adam and Eve “would not have fallen . . . they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery” (2 Nephi 2:22–23). Once we understand that opposition, pain, and sorrow are a part of the Lord’s plan, we are better prepared to understand the doctrine of happiness.

The writings of ancient as well as latter-day prophets do not appear to make any significant differentiation between joy and happiness. These terms seem to be used synonymously throughout all scripture and describe a dimension of life the Lord wants His children to experience both on earth and in the world to come. King Benjamin taught: “And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may

dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness” (Mosiah 2:41).

During His ministry to the inhabitants of the Americas, the Savior stated that He had received a “fulness of joy” from the Father and promised others that they could receive the same blessing: “And for this cause ye shall have fulness of joy; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy; and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one” (3 Nephi 28:10).

These statements, representative of God’s desire “for the welfare and happiness of his people” (Helaman 12:2), may simply confirm the obvious to some, but others view them as antithetical to the teachings of Christianity. Statements made by Jesus such as “Blessed are the *poor* in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3; emphasis added) have been interpreted by some to mean that happiness and joy are not intended to be a part of Christian life. Some readers of the biblical text have interpreted the phrase “poor in spirit” to be descriptive of a virtue one should seek through ascetic suffering and self-denial. The following statement by a fourteenth-century priest represents this perspective: “If any one of you will know whether or not he is really poor in spirit, let him consider whether he loves the ordinary consequences and effects of poverty, which are hunger, thirst, cold, fatigue, and the denudation of all conveniences. See if you are glad to wear a worn-out habit full of patches. See if you are glad when something is lacking to your meal, when you are passed by in serving it, when what you receive is distasteful to you, when your cell is out of repair. If you are not glad of these things, if instead of loving them you avoid them, then there is proof that you have not attained the perfection of poverty of spirit.”⁷ Earlier we learned from Lehi’s writings that happiness and misery are necessary pairs, but is misery something that should be sought? Scripture and latter-day prophets clearly teach that while suffering is a necessary part of the Lord’s plan, it is not something that should be pursued. The Book of Mormon and the Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 5:3 add four words to the text that change

the meaning in a significant and meaningful way. Observe the comparison between the versions of Matthew and 3 Nephi:

Matthew 5:3	3 Nephi 12:3; JST, Matthew 5:3
“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”	“Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit <i>who come unto me</i> , for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

From this comparison we learn that the Savior’s answer to being “poor in spirit” is to come unto Him (see also Matthew 11:28). While suffering, pain, sorrow, and other forms of opposition are all a part of the Lord’s plan for His children, there is no virtue in seeking to be poor, sad, or in despair. To seek to be “poor in spirit” or to seek out temptation or trial in order to prove your virtue is to be deceived by the adversary’s philosophy of *asceticism*. While possessing some element of truth, asceticism is a counterfeit of the righteous self-denial asked of us by the Lord (see Matthew 10:38–39; Alma 38;12). The philosophy of asceticism has been defined as “the doctrine that through the renunciation of the desires of the flesh and of pleasure in worldly things and through self-mortification or self-denial one can subdue his appetites and discipline himself so as to reach a high spiritual or intellectual state.”⁸

While disciplined discipleship includes practices such as fasting, sexual abstinence outside of marriage, obeying the Word of Wisdom, paying tithing, attending meetings, and so forth, an overzealous approach to these commandments could border on asceticism. As President Boyd K. Packer wisely counseled: “A virtue when pressed to the extreme may turn into a vice. Unreasonable devotion to an ideal, without considering the practical application of it, ruins the ideal itself.”⁹ Asceticism is indeed such a practice. Individuals who have been seduced by the philosophy of asceticism generally feel guilt when they experience any form of prosperity or happiness, and they experience vain pride through various kinds of deprivation. One fifth-century Christian, Simeon Stylites, lived on the top of a fifty-foot pillar for some thirty-six years as a supposed expression of his devotion to God.¹⁰ This and other forms of asceticism, including

exceptionally long periods of fasting, celibacy, self-mutilation, a rigid dietary code, taking vows of silence or poverty, and so on, have been revered as saintly by some but as symptoms of spiritual instability by others. President Spencer W. Kimball warned: “You ask if asceticism is a virtue. No. Not as asceticism. But I am sure that most of the vices and errors of the world are distortions of truths. As I see it, asceticism is but a terrible extreme and distortion of the truth: Thou shalt know and control thyself.”¹¹

It is important to note that the Book of Mormon does not countenance the practice of asceticism in any form. None of the prophets submitted themselves to anything like those practices mentioned earlier in this text. None of the righteous leaders and teachers were hermits or monks who secluded themselves from family and friends. Celibacy was not viewed as a virtue. Nor are there any examples in scripture of faithful individuals who abused their bodies as a means of attaining some kind of spiritual enlightenment. Asceticism is the counterfeit of the counsel expressed in Alma’s words to his son Shiblon: “See that ye are not lifted up unto pride; yea, see that ye do not boast in your own wisdom, nor of your much strength. Use boldness, but not overbearance; and also see that ye *bridle all your passions*, that ye may be filled with love; see that ye refrain from idleness” (Alma 38:11–12; emphasis added).

HEDONISM AND IDOLATRY

Likening the deceptions we have discussed to a counterfeit coin, we would put asceticism on one side and hedonism on the other. British philosopher C. S. Lewis wisely warned that false doctrines often come in pairs: “He [Satan] always sends errors into the world in pairs—pairs of opposites. And he always encourages us to spend a lot of time thinking which is the worse. You see why, of course? He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one.”¹²

Some of us have known men or women who were so repulsed by another’s hedonistic behavior, including a disregard for anything

religious, that they responded by becoming fanatically self-disciplined and self-righteous. I have often wondered if wicked King Noah's licentiousness was in any way influenced by his father Zeniff's being "over-zealous" (Mosiah 7:21; 9:3).

Fortunately, the Lord also sends *truth* into the world in pairs of opposites: justice and mercy, confidence and meekness, heart and mind (to name a few) and for the purposes of this discussion, happiness and sorrow. While happiness has a requisite opposite in sorrow, it also has a counterfeit—hedonism. Most students of the Book of Mormon will recognize the following descriptions of hedonism recorded by the prophet Nephi:

"Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us.

"And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God.

"Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark" (2 Nephi 28:7–9). Most readers quickly reject the nihilistic argument that what we do today has no eternal consequences, "for tomorrow we die," but many believe in the notion that "committing a little sin" is something that is expected and even approved of by God. After all, we reason, aren't we all entitled to a little "happiness"? Many, like the Nephites of old, seek "for happiness in doing iniquity" (Helaman 13:38).

C. S. Lewis described how many of us, while acknowledging the importance of keeping the commandments, view our service to God much like the paying of our taxes—we hope that "what is left over will be enough for [us] to live on."¹³ In other words, while recognizing the importance of being good people, we want to serve God, our

families, our neighbors, the church, and the community only as much as we absolutely have to, hoping there will be some time left over to pursue a little self-interested pleasure. While recognizing that the person who seeks to balance their “needs” with the will of God is at least attempting to be more virtuous than one whose life is focused singly on themselves, Lewis describes a third possibility: centering our lives on Christ. “These people have got rid of the tiresome business of adjusting the rival claims of Self and God by the simple expedient of rejecting the claims of Self altogether. The old egoistic will has been turned round, reconditioned, and made into a new thing. The will of Christ no longer limits theirs; it is theirs. All their time, in belonging to Him, belongs also to them, for they are His.”¹⁴ Lewis also taught: “Our real selves are all waiting for us in Him. The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and natural desires. . . . It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.”¹⁵

The fundamental difference between hedonism and happiness is that hedonism is centered in the self, while the happiness described in scripture comes only as one centers his or her life in Christ. Elder James E. Talmage provides a description of other differences:

“Happiness is true food, wholesome, nutritious and sweet; it builds up the body and generates energy for action, physical, mental and spiritual; pleasure is but a deceiving stimulant which, like spirituous drink, makes one think he is strong when in reality enfeebled; makes him fancy he is well when in fact stricken with deadly malady. Happiness leaves no bad aftertaste, it is followed by no depressing reaction; it calls for no repentance, brings no regret, entails no remorse; pleasure too often makes necessary repentance, contrition, and suffering; and, if indulged to the extreme, it brings degradation and destruction. True happiness is lived over and over again in memory, always with a renewal of the original good; a moment of unholy pleasure may leave a barbed sting, which, like a thorn in the flesh, is an ever-present source of anguish. Happiness is not akin

with levity, nor is it one with light-minded mirth. It springs from the deeper fountains of the soul, and is not infrequently accompanied by tears.”¹⁶

Hedonism is closely related to what is referred to in scripture as idolatry (see 1 Samuel 15:23, Acts 17:16; Mosiah 11:6). President Spencer W. Kimball, in a classic discourse entitled “The False Gods We Worship,” observed that “few men have ever knowingly and deliberately chosen to reject God and his blessings. Rather, we learn from the scriptures that because the exercise of faith has always appeared to be more difficult than relying on things more immediately at hand, carnal man has tended to transfer his trust in God to material things. Therefore, in all ages when men have fallen under the power of Satan and lost the faith, they have put in its place a hope in the ‘arm of flesh’ and in ‘gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know’ (Daniel 5:23)—that is, in idols. This I find to be a dominant theme in the Old Testament. *Whatever thing a man sets his heart and his trust in most is his god; and if his god doesn’t also happen to be the true and living God of Israel, that man is laboring in idolatry.*”¹⁷

While most would agree that an undue emphasis on material possessions, physical appearance, political power, or social status can be forms of idolatry, what about more sacred parts of our lives such as church and family? Elder M. Russell Ballard has stated that the Church has been placed on earth as a “scaffolding that helps support and strengthen the family.”¹⁸ Understanding Elder Ballard’s use of the word “scaffolding” as a *temporary* structure is vital in helping us understand that the Church is the Lord’s authorized, earthly *means* of assisting us in creating eternal families and not an *end* unto itself. It is also important to understand that while the family is intended to be eternal, it is possible, in an idolatrous way, to place family before God. The Savior taught: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:37–39). The moment we reverse the

intended order of the commandments to (1) “love the Lord thy God” and (2) “love thy neighbour” (Matthew 22:37, 39) we are going against the divine order given by God. President Ezra Taft Benson said: “When we put God first, all other things fall into their proper place or drop out of our lives. Our love of the Lord will govern the claims for our affection, the demands on our time, the interests we pursue, and the order of our priorities. We should put God ahead of *everyone else* in our lives.”¹⁹

A description of the Nephite civilization following the ministry of Christ represents the blessings that follow placing God first: “And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God” (4 Nephi 1:16). As one reads the text of 4 Nephi, it is obvious that their focus was not on happiness but on following Christ and His teachings. After two hundred years of “prosperity in Christ” (4 Nephi 1:23), the desires of the people began to change from worshiping God to focusing on themselves. Their prosperous civilization was no more.

Viewing our relationship with God and Christ simply as a means to bring us happiness is also a form of idolatry. One biblical scholar stated that he has seen this phenomenon within the traditional Christian community: “The most basic truths of our faith have fallen victim to [a] self-centered theology. Many modern-day evangelists have reduced the gospel message to little more than a formula by which people can live a happy and more fulfilling life. Sin is now defined by how it affects man, not how it dishonors God. Salvation is often presented as a means of receiving what Christ offers without obeying what He commands. The focus has shifted from God’s glory to man’s benefit. The gospel of persevering faith has given way to a kind of religious hedonism. Jesus, contemporary theology implies, is your ticket to avoiding all of life’s pains and experiencing all of life’s pleasures.”²⁰

Could this practice of religious hedonism exist in the Latter-day Saint community as well? Nephi warned of this latter-day deception in his farewell sermon when he wrote, “And others will he pacify,

and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell” (2 Nephi 28:21). One of the problems with understanding the gospel simply as a means to happiness is that the Book of Mormon plainly teaches that besides the name of Jesus Christ “there is no other name given whereby salvation cometh” (Mosiah 5:8). Our families, as much as we love them, cannot save us. Neither can the prophets or our membership in the Savior’s Church. The Book of Mormon teaches “that only in and through Christ can [we] be saved” (Mosiah 16:13).

If we see the gospel as merely a means or a tool to make us happy, and we are not happy, we will begin to question the effectiveness of the tool. I have often witnessed the faulty logic expressed by men or women who want to divorce their spouse on the premise that their partner isn’t “making them happy.” They may change their spouse, their job, their ward or stake, but the Book of Mormon plainly teaches, “He that is righteous shall be righteous still; he that is happy shall be happy still; and he that is unhappy shall be unhappy still” (Mormon 9:14). Happiness, unlike hedonism, does not depend upon circumstance but upon our relationship with God. This is not to say that unpleasant circumstances should not be avoided, but we should do so only when it is consistent with what is right and good. If we put God first, He will tell us what should be second, third, fourth, and so on. Perhaps this is a part of what the Savior meant when He said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (3 Nephi 13:33). We can always depend upon God to tell the truth, for He “cannot lie” (D&C 62:6). All other allegiances are subject to error or dishonesty.

The thoroughfare of hedonism and twisted mountain pass of asceticism are two of the many “strange roads” (1 Nephi 8:32) that lead away from the “strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:18) and to the “fulness of joy” (3 Nephi 28:10) promised by the Savior. In what has become a classic statement, the Prophet Joseph Smith observed, “Happiness is the object and

design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God.”²¹ On occasion, only the first nine words of the above statement are quoted, leaving the hearer with the misconception that the pursuit of happiness has preeminence above all else. It is clear from the Prophet Joseph’s words, however, that mankind’s happiness is God’s “object and design” for us, but to obtain it our focus should be on Christ and the virtues He embodies. The unfortunate reality is that anything we place above God is our god, but the joyous truth is that if we do place God first, all else will eventually fall into place. President Howard W. Hunter provided the following instructive and inspiring statement: “I am aware that life presents many challenges, but with the help of the Lord, we need not fear. If our lives and our faith are centered on Jesus Christ and his restored gospel, nothing can ever go permanently wrong. On the other hand, if our lives are not centered on the Savior and his teachings, no other success can ever be permanently right.”²²

CONCLUSION

From the Book of Mormon we learn that “it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that [we] must build [our] foundation” (Helaman 5:12). However, centering our lives in Christ does not ensure that our lives will be free of pain and full of pleasure, for such is the desire of the hedonist. Similarly, obeying the will of God requires no distorted pursuit of discipline; that is the error of the ascetic. True joy—the joy and happiness described in scripture—escapes the proud and is reserved for the faithful follower of Christ. Jacob, the son of Lehi, taught: “And whoso knocketh, to him will he open; and the wise, and the learned, and they that are rich, who are puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches—yea, they are they whom he despiseth; and save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them. But the things of the wise and the prudent shall be

hid from them forever—yea, that happiness which is prepared for the saints” (2 Nephi 9:42–43).

NOTES

1. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1975, 94–95.
2. See Henry B. Eyring, in Conference Report, April 1997, 33; see also Gerald N. Lund, “An Anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon—The Face May Be Strange, but the Voice Is Familiar,” in *Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 105.
3. *Merriam-Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, CD-ROM Version, 2002, s.v. “hedonism.”
4. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 170.
5. See T. Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 1–22.
6. Joseph B. Wirthlin, in Conference Report, October 1976, 36–37.
7. William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (Longmans: London, 1952), 309.
8. *Merriam-Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, CD-ROM Version, 2002, s.v. “asceticism.”
9. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 1990, 108.
10. Robert Doran, trans., “The Lives of Simeon Stylites,” in *Cistercian Studies Series: Number One Hundred Twelve* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1992).
11. Kimball, *Teachings*, 170.
12. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 160.
13. C. S. Lewis, “Three Kinds of Men,” in *Present Concerns: Essays by C. S. Lewis*, ed. W. Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 21.
14. Lewis, “Three Kinds of Men,” 21.
15. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 189.
16. James E. Talmage, “A Greeting to the Missionaries,” *Improvement Era*, December 1913, 173.
17. Kimball, *Teachings*, 76; emphasis added.
18. M. Russell Ballard, in Conference Report, April 1996, 112.
19. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1988, 3.
20. John MacArthur Jr., *Our Sufficiency in Christ* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), 154–55.

21. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 5:134–35.

22. Howard W. Hunter, *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 40.

RECEIVING OFFENSE WITHOUT TAKING OFFENSE

THE BOOK OF MORMON AND
THE POWER TO FORGIVE

Keith J. Wilson

A FRIEND OF MINE CONVERTED TO THE Church as a young woman. Shortly before she was baptized, a member in whose home she had accepted baptism took her aside and gave her the following counsel, “Sooner or later you’re going to be offended by someone in the Church, perhaps even a leader. You might be tempted to stay away awhile or go inactive. But I want you to remember that you are not covenanting with that member or with anyone else, but with the Lord Jesus Christ. Your covenant is with Him.”¹ This solemn counsel echoes the Savior’s words when He told His Apostles shortly before the Crucifixion, “It is impossible but that offences will come” (Luke 17:1). The Savior knew that each of us was destined to deal with having our feelings hurt by those around us.

This reality brings with it a double-edged sword. Not only are we promised a mortality with multiple offenses, but the Lord has also required that we forgive each of those offenses in order to

Keith J. Wilson is an associate professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

move forward spiritually (see 3 Nephi 13:15; D&C 64:10). The emotional price of this commandment to forgive can often be overwhelming. This chapter will attempt to outline some salient doctrines and examples of forgiving an offender as chronicled in the Book of Mormon.

A BOOK OF MORMON OVERVIEW: THE CONSEQUENCES OF SHUNNING FORGIVENESS

The Book of Mormon can be studied and analyzed from a score of different perspectives. Some of these include such approaches as a historical record, a doctrinal text, or a literary work. The Book of Mormon is also an account of conflicts in which the principle of forgiveness plays a pivotal role in the functioning of the people. Sadly, beginning with Lehi and ending with Moroni, the book bears its solemn witness to the consequences of failing to forgive others.

Certainly much can be gleaned from studying these failures and the harm that disregarding forgiveness can bring. However, the power of positive principles not only teaches but also lifts the soul. Accordingly, this paper will focus primarily on the positive examples. Suffice it to mention here one potent but pathetic Book of Mormon account of shunning forgiveness.

Nephi, son of Lehi, lived out his life in the shadow of his elder brothers' constant complaining and recriminations. When Nephi's life was at risk, the Lord finally counseled him to separate from his contentious siblings. He obeyed, and two nations emerged from this division. Approximately four hundred years after this occurred, a Nephite leader by the name of Zeniff recounted why the Lamanites still harbored such animus toward the Nephites. Note the generational hatred that persisted in the collective Lamanite memory: "They [the Lamanites] were a . . . blood-thirsty people, believing in the tradition of their fathers, which is this—believing that they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem because of the iniquities of their fathers, and that they were wronged in the wilderness by their brethren, and they were also wronged while crossing the sea; and again, that they were wronged while in the land of

their first inheritance, after they had crossed the sea, and all this because [of] . . . Nephi” (Mosiah 10:12–13).

After addressing more of their specific grievances, Zeniff then summarized their hatred: “And thus they [the Lamanites] have taught their children that they should hate them [the Nephites], and that they should murder them, and that they should rob and plunder them, and do all they could to destroy them; therefore they [the Lamanites] have an eternal hatred towards the children of Nephi” (Mosiah 10:17).

What a tragic aftermath of two brothers with an enlarged disposition for revenge! But even four hundred years did not circumscribe the damage of these two unforgiving brothers. Approximately one thousand years after Laman and Lemuel contended with Nephi, the prophet Mormon watched hundreds of thousands perish as those who called themselves Lamanites annihilated the entire Nephite nation. The pattern for this genocide traced itself back to a contempt for those who followed God or were the children of Nephi (see 4 Nephi 1:39). Thus, two contemptuous brothers set the pattern for almost one thousand years of conflict. It represents the ultimate example of the aphorism, “He who is offended when no offense was intended is a fool; he who is offended when offense was intended is a greater fool.”

Fortunately, the Book of Mormon is not only about failing to forgive others. Within its pages are numerous accounts of those who understood and applied the balm of forgiveness. Four positive examples will serve the purposes of this analysis. They are Lehi, Nephi, Pahoran, and the risen Lord.

LEHI AND SARIAH: RESPONDING WITH LOVE

Almost unnoticed in the story of the Book of Mormon is the relationship between Lehi and Sariah. As this couple heeded the Lord’s will to leave Jerusalem, tremendous pressures were placed upon their marriage. In one case these pressures boiled over, and Sariah gave Lehi a terse tongue-lashing.

Nephi recorded this difficult exchange: “For she had supposed

that we had perished in the wilderness; and she also had complained against my father, telling him that he was a visionary man; saying: Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness. And after this manner of language had my mother complained against my father” (1 Nephi 5:2–3).

With the pressure that Lehi felt, Sariah’s attack was undoubtedly searing and painful. A likely response would have been to lash back and “put her in her place.” Of all people, she should have known better. She had watched as the people of Jerusalem sought his life. She would have known of his heavenly vision that had occurred as he lay upon their bed, a vision that had included even the Savior Himself. She had been willing to leave their possessions behind and set out into the wilderness. And now she had abruptly turned on Lehi, accusing him of false visions and misleading their family. Such were the grounds for Lehi to take offense.

Yet Lehi did not recriminate or even denigrate his faltering spouse. Rather, Lehi took upon himself the responsibility of the situation, saying, “I know that I am a visionary man; for if I had not seen the things of God in a vision I should not have known the goodness of God, but had tarried at Jerusalem, and had perished with my brethren.” After acknowledging the awkwardness of their circumstances, this husband then encouraged his wife with the power of his testimony, “Yea, and I know that the Lord will deliver my sons out of the hands of Laban, and bring them down again unto us in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 5:4–5).

The account does not specify how soon thereafter Sariah accepted his consoling words. It is clear that upon the return of their sons, she rejoiced and retracted her criticisms. What is also evident from these events is that Lehi did not harbor ill feelings toward his wife. Instead, he stopped, listened to her concerns, and responded lovingly to her. He chose to sidestep the offense, forgiving Sariah for her indiscretions and lovingly seeking to lift her sagging spirits and faith. Lehi was a great example of forgiving a faltering or insensitive spouse.

NEPHI WITH LAMAN AND LEMUEL:
FORGIVING FREELY AND COMPLETELY

Perhaps Nephi learned about this ability to forgive from his father because he certainly displayed it as he interacted with his two older siblings, Laman and Lemuel. He was told early in the Book of Mormon record that he would be a ruler and a teacher over them (see 1 Nephi 2:22). But he appears to have been unprepared for how often they would malign and abuse him. One of the first recorded abuses was during the initial return trip to Jerusalem as the brothers went seeking the plates. After their second unsuccessful and life-threatening experience, Laman and Lemuel began to beat Nephi and Sam with a rod. An angel intervened and castigated them with the message that Nephi had been chosen to rule over them because of their iniquities. Even though an apology was beyond their ability, they did capitulate and follow Nephi back to Jerusalem, albeit somewhat reluctantly. In spite of their resistance, Nephi was still able to secure the plates and return to their base camp.

The saga of Nephi's brotherly ordeal continued as he was instructed to return to Jerusalem and convince Ishmael and his family to accompany them into the wilderness (1 Nephi 7). He and his brothers were successful, yet on their return trip Laman and Lemuel again rebelled against Nephi. Nephi begged them to remember the Lord, their experience with the angel, and the impending doom of the city of Jerusalem. They would have none of his exhortations and became so angry with Nephi that they bound him and left him as bait for wild animals. Miraculously, the Lord loosened Nephi's cords. As Laman and Lemuel were about to overpower him a second time, members of Ishmael's family interceded and convinced the brothers to reconsider. Subsequently a wave of remorse engulfed the brothers, and they did an emotional turn-about. With remorseful hearts they begged for Nephi's forgiveness.

How hard would it have been for Nephi to grant them forgiveness? Nephi had endured one painful moment after another with these calloused brothers. They envied and despised him so

thoroughly that they repeatedly sought his life. And then when the Lord intervened with angels and other miracles, they routinely brushed it aside in favor of more hatred and abuse. To this mountain of offense, Nephi responded with forthright forgiveness. His own firsthand account simply reads, “And it came to pass that I did *frankly forgive them* all that they had done, and I did exhort them that they would pray unto the Lord their God for forgiveness. And it came to pass that they did so” (1 Nephi 7:21; emphasis added). This account makes it apparent that Nephi cared nothing for revenge. He looked beyond their malice and concerned himself with his need to forgive and their need to be forgiven of the Lord. Too many of us only partially forgive, or as President Gordon B. Hinckley has warned, “So many of us are prone to say we forgive, when in fact we are unwilling to forget.”² In contrast, Nephi’s forgiveness came without strings or conditions. His was a forgiving soul, worthy of emulation.

PAHORAN AND CAPTAIN MORONI

Another quiet and yet marvelous example of forgiveness in the Book of Mormon record surfaces during the war years following Alma’s ministry. This often-overlooked account involves a government leader who was responsible for supporting the great Nephite leader, Captain Moroni. Pahoran might well represent those whom President Howard W. Hunter once referred to as “no less serviceable” (Alma 48:19) in the eyes of the Lord.³

Pahoran had the civic assignment to support Captain Moroni’s war efforts. Pahoran was the son of Nephihah, who was Alma the Younger’s successor as the Nephite chief judge. During his time as the chief governing officer, an uprising developed among the Nephite upper class. Pahoran called upon Moroni for support, and the insurrection was quelled (see Alma 51). The Nephite armies continued to battle the Lamanites on a number of fronts while depending heavily on Pahoran and his citizenry to sustain and support them.

Unbeknown to Captain Moroni, a second uprising erupted at

home, crippling Pahoran and his government. The situation became so dire that Pahoran and his loyalists were forced to abandon their city and flee. While hiding from his traitors, Pahoran received a scathing letter from Captain Moroni.

The letter accused Pahoran of gross indifference to Moroni's urgent request for additional supplies. As Moroni continued, he made threats of returning to accost those government leaders who were responsible. His accusations became bolder, and by the end of his letter he was threatening Pahoran's life. Among his accusations against Pahoran were such statements as:

"Can you think to sit upon your thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor?" (Alma 60:7).

"Ye . . . are seeking for authority. . . . Ye are also traitors to your country" (60:18).

"Ye are surrounded by security" (60:19).

"Your iniquity is for the cause of your love of glory and the vain things of the world" (60:32).

"The blood of thousands shall come upon your heads for vengeance" (60:10).

"And it is because of your iniquity that we have suffered so much loss" (60:28).

Thus, Moroni caustically attacked Pahoran's character from almost every angle.

As hard as these character accusations might have been for Pahoran, a much deeper wound must have occurred as Moroni intimated that he was acting under divine direction. In the following passages he essentially indicted Pahoran by virtue of a revelation from God on traitorous charges: "It is my God whom I fear; and it is according to his commandments that I do take my sword to defend . . . and it is because of your iniquity that we have suffered so much loss" (Alma 60:28).

"Ye know that ye do transgress the laws of God, and ye do know that ye do trample them under your feet. Behold, *the Lord saith unto me*: If those whom ye have appointed your governors do not repent of their sins and iniquities, ye shall go up to battle against them" (Alma 60:33; emphasis added).

Not only was Moroni claiming that Pahoran was lazy, selfish, greedy, and proud, but now he was implying that God's inspiration was directing him in his criticism of Pahoran. This divinely underwritten accusation comes into even sharper focus as one considers the stature of Moroni within the Nephite community.

Captain Moroni represents the paragon of righteous military leaders in the Book of Mormon. He consulted the prophet Alma regularly as to where he should attack the Lamanites (see Alma 43:23). He was described as "a man of a perfect understanding" (Alma 48:11), one whose soul did not delight in bloodshed but in liberty, freedom, and thanksgiving to God; he was "firm in the faith of Christ" (Alma 48:13) and gloried "in preserving his people" and "resisting iniquity" (Alma 48:16). Finally, Captain Moroni received the ultimate character assessment with these words, "If all men . . . were . . . like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever" (Alma 48:17).

These were not idle compliments. They underscored the esteem that faithful Nephites such as Pahoran would have felt toward Captain Moroni. Yet this very respect made Pahoran emotionally more vulnerable to Moroni's reckless attack. The response by Pahoran could have been a spirited defense of his honor, integrity, and spirituality. Instead, what occurred was an incredible example of Christlike forgiveness.

In the opening stanzas of Pahoran's response, he gave Moroni an accounting of the king-men and their treasonous takeover. He apologetically explained how they seized power and sent him into exile. After explaining the situation, he turned to the subject of Moroni's spurious attack. In one verse he outlined a model response for forgiving those who offend us. His inspired words were, "And now, in your epistle you have censured me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart" (Alma 61:9). In the remainder of his letter, he reaffirmed his commitment to liberty, to trusting in God, and to resisting evil actively. But the essence of his forgiveness seemed to be couched in three essential phrases: first, "it mattereth not;" second, "I am not angry;" and

third, “I . . . do rejoice in the greatness of your heart.” These inspired rejoinders deserve deeper analysis.

“IT MATTERETH NOT”: LEARNING TO LOOK BEYOND PERSONAL ATTACKS

How is it that Pahoran could just say, “Yes, you have belittled me, assailed me, and even threatened my life, but let’s get beyond the unfounded attacks to the real issue here”? Didn’t he have any feelings? How could he just ignore such deeply personal assaults? The answer must have in part originated in Pahoran’s own feelings about himself.

Because he trusted in the integrity of his own behavior, he knew that Moroni’s charges were unfounded. As such he did not have to refute them or concern himself with Moroni’s mistakes. Truth is “things as they really are” (Jacob 4:13; see also D&C 93:24). Moroni would discover the truth soon enough. Pahoran, who did not see it as his responsibility to argue with Moroni, subscribed to the simple counsel of Elder Boyd K. Packer concerning an offense: “Leave it alone. . . . Leave it alone.”⁴ Truly Pahoran had turned it over to the Lord (see Proverbs 16:23) and was no longer concerned (see D&C 64:11). He could ignore the unfounded insults because they truly did not matter to him, and he could focus his attention on the real issue at hand: dealing with the king-men.

“I AM NOT ANGRY”: DISARMING NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

Along with sidestepping Moroni’s misplaced accusations, Pahoran separated himself from unhealthy, negative emotions. His claim, “I am not angry,” settled the issue and possibility of responding in anger. Pahoran chose to align himself with the Savior’s pattern by avoiding entirely the spirit of contention (see 3 Nephi 11:29). He internalized the concept taught by Elder Russell M. Nelson that contention is a spiritual disease: “As we dread any disease that undermines the health of the body, so should we deplore contention, which is a corroding canker of the

spirit.”⁵ For Pahoran, anger was spiritual poison, and that ended the issue.

A second way to view Pahoran’s nonemotional response is that he had the spirit of discernment. He knew through this spirit that he was in the right. This spiritual confidence disarmed any possibility of anger, but it was not enough just to be right. The Savior later confirmed this principle to the Nephites with the words, “Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another” (3 Nephi 11:30). The writer of Proverbs highlighted this truth with the counsel, “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty” (Proverbs 16:32). It seems Pahoran’s ability to resist anger was not in the strength of his argument but rather in the knowledge of his intentions. For him anger was not an option.

“I . . . DO REJOICE IN THE
GREATNESS OF YOUR HEART”:

FINDING COMPASSION FOR THE OFFENDER

The final piece of Pahoran’s inspired pronouncement expressed the thought, “I . . . do rejoice in the greatness of your heart” (Alma 61:9). This was more than just flattery to divert attention from an embarrassing affront. Pahoran not only dismissed the negative, but he wisely replaced it with positive thoughts about Moroni. He understood that negative thoughts are not just to be cleared away, but that they must be supplanted as well. The Saints in 4 Nephi also attested to this principle. The account of their society mentioned the fact that they did not have any contentions whatsoever “because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people” (4 Nephi 1:15). The Apostle Paul endorsed this same idea as he taught the Saints at Ephesus to stay away from the negative and instead speak “that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29). In sum, these teachings and examples remind us that one sure way to avoid the negative in forgiving an offense is to look for the positive in the offender.

There is a second motivation in looking for the good in the offender. The scriptures warn us that if we cannot forgive the offender then we are guilty of a greater sin (see D&C 64:9). This seems completely unbalanced at first glance. Is not the offender responsible for hurting us in the first place? Apparently this commandment has nothing to do with who is right and who is wrong. Instead it has everything to do with entertaining positive or negative feelings. As Pahoran was submerged by a wave of false accusations, he knew that to follow Christ he had to get beyond the initial pain of Moroni's attacks and recognize the good motives in his offender. Accordingly, he saw not only the good but also the "greatness" in Moroni.

EXTENDING FORGIVENESS TO INCLUDE "INSPIRED" LEADERS

One last aspect of Pahoran's response enhances his sterling example. When Moroni attacked Pahoran, this civilian leader had to reconcile some very difficult feelings. How could God let an inspired leader make such a blatant mistake? Does God make mistakes? Was Moroni really chosen by God to lead? These types of questions would have besieged Pahoran. Rather than confront Moroni on these issues, he chose to exercise faith in God's hand. On one occasion Joseph Smith taught this principle to a German couple who mistakenly believed that a prophet is always a prophet. He flatly contradicted this notion with the words, "I told them that a prophet was a prophet only when he was acting as such."⁶ Pahoran continued to believe that God was leading Moroni in spite of Moroni's human weaknesses. In his reply he reinforced Moroni's spiritual standing with such comments as, "See that ye strengthen Lehi and Teancum in the Lord; tell them to fear not, for God will deliver them" (Alma 61:21). One of the great lessons we can take from humble Pahoran's interaction with this inspirational military captain is that chosen leaders can make mistakes and that our spiritual growth depends upon our willingness to forgive and sustain them.

In summary, the Book of Mormon examples of Lehi, Nephi, and Pahoran teach us about extending forgiveness in powerful ways. However, the supreme example of forgiveness in the Book of Mormon is also our perfect Exemplar. After the destructions in ancient America, the risen Lord revealed Himself to some of the survivors and taught them firsthand of His ministry and gospel. What is often overlooked is that He came as the ultimate example of forgiveness.

JESUS CHRIST: THE ULTIMATE EXAMPLE OF FORGIVENESS

As the Savior descended upon the multitude gathered at the temple in Bountiful, He declared with great solemnity that He was Jesus Christ. Further, He added, “I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered” (3 Nephi 11:11).

After the Savior identified Himself and His desire to do the Father’s will, His next words pointed to the atoning sacrifice and how bitter His sufferings were for mankind. The multitude fell to the ground in humility, and He then invited them to come and feel the wounds of His atonement. In essence their first contact with Him was to touch the wounds of His sacrifice.

This epiphany with the glorified Lord deeply involved the principle of forgiveness. Shortly before this event, He took upon Himself all the pain, sins, and suffering of the human family. He was deserted by all. He was wounded by all. Isaiah detailed that lonely event centuries earlier in his “suffering servant” prophecy. Inspired, he wrote about the relationship of Christ’s suffering to each one of us: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded

for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:3–5).

Isaiah made it painfully clear that the Atonement was a personalized sacrifice. In the words of Elder Merrill J. Bateman, “The Atonement involved more than an infinite mass of sin; it entailed an infinite stream of individuals with their specific needs.”⁷ Furthermore, Isaiah taught that as Christ gave Himself as an offering for sin, the Lord would “see his seed” (Isaiah 53:10). With His seed hiding “as it were their faces from him,” it must have been the formula for the ultimate personal offense. Could this have been in part some of the bitterness the Savior mentioned in His opening statement to the people at the temple? Was it particularly bitter because He was rejected by those for whom He suffered?

With these issues in mind, note how the people were received at the temple that morning in the land Bountiful. He invited them personally to touch the wounds of the Atonement. They did not hug, kiss, or caress Him. Instead, each one individually came forth and touched those physical points of His wounds. And what was their response? They shouted, “Hosanna,” meaning “save now” or “grant salvation.” Why did they need the saving grace? Was it because they sensed the reality of this ultimate act of forgiveness and openly desired it?

This whole event foreshadows a future advent of the Lord in which He will identify himself to the Jews. At that event they will ask about the wounds in His hands and feet, to which He will reply, “These wounds are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends. . . . I am Jesus that was crucified” (D&C 45:52). This second event takes the forgiveness motif one step further when the Lord describes His sacrifice as occurring in the house of *His friends*. Thus, the Atonement stands as the ultimate example of forgiveness to others.

As the Savior came to the descendants of Father Lehi, He was the perfect example of a forgiving soul. Elder Neal A. Maxwell pointed to this when he stated, “Jesus partook of history’s bitterest cup without becoming bitter!”⁸ He was the pure example of the

Master in His own parable of the master and the unmerciful servant (see Matthew 18:21–35). Subsequently, the account in 3 Nephi records Him as saying, “My bowels are filled with compassion towards you. . . . And now behold, my joy is full” (3 Nephi 17:6, 20). The Lord ultimately is our quintessential example of forgiveness. While we often overlook this aspect of His atoning sacrifice, it is a fitting capstone for our discussion of forgiving others through the examples in the Book of Mormon.

FORGIVENESS: THEN AND NOW

In our day and culture, the act of forgiving others is often lost in a tidal wave of individualism, pride, and self-justification. A *Wall Street Journal* article went so far as to assert that often “forgiveness is a sin.”⁹ Our prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley, has spoken out forcefully and frequently about forgiving others. In one such talk, he couched his call for the spirit of forgiveness in singular terms: “Is there a virtue more in need of application in our time than the virtue of forgiving and forgetting?”¹⁰ He continued: “We have need of this. The whole world has need of it. It is of the very essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹¹

It seems noteworthy that a modern prophet would term forgiving others “the very essence of the gospel” and that the Book of Mormon would not only teach the doctrine but also provide powerful examples such as Lehi, Nephi, Pahoran, and the Savior. The message rings with clarity that forgiving others cannot be assumed or taken lightly. But perhaps the best reason to internalize the message of forgiveness from the Book of Mormon comes through the Lord’s own words as He taught the righteous Nephites: “And blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (3 Nephi 12:7). Who among us is not in need of such a blessing?

NOTES

1. Conversation with M. Catherine Thomas on 31 January 2003.
2. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Order and Will of God,” *Ensign*, January 1989, 5.
3. Howard W. Hunter, “No Less Serviceable,” *Brigham Young University*

1990–91 *Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1991), 1.

4. Boyd K. Packer, “The Balm of Gilead,” *Ensign*, November 1977, 59.

5. Russell M. Nelson, “The Canker of Contention,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 68.

6. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 5:265.

7. Merrill J. Bateman, “And He did Invite Them One by One,” in *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior*, ed. Paul H. Peterson, Gary L. Hatch, and Laura D. Card (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2002), 162.

8. Neal A. Maxwell, “Enduring Well,” *Ensign*, April 1997, 7.

9. Dennis Prager, “When Forgiveness Is a Sin,” *Wall Street Journal*, 15 December 1997, 37.

10. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Of You It Is Required to Forgive,” *Ensign*, November 1980, 62.

11. Hinckley, “Of You It Is Required,” 61.

COVENANT TEACHINGS IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

Victor L. Ludlow

THE BOOK OF MORMON CONTAINS important covenant teachings of the Savior and His prophets. These teachings fulfill its first stated purpose, “which is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and *that they may know the covenants of the Lord*, that they are not cast off forever” (title page; emphasis added). The Book of Mormon is first intended to teach God’s chosen people about their history and covenants and, second, building on that foundation, it is to testify to Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ. In the Book of Mormon, various prophets and the Savior Himself teach about different covenant relationships, and they highlight special covenant promises to be fulfilled in the last days. Indeed, in His post-resurrection ministry, Jesus prophesies a key sign and other events that demonstrate when the Father’s promised covenant with Israel is finally being fulfilled in the latter days.

Victor L. Ludlow is a professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

THE MEANING OF “COVENANT” AND “COVENANT MAKING”

Starting on the title page and continuing to the next-to-the-last verse in Moroni 10, the word *covenant* appears 154 times in the Book of Mormon, an average of once every three pages. Two common definitions of *covenant* are appropriate to its context within the Book of Mormon. First, the word *covenant* is often defined as a binding or solemn agreement by two or more persons or parties. Covenants in the Book of Mormon are always sincere compacts, whether they represent a *horizontal* person-to-person commitment through a solemn oath between people or a *vertical* God-to-person relationship, binding together Heavenly Father and individuals. Thirty-three of the 154 covenant citations deal with a covenant-binding relationship on a horizontal dimension between mortals, such as political, military, or secret oaths (as recorded primarily in Alma, Helaman, and 3 Nephi).¹ But the great majority of covenant references, at least 118 of them (and potentially 3 others²), are in the vertical dimension since they highlight sacred bonds between God and men. As will be discussed, these religious covenants are clustered within key visions and sermons throughout the Book of Mormon.

A second definition of *covenant* amplifies the vertical aspect and relates even more to the Book of Mormon spiritual context. *Covenants* can also be defined as God’s promises to man, usually carrying with them conditions to be fulfilled by man, as recorded in the scriptures. From this definition, we learn that God’s covenants include conditional promises dependent upon man’s individual and collective behavior. Indeed, a major purpose of the scriptures is to serve as the repository for God’s covenants. This is true not only for the Book of Mormon, which is to help Israel “know the covenants of the Lord,” but also for the Bible and other scriptures. For example, in some early English translations of the Bible, the two major divisions of the text were referred to as the “Old Covenant” and “New Covenant” instead of “Old Testament” and “New Testament,” as we know them today. The integral role of covenants is also

recognized in the scriptures from this dispensation in the very title of the Doctrine and Covenants. A major purpose of all scriptures, then, is to teach us about God's covenant expectations and conditional promises.

Moving from common English definitions to the Semitic language roots of the Old Testament, we learn that *covenant* as a noun derives from the Hebrew word *b'rith*, which probably comes from the prime root *bara*, meaning "to select" or "to choose." The agency of choice is essential in God's covenants. God does not arbitrarily enter into a covenant relationship with His children. He prepares the conditions of a covenant agreement and then invites those with faith and commitment to enter into a covenant relationship with Him. Each individual then chooses whether or not to come unto God and obey Him. Thus, a covenant is a selective choice, carefully entered into by both parties.

The most frequently used technical phrase in the Old Testament for "making a covenant" is *karat b'rith*, meaning literally to "cut a bond" or "cut a choice," similar to the idioms heard today, to "cut a contract" or to "cut a deal." The origin of this expression may lie in the ancient Near Eastern covenant ceremony of sacrificing animals by *cutting* their throats, which symbolized a point of finalization and personal commitment in the contractual process. In other words, when two parties came to an agreement, they would indicate it through an unusual act, such as cutting the throat of an animal to be used as a sacrificial offering or the main dish for their feast of celebration. Cutting or sharing bread or salt were also symbolic acts of covenant celebration.

Ironically, a second possible meaning of *b'rith* seems to be the opposite of "choice." Some scholars suggest *b'rith* is derived from the Akkadian root *biritu*, which means to "fetter" or "chain," as in a binding. We may feel uncomfortable with such strong language of being bound or joined together because, for us, a covenant is not an obligatory or forceful type of binding; it is a voluntary relationship. However, when two covenant parties are free to choose and they have joined in a mutual commitment, it is assumed they will remain true to their vows. Once they have made their pact, they are linked

or “chained together” in a solemn bond. In this context, Latter-day Saints talk about a “new and everlasting covenant,” including a “sealing together,” as in the temple ordinances. This covenant sealing represents an absolute, binding compact between God and His children, stronger than any fetters or chains of earthly mortality.

Indeed, when one looks at covenant making and “cutting a *b’rith* (a “chain” or “bond”) in this second context, the symbolism of the cutting motion can represent both a negative penalty and also a positive deliverance. Within ancient Near Eastern treaties, a list of penalties is often included within the contract, warning of the consequences of broken promises. So to “cut a bond” can mean to commit yourself to dire consequences if you break your promise. However, when we think of “cutting a bond” there is also a positive dimension and the implication of a liberation if one maintains the vow. In a gospel context, as we cut ourselves from the chains of sin by entering into a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ, we free ourselves to achieve our ultimate, eternal destiny. This promise of freedom was also given in the Book of Mormon as King Benjamin spoke to his covenant Israelites (see Mosiah 5).

In review, a covenant is a binding, solemn agreement between God and man, conditional upon certain stipulations as recorded in the scriptures. To enter into a covenant implies a voluntary, binding process between the covenant parties, often symbolized by some special act, such as eating bread together. The process requires both parties to commit themselves to adhere to the terms of the contract.

COVENANT PROMISES, PATTERNS, AND PROPHECIES IN THE BRASS PLATES OF LABAN

To appreciate the covenant teachings in the Book of Mormon, we need to highlight the covenant background the Nephite prophets and people would have had as they left Jerusalem. The three main sources of covenant teachings available to the Nephites were the books of Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Isaiah, all of which were contained in the brass plates of Laban.

Genesis. Beginning in Genesis 12, God enters into a covenant

relationship with Abraham. Chapters 12, 13, 15, and 17 highlight three great promises to Abraham. The first promise is of infinite lineage—a numberless posterity. Second, he is promised a chosen land—the territory between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Most significantly, however, is the third covenant promise which the Lord makes, declaring that Abraham’s lineage will be a blessing for all nations—a consecrated people of God. In sum, Abraham is told, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). The climactic covenant teachings in Genesis are found in chapter 17, where the word *covenant* appears thirteen times, more times than in any other single chapter in the scriptures. Later in Genesis, Moses highlights how this covenant relationship was repeated and renewed on various occasions, first with Abraham, then with his son Isaac, and finally with Isaac’s son Jacob, who became the recipient of the birthright and the covenant promises.

Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is another important book that explains God’s covenant relationship with the house of Israel. It contains the capstone message that Moses delivered at the end of his noble, prophetic ministry and provides an important theological foundation for later prophets and Apostles of the Lord. One special value of Deuteronomy is the pattern of covenant making evidenced throughout the book. This process is divided into six elements, which parallel the same steps that a sovereign ruler would use to establish a horizontal covenant or treaty relationship with his vassals in the ancient Near East. These six steps exemplify the covenant process between the Sovereign of this earth and His children, particularly as demonstrated in baptism, temple, and sacrament ordinances. Also, these six elements are woven into the great covenant sermon of King Benjamin, which will be discussed later. The following list reviews these six elements of the covenant pattern and highlights their application in key ordinances of the gospel:

Preamble. The first element in a covenant-making process is called the preamble or introduction (see Deuteronomy 1:1–5). The preamble establishes a link between the major parties, and it is usually recorded as an introduction, prologue, greeting, or other means of connection. We find this element today when gospel investigators

are invited to be baptized, when temple patrons are welcomed to the house of the Lord, and when Latter-day Saints attend sacrament meeting.

Historical Context. The second step provides a historical context for the covenant commitment (see Deuteronomy 1:6–4:49). This historical background shows earlier interest and involvement of the sovereign for his subjects. Today, missionary discussions and various teaching situations present the events of the Restoration to prospective Church members, and the endowment session reviews God’s creative and instructive acts prior to Adam and Eve establishing their covenants with God. We renew our baptismal and temple covenants through the sacrament service with a special sacrament hymn providing a historical context for this ordinance.

Stipulations. The most important part of covenant making is the third step, where the stipulations and obligations are defined (see Deuteronomy 5–26). The covenant parties enter into particular laws, covenants, commitments, and promises with each other. The expectations of our covenants with God are found in the teachings and commandments of the scriptures. Sometimes these commitments are general and broad, such as in the ordinances of baptism and the sacrament, while at other times they are very specific and narrow, such as in the temple endowment. In all cases, these covenants are expressed in precise, word-for-word terminology as we enter into them.

Blessings or Curses. Closely attached to the stipulations is the fourth step, where certain blessings and curses in conjunction with the covenant relationship are expressed (see Deuteronomy 27–33). Today, this is what we would call the “fine print” of the contract, where incentives for adherence or penalties for disregard of the agreement are spelled out. The blessings of spiritual companionship follow after baptism and the sacrament, and promises of rewards and punishments are part of the temple covenants as detailed in the scriptures.

Witnesses. The fifth step necessary for any covenant to be complete is validation by witnesses (see Deuteronomy 27:1–8; 30:19; 31:26; 32:1–43). These witnesses, usually both heavenly and

earthly, testify that the parties have made their proper, complete vows. All saving ordinances of the gospel, and especially baptism and the temple covenants, must be witnessed by at least two individuals. Our sacrament vows are also witnessed in a communal setting as we each participate in an external act to witness our internal commitment.

Perpetuation. The last step is for the covenant to be perpetuated through acts of recording and renewal (see Deuteronomy 27–28; 31:9–13, 24–27). The saving ordinances of baptism and the temple are recorded in Church and personal membership records. We have the gospel covenant teachings available in the scriptures, and weekly we are asked to renew our covenants. Covenants are meant to be preserved so that current and future generations can enter into and regularly renew their covenant relationships with God.

Isaiah. The third major Old Testament book forming the covenant foundation for the Book of Mormon prophets is the book of Isaiah. This profound prophet taught valuable covenant concepts and delivered important prophecies of God's covenant promises which must eventually be fulfilled. In early chapters, Isaiah pronounces judgments upon ancient wicked Israel and provides messianic prophecies and latter-day promises for the house of Jacob (see Isaiah 1–12). The words of the scriptures are also an important part of the Lord's covenant with latter-day Israel (see Isaiah 29). In later chapters, Isaiah foretells the redemption of the righteous in Zion in the context of the Lord's promises with Israel, highlighting that His Spirit would be upon them, and His words (the scriptures) would never depart from them (see Isaiah 48–59). Isaiah also reviews the Lord's perpetual covenant with Israel, including promises to be fulfilled as the Lord's victory is made known before all nations as the world welcomes His millennial reign (see Isaiah 45, 60–63).

Nephi and the other writers of the Book of Mormon quoted Isaiah in their writings because the Old Testament prophet had important things to say about the Nephites' covenant relationship with God. As Nephi explained, he quoted Isaiah because Isaiah taught how God would deal with Israel (see 1 Nephi 19:19–24).

Jacob similarly indicated that he read from Isaiah so that his listeners could know the Lord's covenants with all the house of Israel (see 2 Nephi 9:1). Jesus said that Isaiah's writings contained the full covenant relationship between God and the house of Israel. Christ significantly indicated that when the prophecies of Isaiah were fulfilled, God's covenant promises with Israel would be completed (see 3 Nephi 20:12, 46; 23:2).

These covenant teachings from the brass plates were a vital part of the scriptural heritage enjoyed by Lehi and the Book of Mormon community. With them, Lehi's descendants could find:

- The covenant *promises* given to the patriarchs, as written in Genesis.
- The *patterns* of covenant making, as recorded in Deuteronomy.
- The inspired covenantal *prophecies* of Isaiah for the latter days.

From these scriptural records, the Book of Mormon prophets found valuable teachings about covenant promises, patterns, and prophecies which they shared with their followers and latter-day readers.

BOOK OF MORMON INSIGHTS

The Book of Mormon contains many important insights about covenants between the Lord and His people. Although at least 118 references to these religious covenants can be found throughout the book, these citations are not scattered evenly. They are concentrated most heavily at the beginning, in 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi, and toward the end, in 3 Nephi. An easy way to remember which books contain the key covenant teachings is to remember that they all share the same name with different numerical prefixes—1, 2, and 3 Nephi.³ As we determine the people who speak most about covenants in the Book of Mormon, we see a similar trend, with 70 percent of the covenant references coming from just three people—Nephi, Mormon, and Jesus. Nephi, at the beginning of the Book of Mormon history, and Mormon, in his editorial comments and writings, refer to covenants twenty-one times each. Although Lehi, Jacob, King Benjamin, and Moroni also give us some important

teachings about covenants, by far the greatest concentration is found in the words of the Savior, as He specifically mentions covenants thirty-seven times in His teachings, especially as recorded in 3 Nephi. Valuable insights about covenant promises are found throughout the Book of Mormon writings of Nephi and Mormon. The teachings of King Benjamin illustrate all the major elements of a covenant pattern. And Jesus' revelations and discourses record God's covenant prophecies with the house of Israel.

NEPHI'S COVENANTAL PROMISES

Nephi's teachings about covenants set the stage for later covenant insights in the Book of Mormon. A cluster of eleven covenant citations is in 1 Nephi 13–15. This passage at the beginning of the Book of Mormon provides important insights into some early covenant teachings given in vision by an angel to Nephi. The angel tells Nephi about the covenant teachings of the Bible (see 1 Nephi 13:23, 26), the Lord's covenant promise with Lehi that his seed would receive a choice land of inheritance (see 1 Nephi 13:30; see also 2 Nephi 1:5), and God's covenants with the house of Israel (see 1 Nephi 14:5, 8, 14, 17; see also 1 Nephi 17:40; 19:15). Then, Nephi teaches his brothers about covenant Israel (see 1 Nephi 15:14) and God's covenants with Abraham (see 1 Nephi 15:18).

In 1 Nephi 22, Nephi is teaching his brothers after he had just quoted chapters 48 and 49 of Isaiah. The brothers pose some hard questions to Nephi, essentially asking, "What is the meaning of these Isaiah scriptures which you just read to us from the brass plates?" Nephi tells them how these passages contain promises for their descendants. Starting in verse 7, Nephi tries to help his brothers appreciate that some latter-day Gentiles would bless their descendants and the whole 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 22:9). He continues in verses 10 and 11, saying that 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.” This promise of the Lord making bare His arm alludes to Isaiah 52:10, one of the most quoted verses from Isaiah in the Book of Mormon (see also Mosiah 12:24; 15:31; 3 Nephi 16:20; 20:35). Nephi promises that the Gentiles, as a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, will assist his seed in bringing forth covenants to the house of Israel, through which all the families of the earth will be blessed as the Lord reveals His power and glory. The Savior amplifies these and other covenant teachings in 2 Nephi.

JEHOVAH’S EARLY PROPHECIES ABOUT COVENANTS

The Lord, as a premortal spirit being, revealed important covenant teachings to the ancient prophets that are recorded only in the Book of Mormon. Most of these divine pronouncements are quoted in 2 Nephi 3, 10, and 29. In chapter 3, as Lehi blesses his son Joseph, he cites some prophecies given to ancient Joseph, who was sold into Egypt. These prophecies speak of a seer and prophet of the last days (Joseph Smith) who would bring forth scriptures from the seed of Joseph. These scriptures, along with the Bible, would teach and comfort the descendants of Joseph, “bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord” (2 Nephi 3:12). The Lord continues with further instruction about this prophet and the restoration, promising that the words of the Book of Mormon would strengthen the faith of Joseph’s descendants unto the remembering of His covenant that He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see 2 Nephi 3:21).

In 2 Nephi 10, Jacob also quotes some unique covenant pronouncements of the Lord. After quoting Isaiah 50 and 51, he foretells what will happen to the Jews after the crucifixion of Christ, stating: “But behold, thus saith the Lord God: When the day cometh that they [the Jews] shall believe in me, that I am Christ, then have I covenanted with their fathers that they shall be restored in the flesh, upon the earth, unto the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 10:7). Passages from Isaiah 49 are then quoted, and the Lord promises that America will be a land of inheritance for Jacob’s

descendants and a land of liberty for the Gentiles “for this cause, that my covenants may be fulfilled which I have made unto the children of men” (2 Nephi 10:15). Thus, the coming of the Gentiles to America is an important precondition for the fulfilling of God’s covenants to the house of Israel.

This promise is repeated and elaborated upon by the Lord in a revelation given to Nephi as recorded in 2 Nephi 29. After highlighting the roles of the different scriptures which will come forth from the scattered segments of Israel in the last days, the Lord concludes: “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 29:14). This verse illustrates that the scriptures contain key elements of God’s covenant promises to Israel. Christ would continue His covenant teachings over five centuries later when He appeared to the Nephites as a resurrected being.⁴

THE COVENANT PATTERN IN KING BENJAMIN’S SPEECH

Almost 150 years prior to the Savior’s postresurrection ministry, a righteous king and prophet named Benjamin delivered some powerful covenant teachings. As the first caretaker of all the prophetic and royal records which had accumulated from the time of Nephi, King Benjamin was familiar with the earlier writings of Nephi, Jacob, and others (see Omni 1:25; Words of Mormon 1:10, 17). He was also familiar with the Old Testament covenant writings of Moses and Isaiah because he taught his sons directly from the brass plates (see Mosiah 1:3)⁵. At the end of his ministry, he invited all the people to hear his final words (see Mosiah 1:10, 18). His speech and the people’s response comprise Mosiah 2–5. All six elements of a covenant pattern, as discussed earlier, are found in these chapters.

Indeed, as seen in the chart below, some of these elements intertwine in the same verses:

KING BENJAMIN'S COVENANT TEACHINGS
MOSIAH 2:1-6:3

Covenant Element	Ch. 2	Ch. 3	Ch. 4	Ch. 5	Ch. 6
Preamble	1-9, esp. 9	1-4	1, 4	1	
Historical Context	9-17, 23, 25-30, 34-35	5-17	2-4	2-4	
Stipulations	18-22, 24, 31	18-19	2, 5-11, 14-22, 26-29	5, 7-8, 11-15	
Blessings or Curses	22, 24, 31-33, 36-41	24-27	3, 12-13, 20, 23-25, 30	5, 9-10, 15	
Witnesses	14-15, 27, 41	23-24	30	2-8, esp. 6	
Perpetuation	8	20-22	4	7, 9, 11-12	1-3

Speaking to the hearts and souls of his subjects, King Benjamin followed Moses' ancient covenant pattern as he brought the people into a covenant bond with God. One century and a half later, the resurrected Savior would establish His followers as a covenant society.

CHRIST'S COVENANT PROPHECIES IN 3 NEPHI

Most of Christ's covenant teachings in the Book of Mormon are found in 3 Nephi, starting with chapter 11. As a resurrected being,

Jesus teaches three major sermons or discourses, each one dealing with covenants. The first is the American version of the Sermon on the Mount (see 3 Nephi 12–14), which is essentially the same discourse as recorded in Matthew, with a few major changes. One significant addition in the 3 Nephi version places the sermon into a covenant context as it is specifically directed to those who have already entered into a baptismal covenant relationship with the Lord (see 3 Nephi 12:1–2). Thus, the Sermon on the Mount is not a universal declaration to anyone listening to Jesus preach; it is the “Christian Constitution” for all who take upon themselves Christ’s name through the covenant ordinance of baptism.

The second discourse contains teachings to Israel on the law and the covenant (see 3 Nephi 15–16). This sermon includes material also found in the Old and New Testaments, but with greater detail. The capstone of the three sermons is His “Covenant People Discourse,” which constitutes 3 Nephi 20:10 to 23:5. This discourse is particularly valuable because it is unique to the Book of Mormon. Here we read teachings that were not recorded in the Bible but were partially mentioned earlier in 2 Nephi. It may be that Jesus taught them elsewhere, but they have not been recorded and passed down, at least not yet.

THE LAW AND THE COVENANT DISCOURSE

In the second discourse, starting in 3 Nephi 15, Jesus first clarifies some misunderstandings which the Nephites held about the law of Moses. Earlier, when the signs were given of Jesus’ birth, some Nephites thought they no longer needed to live the Mosaic law since the Son of God was now living on earth. However, their prophets persuaded them that the law was not yet fulfilled (3 Nephi 1:24–25). The resurrected Christ now appears and says to the multitude at Bountiful, “Behold, I say unto you that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses” (3 Nephi 15:4). As the premortal Jehovah, He gave the law to Moses and made the covenant with Israel (3 Nephi 15:5). Then, as the mortal Savior, He fulfilled the law at Gethsemane, Golgotha, and the Garden Tomb. He continues: “For

behold, the *covenant* which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but the *law* which was given unto Moses hath an end in me” (3 Nephi 15:8). He tells them that the *law* was fulfilled but that the *covenant* was not yet fulfilled. The Mosaic law and the Abrahamic covenant are not the same thing. As discussed earlier, the Abrahamic covenant, with its three major promises was established six centuries before the Mosaic law, with its demands of justice, was delivered by the Lord.

In essence, the *covenant* was given first (about 1900 B.C.) as God made special promises with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but it would not be fulfilled until the last days. Elements of the three promises were fulfilled in earlier times, others during the time of Christ’s earthly ministry, and still others were not accomplished until after this gospel dispensation was begun by Joseph Smith. Indeed, the last of these covenant promises will not be completed until Christ’s millennial reign is ushered in. The *law* was given later (about 1300 B.C.) to Moses, and it refers particularly to the elaborate set of preparatory legislation, statutes, and sacrifices which constituted the Mosaic dispensation in anticipation of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. The demands of the law of justice and expectations of the law of mercy were fulfilled in Christ’s great sacrifice at Gethsemane and Golgotha. Thus, the *law*, which was given later, was fulfilled first, but the *covenant*, which was given earlier, would be fulfilled last. This follows the well-known principle, the “first shall be last; and the last shall be first” (Matthew 19:30; see also Jacob 5:63; D&C 29:30). Although the law was satisfied about two thousand years ago, we still await the completion of the covenant.

Jesus continues in 3 Nephi 15 by admonishing His listeners to keep His commandments and by discussing some of the remaining covenant promises—particularly those which must be fulfilled by the house of Israel. He teaches what has to be done to fulfill these promises. He mentions, for example, that He has other sheep in his Israelite fold who need to hear His voice. In fact, He indicates that He had mentioned this promise to His disciples in the Old World. This is recorded in John 10, where He said “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold . . . they shall hear my voice; and there

shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16). Jesus was to visit all the different segments of Israel. Ideally, all of Israel as a people would some day gather in their lands of inheritance and live the covenant of God. This has always been the intention of the Lord and His prophets. However, the ancient Israelites failed their destiny as a people. Instead of the world coming up to Israel’s standards, the Israelites fell into worldly behavior, and the Lord scattered them among the nations.

But, as Jesus tells us in 3 Nephi 16, in order for the covenant to be fulfilled, all Israel must unite under the Messiah’s leadership in their lands of inheritance and live as a Zion people. Before Israel can be gathered, the gospel truths must first be given to the faithful among the Gentiles, who will then be numbered among His people. He is particularly talking about the remnants of Israel scattered among the Gentiles who have joined His Church and become a covenant people. Jesus also warns the Gentiles that they could forfeit their presence in this land through their wickedness, allowing the house of Israel to have power over them. Then in 3 Nephi 16:17 He prophesies what will happen when Israel’s hope and promise is finally realized, for “then the words of the prophet Isaiah shall be fulfilled.” He concludes His teaching on this day by quoting three verses from Isaiah 52, which foretell watchmen singing and the Lord’s people rejoicing because Zion has been established, and Israel has been gathered as the Lord made bare His arm.

JESUS’ COVENANT PEOPLE DISCOURSE

In 3 Nephi 20:10, we continue with the Savior teaching the multitudes the following day. This is the beginning of what may be called His Covenant People Discourse.⁶ After referring to the words of Isaiah, He says, “And verily, verily, I say unto you, that when they [the words of Isaiah] shall be fulfilled then is the fulfilling of the covenant which the Father hath made unto his people, O house of Israel” (3 Nephi 20:12). In this significant passage, Jesus tells us where we can find a checklist of key prophecies which will mark the

fulfillment of the covenant. The list is in Isaiah, and when the words of Isaiah are fulfilled then the covenant is finally fulfilled (compare 3 Nephi 20:46; 23:1–3).

Jesus continues his Covenant People Discourse by describing some of these prophesied signs. He promises that the remnants of Israel will be gathered and given power over the unrepentant Gentiles as the Lord establishes his chosen people (3 Nephi 20:13–20). He promises to establish the house of Israel in this land “unto the fulfilling of the covenant. . . . And the powers of heaven shall be in the midst of this people” as He establishes His millennial reign (3 Nephi 20:21–22). Jesus then reviews key messianic prophecies given to Moses and covenant promises given to Abraham which He will fulfill (see 3 Nephi 20:21–28). He promises He will remember the covenant He made with His people, promising He will gather them together into the land of their inheritance with the fulness of His gospel to be preached unto them (see 3 Nephi 20:29–31). Finally, the three promises of the Abrahamic covenant (people, land, and blessing) will come together. Then, Jesus begins quoting Isaiah 52.⁷ After quoting most of the chapter, He concludes with a very important promise that “then shall this covenant which the Father hath covenanted with his people be fulfilled”! (3 Nephi 20:46).

A KEY SIGN IN THE FULFILLMENT OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

The Savior then promises a key sign so we can know when these things “shall be about to take place”—that He will gather the house of Israel and establish His Zion among them (3 Nephi 21:1). The promised sign is actually within one long, very complex sentence comprising seven verses. First, the Lord promises a sign so we will know when the promised covenant is about to be fulfilled, then He reveals the sign in verses 3 through 5, and finally He testifies that after the sign is given we will know the Father’s covenant promises are nearing fulfillment.

To clarify what Jesus is saying, one needs to identify the central

core of the sentence—the essential message which is shown: “And verily I say unto you, I give unto you [the people at Bountiful] a sign. . . . And behold, this is the thing which I will give unto you for a sign—for verily I say unto you that when these things [the Book of Mormon] . . . shall be made known unto the Gentiles . . . ; verily, verily, I say unto you, when these things shall be made known unto them of the Father, and shall come forth of the Father, from them unto you; . . . that these things might come forth from them unto a remnant of your seed [the Lamanites], that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel; therefore, when these works . . . shall come forth from the Gentiles, unto your seed . . . 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 21:1–5, 7). Though the central core of this sentence is quite long, it is profound. When the Lamanites receive and begin to know the Book of Mormon, it will be a sign that the work of the Father has already started to finally fulfill the covenant which He has made with the house of Israel.

Although many attempts to convert the Lamanites were made in the first 140 years of Church history, major success among the American Lamanites was not experienced until the administration of Spencer W. Kimball. Finally in the 1970s, Church growth in Mexico and in Central and South America demonstrated that this promised sign was being fulfilled. For example, the cities of Lima, Peru, and Mexico City, Mexico, have recorded barometers of Church growth far more dynamic than ever witnessed in Salt Lake City, Provo, or other historical centers of the Church. Lima had seven new stakes (not wards or branches, but *stakes* of Zion) established on a single weekend early in 1988. Mexico City’s record was even greater with nine new stakes being established in one weekend in November 1975. Indeed, 1975 seems to be the pivotal year in the deliverance of the sign that the Lamanites were receiving the gospel in large enough numbers that the marvelous missionary work

among the house of Israel was reaching new levels of success. Since then, the magnitude of success among the Lamanites and peoples of Central and South America has truly blossomed.

After stating the sign and its surrounding conditions in a singular sentence, Jesus continues His Covenant People Discourse and promises marvelous blessings to the covenant Israelites and obedient Gentiles of the last days after this sign is given. As a parallel to the detailed covenant teachings in chapter 20, the Lord summarizes Heavenly Father's great work of the gospel restoration among the Gentiles and His covenant people (see 3 Nephi 21:8–11; compare 3 Nephi 20:21–46). He then repeats some promises from Micah and highlights the gathering of Israel and the establishment of New Jerusalem by the Lamanites and other Israelite groups, such as Ephraim and the Ten Tribes, with the assistance of the Gentiles (see 3 Nephi 21:12–25; compare 20:13–20). Jesus continues with a summation of the Father's work in gathering the dispersed of Israel in the last days (see 3 Nephi 21:26–29; compare 20:10–12). He then places a capstone upon his Covenant People Discourse and reviews the blessings of Zion and her stakes in the last days by quoting all of Isaiah 54 (see 3 Nephi 22). When the covenant is finally fulfilled, Christ's kingdom and peace will be established as stakes of Zion are found throughout the world, Israel's people will settle in their promised lands, and righteousness will fill the whole earth. Jesus concludes His discourse in the first five verses of chapter 23 of 3 Nephi the same way He had begun it three chapters earlier, by admonishing us to search the words of Isaiah, since they contain the key covenant promises given to Israel.

In 3 Nephi 12–20, we have witnessed an evolution from the simple, terse statements of the Sermon on the Mount, through the slightly elaborated declarations in the Law and the Covenant Discourse, into the complex but structurally eloquent Covenant People Discourse with one pivotal, profound sentence containing the Lord's key latter-day sign of the fulfillment of God's covenant with the house of Israel.

MORMON'S WITNESS OF THE COVENANT PROMISES

Later in 3 Nephi, Mormon adds his own testimony to the covenant teachings of the Savior that he has recorded. One selection from Mormon's teachings provides literary consistency along with a clear capstone to Christ's covenant teachings. In chapter 29, Mormon promises that after the Book of Mormon comes forth, the people will no longer need to say that the Lord delays His coming to the children of Israel. The prophet then pronounces judgments both upon those who would deny the doings of the Lord, or the gifts of the Spirit, and also upon those who would persecute any remnant of Israel (see 3 Nephi 19:6–9). Mormon testifies that no one can turn aside or hinder the Lord from fulfilling the covenant which He has made with the house of Israel (see 3 Nephi 29:9).⁸

OUR COVENANT RESPONSIBILITIES

Our personal responsibility towards covenants is twofold: first, we need to prepare ourselves to enter into all of the covenants that the Lord has made available to us; second, we need to remember and keep the covenants we have already made. To assist in our preparation, we can review the meaning of the term "covenant," the six-step pattern of covenant making, and the key Book of Mormon passages about covenants as discussed in this article.

To assist us in our keeping of covenants, we should remember the seriousness of an oath with the Lord. The solemnity of our vows is evident in the third of the Ten Commandments, which tells us not to take the name of God in vain. We usually think of this in a negative language context—"Do not swear." But it originally had a positive covenantal context—"Do not enter into a vow with God or a promise in his name without the sincere intent to fulfill it." For example, the New Revised English Bible translates this commandment as, "You must not make wrong use of the name of the Lord your God; the Lord will not leave unpunished anyone who misuses his name." We need to solemnly keep our vows. We need to remember the consequences for not keeping a covenant we have made with God. We should also remember that God always rewards

faithful adherence to a covenant, especially if our obedience is predicated upon noble motivations, such as love, faith, and unity, rather than upon more common incentives, such as fear, logic, or peer pressure.

As we strengthen our own covenant relationship with God, we become better prepared to assist others in their covenant making. As more people join Christ's Church through the covenant waters of baptism and as more Latter-day Saints enjoy the covenant blessings of the temple, important prophecies and signs of the last days move closer to fulfillment. The key sign of the Book of Mormon message going to the Lamanites and being received by them marks the start of the final fulfillment of God's covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when their descendants will share the gospel blessings with all people. As we study the scriptures and become aware of what the Lord has promised for these latter days, we can do our share in bringing to pass what has been promised. God's work is rolling forth to effect the promises given to the patriarchs. Their descendants are preparing to gather together to the lands of their inheritance as they share gospel truths and blessings with others. Increasingly, converts from the Gentile Christian and non-Christian nations are assisting the house of Israel in building Christ's kingdom on earth and in sharing His gospel.

It is a marvelous time to be on the earth, a period foreseen and yearned for by the ancient prophets. Rather than resisting or ignoring God's expanding kingdom, and more than just witnessing prophetic promises, we share the responsibility of actually bringing to reality that which the prophets promised so long ago. As they prophesied about our age, prophets foretold of servants in the vineyards and workers in the fields of God's great harvest scenes. We can fulfill part of their dreams and vision as we build Christ's Church here and abroad. The Savior invites our assistance in fulfilling His covenant promises in the end of time so we can help usher in His millennial reign. His covenant teachings in the Book of Mormon help us catch the vision and recognize the signs of His covenant promises which were recorded so long ago but are only

now finding complete fulfillment. May we do our part to bring these covenant promises into reality!

NOTES

1. For more insight on some of these horizontal covenants made between various individuals, see Victor L. Ludlow, "Secret Covenant Teachings of Men and the Devil in Helaman through 3 Nephi 8," in *The Book of Mormon: Helaman and 3 Nephi 1–8, According to Thy Word* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 265–82.

2. With the three citations mentioning the covenants made by Helaman's stripling warriors, it is not specifically stated whether these covenants were made with God (in a vertical dimension) or with Helaman (in a horizontal relationship); see Alma 53:17–18.

3. The following list shows the books where these 118 religious covenant citations are found: title page—1, 1 Nephi—18, 2 Nephi—23, Enos—2, Mosiah—14, Alma—13 (+3? see note 2 above), 3 Nephi—32, Mormon—9, Ether—2, and Moroni—4.

4. Other key chapters in the early history of the Book of Mormon which contain valuable covenant teachings are 2 Nephi 6, 9, 30; Alma 46; and 3 Nephi 5.

5. See also Stephen D. Ricks, "Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6," in *King Benjamin's Speech* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 254–60.

6. In 3 Nephi 20, the word *covenant* appears ten times, more often than in any other chapter in the Book of Mormon.

7. Toward the end of His discourse, Jesus will also quote all of chapter 54 of Isaiah (see 3 Nephi 22). Thus, we find almost two full chapters of Isaiah within the three chapters of Christ's Covenant People Discourse.

8. Later, important Book of Mormon teachings about covenants and promises to Israel in the last days are found in Mormon 5, 8; Ether 4, 13; and Moroni 7, 10.

PEACE THROUGH CHRIST

THE BOOK OF MORMON'S DIVINE PERSPECTIVE ON WAR

David Brent Marsh

LEAD STORIES ON THE EVENING NEWS almost daily report incidents of war and violence. Murder, bloodshed, and other acts of violent aggression are continually displayed in the visual, printed, and electronic media. This never-ending array of local and global hostilities can cause even the most faithful disciple of Christ to stand aghast. Shortly after the tragic events of 9/11/2001, President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “Occasions of this kind pull us up sharply to a realization that life is fragile, peace is fragile, [and] civilization itself is fragile.”¹

While sobering, these terrible incidents should not be surprising. The scriptures teach that in the last days Satan will “make war” (Revelation 12:17) with the faithful and that “peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion” (D&C 1:35). The Lord has made it clear that because of the abundance of iniquity “the love of men shall wax cold;” and hence those living in the last days will encounter “wars, and rumors of wars”

David Brent Marsh, a former Church Educational System instructor, is a religious educator living in Sandy, Utah.

(Joseph Smith–Matthew 1:23, 30). Moreover, ever-increasing wickedness emerges as a precursor to the prophesied time when “every man that will not take his sword against his neighbor must needs flee unto Zion for safety,” for “it shall be the only people that shall not be at war one with another” (D&C 45:68–69). President Hinckley declared, “We live in a season when fierce men do terrible and despicable things. We live in a season of war.”²

As war and violence draw closer to our nations, cities, and homes, disciples of Christ yearn for a sense of peace and safety. The Book of Mormon was brought forth in these latter days to provide inspired instruction and hope for disciples of Christ who live during times of war.

THE BOOK OF MORMON AND WAR

From the first chapters of Nephi, in which Lehi’s life was threatened (see 1 Nephi 1:20), to the final book of Moroni, in which those who would not deny Christ were put to death (see Moroni 1:2), disciples of Christ experienced many episodes of war. Assuredly, each generation experienced times of peace, but, with the exception of the generations immediately following the Savior’s visit to the Nephites, each generation underwent its share of violence, and the righteous were frequently required to defend themselves.

Of the 239 chapters in the Book of Mormon, 164 (68 percent) deal either wholly or partially with some kind of violence, including war, terrorism, murder, political conspiracies, secret combinations, threats, family collusions, and other hostilities.³ This perspective of the Book of Mormon begs the question: If the Book of Mormon is supposed to bring us to Christ, and if the writers were so concerned about using the space on the plates for “the things which are pleasing unto God,”⁴ why is so much of the book devoted to war?

Perhaps the simple answer is that we live in times of war and that we need divine understanding to help us live under those conditions. President Ezra Taft Benson stated, “From the Book of Mormon we learn how disciples of Christ live in times of war.”⁵ The Book of Mormon illustrates why wars occur, explains when war is

justified, portrays how the Lord delivers His disciples from war, shows how He provides relief for them during war, and explains why He allows some of His disciples to suffer and die.

WHY DO WARS OCCUR?

The Book of Mormon teaches that war, captivity, destruction, death, and dangerous circumstances come upon people “because of iniquity.”⁶ Lehi prophesied that those who live in the promised land “shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity” (2 Nephi 1:7). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power.”⁷ When the devil gains power or influence over people, at least two things happen: they seek for power over others, and they allow wickedness to flourish in their communities. Both bid war welcome.

Individuals or groups seeking power over others often engage in war and other forms of violence to accomplish their evil desires. For example, Amlici lost a contentious but legitimate election yet refused to relinquish his desire to reign over others. Consequently, he convinced his constituents to consecrate him king anyway. His first order of business was to command his new subjects to engage in war against their fellow Nephites. The result was a scene of carnage in which tens of thousands were killed. The river Sidon became a watery grave for many lifeless bodies, while the living were driven into the wilderness only to be devoured by wild and ravenous beasts (see Alma 2). Thousands suffered unnecessary violence because one man wanted power over others.

Amalickiah, another Nephite traitor, used deception to create war and cause countless deaths in his personal pursuit for power. He “was desirous to be a king,” and those who supported him were also “seeking for power” (Alma 46:4). However, Amalickiah was unable to accomplish his designs among the Nephites because of Moroni’s inspired military strategies (see Alma 46). Subsequently, he fled to the Lamanites with the intent to “place himself at their head and dethrone the king and take possession of the kingdom”

(Alma 47:8). By treachery, fraud, and murder, Amalickiah achieved his evil designs. Using flattery and lies, he incited the Lamanites against the Nephites, “for he was determined . . . to overpower the Nephites and to bring them into bondage” (Alma 48:4). Because of Amalickiah’s wickedness, the Nephite nation suffered war and violence for the next five years. Speaking of Amalickiah, Mormon noted, “We also see the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause to take place among the children of men” (Alma 46:9).⁸

While the Book of Mormon graphically portrays the tragic consequences of despots seeking for power over others, it also shows that war and violence come upon people who allow iniquity to go unchecked in their communities or nations.

Nephi taught that various groups of people were “destroyed from generation to generation according to their iniquities” (2 Nephi 25:9). King Limhi lamented, “Yea, I say unto you, great are the reasons which we have to mourn; for behold how many of our brethren have been slain, and their blood has been spilt in vain, and all because of iniquity. For if this people had not fallen into transgression the Lord would not have suffered that this great evil should come upon them” (Mosiah 7:24–25). Captain Moroni assured his people, “Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ, shall be trodden down and destroyed, until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions” (Alma 46:18). Mormon noted, “It has been [the Nephites’] quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions” (Alma 50:21).⁹

Why would God allow war and terror to come upon His own children whom He loves so much? Does He simply want to punish them? Again, the Book of Mormon provides divine insight. Mormon keenly observed, “And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him” (Helaman 12:3). The Lord knows that peace and happiness result when His

children remember Him and follow His ways. When they begin to forget Him, He calls after them. At first He sends prophets to warn them, but if they do not repent and return to Him through these more merciful means, He uses more exacting approaches.¹⁰ In essence, allowing wars among His children can be seen as the Lord's "last resort" to help them repent and return unto Him.

The Book of Mormon distinctly testifies that iniquity invites war. Whether it be a wicked individual seeking for power over others or the general wickedness of a nation forfeiting divine protection, war becomes a reality.

WHEN IS WAR JUSTIFIED?

The Lord condemned wars of aggression but also explained to the Nephites when they were justified in declaring war against others. He said, "Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies. . . . Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed" (Alma 43:46–47). Mormon also recorded the following: "Now the Nephites were taught to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood if it were necessary; yea, and they were also taught never to give an offense, yea, and never to raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives" (Alma 48:14). In our dispensation the Lord also explained to Joseph Smith when war is justified:

"Behold, this is the law I gave unto my servant Nephi, and thy fathers, Joseph, and Jacob, and Isaac, and Abraham, and all mine ancient prophets and apostles.

"And again, this is the law that I gave unto mine ancients, that they should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people, save I, the Lord, commanded them.

"And if any nation, tongue, or people should proclaim war against them, they should first lift a standard of peace unto that people, nation, or tongue;

"And if that people did not accept the offering of peace, neither

the second nor the third time, they should bring these testimonies before the Lord;

“Then I, the Lord, would give unto them a commandment, and justify them in going out to battle against that nation, tongue, or people.

“And I, the Lord, would fight their battles, and their children’s battles, and their children’s children’s, until they had avenged themselves on all their enemies, to the third and fourth generation.

“Behold, this is an ensample unto all people, saith the Lord your God, for justification before me” (D&C 98:32–38).

President Hinckley declared, “The terrible forces of evil must be confronted and held accountable for their actions,” and then he explained, “There are times when we must stand up for right and decency, for freedom and civilization, just as Moroni rallied his people in his day to the defense of their wives, their children, and the cause of liberty.”¹¹ Elder Russell M. Nelson also confirmed that the scriptures “strongly condemn wars of aggression but sustain obligations of citizens to defend their families and their freedoms.”¹²

In the Book of Mormon, the Lord clearly condemned wars that were intended to conquer others, but He also supported the right of His children to defend themselves against evil aggressors. The Book of Mormon also shows that when the people were righteous they were delivered by the power of God.

BEING DELIVERED BY THE POWER OF GOD

The Book of Mormon teaches that God delivers His disciples from war if they trust in Him and follow His ways.¹³ Nephi taught “that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20). He then proceeded to show how the Lord delivered his father from people who wanted to kill him (see 1 Nephi 2:1–3), delivered his family from the destruction of Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 2:11–14), delivered him and his brothers from Laban’s attempt to kill them (see 1 Nephi 3–4),

and delivered him from Laman's and Lemuel's attempts to cause him pain and suffering (see 1 Nephi 3:28–30; 7:16–19; 18:9–23).

Alma counseled Shiblon, “I would that ye should remember, that as much as ye shall put your trust in God even so much ye shall be delivered out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions, and ye shall be lifted up at the last day” (Alma 38:5). After gaining advantage over the Lamanite army, Moroni testified to Zerahemnah:

“But now, ye behold that the Lord is with us; and ye behold that he has delivered you into our hands. And now I would that ye should understand that this is done unto us because of our religion and our faith in Christ. And now ye see that ye cannot destroy this our faith.

“Now ye see that this is the true faith of God; yea, ye see that God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him, and unto our faith, and our religion; and never will the Lord suffer that we shall be destroyed except we should fall into transgression and deny our faith” (Alma 44:3–4).

During his abridgment, Mormon observed that “those who were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times, whilst thousands of their wicked brethren have been consigned to bondage, or to perish by the sword” (Alma 50:22).

Shortly after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C., President Hinckley declared, “Our safety lies in repentance. Our strength comes of obedience to the commandments of God.”¹⁴ Nephi stated, “But, behold, all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people shall dwell safely in the Holy One of Israel if it so be that they will repent” (1 Nephi 22:28). While the Book of Mormon demonstrates the Lord's ability and willingness to deliver those who repent and remember Him, it also shows how He provides relief for them when they are required to experience war.

RECEIVING RELIEF DURING WAR

A young Bosnian student who recently immigrated to the United States described what it was like growing up in her war-torn

country. She said, "You wouldn't be able to walk down the street and be safe, or be in your house and be safe. When you're sleeping, you're just thinking that . . . you could just die any second."¹⁵ Fear and anxiety naturally grip us during times of war and terror. Thoughts of violence and death can cause even the most affable person to become gloomy. But the Book of Mormon shows that disciples of Christ can receive relief and live with inner peace, happiness, and prosperity during times of war.

Perhaps in an effort to emphasize God's tender care for His disciples, Mormon placed two stories of relief and deliverance side by side. King Limhi and his people were brought into subjection to the Lamanites because of their own wickedness. During their captivity, the Lamanites "would smite them on their cheeks, and exercise authority over them; and began to put heavy burdens upon their backs" (Mosiah 21:3). But after Limhi's people humbled themselves and prayed to the Lord, He "began to soften the hearts of the Lamanites that they began to ease their burdens; yet the Lord did not see fit to deliver them out of bondage. And it came to pass that they began to prosper by degrees in the land" (Mosiah 21:15–16). The Lord's incremental relief came as they turned to Him, and eventually they were freed from their captors.

The very next chapter relates how Alma and his converts were relieved of their burdens and miraculously freed through God's power. Amulon, one of the former wicked leaders of Noah's priests and a tributary monarch under the Lamanites, was angry at Alma for his religious conversion through Abinadi's teaching (see Mosiah 24:9). Amulon persecuted Alma and his people by putting tasks on them and prohibiting them from praying. The record then states:

"And Alma and his people did not raise their voices to the Lord their God, but did pour out their hearts to him; and he did know the thoughts of their hearts.

"And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage.

"And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your

shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.

“And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord” (Mosiah 24:12–15).

Before long, “the Lord caused a deep sleep to come upon the Lamanites,” and Alma’s group departed for Zarahemla and freedom (see Mosiah 24:16–25).

The Nephites believed that “if they were faithful in keeping the commandments of God that he would prosper them in the land; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger; and also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them” (Alma 48:15–16). Referring to survivors of deadly natural disasters, Mormon again noted that “it was the more righteous part of the people who were saved, and it was they who received the prophets and stoned them not; and it was they who had not shed the blood of the saints, who were spared” (3 Nephi 10:12; see also 3 Nephi 9:13). In juxtaposition, Mormon also noted that people perished “by thousands in the more wicked parts of the land” (Helaman 11:6).

Jacob told the pure in heart that if they looked unto God with firmness of mind and prayed with faith that the Lord would “console you in your afflictions, and he will plead your cause, and send down justice upon those who seek your destruction.” He then added that they could “feast upon” God’s love (Jacob 3:1–2). Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, “Though living in a time of violence, we can have that inner peace that passeth understanding. Perplexing things will still happen, but, like Nephi, we can still know that God loves us, a felicitous and fundamental fact which can and will sustain us through so much!”¹⁶ Elder Russell M. Nelson said, “Peaceful—even prosperous—living can come to those who abide His precepts and

follow His pathway to peace.”¹⁷ Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin testified, “While [God] allows all of us to make choices that may not always be for our own or even others’ well-being, and while He does not always intervene in the course of events, He has promised the faithful peace even in their trials and tribulations.”¹⁸ President Ezra Taft Benson stated, “The Lord has made it very clear in the revelations that even though times become perilous, even though we be surrounded by temptation and sin, even though there be a feeling of insecurity, even though men’s hearts may fail them and anxiety fill their souls, if we only trust in God and keep his commandments we need have no fear.”¹⁹ In the midst of the “war on terrorism,” President Hinckley also promised “that whatever happens in the world, and I think none of us can foretell what might happen at this time, that God will be with us. He will watch over us. He will protect us. He will see that we are provided for. And we shall endure under His watchful care if we will be true and faithful and obedient and harken to His word.”²⁰

The Book of Mormon teaches that God blesses the faithful during episodes of affliction. It illustrates that God is merciful and, like a compassionate parent whose attention is amplified when a child is afflicted, He is anxious to succor His children during times of war.²¹ It is comforting to know that the Lord will bless His disciples with inner peace during war, but perhaps one of the most difficult things to understand is why some faithful disciples suffer and die as a result of war and other tragedies.

SUFFERING AND DYING AS A RESULT OF WAR AND OTHER TRAGEDIES

Suffering and death that result from war and other tragedies are harsh realities not easily accepted or understood, especially when they involve faithful disciples of Christ. Elder Maxwell reminded us that “the faithful will not be totally immune from the events on this planet.”²² President Hinckley also acknowledged that some of us “may even be called on to suffer in one way or another.”²³ The Book of Mormon preserves a few episodes of inhumane abuse and savage

slaughtering to help us understand why the Lord sometimes allows His disciples to suffer and die.

The wicked priests of Noah bound Abinadi “and scourged his skin with faggots, yea, even unto death” (Mosiah 17:13). Before dying, Abinadi testified, “I will suffer even until death, and I will not recall my words, and they shall stand as a testimony against you. And if ye slay me ye will shed innocent blood, and this shall also stand as a testimony against you at the last day” (Mosiah 17:10).

The wicked lawyers and judges of Ammonihah took the wives and children of religious converts and burned them and their scriptures. Alma and Amulek were bound and brought to the place of martyrdom so they could witness this savage massacre. “When Amulek saw the pains of the women and children who were consuming in the fire, he also was pained; and he said unto Alma: How can we witness this awful scene? Therefore let us stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames.” Alma responded, “The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day” (Alma 14:10–11). In his letter to Pahoran, Moroni makes this pointed remark: “For the Lord suffereth the righteous to be slain that his justice and judgment may come upon the wicked; therefore ye need not suppose that the righteous are lost because they are slain; but behold, they do enter into the rest of the Lord their God” (Alma 60:13).

After a devastating battle that left the bodies of thousands “moldering in heaps upon the face of the earth,” including some faithful disciples of Christ, the Book of Mormon records that the survivors “truly mourn for the loss of their kindred, yet they rejoice and exult in the hope, and even know, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are raised to dwell at the right hand of God, in a state of never-ending happiness” (Alma 28:11–12). Helaman

lamented the loss of “a vast number” of soldiers and tenderly declared, “We may console ourselves in this point, that they have died in the cause of their country and of their God, yea, and they are happy” (Alma 56:10–11; see also Alma 24:26).

We may not always understand why faithful disciples die during war and other tragedies, but the Book of Mormon makes it clear that, whether they die or survive, the righteous are happy. Modern technology allows us to witness the suffering and death of people all over the world. As we weep over the innocent and the righteous who are caught in destructive and deadly forces of war, violence, and natural disasters, perhaps we can appreciate even more the divine perspective the Lord provides in the Book of Mormon. It teaches hope, furnishes eternal perspective, and gives comfort to disciples of Christ.

CONCLUSION

The Book of Mormon was brought forth to bless those who live in a dispensation of worldwide violence. It explains why wars occur and when war is justified. It also testifies in unmistakable terms that the Lord delivers His disciples from war or provides relief for them during war, and it explains why some disciples are allowed to suffer and die. Ultimately, the Book of Mormon teaches disciples of Christ how to receive peace in their hearts, homes, and nations (see 2 Nephi 3:12). It is the preeminent instrument to bring us to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. By reading and pondering its divine teachings, we come to know the Savior and learn how to invite Him into our daily lives. The more Jesus Christ becomes the focus of our attention, the more peaceful our lives become. As President Howard W. Hunter promised, “If our lives and our faith are centered on Jesus Christ and his restored gospel, nothing can ever go permanently wrong.”²⁴

NOTES

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Times in Which We Live,” *Ensign*, November 2001, 73.

2. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Living in the Fulness of Times," *Ensign*, November 2001, 6.

3. The following is a list of chapters in the Book of Mormon that mention various kinds of violence: 1 Nephi 1–4, 7, 10–15, 17–19, 22; 2 Nephi 1, 4–10, 12–21, 23–28, 30; Jacob 2–4, 7; Enos 1; Jarom 1; Omni 1; Words of Mormon 1; Mosiah 1–3, 7, 9–14, 17–24, 27, 29; Alma 1–5, 7–11, 14–22, 24–31, 33, 35–38, 43–63; Helaman 1–16; 3 Nephi 1–10, 16, 21–22, 25, 27–28, 30; 4 Nephi 1; Mormon 1–8; Ether 2, 7–11, 13–15; Moroni 1, 9.

4. See 1 Nephi 6:3–5; 19:18; 2 Nephi 25:23, 26; 33:3–4; Jacob 1:2–4; Words of Mormon 1:3–9; Mormon 3:17–22; 5:12–15; Ether 8:26; Moroni 10:1.

5. Ezra Taft Benson, "The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion," *Ensign*, November 1986, 7.

6. See 2 Nephi 1:7; 25:9; Mosiah 7:24; Alma 45:14; 46:18, 21–22; 49:3; 50:21; 53:8–9; 59:11–13; 60:15–16; Helaman 4:6–11, 13; 11:6, 32–34; 13:30; 3 Nephi 9:2, 12.

7. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 181.

8. Incidents where someone sought for power over others through violent means: Alma 61:3–8; Helaman 1:1–13.

9. Scriptures that show wickedness invites war: Mosiah 11:20–25; Alma 46:21–22; 49:3; 53:8–9; 59:11–13; 60:15–16; Helaman 4:6–11, 13; 11:6, 32–37; 13:30; 3 Nephi 9:12.

10. Scriptures that teach how the Lord allows war and natural disasters to help us remember Him: 1 Nephi 17:33–40; 19:11; 2 Nephi 6:14–15; 25:9; 28:15–17; Mosiah 1:17; 7:20, 25, 29–33; 11:20–25; 23:21; Alma 62:39–41; 3 Nephi 9:1–13; 16:8–15; Ether 2:8–12; Deuteronomy 28:15–68; Leviticus 26:14–33; 1 Kings 9:1–9; 11:9–14; 24:2–3; 2 Kings 19:7; 24:2; Psalm 78:34; Jeremiah 1:15–16; 25:9, 16; 36:31; Ezekiel 20:26; Amos 4:6–11; Haggai 2:17; D&C 43:20–25; 88:81, 88–90; 98:19–22; 101:2–5.

11. Hinckley, "Times in Which We Live," 72.

12. Russell M. Nelson, "Blessed Are the Peacemakers," *Ensign*, November 2002, 40.

13. Scriptures that teach how the Lord delivered people from war and other dangerous circumstances: 1 Nephi 4:1–3; 13:16–19; 14:2; 2 Nephi 6:17; Omni 1:6–7; Mosiah 2:4; 7:33; 9–22; 11:26; 23:18; 24:10–25; 25:16; 27:16; Alma 5:4, 9; 9:10, 22; 14:12–29; 19:27; 26:29; 29:12; 31:38; 36:3, 27–29; 38:5; 43:48–53; 44:3–5; 45:1; 48:7–9, 14–16; 49:23, 28–30; 50:12–24; 53:10–15; 55:31; 56:6–8, 47–48; 57:21–27, 35; 58:9–12, 39–40; 60:20; 62:50; Helaman 7:20–23; 12:1–3; 13:12–14; 3 Nephi 3:15; 4:33; 9:13; 10:12–13; 22:14–15, 17; 28:20; Mormon 3:13, 15; Ether 2:12.

14. Hinckley, "Times in Which We Live," 74. See also Helaman 4:10–18, 20–26; 5:48–52 for incidents when repentance brought success to military maneuvers.

15. Channel 4 News interview by Chris Vanocur, aired 10 January 2003; written transcript in author's possession.

16. Neal A. Maxwell, "Encircled in the Arms of His Love," *Ensign*, November 2002, 18. See also 2 Nephi 2:2; Mosiah 24:14–15; Alma 31:38; 33:23; 36:3, 27; 50:22.

17. Nelson, "Blessed Are the Peacemakers," 41.

18. Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Finding a Safe Harbor," *Ensign*, May 2000, 59.

19. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, October 1950, 145–46.

20. Gordon B. Hinckley, "God Will Protect Us in These Perilous Times," *LDS Church News*, 22 February 2003, www.desnews.com.

21. See Mosiah 15:9; Alma 7:12; 3 Nephi 17:6–7.

22. Maxwell, "Encircled," 17.

23. Hinckley, "Times in Which We Live," 74.

24. Howard W. Hunter, *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 40.

“THAT I MIGHT DRAW
ALL MEN UNTO ME”

Brian K. Ray

OF THE MANY TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL OF Jesus Christ, certainly there is no truth more important or more sublime than the atonement of Jesus Christ. His infinite sacrifice is the crowning event of this earth’s existence—the veritable centerpiece of the plan of happiness.¹ The Book of Mormon plainly teaches that without Christ’s redeeming and rescuing role in the Father’s plan, mankind would remain “in a lost and in a fallen state” (1 Nephi 10:6). The prophet Jacob teaches this same principle in frightening terms—without the Atonement, all would be “subject to that angel who fell,” “in misery,” and caught in the “grasp of this awful monster,” even “death and hell” (2 Nephi 9:8–10).

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ gained the eternal victory and “delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell” (2 Nephi 9:19). By allowing His will to be “swallowed up in the will of the Father,” the Son is given power to redeem mankind from physical and spiritual death (Mosiah 15:7). As we gain a deeper understanding of His atonement, we learn that

Brian K. Ray is a seminary teacher in Mesa, Arizona.

Christ’s sacrifice was not limited to the effects of sin or the pangs of death. The Atonement is infinite and therefore infinitely far-reaching across the spectrum of human suffering. Because Jesus suffered “pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind” (Alma 7:11) as part of the “awful arithmetic of the Atonement,”² He is “filled with mercy” and knows perfectly “how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12).

The Book of Mormon adds precious enlightenment to our understanding of the Savior’s atonement and its infinite power to redeem. As witnesses of the wonder and beauty of the Atonement, both the prophet Nephi and the resurrected Lord Himself highlight one aspect of this crowning doctrine. The prophet Nephi taught that the Savior “doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life *that he may draw all men unto him*. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation” (2 Nephi 26:24; emphasis added). During His ministration to the Nephites, Christ explained: “And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, *that I might draw all men unto me*, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—and for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father *I will draw all men unto me*, that they may be judged according to their works” (3 Nephi 27:14–15; emphasis added).

Christ’s ability to draw us unto Him by virtue of His atonement and by His loving efforts is a sublime and beautiful doctrine. To “draw” means “to move or cause to move in a specified direction or to a specified position, as by leading.”³ Additionally, it means to carry, to bear, or to carry together.⁴ The Book of Mormon describes the two-fold nature of the Savior’s power and efforts in this regard: His capacity to draw all men physically and His capacity to draw all men spiritually.

DRAWN PHYSICALLY

Christ's gathering of Israel exemplifies the physical *drawing*. The Book of Mormon plainly teaches that Israel has been scattered, and that after their "long dispersion," they will be "gathered in . . . from the isles of the sea, and from the four parts of the earth" (2 Nephi 10:8). The Lord taught the Nephites that He would "remember the covenant which [He] made with [His] people" and that in His "own due time" the house of Israel would again be brought to the land of their inheritance (3 Nephi 20:29). This is no idle promise; this is a covenant made by the Good Shepherd to His sheep whom "he numbereth" (1 Nephi 22:25). Israel can rest assured that they will be "led up as calves of the stall" to their inheritance, where there not only will "be one fold and one shepherd; and he shall feed his sheep," but Jesus Himself will "reign in dominion, and might, and power, and great glory" (1 Nephi 22:24, 25).

As a part of the glorious events of this last dispensation, Israel will be *drawn* together physically to receive the blessings promised to them through the covenant. The prophet Nephi describes the Savior's caring labors to gather Israel as follows: "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.

"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 22:11–12).

Another aspect of Christ's power to *draw* physically is the Resurrection, one of the most hope-inspiring doctrines of the gospel. Mormon counseled all to "have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection" (Moroni 7:41). The prophet Jacob, after extending an invitation to "reconcile [ourselves] to the will of God" (2 Nephi 10:24), concluded: "Wherefore, may God raise you from death by the power of the resurrection, and also

from everlasting death by the power of the atonement, that ye may be received into the eternal kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 10:25).

The Resurrection is a gift to all men and women who kept their first estate. All born into mortality will be raised in immortality regardless of knowledge possessed or choices made. “Behold, there is a time appointed that *all* shall come forth from the dead. Now when this time cometh no one knows; but God knoweth the time which is appointed, . . . and it sufficeth me to know that this is the case—that there is a time appointed that *all* shall rise from the dead” (Alma 40:4–5; emphasis added). While we rejoice in the fact that Christ “breaketh the bands of death” and “that the grave shall have no victory” (Alma 22:14), the power of the Resurrection conquers even spiritual death, which is a separation from the presence of God. Samuel the Lamanite taught as follows:

“For behold, he surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord.

“Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual.

“But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord” (Helaman 14:15–17).

Sons and daughters of God will be *drawn* back into the Father’s presence as part of the Resurrection. For a portion, however, the privilege of remaining with Him will be short-lived. That is because of what awaits us in God’s presence subsequent to the Resurrection. The prophet Alma taught that after “all shall rise from the dead” we would “stand before God, and be judged according to [our] works” (Alma 11:41). Jesus will draw each of us through “the power of the redemption and the resurrection, which is in Christ, . . . to stand with shame and awful guilt before the bar of God” (Jacob 6:9). Alma

explained in perhaps the most detailed terms in scripture about the Resurrection and Judgment:

“Now, there is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death.

“The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt.

“Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil” (Alma 11:42–44).

DRAWN SPIRITUALLY

We are invited repeatedly throughout the scriptures to “come unto the Lord, the Holy One” (2 Nephi 9:41). We can take great comfort in knowing that we are not left alone in this spiritual journey, for Jesus promises that His “arm of mercy is extended towards [us]” (3 Nephi 9:14). His arm of mercy reaches out to all mankind to *draw* them to Him, to help them become like Him, and to help them be worthy to be “joint-heirs” with Him (Romans 8:17). The Book of Mormon powerfully describes, with some of the most evocative images of the Savior’s love for each of us, His efforts to draw us spiritually and bear us back to the Father.

Jesus promises to *bring* the faithful back to Him just as He “did *bring* [Israel] out of the land of Egypt” (1 Nephi 17:40; emphasis added). As a missionary, Ammon witnessed the Lord bringing the Lamanites back to Him and described it as follows: “Yea, they were encircled about with everlasting darkness and destruction; but

behold, he has *brought* them into his everlasting light, yea, into everlasting salvation” (Alma 26:15; emphasis added). Ammon knew deeply and personally of the Savior’s power to *draw* him back: “Behold, he did not exercise his justice upon us, but in his great mercy hath *brought* us over that everlasting gulf of death and misery, even to the salvation of our souls” (Alma 26:20; emphasis added). While we may not be considered “the very vilest of sinners” (Mosiah 28:4), as were Ammon and his brothers, we still find ourselves distant from God because of our sins, however minor they may be. Each of us, especially those under covenant, will feel the Savior reaching out to *bring* us back to Him. If we respond to His efforts and if we are faithful and repentant, then He will bless us and make our “garments spotless, that [we] may at last be *brought* to sit down . . . in the kingdom of heaven to go no more out” (Alma 7:25; emphasis added).

The prophet Nephi recognized that the Lord had great power to lead his family to the promised land just as He led Moses and the children of Israel out of Egypt. Nephi rehearsed the story of Moses to his brothers so they might recognize how the Lord continually leads His people, especially in spiritual matters (see 1 Nephi 17:13, 23–24, 38, 42). Nephi later testified of how the Lord had led him: “My God hath been my support; he hath *led* me through mine afflictions in the wilderness” (2 Nephi 4:20; emphasis added). It is interesting to note that Nephi does not say that the Lord led him through the wilderness, but that the Lord led him *through his afflictions*. We might ask ourselves: Where was the Lord leading him? Undoubtedly, the answer is that the Lord was drawing Nephi back to Himself, allowing Nephi, as He does with each of us, to be refined in the “furnace of affliction” (1 Nephi 20:10). We know that the Lord will not leave us in our current situation forever, however bright or bleak we perceive it to be. Instead, Christ is consistently the One “who *leadeth* thee by the way thou shouldst go” (1 Nephi 20:17; emphasis added). Jesus explained to the prophet Moroni that “whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good is of me; for good cometh of none save it be of me. I am the same that *leadeth* men to all good; he that will not believe my words will not believe me—that

I am; and he that will not believe me will not believe the Father who sent me. For behold, I am the Father, I am the light, and the life, and the truth of the world” (Ether 4:12; emphasis added).

Mormon and Moroni waded through some of the most painful and disheartening times described in scripture, their trials culminating in the destruction of their people. They were surrounded by a portion of God’s covenant people who absolutely refused to be drawn by and to their Redeemer. These prophets labored “without hope” because the Nephites refused to repent (Mormon 5:2). However, each was consoled in his testimony of the Atonement and the Lord’s power to draw them back to Him. On one occasion Mormon counseled Moroni: “My son, be faithful in Christ; and may not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death; but may Christ *lift thee up*, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever” (Moroni 9:25; emphasis added). By lifting us up, whether it be “at the last day” or merely lifted up from the day to day difficulties of mortality, the Savior will draw us to Him and with Him that we might “enter into his rest” (Alma 13:29).

In an answer to the humble pleadings of a distraught father, as well as the prayers of their people, the Lord sent an angel to correct Alma the Younger. After days of intense repentance in a comalike state, Alma awoke and testified of how the Lord had drawn him back. Alma exclaimed: “Nevertheless, after wading through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death, the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to *snatch* me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God.

“My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am *snatched*, and my soul is pained no more” (Mosiah 27:28–29; emphasis added).

The word *snatch* connotes a sudden or unexpected seizing or catching. Originally the word made reference to a “sudden snap or bite at something.”⁵ How comforting it is to know that when we face

our private and personal challenges, that when we feel that “the very jaws of hell . . . gape open the mouth wide after [us]” (D&C 122:7), our Savior has the power and the love to *snatch* us and *draw* us to Him. Though He may not remove our own individual “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7), for to do so may deprive us of necessary “experience” that “shall be for [our] good” (D&C 122:7), nevertheless He will be merciful to both strengthen us and *snatch* us from that which is “awful, sinful, and polluted” (Alma 26:17).

For a child that is hurt or frightened, few things could be more comforting than to be embraced by one whom he loves and who loves him. It is not difficult to imagine our Savior, filled with mercy and compassion, reaching out to *draw* us into His healing arms. This is the “whole meaning,” according to Amulek, and “the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance. And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and *encircles them in the arms of safety*” (Alma 34:14–16; emphasis added). Mormon lamented the fact that the Nephites “rejected that Jesus, who stood with *open arms* to receive [them]” (Mormon 6:17; emphasis added). In this time of great commotion as the second coming of the Lord draws near, those who suffer from fear or pain or any of the host of human sufferings can be *drawn* into the Savior’s “ample arm[s]”⁶ and “clasped in the arms of Jesus” (Mormon 5:11).

THE ONGOING LABOR TO DRAW

Our Savior is indomitable in His efforts to draw us back to Him. In the allegory of the olive tree, He asks the question, “Have I slackened mine hand?” His answer is plain: “Nay, . . . I have stretched forth mine hand almost all the day long” (Jacob 5:47). However, in spite of His unrelenting efforts on our behalf, He will not abrogate man’s agency. He will plead, entice, invite, and persuade, but He will never force or compel. “Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you. Yea, he saith: Come unto me

and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely” (Alma 5:33–34).

Some have been blessed by the personal ministry of the Lord and have been drawn to Him in the flesh, such as the Nephites who, at the behest of the resurrected Lord, came forward “one by one” to feel the prints in His hands, feet, and side (3 Nephi 11:15; see also 3 Nephi 17). Yet for the majority of God’s children, our Savior’s efforts will be much more subtle. Some will be invited by the voice of the Lord (see Alma 5:37–38, 60), while others will be “wrought upon” by the Holy Ghost (1 Nephi 13:12; see also Mosiah 5:2; Alma 16:16). In addition, some are tutored by the “wintry”⁷ doctrines such as a personal weakness (see Jacob 4:7; Ether 12:27, 37) or a chastening experience (see Mosiah 23:21–22; Helaman 12:3). Whatever the case, the perfect example of our Redeemer will draw us to Him. Nephi testified that Christ “set the example” for each of us. The prophet further taught that Jesus “said unto the children of men: Follow thou me. . . .

“And now, my beloved brethren, I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved.

“Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do” (2 Nephi 31:9–10, 16–17).

CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Book of Mormon, and His atonement is the central doctrine therein. His infinite sacrifice was the fruit of His love and selflessness, as well as His devotion to our Heavenly Father. Through the power of His atonement and because of His endless charity toward mankind, those who have been drawn spiritually to Jesus, becoming like Him through His atoning blood, will become heirs to the celestial kingdom. In the words of the prophet Jacob: “Wherefore, beloved brethren, be reconciled unto him through the atonement of Christ, his Only Begotten Son, and ye may obtain a resurrection, according to the power

of the resurrection which is in Christ, and be presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God, having faith, and obtained a good hope of glory in him before he manifesteth himself in the flesh” (Jacob 4:11).

NOTES

1. See Neal A. Maxwell, “Put Off the Natural Man and Come Off Conqueror,” *Ensign*, November 1990, 15.
2. Neal A. Maxwell, “Willing to Submit,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 73.
3. *Webster’s II New Riverside Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), s.v. “draw.”
4. Robert K. Barnhart, ed., *Chamber’s Dictionary of Etymology* (New York: Larousse Kingfisher, Chambers, 1988), s.v. “draw.”
5. *Chamber’s Dictionary of Etymology*, s.v. “snatch.”
6. “Lean on My Ample Arm,” *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 120.
7. Neal A. Maxwell, “Irony: The Crust on the Bread of Adversity,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 62.

"FOR A WISE PURPOSE"

Robert J. Matthews

SOME FORTY YEARS AGO BRIGHAM YOUNG University inaugurated a "Last Lecture" series. The idea was that if a professor knew that he or she was giving the last lecture on a particular subject, the professor would present the most persuasive arguments and important concepts on that subject. I don't know that this will be my last lecture, but I have organized it on that premise. Although I have sought the help of the Holy Spirit, I alone am responsible for what I am about to say.

The title of this essay is "For a Wise Purpose," a phrase used several times in the Book of Mormon and in the Doctrine and Covenants (see 1 Nephi 9:3–6; Words of Mormon 1:3–5; Alma 37:2, 8, 14; D&C 5:9), and I will note in the discussion that the "wise purpose" has several applications and includes the entire message of the Book of Mormon. This wise purpose, the Lord has testified, is to bear witness of the Savior and to teach with purity the doctrines and

Robert J. Matthews is an emeritus professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

prophecies that His ancient covenant people once had (see D&C 3:16–20).

A DUAL RECORD

The Lord commanded Nephi to make two separate accounts of the history of his people on separate collections of gold plates. One record would be known as the large plates, the other as the small plates. Forging heavy gold plates by hand and engraving characters upon them is difficult work by itself and was increased by two records. Apparently the Lord did not tell Nephi all the reasons why double coverage was necessary but did tell him it was for a wise purpose known to God and would be made manifest to future generations (see 1 Nephi 9:5–6; 19:3; Alma 37:12, 14). A thousand years later, while editing a final version of the records, the prophet Mormon was inspired to include the original small plates of Nephi along with Mormon’s own abridged version of the large plates. Mormon said he acted by inspiration for a “wise purpose” that was known to God but not to him (Words of Mormon 1:7). When Mormon’s son, Moroni, hid the records in the Hill Cumorah, he preserved the double record for future use. Joseph Smith obtained those plates in September 1827 from the same Hill Cumorah.

THE “LOST” MANUSCRIPT

Persons familiar with the translation and printing of the Book of Mormon know of the loss of 116 pages of manuscript in 1828, which involved the Prophet’s scribe, Martin Harris of Palmyra, New York. We call it the “lost manuscript,” but in truth it was the stolen manuscript, taken by persons attempting to destroy the holy work that God had called Joseph Smith to do. The 116 pages were Joseph Smith’s translation from the plates of Mormon, which began with a book of Lehi, and covered a period of approximately 470 years, from 600 B.C. to 130 B.C., a significant loss. These dates are determined by the length of the small plates from 1 Nephi 1 to the beginning of the book of Mosiah.

It was not the gold plates that were stolen, only the Prophet

Joseph's translation. He could have translated the record a second time, but the Lord counseled him not to do so and explained that a remedy had been provided centuries ago by the Lord in requiring the inclusion of the small plates. The remedy was to use a translation of the more spiritual small plates of Nephi in place of the translation of Mormon's more secular record. The small plates began with the book of Nephi, whereas the stolen portion began with a book of Lehi. As a result of this substitution, the book of Lehi does not occur in the printed Book of Mormon. Two revelations from the Lord giving the above directions to the Prophet Joseph are published in the Doctrine and Covenants as sections 3 and 10.

The first edition of the Book of Mormon, published in March 1830, in Palmyra, contained the following statement written by Joseph Smith as part of a preface:

“To the Reader—

“ . . . I would inform you that I translated, by the gift and power of God, and caused to be written, one hundred and sixteen pages, the which I took from the Book of Lehi, which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon; which said account, some person or persons have stolen and kept from me, notwithstanding my utmost exertions to recover it again—and being commanded of the Lord that I should not translate the same over again, for Satan had put it into their hearts to tempt the Lord their God, by altering the words, that they did read contrary from that which I translated and caused to be written; and if I should bring forth the same words again, or, in other words, if I should translate the same over again, they would publish that which they had stolen, and Satan would stir up the hearts of this generation, that they might not receive this work: but behold, the Lord said unto me, I will not suffer that Satan shall accomplish his evil design in this thing: therefore thou shalt translate from the plates of Nephi, until ye come to that which ye have translated, which ye have retained; and behold ye shall publish it as the record of Nephi; and thus I will confound those who have altered my words. I will not suffer that they shall destroy my work; yea, I will shew unto them that my

wisdom is greater than the cunning of the Devil. Wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, I have, through his grace and mercy, accomplished that which he hath commanded me respecting this thing. . . .

“The Author”

It must have been a painful frustration to those Palmyra pirates when they opened their first copy of the Book of Mormon, only to find that they, as the servants of Satan, had been outmaneuvered by the God of Joseph Smith.

Marvelous as this Palmyra event is, the wise purpose of the Lord extends much further to include the entire message of the Book of Mormon, especially its witness of Jesus Christ. It is concerning some of the precise doctrines preserved in the Book of Mormon that I will speak in the remainder of this essay.

ANOTHER WITNESS OF JESUS CHRIST

The Book of Mormon affirms that God has a plan of happiness for mankind; that mortal life is a probation; that individual, intelligent life continues after the death of the mortal body; that every person’s spirit and body will be permanently reunited in a resurrection and receive a just judgment of God according to one’s works. This plan is operative only because of Jesus Christ.

The central theme of the Book of Mormon is that Jesus Christ is mankind’s only source for salvation. The book presents 101 name-titles, each of which defines Jesus’ character and redeeming mission. These 101 name-titles are repeated for a total of 3,925 times.¹ The witness for Christ flows continually throughout the entire book, and of 239 chapters, only six do not mention the Lord. These are Mosiah chapters 9 and 22; Alma chapters 51 and 52; and Helaman chapters 1 and 2, dealing with wars and civil government.

In the modern world there is growing rejection of Jesus Christ as the divine Redeemer. It is a sophisticated, intellectual, and sociological approach, generally denying Christ’s godhood, His miracles, and His physical resurrection from the tomb. Many persons of learning seriously question if Jesus Christ was a real person who

lived on this earth. They speak of the Jesus of history as being different from the Jesus of faith—in other words, the Jesus of the Bible did not actually exist, was not divine, performed no miracles, did not make an atonement with His precious blood, and did not rise from the dead in a resurrection nor conquer death and sin for mankind. Many of these faithless views are promoted by pastors and teachers in traditional Christian churches of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.² It appears that their doctrinal foundation has crumbled, even though they have a Bible in the pulpit. With many, the Bible no longer has divine authenticity. The Lord knew that this rejection of Jesus and of the Bible would occur, and therefore He sent the Book of Mormon as a fresh, second witness of the real Jesus Christ and the real Bible (see D&C 3:16–20; 10:57–63; 1 Nephi 13:32–36).

Because of the plain language of the Book of Mormon, it is in many ways a stronger, more revealing, and particular testament for Christ than the present New Testament is. It also shows that the prophets from the time of Adam were Christian prophets and that every dispensation was a Christian dispensation, with the same gospel, same ordinances, and same plan of salvation centered in Christ.

The following Book of Mormon statements about Jesus Christ are definitive, more so, I think, than the Bible. When Book of Mormon prophets spoke of Christ they often used superlatives, absolutes, and ultimates—the most, the greatest, the only, and so forth. They also set forth great contrasts, as you will notice.

THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST

The prophet Alma said: “There be many things to come; and behold, there is one thing which is of more importance than they all—. . . the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people. . . . He shall be born of Mary, . . . she being a virgin, . . . [who shall] bring forth . . . the Son of God” (Alma 7:7, 10).

Centuries earlier, Nephi reported that he had seen in vision a most beautiful and fair virgin “in the city of Nazareth” and that an

angel told him the virgin “is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh.” He also saw “the virgin . . . bearing a child in her arms.” The angel said, “Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the eternal Father!” (1 Nephi 11:13, 18, 20–21). Nephi also beheld that “the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men” is made manifest in the coming of the Son of God to earth and is possible only by the “condescension of God.” This love of God is described as “the most desirable above all things” and “the most joyous to the soul” (1 Nephi 11:16, 22–23).

Why the emphasis on Jesus, above all others? It is because only Jesus can give that which mankind most desperately needs and which men are totally unable to provide for themselves. Only Jesus could conquer death and sin, because He alone, of all our Father’s spirit children, is a God. The wonderfully brave Abinadi said that all the prophets have taught that “God himself” (Mosiah 13:34) would come down among men and make the Atonement. Alma said that “God himself atoneth for the sins of the world” (Alma 42:15).

AN INFINITE GOD

Book of Mormon prophets repeatedly use the word *infinite* when speaking of Jesus. Nephi said that the Atonement “is infinite for all mankind” (2 Nephi 25:16). The perceptive Amulek said: “For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice.

“Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another. . . . therefore there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world” (Alma 34:10–12).

And the inspired theologian Jacob explained that “it must needs be an infinite atonement” or it could not redeem either man’s body or his spirit (2 Nephi 9:7). All of the foregoing passages place Jesus in the most preeminent status of any person ever to live on this earth.

What would the consequences be for the human family if no atonement were made? Nephi and Amulek both said that without the Atonement all mankind would “perish” (2 Nephi 11:6; Alma 34:9). But what does “perish” mean in this context? Jacob, the great doctrinarian, explained that in such a case, bodies would be “laid down to rot and to crumble to . . . mother earth, to rise no more,” and our spirits would “become devils . . . to be shut out from the presence of our God . . . in misery” forever. In gratitude, Jacob cries out, “O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster . . . death and hell” (2 Nephi 9:7, 9–10).

THE ONLY SAVIOR

Just how dependent are we upon Jesus? Was there an alternate plan? A backup redeemer? The New Testament seems to answer these questions with Peter’s eloquent words spoken a few weeks after Jesus’ death and resurrection: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Likewise, Paul said there is no other foundation but Christ (see 1 Corinthians 3:11). I once quoted Peter’s words to some friends who were wondering if there might have been an alternate emergency plan and a backup savior. I thought Peter’s words would convince them that Jesus is the One and Only, but I discovered that neither Peter’s nor Paul’s words were convincing to them. Their response was that since Peter’s and Paul’s statements were made after Christ’s atoning sacrifice, they had no bearing on whether or not there had been an alternate plan beforehand. I came to appreciate the greater clarity and definition of the Book of Mormon on this matter. For example, Nephi wrote almost the identical thought as Peter, but he did it more than five hundred years before Peter said it and therefore before Jesus came to earth (see 2 Nephi 31:21).

King Benjamin left no wiggle room in his definition of the plan, and he said it 124 years before Jesus was born: “And moreover, I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given nor any other way

nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:17). And “the atonement . . . was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world. And this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you” (Mosiah 4:7–8).

THE FALL AND THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST

Another essential doctrine in the Book of Mormon is the inseparable connection between the fall of Adam and the atonement of Jesus Christ. The severe, intense, and necessary consequences of the Fall are explained in much greater detail in the Book of Mormon than in the Bible. Genesis has a brief account of the transgression of Adam and Eve (chapter 3) but develops no clear doctrine of the Fall. After the fifth chapter of Genesis, Adam is seldom mentioned in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, only Paul discusses the doctrine of the Fall and its relation to the Atonement, and even he does it briefly. Beyond Genesis the Bible mentions Adam only twelve times, and some of these are one-word entries in genealogical lists. In sharp contrast, the Book of Mormon abounds in passages about Adam and the Fall, and Adam is mentioned by name twenty-five times, mostly in doctrinal discussions about the Fall and the Atonement.

Who in the Book of Mormon taught the doctrine of the Fall? No less than Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, King Benjamin, Abinadi, both Almas, Ammon, Aaron, Amulek, Samuel the Lamanite, Mormon, Moroni, and the brother of Jared. These prophets also cite Zenock, Zenos, and Neum. The following passages illustrate the particular clarity of the Book of Mormon. The great visionary Lehi explained that without the Fall, Adam and Eve would have had no children, which is a major doctrinal statement because it testifies that the Fall was a necessary action (see 2 Nephi 2:23). Lehi also said that

without the Fall “all things . . . must have remained forever” without death (2 Nephi 2:22), which is another major doctrinal declaration.

Lehi continued: “But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall” (2 Nephi 2:24–26). These three statements by Lehi place the Fall as an essential step in the plan of salvation, and they also stand against the theory of organic evolution as man’s origin.

King Benjamin explained: “For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19).

And Moroni gave this tidy summary: “Behold, [God] created Adam, and by Adam came the fall of man. And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ, even the Father and the Son; and because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man” (Mormon 9:12).

RESURRECTION: THE GREATEST MIRACLE

Jesus convincingly demonstrated his physical resurrection by showing His body to about 2,500 persons and asking them to touch it. In a dramatic scene, the Father spoke from the sky and introduced Jesus as His Beloved Son as Jesus came down and stood before the people. Jesus declared that He was the Christ and then said:

“Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

“And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one

until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come.

“And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying:

“Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him” (3 Nephi 11:14–17).

Other men could teach doctrine and administer ordinances, but only Jesus could atone and conquer death. He came in person to assure the people that the Resurrection was real and that He was real. Who taught the doctrine of resurrection in the Book of Mormon? Nearly every prophet that is quoted in it, the same prophets who taught about the Fall (see Mosiah 13:33–35).

SAVED ONLY THROUGH THE MERITS OF CHRIST

Lehi declared: “There is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8). Nephi taught that man must rely “wholly upon the merits” of Christ (2 Nephi 31:19). Ammon said that our great God has “taken away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son” (Alma 24:10). Samuel the Lamanite testified that remission of sins comes “through his merits” (Helaman 14:13). And Moroni said that we must rely “alone upon the merits of Christ” (Moroni 6:4).

IMMEDIATE BLESSINGS

Salvation is set in motion, and as soon as a person believes in Jesus and repents of sin, the blessings of the gospel begin to be felt. King Benjamin’s people immediately felt great joy, peace of conscience, remission of sins, and a mighty change of heart because of their exceeding faith in Jesus Christ (see Mosiah 4:3, 26; 5:1–4; see also Alma 34:31). When Alma was racked with spiritual pain because of his many sins, he remembered what his father had said about Jesus’ atonement (note Alma’s use of contrast):

“Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

“And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

“And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!

“Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy” (Alma 36:18–21).

Alma testified that the Lord supported him through trials of every kind and also gave him joy in his labors (see Alma 36:37). All these are examples of the love of God that comes through Jesus Christ.

THE KEYSTONE OF DOCTRINE

We see how forcefully the Book of Mormon teaches the points of Christ’s doctrine, not in competition to the Bible but as a witness for the truth of the Bible. If a person believes one record, he should believe both records (see Mormon 7:8–9). This witness in support of the Bible is one of the Lord’s wise purposes in making the Book of Mormon available.

The Prophet Joseph Smith spoke of the Book of Mormon as the “keystone of our religion.”³ I suppose it is the keystone because it is definite, it sets the standard, and it holds the fundamental doctrines in place, not allowing multiple interpretations or room to hedge. Without it, the blind lead the blind, or we might say, the bland lead the bland. Elder Orson Pratt described it perfectly: “The nature of the message in the Book of Mormon is such, that if true, no one can possibly be saved and reject it; if false, no one can possibly be saved and receive it.”⁴

PRECISE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

By divine direction, Father Lehi declared that wicked Jerusalem would be destroyed, many Jews would be slain, and others would be taken captive to Babylon. Before the destruction, the Lord led Lehi and his family out of Jerusalem to the Western Hemisphere, where he learned by vision that the word of the Lord was verified and Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians (see 1 Nephi 1:12–14, 18–20; 2 Nephi 1:4; 6:8; see also 2 Nephi 25:9).

One of Mormon’s inspired editorial accomplishments was to show that the word of the Lord spoken by His chosen prophets is always fulfilled to the letter. Mormon makes certain that the reader knows that the prophecies of Alma and Amulek concerning the destruction of the wicked city Ammonihah were completely fulfilled (see Alma 9:12, 19; 10:22–23; 16:1–3, 9–12). Likewise, with much detail, Mormon rehearses Abinadi’s fiery prophecies that wicked King Noah would be killed, that the priests of Noah would put people to death by fire, and that a curse would come upon the land, which would be infested with sorceries, witchcrafts, and magics. Mormon shows that all of these pronouncements were categorically fulfilled (see Mosiah 13:10; 17:13–20; Alma 25:7–12; Mormon 1:18–19). So readers will not fail to get the point, Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni use literary devices such as “behold, I will show unto you that” or “thus we see that.”⁵

Father Lehi’s prophecies of prosperous times for his posterity when they were righteous, but also terrible troubles if they became wicked, were literally fulfilled several times, as Mormon is careful to remind the reader (see 2 Nephi 1:5–12; Alma 9:13–22; 50:19–23). Mormon also records the fulfillment of the prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite of a night without darkness at Christ’s birth and three days with nothing but darkness at his death, accompanied by earthquakes, storms, and tumults, and also of tools and weapons becoming “slippery” and hard to maintain (see Helaman 13:17–31; 14:2–28; Mormon 1:18–19; 2:10). The marvelously persistent Samuel also prophesied that many Saints would be resurrected after Jesus’ resurrection. This was literally fulfilled. When Jesus visited the people, knowing that the fulfillment was not recorded in the

sacred, official record, He commanded that the exact fulfillment be entered into the books (see 3 Nephi 23:7–13).

PROPHECIES CONCERNING CHRIST

The most significant prophecies fulfilled were the birth of Jesus Christ and His miracles, the Atonement, Resurrection, and His visit to the Western Hemisphere. Many vocal unbelievers said it “was not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come,” and they planned to put to death those who believed in the prophecies. It was Satan who planted these doubts in their minds (see Helaman 16:17–23). Mormon shows that the prophecies were literally fulfilled and tells us that the voice of the Lord Jesus came to Nephi, saying: “On the morrow come I into the world, to show unto the world that I will fulfill all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets . . . from the foundation of the world” (3 Nephi 1:13–14). The sign of Christ’s birth was given, and the unbelievers were frustrated. Thirty-four years later, the special signs of Christ’s death were given; darkness, earthquakes, storms, and tumult occurred, and many people were slain. Faithful and industrious Mormon is careful to record all these things in detail and then gives this explanation and warning: “And now, whoso readeth, let him understand; he that hath the scriptures, let him search them, and see and behold if all these deaths and destructions by fire, and by smoke, and by tempests, and by whirlwinds, and by the opening of the earth to receive them, and all these things are not unto the fulfilling of the prophecies of many of the holy prophets” (3 Nephi 10:14).

Other passages attesting to the exact fulfillment of prophecy are found in the Words of Mormon 1:4; Mormon 8:22; Moroni 10:28; and 3 Nephi 23:1–3. I believe that one of the wise purposes of the Book of Mormon is its witness to the fulfillment of prophecy.

AN INSPIRED PRONOUNCEMENT CONCERNING THE BIBLE

By heavenly visions and the guidance of a holy angel, Nephi was shown what would happen to the record of the Jews, consisting of

the writings of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament Apostles. This inspired pronouncement about the Bible is recorded in 1 Nephi 13:21–42 and 14:23–27, with these declarations:

1. The Bible, containing the covenants of the Lord and the fullness of the gospel, was originally plain and easy to understand (see 1 Nephi 13:21–24; 14:23–27).
2. This Jewish Bible was deliberately altered by the great and abominable Gentile church, which took “many parts which are plain and most precious,” “many covenants,” and much of the gospel out of “the book” (1 Nephi 13:26, 28; see Mormon 8:33).
3. Alterations to the text were made deliberately to “pervert the right ways of the Lord” (1 Nephi 13:27).
4. The alterations were made early, for it was after the Bible was altered that it went to “all the nations of the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:29).
5. Because many precious parts are “kept back” and taken out of the Bible and out of the gospel, many persons “stumble” and are in an “awful state of blindness” (1 Nephi 13:29, 32).
6. To rescue the world from this spiritual blindness, the Lord will bring the Book of Mormon and “other books” to “make known the plain and precious things that have been taken away” from the Bible (1 Nephi 13:39–40).
7. The Book of Mormon and the “other books” will establish the truth of the original Bible (see 1 Nephi 13:39–42).

Deliberate alterations can be done quickly and early and are more destructive than accidental changes because they target doctrinal passages and are cleverly done so that the loss to the passage is not abruptly noticeable.

A LESSON FROM THE LOST MANUSCRIPT

It is my experience that many members of the Church do not realize how severely the Bible has been altered. Some have said to me that they do not think that the Lord would permit sacred

scripture to be altered by evil and designing people. They should look to the Book of Mormon for help on this point. Not only does it say that the early Bible manuscripts were deliberately altered by abominable persons, but it provides us a parallel by the theft, changing, and loss of the 116 pages of the book of Lehi. Believers in the Book of Mormon and the history of Joseph Smith should have no difficulty accepting that early manuscripts of the Bible were severely changed and reduced in content, since our Book of Mormon went through the same type of attack. If 116 pages can be lost in less than a year, what could happen to a Bible in three or four centuries? Thieves altering scripture in Palmyra were typical of other thieves, at other times, in other lands, tampering with sacred biblical scripture. Judging from the many repeated warnings from the Lord not to “add to” or “take from” the scriptures, mankind seems to have a strong tendency to do just that. I have noted seventeen such references.⁶ Satan hates good scripture, and it is part of his long war against Christ to attack the scriptures that testify of Christ in an attempt to destroy His divinity, mock His miracles, and rescind His resurrection. The Great Apostasy of the past nineteen centuries left the world without an adequate church, without an adequate Bible, and without an adequate body of doctrine. In all these cases, new revelation was necessary to recover what was lost. In my own opinion, the Bible has been ravaged much more than most of us realize, yet it still conveys the basic truth that Jesus is the Messiah, although many necessary details are missing.

The Book of Mormon repeatedly speaks of the gold plates being hidden in the earth for safekeeping (see 1 Nephi 13:35; 2 Nephi 27:22; 4 Nephi 1:48–49; Mormon 2:17; 5:12; 6:6; 8:4, 14; Ether 4:3; 5:11; title page, first paragraph). Thus hidden, no human could alter or destroy the records, and they were preserved in the original sense in which they were written. The Book of Mormon had to be protected from the loss of clarity that the Bible has gone through so it could do what the Lord in His wisdom purposed it to do—to be a witness for the real Christ and for the real Bible.

THE BOOK OF MORMON
AS A WITNESS FOR THE BIBLE

To faithful Nephi, the Lord declared that He speaks “the same words to one nation like unto another” and “they shall write it” (2 Nephi 29:8, 12). Unless the Bible and the Book of Mormon had the same points of doctrine, one could not be a valid witness for the other. Thus, we conclude that originally the Bible was as doctrinally precise as the Book of Mormon is. The Bible is still wonderful but less clear or complete than it once was. I think it an insult to the biblical prophets and Apostles if we suppose that they did not explain the doctrines and ordinances of the gospel with greater precision than appears in present-day Bibles. As a divinely revealed original record, the Book of Mormon deserves to be used by scholars and laymen alike as a major documentary source for understanding the original doctrine of the Bible. Surely the Lord expects us to do this. Surely it is one of His wise purposes.

CONCLUSION

The message of the Book of Mormon is weightier than the gold plates on which it was engraved and is the keystone of doctrine in the Church. The wise purpose of the Lord in causing the book to be written thousands of years ago, then hidden in the earth to be given to the world in the last days, is declared by the Lord Himself in Doctrine and Covenants 3:16–20:

“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—

“And this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites. . . .

“And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;

“And that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their

fathers, and that they might know the promises of the Lord, and that they may believe the gospel and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ, and be glorified through faith in his name, and that through their repentance they might be saved.”

According to this declaration from the Lord, salvation would not come to our generation without the Book of Mormon.

NOTES

1. Susan Easton Black, *Finding Christ through the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 16.

2. The following is a sampling of the many publications that demonstrate the current abandonment of the Bible as an authentic record. The authors are for the most part ministers of religion, scholars, and seminarians: George Herbert Betts, *Beliefs of Seven Hundred Ministers and Their Meaning for Religious Education* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1929); Walter Russell Bowie, *The Story of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1934); John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1977); Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover, The Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993); C. F. Rehnborg, *Jesus and the New Age of Faith* (Buena Park, Calif.: C. F. Rehnborg Literary Foundation, 1955).

3. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 194.

4. Orson Pratt, “Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon,” in *Orson Pratt’s Works* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1945), 107.

5. See 1 Nephi 16:29; 17:3; Mosiah 23:23; Alma 3:19; 24:19, 27, 30; 26:37; 28:13, 14; 46:8; Ether 2:9; 14:25.

6. See Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:5–6; Jeremiah 36:1–32; Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 11:53; 2 Corinthians 2:17; 2 Peter 3:15–16; 3 John 1:9–10; Revelation 22:18–19; 1 Nephi 13:20–41; 14:20–27; Mormon 8:33; D&C 10:1–45; 6:27; 20:35; 68:34; Moses 1:23, 40–41.

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