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

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

Learning to Love the Book of Mormon

Updated August 2013 to February 2014

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

President Benson would later write:

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

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

Further:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Michael J. Preece

The Second Book of Nephi

An account of the death of Lehi. Nephi's brethren rebel against him. The Lord warns Nephi to depart into the wilderness. His journeyings in the wilderness, and so forth.

In the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, the title of the Second Book of Nephi was simply designated as "the Book of Nephi." Later Oliver Cowdery realized that there was more than one book of Nephi which led him to insert the word *second*. It is easily identifiable on the original manuscript, as it is written with considerably heavier ink, providing evidence that the insertion was made on another occasion (Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon, Evidence from the Original Manuscript" in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited, The Evidence for Ancient Origins*).

The Book of Mormon is a primary source of doctrine for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and 2 Nephi is one of the most doctrinally rich books in the Book of Mormon.

John W. Welch has found much in the first four chapters of 2 Nephi that is compatible with ancient Israelite family laws and customs. He has referred to these four chapters as "Lehi's last will and testament" (*The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft and Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University], 1989, 62).

Chapter Outline of 2 Nephi

A brief outline of 2 Nephi, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

2 Nephi 1-4 Father Lehi counsels and blesses each of his sons.

2 Nephi 2 Lehi's counsel to his son Jacob includes teachings on the atonement.

2 Nephi 5 Nephi and his followers separate from the Lamanites and move to the land of Nephi.

2 Nephi 6-10 Jacob delivers an important two-day sermon to the Nephites.

2 Nephi 7-8 Isaiah 50-51

2 Nephi 9 Jacob's teachings include teachings on the atonement.

2 Nephi 12-24 Isaiah 2-14

2 Nephi 27-30 Nephi prophesies of latter-day apostasy, coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and restoration of the gospel.

2 Nephi 27 Isaiah 29

2 Nephi 31 Baptism

2 Nephi Chapter 1

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 1-4 Father Lehi counsels and blesses each of his sons.

2 Nephi 1:13-16 Father Lehi's counsel to his rebellious descendants: O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe. Awake! and arise from the dust, and hear the words of a trembling parent, whose limbs ye must soon lay down in the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveler can return; a few more days and I go the way of all the earth. But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love. And I desire that ye should remember to observe the statutes and the judgments of the Lord; behold, this hath been the anxiety of my soul from the beginning.

Sometime after the arrival of Lehi's colony in the promised land, and possibly just shortly before Lehi's death, Lehi called together the entire community to give them a final blessing. Chapter 1 contains Lehi's final warnings and admonitions to his sons, to the sons of Ishmael, to Zoram, and to all their posterity. This chapter confirms the teaching that the Americas are a land choice above all other lands given by covenant to Lehi and his posterity forever and also to all others that the Lord would bring. The land will continue prosperous and free only on the condition that its inhabitants keep the commandments of God.

1 And now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had made an end of teaching my brethren, our father, Lehi, also spake many things unto them, and rehearsed unto them, how great things the Lord had done for them in bringing them out of the land of Jerusalem.

verse 1 “after I, Nephi, had made an end of teaching my brethren” From 1 Nephi 19:8 through the end of 1 Nephi 22, Nephi discoursed to his brothers on the coming and the ministry of the Savior and the scattering and gathering of Israel.

2 And he spake unto them concerning their rebellions upon the waters, and the mercies of God in sparing their lives, that they were not swallowed up in the sea.

verse 2 The “rebellions upon the waters,” of course, refers to the irreverent and probably lascivious behavior of Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael during the trip over the ocean to the promised land, reported in 1 Nephi 18:9-20.

3 And he also spake unto them concerning the land of promise, which they had obtained—how merciful the Lord had been in warning us that we should flee out of the land of Jerusalem.

4 For, behold, said he, I have seen a vision, in which I know that Jerusalem is destroyed; and had we remained in Jerusalem we should also have perished.

verse 4 Nephi is quoting his father Lehi here and will continue to do so intermittently through 2 Nephi 4:12.

“I have seen a vision” When and where did Lehi have this vision? Was it in the wilderness? In the land of promise? At any time following his vision in the first year of Zedekiah’s reign, 597 BC, Lehi could have factually proclaimed, “I have seen a vision in which I know that Jerusalem is destroyed.” Apparently during that original vision, Lehi learned of Jerusalem’s eventual fate. He did not need another vision to confirm Jerusalem’s destruction (see 1 Nephi 5:4). Nephi’s brother Jacob would later have a similar vision which is reported in 2 Nephi 6:8. Nephi also will yet mention the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Nephi 25:6-10).

The destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon is recorded in the Bible in 2 Kings 25 and took place about 586 BC. Again, see the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the Time of Lehi*.

5 But, said he, notwithstanding our afflictions, we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever, and also all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord.

verse 5 A point to ponder: When we consider the concept of a “land of promise,” a covenant land belonging to the tribe of Joseph, to which specific land does this title apply? North America? Central America? South America? The entire western hemisphere? Certainly some prophecies seem to apply more to North America, specifically to the United States of America—especially those prophecies which have to do with the “great Gentile nation” and the restoration of the gospel and the latter-day gathering of Israel and bringing forth of the Book of Mormon. Perhaps, though, we ought to be careful about restricting our notion of the promised land to North America, especially since it is likely that the land inhabited by the immediate descendants of Lehi was Central America, and not North America.

“the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever” What is the duration of this covenant agreement? For how long is it binding? For a century or two? For a dispensation or two? For the duration of the existence of this mortal earth? The answer is probably forever! Keep in mind that the earth will eventually be celestialized and become the eternal home of the righteous. Orson Pratt made a thought-provoking observation: “Different portions of the earth have been

pointed out by the Almighty, from time to time, to his children, as their everlasting inheritance. As instances—Abraham and his posterity, that were worthy, were promised Palestine. Moab and Ammon—the children of righteous Lot—were promised a portion not far from the boundaries of the twelve tribes. . . . In the resurrection, the meek of all ages and nations will be restored to that portion of the earth previously promised to them. And thus, all the different portions of the earth have been and will be disposed of to the lawful heirs; while those who cannot prove their heirship to be legal, or who cannot prove that they have received any portion of the earth by promise, will be cast out into some other kingdom or world” (*JD*, 1:332-33).

“all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord” This important phrase verifies that the Americas are not a promised land to Lehi’s descendants alone—but also to all those who are directed there by the hand of the Lord. Certainly this applies to the Pilgrim fathers and to the Puritans and also to many who joined the Church of Jesus Christ in this final dispensation and then immigrated to the United States to live among the saints.

6 Wherefore, I, Lehi, prophesy according to the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that there shall none come into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord.

verse 6 What precisely is meant by this verse? Taken at face value, it suggests that the only individuals who will come from the Old World to the New World will be those who have been invited by the Lord or brought by his hand. This has obviously not been the case. Certainly the New World has been the recipient of many unsavory and ungodly individual immigrants over the years.

A couple of other possible meanings are more plausible. First, this prophecy might refer to groups and not individuals. For example, the Lord certainly had a role in directing the Jaredites, the Mulekites, the Lehites, the Pilgrims, the Puritans, some of the early Mormon converts, and probably many other individuals to gather in the Americas. In each of these groups, however, there have obviously been unrighteous individuals unworthy of the Lord’s covenant blessings. Alternatively, the verse might refer selectively only to those to whom the covenant of a promised land applies. All such “shall be brought [to the Americas] by the hand of the Lord.” This meaning is likely in view of the following verse.

7 Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring. And 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.

verse 7 This is largely a self-explanatory verse of vital importance!

“this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring” To *consecrate* is to do something with sacredness, to dedicate, devote, and focus oneself toward the realization of a sacred end. In addition, it is to set apart and designate for sacred purposes, as when priests and teachers are called and put in place in the Church (2 Nephi 5:26). The saints of the Most High consecrate their resources to God when they enter into the law of consecration and stewardship (3 Nephi 26:19; 4 Nephi 1:3; D&C 42:30). If they are submissive, the people of the Lord may have their desires and their works consecrated by God to their eternal gain (2 Nephi 32:9; 33:4).

“And if it so be” Prophecy may be categorized into two types, conditional and unconditional. Unconditional prophecy is binding and will come to pass regardless of the actions of men or nations. Can you think of any unconditional prophecies? How about the birth of Christ, the second coming of Christ, the resurrection, and the day of judgment? These things have come to pass or will come to pass regardless of the actions of men. Conditional prophecies are those contingent upon obedience or disobedience. This promise of liberty to the inhabitants of the Americas is obviously conditional.

“if so” The conjunction “if so” refers to the possibility of the land of promise’s being brought “down into captivity.”

8 And behold, it is wisdom that this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations; for behold, many nations would overrun the land, that there would be no place for an inheritance.

verse 8 We believe that Columbus was directed to discover the Americas by the Holy Spirit. This verse implies that other peoples were prevented from discovering the New World until, in the Lord’s economy, the time was right.

The verse also suggests one reason why the New World was protected in this manner by the Lord. It was to prevent the land from being overrun by non-covenant people and to preserve the area as a land of inheritance.

The New World was to be groomed and prepared for the eventual restoration of the gospel and the gathering of Israel. Keeping this in mind, another interesting reason has been suggested for the Lord’s protecting the New World from untimely immigration. It was important to keep out religious cultures that might adversely affect the eventual establishment of the restored Church of Jesus Christ. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet suggested, “Had the knowledge of the Americas been made known even a century earlier, the religion transplanted to the Western World would have been that of the church of Europe at its lowest stage of decadence. The period closing with the fifteenth century was that of the dense darkness that goes before the dawn. . . . Indeed, it was to escape the chains of bondage and the darkness of religious

oppression that people of spiritual nobility emigrated to the new land” (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume 1, 185).

9 Wherefore, I, Lehi, have obtained a promise, that inasmuch as those whom the Lord God shall bring out of the land of Jerusalem shall keep his commandments, they shall prosper upon the face of this land; and they shall be kept from all other nations, that they may possess this land unto themselves. And if it so be that they shall keep his commandments they shall be blessed upon the face of this land, and there shall be none to molest them, nor to take away the land of their inheritance; and they shall dwell safely forever.

verse 9 What a sweeping promise the Lord made with Lehi! But the posterity of Lehi did not keep the Lord’s commandments. Is it possible that the conquest of Central America by the Spaniard Cortez in AD 1519 was “allowed” by the Lord because of the disobedience of the people? What about the earlier discovery of the New World by Columbus in AD 1492? Might this event also have resulted from the people’s failure to keep the commandments? We have discussed elsewhere that Columbus was inspired by the Spirit of God to make the discoveries he made (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 13:12). Did Columbus’s inspiration come as the result of the unrighteousness of the peoples in the New World, or rather was his “discovery” simply an essential part of the plan to prepare the New World for the eventual restoration of the gospel and gathering of Israel? This is a difficult question. Certainly the indigenous peoples of the Americas (some of which were Lehi’s posterity) were eventually “scattered and smitten” as a result of the discovery of the New World by Columbus. It seems likely that Columbus’s discovery was made necessary, in God’s broad plan, by the apostasy of the native Americans.

10 But behold, when the time cometh that they shall dwindle in unbelief, after they have received so great blessings from the hand of the Lord—having a knowledge of the creation of the earth, and all men, knowing the great and marvelous works of the Lord from the creation of the world; having power given them to do all things by faith; having all the commandments from the beginning, and having been brought by his infinite goodness into this precious land of promise—behold, I say, if the day shall come that they will reject the Holy One of Israel, the true Messiah, their Redeemer and their God, behold, the judgments of him that is just shall rest upon them.

verse 10 “a knowledge of the creation of the earth” Where did they get this knowledge? Initially, from the plates of brass. Later on, the “record of the Jews,” the Bible, will be brought to the New World.

“having power given them to do all things by faith” This concept might also have come from the plates of brass, specifically the book of Genesis even though it is

not in the King James version of Genesis. In Joseph Smith's inspired revision of the Bible, the JST, we read that those who hold the priesthood "should have power, by faith, to break mountains, to divide the seas, to dry up waters, to turn them out of their course; to put at defiance the armies of nations, to divide the earth, to break every band, to stand in the presence of God" (JST, Genesis 14:30-31).

"having all the commandments from the beginning" We believe that the basic saving doctrines and ordinances have been available to each and every dispensation including those of Adam, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham.

The construction of this verse is unusual and perhaps a bit awkward in that Nephi initially writes "when the time cometh" that the people will lose their faith, indicating that the time will indeed come. But later on in the verse he changes the thought to a less-conclusive "if the day shall come" that they should reject Jesus Christ and his gospel.

11 Yea, he will bring other nations unto them, and he will give unto them power, and he will take away from them the lands of their possessions, and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten.

verse 11 All of the *thems* in this verse refer to the native Americans except the second which refers to the foreign nations empowered by God to establish themselves in the New World and thus chasten rebellious Israel.

verses 9-11 Ultimately four groups of covenant people are to inhabit this same promised land: (1) the antediluvians, from Adam to Noah (D&C 116; 107:53); (2) the Jaredites; (3) the Lehites; and (4) the latter-day Israelites, especially those descendants of the ten tribes, being gathered by the missionaries of this great Gentile nation. We have learned or will learn that the first three of these groups have, indeed, ripened in iniquity and have been destroyed. The single exception is a subgroup of the Lehites, the Lamanites, whom the Lord is preserving, though chastening repeatedly. The complete story of the Gentiles is not yet recorded, though scripture suggests that there will be a great final destruction and purging before the Lord's second coming wherein the righteous among them will be preserved but the wicked will be cleansed from the earth.

12 Yea, as one generation passeth to another there shall be bloodsheds, and great visitations among them; wherefore, my sons, I would that ye would remember; yea, I would that ye would hearken unto my words.

verse 12 This verse spells out the fate of the disobedient and apostate remnants of the Book of Mormon peoples. The "great visitations" spoken of here refer to the judgments brought against them by the Holy Spirit.

13 O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains

which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe.

verse 13 The term “deep sleep” likely refers to spiritual indifference or a lack of susceptibility to the promptings of the Spirit.

The “chains” spoken of are the “chains of hell” defined by Alma (Alma 12:9-11) as the inevitable plight of the individual whose heart is not responsive to things of the Spirit. They are given lesser and lesser portions of the word until eventually they know nothing of the doctrine or word of God. Then they are inevitably taken captive by Satan and led down to destruction. This tragic sequence is what is meant by the expression “chains of hell.” In D&C 123 Joseph wrote from Liberty Jail that a world without eternal truths is ripe for a takeover by the devil. He then goes on to describe this spiritual bondage as “an iron yoke, a strong band, handcuffs, chains and shackles, and fetters of hell” (D&C 123:7-8).

Wo or *woe* is grief; sorrow; misery; a curse. Do we really believe that Lehi’s rebellious sons will eventually inherit an “eternal gulf of misery and woe”? This implies that they will become sons of perdition, for that is the only eternal state of misery of which we are aware. Wicked and spiritually recalcitrant though they were, it is unlikely that they will become sons of Perdition. For a discussion of this problem, see “Post-Mortal Life and the Book of Mormon” *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13, *The Spirit World*. Similar references are made to the post-mortal life of Lehi’s rebellious sons in verses 17 and 22 of this chapter.

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

verse 14 “**ye must soon lay down in the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveler can return**” This phraseology has been a source of difficulty. Anti-Mormons have suggested that Joseph Smith borrowed from William Shakespeare as he recorded it. For a discussion of this problem see the commentary for 1 Nephi 22:15.

15 But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.

verse 15 Lehi apparently was blessed to receive the Second Comforter—to have his calling and election made sure. For a discussion of this topic, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7 and also *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*.

16 And I desire that ye should remember to observe the statutes and the judgments of the Lord; behold, this hath been the anxiety of my soul from the beginning.

17 My heart hath been weighed down with sorrow from time to time, for I have feared, lest for the hardness of your hearts the Lord your God should come out in the fulness of his wrath upon you, that ye be cut off and destroyed forever;

verse 17 The concept of a “heavy” or a “hard” heart seems to have its origins in Egyptian mythology. Osiris, the god of the underworld, and his assistant Anubis weighed the hearts of the dead on a balance against the positive virtues of truth, goodness, etc. The heavy heart, weighed down with sin, weighed more than the heart imbued with positive virtues.

The phrase “lest for” may be interpreted “that because of.”

“that ye be cut off and destroyed forever” Who is it, according to our modern-day understanding of the plan of salvation, that is “cut off and destroyed forever”? It would seem that only those who live eternally with Satan would fit this description. Even then, it is not possible, even for God, to literally destroy an intelligence. We thus have a similar problem to that mentioned in verse 13 above—that of incomplete doctrine of the post mortal world taught in the Book of Mormon.

18 Or, that a cursing should come upon you for the space of many generations; and ye are visited by sword, and by famine, and are hated, and are led according to the will and captivity of the devil.

verse 18 “Or, that a cursing should come upon you for the space of many generations” The “sore cursing” which will eventually come upon Laman and Lemuel and their descendants was not the “skin of blackness.” Rather the cursing was losing the Spirit or being cut off from the presence of the Lord (2 Nephi 5:20). The “skin of blackness” is rather simply a mark of the curse which indicates those peoples on whom the curse has been pronounced.

Are you comfortable with the idea that “many generations” of descendants of Laman and Lemuel should be cursed because of the misdeeds of their forefathers? Is this fair? Should any man be mandated by God to suffer because of the sins of another? I believe we must acknowledge that generations of Lamanites were born into spiritually adverse circumstances because of the wickedness of their forebears. This does not negate the inviolate principle, however, that each man will be ultimately judged on his own merits—what he has done with the circumstances he inherits in this mortal life. It is certain that some Lamanites will be judged more leniently than many of their counterpart Nephites. The latter were blessed to receive many more spiritual benefits at their birth. It is also possible that an outsider, observing those Lamanites so blessed, might conclude that they do not appear on the surface to be as righteous in their actions as those Nephites who received a lesser judgment. It is difficult to judge a man’s heart, and only the Lord is qualified. This is the great principle of D&C 82:3: “For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation.” Surely this same principle applies to all of us in the

Church. To an outsider we might appear to be a rather homogeneous group, all blessed with happy and supportive family relationships, and all content and enthusiastic about our Church and culture. Are we really that homogeneous? Is life and its varied circumstances really so simple that we can be categorized into this or that large group? Certainly not. Life is complex and intricate and each of us has very different circumstances as we wend our way through mortality. Only the Lord knows our heart and unique circumstances, and only he can judge us.

“led according to the will and captivity of the devil” Are individuals born into an environment where there is no gospel influence and no priesthood more apt to be influenced by Satan? Perhaps so, but this fact also does not invalidate the important principle discussed in the paragraph above.

It would seem that there are three vital factors which will surely be considered by the Lord in his final judgment of us following this mortal experience:

1. Each of us arrives here on earth having earned various degrees of spiritual light and progress in the premortal world. Some have been valiant and obedient, and others less so. Hence, some have acquired significantly more spiritual growth than others. Which will be judged most rigorously? Again the principle of D&C 82:3: Of the more accomplished souls, more is expected, and the Lord is likely to be more lenient with those of lesser initial spiritual accomplishment.

2. We will live out our mortal experience in widely divergent circumstances. Some will live in wealth and plenty, while others will struggle just to survive. Some will experience loving parents and associates, while others will be treated more harshly. Some will be reared in a home where the principles of the gospel are observed. Others will never even be exposed to the gospel or its teachings. The span of our lives will vary from short to long. Consider also the nearly infinite variety of vicissitudes and pitfalls each of us will encounter. Certainly a loving Lord will take into account in his judgment the circumstances of each of our lives.

3. Finally, each of us will earn a certain absolute amount of spiritual progress between our birth and death. Each of us will grow a certain measurable and quantifiable distance toward godhood—some will grow inches and others will grow miles. We will not, of course, be judged according to our absolute progress. Rather the Lord, with his divine wisdom and insight, will place our absolute progress in the context of factors 1. and 2. For some spiritually disadvantaged and beleaguered souls, a small amount of absolute spiritual growth may be sufficient for exaltation. Others, with more spiritual advantages in life may be judged unworthy of exaltation though their measurable growth exceeds that of those who were less advantaged.

19 O my sons, that these things might not come upon you, but that ye might be a choice and a favored people of the Lord. But behold, his will be done; for his ways are righteousness forever.

verse 19 “But behold, his will be done” A casual reading of this verse, and particularly this phrase, might lead one to incorrectly interpret it to suggest that it is the Lord’s will that Laman and Lemuel and their descendants not become “a favored people of the Lord.” It might be more correctly interpreted to mean: “May the Lord’s plan remain the standard of righteousness.” There is nothing about this verse that negates the principle of agency and the principle of the Lord’s incalculable love for each and every one of us.

20 And he hath said that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence.

verse 20 Here is an important covenant which is restated throughout the pages of the Book of Mormon (see 1 Nephi 4:14; Mosiah 2:22; Alma 9:13; see also verses 7, 9-10 in this chapter). It is usually referred to as the “promise/curse” of the Book of Mormon. This covenant is fundamental to the relationship between the Book of Mormon peoples and their God (see the introductory commentary for Alma 43).

This covenant has also been called the “covenant of Moses” (Lauri Hlavaty, “The Religion of Moses and the Book of Mormon” in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn With Joy*, Provo, Utah, 103) and is the essence of the religion of the ancient Jews and of the Book of Mormon people. To understand better this “covenant of Moses,” it is helpful to contrast it with the “covenant of Christ.”

The covenant of Christ is given to individuals and includes promises of eternal individual exaltation. Its ordinances belong to the Melchizedek priesthood. Basically stated, it says: “If you keep my commandments and come to know and emulate my Son, you shall become like me and live with me forever.” The covenant of Moses, on the other hand, is given collectively to a people, not to individuals. It pertains to their temporal welfare and not to their eternal salvation. It is administered through the Aaronic priesthood which is concerned with temporal affairs. It may be simply stated: “If you keep my commandments, I will take care of you here on earth.” A good example of the covenant of Moses is expressed in Leviticus: “If ye walk in my statutes and keep my commandments . . . I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase. . . . I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. . . . and I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Leviticus 26:3, 4, 6, 12). In this passage in Leviticus, the “you” is plural. This covenant is made with a people or community and not with an individual. The covenant of Moses should not be interpreted that every person who keeps the commandments will prosper. Rather it means that if a group of people keep the commandments, then they, as a group, will prosper (see also Joshua 23:6-13).

One other point is pertinent. The term “law of Moses,” as we use it today, often refers to the entire religion of Moses. This religion actually consists of two fundamental parts.

1. First, there is a set of carnal commandments or laws governing every day behavior. Many of these are a part of the everlasting gospel including self discipline, concern for others, and love for and faith in God. These were given to Moses but later added to and corrupted by apostate Judaism. These laws defined social behavior (and also became the basis of the Jewish legal code) and specified the rituals, especially sacrifices to be used in worship.

2. Second, there is the covenant of Moses. The two together, the laws and the covenant make up the entire “law of Moses” (*Ibid.*).

21 And now that my soul might have joy in you, and that my heart might leave this world with gladness because of you, that I might not be brought down with grief and sorrow to the grave, arise from the dust, my sons, and be men, and be determined in one mind and in one heart, united in all things, that ye may not come down into captivity;

verse 21 “arise from the dust, my sons, and be men” Lehi’s intended meaning is unmistakable. “Quit groveling in the dust of your iniquity. Arise and be real men!” This imagery is repeated in verse 23.

“in one mind” Is this verse teaching the necessity of unity—that we must be united one with another? Perhaps, but an additional implication is likely. Each of us should be united with Christ. Paul taught that it was desirable to have the “mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). To earn our exaltation, we must strive to have the “mind of Christ.” That is, we must think as he thinks, believe as he believes, and do as he would do.

22 That ye may not be cursed with a sore cursing; and also, that ye may not incur the displeasure of a just God upon you, unto the destruction, yea, the eternal destruction of both soul and body.

verse 22 “that ye may not incur the displeasure of a just God upon you, unto the destruction, yea, the eternal destruction of both soul and body” The precise definition of “soul,” as provided us in latter-day scripture is the combination of a spirit and a mortal body (D&C 88:15-16). In the Book of Mormon, however, the word “soul” is usually best interpreted as *spirit* (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 15:35).

The phrase “eternal destruction” cannot, of course, be interpreted as annihilation since there is no possibility of annihilation of the body and spirit of man in the eternities, as we understand the doctrine (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:3). How do we explain this verse, then? Perhaps the phrase “eternal destruction” means simply eternal alienation from the presence or influence of God. Only the sons of Perdition, as we

understand them, will qualify for this awful fate. Again, we might ask the question, “Are Laman and Lemuel likely candidates for outer darkness? Probably not. For a discussion of this matter, again, see “Post-Mortal Life and the Book of Mormon” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13, *The Spirit World*. Later on, the Book of Mormon will teach unequivocally of a universal resurrection that consists of the inseparable union of body and spirit (see Alma 11:44-45; 40:19-23).

Some have seen this verse as evidence that certain of the children of God, namely those who become sons of perdition, may, after their resurrection, experience eventual dissolution of their bodies. Brigham Young said of the sons of perdition:

They will be decomposed, both soul and body, and return to their native element. I do not say that they will be annihilated; but they will be disorganized, and will be as though they never had been, while we will live and retain our identity, and contend against those principles which tend to death or dissolution. I am after life; I want to preserve my identity, so that you can see Brigham in the eternal worlds just as you see him now (*JD*, 7:57-58).

Presumably, this dissolution of the bodies of the sons of perdition would include the dissolution of the resurrected bodies (and probably the spirit bodies)—for those who had a mortal experience—and a dissolution of the spirit bodies of Satan himself and his angels. This would leave these individual intelligences of both groups without any embodiment whatever. Each would have nothing remaining except for their individual naked intelligence, in which they would be cast into outer darkness, perhaps never again to be picked up in another round of creation. This final dissolution of the bodies may be termed the third death.

23 Awake, my sons; put on the armor of righteousness. Shake off the chains with which ye are bound, and come forth out of obscurity, and arise from the dust.

verse 23 Lehi doubtless learned this imagery in reading from the brass plates—see Isaiah 59:17.

24 Rebel no more against your brother, whose views have been glorious, and who hath kept the commandments from the time that we left Jerusalem; and who hath been an instrument in the hands of God, in bringing us forth into the land of promise; for were it not for him, we must have perished with hunger in the wilderness; nevertheless, ye sought to take away his life; yea, and he hath suffered much sorrow because of you.

25 And I exceedingly fear and tremble because of you, lest he shall suffer again; for behold, ye have accused him that he sought power and authority over you; but I know that he hath not sought for power nor authority over you, but he hath sought the glory of God, and your own eternal welfare.

26 And ye have murmured because he hath been plain unto you. Ye say that he hath used sharpness; ye say that he hath been angry with you; but behold, his sharpness was the sharpness of the power of the word of God, which was in him; and that which ye call anger was the truth, according to that which is in God, which he could not restrain, manifesting boldly concerning your iniquities.

27 And it must needs be that the power of God must be with him, even unto his commanding you that ye must obey. But behold, it was not he, but it was the Spirit of the Lord which was in him, which opened his mouth to utterance that he could not shut it.

28 And now my son, Laman, and also Lemuel and Sam, and also my sons who are the sons of Ishmael, behold, if ye will hearken unto the voice of Nephi ye shall not perish. And if ye will hearken unto him I leave unto you a blessing, yea, even my first blessing.

29 But if ye will not hearken unto him I take away my first blessing, yea, even my blessing, and it shall rest upon him.

verses 28-29 “first blessing” We have spoken previously about the concept of primogeniture that existed in ancient Israel (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:37). This principle held that upon the death of the father, the eldest son of the father’s first wife was entitled to occupy the father’s house and estate. This would help him care for his mother and unmarried sisters when the father passed away. The firstborn also was given the right to preside over the family after the death of the father, though this right could be bartered away, as happened to Esau (Genesis 25:29-34), or forfeited by unrighteousness as happened to Reuben (Genesis 35:22; 49:3-4; 1 Chronicles 5:1). The firstborn was also granted the right to be shown deference by his siblings throughout his life (e.g., Genesis 43:33). Apparently this principle was not always applied without qualification. In Israel a father was free to choose a younger son as his successor if he found the eldest unworthy of the honor. Also this privilege did not pass automatically, but had to be conferred and publicly acknowledged by the father, usually in the form of an oral blessing. Additionally, by Lehi’s time the firstborn was not given the entire estate to the exclusion of all other sons. Rather the firstborn was given a double share compared with his brothers (Deuteronomy 21:17). Given the culture in which he was reared, Laman might well have had the expectations that he would succeed his father as the leader of the family and that he would have received more than an even share of his father’s estate.

In this verse, Lehi’s approach to this potentially explosive problem is an interesting one. It is clear that Lehi wanted the role of spiritual leadership of the family to pass to Nephi. Lehi promises to his sons and his sons-in-law the birthright blessing contingent upon their righteous obedience of the gospel laws as promulgated by Nephi. Lehi could hardly have blessed each of his sons or sons-in-law simultaneously with this “first blessing.” He could, however, bless each of them to participate in this patriarchal

sequence should the one or ones above them default. He could also take away the birthright from any or all of them. His solution is particularly interesting in that it guarantees the right of leadership to Nephi. In order for Laman to obtain the first blessing, he had to obey Nephi. If he did not obey Nephi, his father's blessing would go to Nephi anyway.

We might intuitively predict Laman and Lemuel's reaction to this offer. They likely regarded Lehi's words as "rubbing salt into the wound." Centuries later, the descendants of Laman would still be complaining of how they were robbed of their "right to the government when it rightly belonged to them" (Alma 54:17).

30 And now, Zoram, I speak unto you: Behold, thou art the servant of Laban; nevertheless, thou hast been brought out of the land of Jerusalem, and I know that thou art a true friend unto my son, Nephi, forever.

31 Wherefore, because thou hast been faithful thy seed shall be blessed with his seed, that they dwell in prosperity long upon the face of this land; and nothing, save it shall be iniquity among them, shall harm or disturb their prosperity upon the face of this land forever.

32 Wherefore, if ye shall keep the commandments of the Lord, the Lord hath consecrated this land for the security of thy seed with the seed of my son.

verses 30-32 In verses 1 through 29 above, Lehi has spoken to his sons collectively. John W. Welch has pointed out that in these three verses (verses 30-32) and in the several verses that follow, Lehi will speak in turn to:

1. Zoram (verses 30-32),
2. Jacob (2 Nephi 2),
3. Joseph (2 Nephi 3),
4. the children of Laman (2 Nephi 4:3-7),
5. the children of Lemuel (2 Nephi 4:8-9),
6. the sons of Ishmael (2 Nephi 4:10), and
7. Sam and Nephi (2 Nephi 4:11).

In so doing, brother Welch feels that he was organizing his posterity into seven groups or tribes (*The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft and Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University, 1989, 68-70).

Just as the descendants of Israel were organized into twelve tribes, so are Lehi's posterity divided into these seven, and Lehi is functioning in creating this organization in just the same patriarchal tradition as did Jacob of old. This organization will persist throughout the Book of Mormon and will be mentioned on three other occasions (Jacob 1:13; 4 Nephi 38; and Mormon 1:8). Just as the Israelites have always known Abraham as "father Abraham," so will the Nephites accord Lehi the honor of being "father Lehi"

throughout the Book of Mormon (Enos 1:25; Mosiah 1:4; 2:34; Alma 9:9; 18:36; 36:22; 56:3; Helaman 8:22; 3 Nephi 10:17).

Although the text does not state it explicitly, Brother Welch further feels that Lehi was assigning each tribe or group a specific “land of inheritance” to which each had perpetual rights. He further suggests this right was a significant factor which, later in the text, will motivate the followers of Zeniff to repossess (see Omni 27) their land (*The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft and Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University, 1989, 71). Further support is gained for this idea in Lehi’s reference above (2 Nephi 1:11) to “the lands of their possessions.” Note the plural form of the terms “lands” and “possessions.” Apparently Lehi perceived the land as divided into several “lands” or territories.

2 Nephi Chapter 2

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 2 Lehi's counsel to his son Jacob includes teachings on the atonement.

2 Nephi 2:6-8 Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth. Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered. Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know 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, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise.

2 Nephi 2:11 There is an opposition in all things.

2 Nephi 2:14 Things to act and things to be acted upon.

2 Nephi 2:25 Adam fell that men might be, and men are, that they might have joy.

2 Nephi 2:27 Lehi's teaching on the principle of agency. Wherefore, men 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 .

In giving his son Jacob a father's blessing, Lehi delivers a doctrinal discourse on the fall of man, the atonement, and the agency of man. Before studying this chapter, please read *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord's Atonement* and volume 2, chapter 2, *Consequences of the Savior's Atonement*.

1 And now, Jacob, I speak unto you: Thou art my first-born in the days of my tribulation in the wilderness. And behold, in thy childhood thou hast suffered afflictions and much sorrow, because of the rudeness of thy brethren.

verse 1 **"Thou are my first-born in the days of my tribulation in the wilderness"** This statement may have a deeper meaning than simply stating that Jacob was the first child to be born to Sariah while in the wilderness. Lehi may have considered Jacob to be something of a replacement for his eldest son, Laman, with his younger son Joseph being a replacement for the second son, Lemuel. There is a parallel to this situation in Genesis 48:5, 16 where Jacob adopted Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim in place of Reuben and Simeon who had sinned (see Genesis 34:30; 35:22; 49:3-5). In consequence of Reuben's sins, he was replaced as firstborn by Joseph (see 1 Chronicles 5:1-2). In the case of Lehi, however, with the rebellion of his two elder sons, the birthright went to Nephi and not Jacob.

“in thy childhood thou hast suffered afflictions and much sorrow” The Book of Mormon account of the travels of Lehi’s colony in the wilderness, after their departure from the valley of Lemuel, is reported in 1 Nephi 16 and 1 Nephi 17:1- 4. It would seem that the trail from Nahom to Bountiful was the most difficult leg of the trip. One of the poignant phrases in these verses is in 1 Nephi 17:1 where Nephi reports, “And we did travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness.” One might wonder if this wasn’t something of an understatement!

“because of the rudeness of thy brethren” Though “rude” has come to mean “impolite” in twentieth-century English, at the time Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, it meant “wild” or “savage.”

2 Nevertheless, Jacob, my first-born in the wilderness, thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain.

verse 2 “he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain” Here is an important doctrine: The Lord will turn suffering and tribulation into blessings. Since all people will experience adversity, this is a vital doctrine for all to know. Afflictions will be imposed upon us from without by the very nature of this mortal experience, and perhaps on occasion by a loving God who wishes to try and test us. They most often occur quite at random, through no fault of our own, simply because vicissitudes and trials characterize this mortal experience. Also afflictions may come from within. We may bring them on ourselves due to sins, errors in judgment, or mistakes. Whatever the source of our trials, in this verse we are promised that as we strive to overcome them, we will be blessed with spiritual strength. For a more detailed discussion of adversity, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 1, *Adversity and Suffering*. See particularly the section titled “How Might We Categorize Adversity and Suffering?”

Jacob had been born “in the days of [Lehi’s] tribulation.” He had been raised on raw meat rather than milk and will be orphaned at a young age. Some people are hardened and made cynical and resentful by hardship, but not Jacob. We will learn that Jacob will become a uniquely sensitive and loving prophet. His long afflictions seem to have softened his spirit. He is a grand example of the sweet uses of adversity.

3 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.

verse 3 What does it mean to be *redeemed*? The word *redeem* means to buy back or to clear by payment. From what great evil does man need redemption? Man is in need of redemption from his own sins. Because every man has sinned, he is not qualified to return to God’s presence or, in fact, he does not qualify to be assigned to

any degree of glory. He is said to be in a *fallen* state. We also know that man cannot redeem himself from this fallen state. He must have a rescuer, a redeemer, a savior. The scriptures teach clearly that if there had been no Savior and no atonement, then all mankind would sojourn with Satan in outer darkness forever (2 Nephi 9:8-9). To be redeemed in a spiritual sense, then, means to be rescued from the fall of man, to be saved in a degree of glory, to be snatched from the clutches of the Devil. The optimal form of redemption is, of course, to be exalted in the celestial heaven.

“thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother Nephi” “I know that thou art redeemed” Apparently it had been made manifest to father Lehi, presumably by the Holy Ghost, that the “callings and elections” of both Jacob and his brother Nephi have been made sure. In other words they are assured of their exaltation, barring any unforeseen and unlikely spiritual mishaps.

“righteousness of thy Redeemer” One of the ways in which Jesus qualified to be able to atone for our sins was that he was perfectly righteous and “justified by the law.” In addition, by virtue of His atonement, Jesus will qualify himself to become the perfect judge of all mankind. In this context, Jesus may be referred to as the “righteous judge” or able to judge with perfect “righteousness.”

“in the fulness of time” This expression has reference to the period of Christ’s mortal ministry (see Galatians 4:4-5). A similar phrase, the “fulness of times” (plural) is used many times in the Doctrine and Covenants, usually referring to the “dispensation of the fulness of times,” the dispensation beginning at the restoration of the gospel through the prophet Joseph Smith (D&C 27:13; 112:30; 122:31; 124:41; 128:18-20; 138:53). The expression “dispensation of the fulness of times” was also spoken of by Paul (Ephesians 1:10). Doctrine and Covenants 76:106 employs the phrase “fulness of times” to refer to the end of the Millennium.

“he cometh to bring salvation unto men” As has been mentioned previously, the word *salvation* when used in scripture often means “exaltation.” Here, however, it may simply refer to the fact that the Savior’s atonement has made it possible for man to achieve a kingdom of glory, whether it be celestial, terrestrial, or telestial. An individual qualified to enter any of the three degrees of glory is said to be “saved.”

4 And thou hast beheld in thy youth his glory; wherefore, thou art blessed even as they unto whom he shall minister in the flesh; for the Spirit is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. And the way is prepared from the fall of man, and salvation is free.

verse 4 “And thou hast beheld in thy youth his glory” Jacob and his brother Nephi were both blessed to see the Lord Jesus Christ as had the prophet Isaiah many years previously (see also 2 Nephi 11:2-3).

“the Spirit is the same, yesterday, today, and forever” From the context of this passage, the “Spirit” is Jesus Christ. As the Lord deals with us in this dispensation,

so he has dealt with all people in all dispensations of time since the human family inhabited the earth. There is a “timelessness” to the Lord’s eternal plan for us. A specific example of this timelessness would have been particularly pertinent for Jacob. He lived six hundred years before the Savior came to earth to work out the infinite atonement. Yet, the atonement is retroactive. Its benefits apply to Jacob just as much as they apply to any people who have ever lived on the earth in any dispensation, before or after Jesus’s mortal ministry. The blessings of the Lord’s atoning sacrifice are not contingent on when one is born during this earth’s history.

“the way is prepared from the fall of man” There is a tendency to read this phrase, “And the way is prepared for the fall of man.” It actually says, “And the way is prepared *from* the fall of man” (italics added). This phrase implies that the plan of redemption was prepared long before the fall took place (see also D&C 124:33, 41; 128:5; 130:20). The plan was laid from the very beginning. When Adam fell, there was no confusion or anxiety in Heaven. The plan was already in place to save mankind.

“salvation is free” There are at least two possible interpretations of this phrase:

1. The term “salvation” here may refer to the “unconditional” aspect of Christ’s atonement, the gift of resurrection and immortal life. To earn this gift, one must needs do nothing. It is provided free of charge. All will be resurrected, and all will live forever.

2. The word “salvation” here might refer to exaltation or to salvation in the lesser two degrees of glory. In what way, then, is this salvation “free”? This phrase may simply be teaching the important concept that man cannot obtain exaltation through meticulously living the law of Moses or even the law of the gospel of Jesus Christ alone. Man cannot be “justified by the law.” Another essential ingredient is necessary for a man’s exaltation. This ingredient is “free” and given to man without his having earned it. This is the atonement of Christ which is given to a righteous man because of Christ’s love for the man—the “grace of Christ.” While the opportunity to take advantage of Christ’s atonement is free and need not be earned, man does need to live worthy of this great blessing in order to actually receive it. Thus, the actual working out of one’s salvation and ensuring that the blessings of the Lord’s atonement will be applied to any individual are not in fact free. They require diligent effort and self denial.

5 And 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. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever.

verse 5 **“And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil.”** This important principle applies only to those who reach the age of accountability. All accountable people are provided a level of understanding that allows them to intuitively know good from evil. This free gift may be referred to as the light of Christ or the spirit of Christ (D&C 88:7; 93:2; Moroni 7:16-17).

“And the law is given unto men” The “law” here is apparently the law of the gospel of Jesus Christ—all the commandments of the Lord.

“And by the law no flesh is justified” We know that by living the law of the gospel alone no man can be justified. Remember that to be “justified” is to have one’s penalties for sin removed. When an individual commits sin, a penalty is inflicted or imposed by the law of justice. The individual is thereafter unworthy to be exalted or to enter any degree of glory. When the individual’s penalty for sin is removed, he or she is said to be “justified.”

To understand this phrase in this context, it is essential to understand the concepts of justice (the law of justice), the law of mercy, and the atonement. These concepts are discussed in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 12, *The Law of Justice*, and chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement*. Even if you have already read these articles, yet their vital concepts are not fresh on your mind, please re-read them before you study the rest of this chapter. See also the commentary for Mosiah 14:11.

This phrase simply implies that no man can be “justified” or judged worthy of exaltation through his living of the law alone, since no man can live the law perfectly without sin. The grace or mercy of God is also necessary. By this grace or great love for us, the Savior is inclined to apply the power of his atonement to mankind. Each and every man and woman, based on his or her performance relative to the law do not really merit that application.

“by the law men are cut off” Adam transgressed and every other man commits sin. Because of the workings of the law of justice each man is “cut off”—that is, subject to two types of death:

1. “physical death” This is separation of the body and the spirit. A man who dies a physical death is thus said to be cut off by the “temporal law.”

2. “spiritual death” This is separation of man from God’s presence. Thus man is said to perish by the “spiritual law.”

In both of these are men “cut off,” or separated, from something important.

“become miserable forever” This phrase refers to the idea that if the states of death (physical and spiritual) are not reversed, then all men will become sons of perdition and live with Satan forever (2 Nephi 9:8-9).

verses 6-13 Please do not take these verses for granted. They are vital and contain some of the clearest teachings on the doctrine of the atonement found in all of the scripture. There is no clear explanation of this vital doctrine found in the Old Testament, and a study of the New Testament has led to much confusion (see also 2 Nephi 9:6-16; Alma 34:13-16; Alma 42:13-26; and Mormon 9:13-14).

6 Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth.

verse 6 Man may only be redeemed from the fall (resurrected, justified, and saved in a degree of glory) through Christ's atoning sacrifice.

"he is full of grace and truth" The redemption of man, which comes "in and through" Christ, is not a matter of grace (his matchless love for us—proclivity his proclivity to grant us mercy) alone or truth (righteousness and obedience to the law) alone. Rather redemption is found in the combination of the two. The Savior is the source and prototype of both the saving grace and the saving truths of the gospel.

7 Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.

verse 7 Through his atoning sacrifice, Christ "answer[ed] the ends of the law," that is, he fully qualified himself, according to the eternal law, the law of justice and the law of mercy, to absolve men of their sins. And, unto whom will he extend this absolution? To those who manifest "a broken heart and a contrite spirit," in other words, to those who are obedient.

A "broken heart and a contrite spirit" is a gift of the Spirit. It is the gift of being aware constantly of a deep and compelling sense of gratitude to the Savior for his love and his willingness to die for us all. With this gift comes the motivation to obey the commandments, to submit to his will. In a sense, we may say that "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" is the gift of being able to obey enthusiastically and gratefully.

"unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else" Doesn't Christ's atonement apply to all men? Why does this verse say that his "sacrifice" applies only to those who qualify? The atonement of the Savior has a dual character. There are "unconditional" blessings or benefits of the atonement and "conditional" blessings of the atonement. Man is automatically the beneficiary of the unconditional blessings of the atonement without any effort on his own part. By this unconditional atonement, the effects of the fall of Adam are completely overcome. That is, all men shall be resurrected, and no one will be kept out of his eternal presence because of Adam's sin. These unconditional blessings of the atonement also overcome the effects of "sins" or transgressions committed by those who were not in a state of accountability at the time. The conditional blessings of the atonement overcome the effects of the fall of each individual person, but only on condition of that person's repentance and obedience—only those with "a broken heart and a contrite spirit." These are the people who repent of their sins.

"unto none else can the ends of the law be answered" The "ends of the law" are "answered" for an individual when he is justified and able to return to the presence

of God to receive his exaltation. He has satisfactorily repented of his sins and therefore is qualified to receive the Savior's absolution or forgiveness.

8 Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know 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, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise.

verse 8 This verse contains the succinct "bottom line." Since no man can live the law to perfection, no man can be justified and saved by virtue of his own merits. No one will live with God in the celestial kingdom or in any kingdom of glory "save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah." There is no other name by which man can be exalted. There is no other way. We are all totally and abjectly dependent upon him. He is qualified to be our Savior by (1) his "merits"—he lived a sinless life and suffered the agony of the atonement; (2) his "mercy" his willingness and inclination to provide each of us blessings greater than we actually merit; and (3) his "grace"—his unparalleled love for us, particularly that aspect of his love that inclines him to give us blessings we don't fully merit.

"who layeth down his life according to the flesh" Jesus's agony and death in Gethsemane and on the cross was not mitigated by his being the God Jehovah and his being sired by the Father. He suffered the unbelievable agony just a man would suffer. His body was mortal and had to undergo the obligatory terminal physiologic phenomena necessary to terminate life common to all mortals.

"and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit" This phrase suggests that the Holy Ghost was somehow involved in the resurrection. This is certainly a provocative independent observation.

9 Wherefore, he is the firstfruits unto God, inasmuch as he shall make intercession for all the children of men; and they that believe in him shall be saved.

verse 9 "he is the firstfruits" Mosaic law required the consecration of the choicest and initial part of the harvest to God—the "firstfruits." These were brought to the temple and given to the priests for their support.

In an analogous way, Christ's life was lived and given up as a sacrifice to the Father. The term firstfruits has reference to a few different aspects of the life of the Savior. First, it refers to the fact that he is "the first that should rise" from the dead—the first to be resurrected. Second, that he is the "Firstborn" spirit child of Elohim (D&C 93:21). Finally, as in this verse, the term firstfruits refers to the fact that "he shall make intercession for all the children of men."

As a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ as the “firstfruits,” the ancient Israelites were commanded to “give,” or dedicate to God, the “firstborn of [their] sons” (Exodus 22:20); to sacrifice to God the “firstling males of their flocks and herds” (Deuteronomy 15:19-21); and to bring “the first of the fruits” of their land “into the house of the Lord” (Exodus 23:19). Book of Mormon peoples followed this same practice, “according to the law of Moses,” specifically noting the sacrifice of the “firstlings of their flocks” (Mosiah 2:3).

Actually two other variations of the term “firstfruits” are used also in the Book of Mormon, *first-fruits*, and *first fruits*. The followers of Christ who are worthy to come forth in the first resurrection will be “presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God” (Jacob 4:11). This is the first harvest of souls redeemed through the atonement of Christ. The phrase *first fruits* may be used to mean the first action as a consequence of another action or principle. For example, “the first fruits of repentance is baptism” (Moroni 8:25).

“he shall make intercession for all the children of men” An intercession is an intervention to resolve a predicament. The predicament here is that all are guilty of sin (Romans 3:23), and therefore unworthy to return to the celestial presence of the Father or any other kingdom of glory.

“they that believe in him shall be saved” This rather understated passage might be rephrased, “those that accept Christ and his gospel with all their hearts and repent of their sins and persist in obedience to the end will be exalted in his presence.”

10 And because of the intercession for all, all men come unto God; wherefore, they stand in the presence of him, to be judged of him according to the truth and holiness which is in him. Wherefore, 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—

verse 10 “all men come unto God; wherefore, they stand in the presence of him, to be judged of him” One of the unconditional blessings of Christ’s atoning sacrifice was the complete overcoming of the effects of Adam’s transgression. Please recall that because of Adam’s transgression, all men will suffer a physical death, and all will also be temporarily separated from God—they will suffer a temporary spiritual death. Because Christ’s intercession has completely overcome the effects of Adam’s transgression, all men will be resurrected and all will be brought back into the presence of God at least long enough to be judged. These are the unconditional blessings of the Savior’s atonement. The presence of God that we seek, however, is not just a brief audience during which we will be judged but rather an eternal sojourn with him in the celestial kingdom.

“the ends of the law which the Holy One hath given” The phrase “ends of the law” refers to the demands of justice. Simply stated, they are that a man guilty of sin is unworthy to return to his celestial home, or in fact, unworthy to return to any

degree of glory. The phrase “which the Holy One hath given” simply states that in the plan of the Father and the Son, man is made subject to the “ends of the law.”

“unto the inflicting of the punishment which is affixed, which punishment that is affixed is in opposition to that of . . . happiness” Since all have sinned, all are subject to the “ends of the law” and will receive the “punishment which is affixed” to that law. That is, by his own merits, each and every man is shut out of God’s heavenly kingdom and shut out also of any degree of glory. He thus cannot find eternal happiness.

“happiness . . . is affixed, to answer the ends of the atonement” Punishment is inexorably “affixed” to the law of justice. Happiness is “affixed” to the blessings of the Lord’s atonement.

Each man will be judged by the Lord according to the individual’s intentions and actions relative to the law of the gospel. Each will be meted out “happiness (reward)” or “punishment” according to his merit. Those who have done their best to adhere to the gospel principles as they understand them will qualify and benefit from Christ’s atonement. Christ’s suffering will answer or satisfy the law of justice for those sincere individuals. They will be justified and cleansed from sin and perfected and return to his presence for eternity where they will receive a fulness of happiness or joy (see D&C 45:3-5). Those who are hard-hearted and proud and remain unrepentant will not qualify for the benefits of the atonement. There will be no intercession. The law of justice will not be satisfied. The individual will then be left to suffer personally for his own sins in the spirit prison (see D&C 19:4, 15-17). It would seem that the phrase “ends of the atonement” refers to the ultimate fulfilling purpose of the atonement—exaltation in the eternal presence of the Father.

In the spirit world, if the demands of justice are not satisfactorily met by the individual’s own personal suffering, and if he does not eventually repent and confess Jesus Christ, the individual will remain “filthy still” and go with Satan and his angels. If, in spirit prison, he is successful in making the needed personal atonement, the benefits of Christ’s atonement will be extended to him, and the law of justice will be fulfilled. He will then become “justified” and be resurrected to a lesser kingdom where he will experience joy, but not a fulness of joy.

The use of the word “atonement” here is the first usage found in the text of the Book of Mormon. This is a most interesting word. It has no Greek or Latin root. It is a “neologism” or new word created by the early English translators of the Bible in the latter sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. As they came across the concept of bringing two estranged and alienated things into perfect harmony, they sometimes used the word *reconcile*. At other times, they apparently found that word wanting, and they made up a new word. They created the word *at-one-ment* or atonement. The word contains the idea of scattered or separated things being encircled or embraced or enveloped by something—for example, being encircled in the arms of the Lord. The

prophet Lehi said, “The Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love” (2 Nephi 1:15).

Atonement is also another word for sealing. There is no eternal embrace by the Lord or eternal relationship between two people that is not secured by a priesthood or temple ordinance. Priesthood ordinances both in and out of the temple may be viewed as a progressive sealing of ourselves to the Lord until the atonement is complete and we are embraced in the arms of the Savior. Many scriptural words may be considered synonymous with atonement. Consider, for example, *oneness, in one, unity, united, gathering, equal, cleaving, sealing, welding, linking, embracing*, and even *resurrection*.

The reader may wonder why Joseph Smith used the word *atonement* in the Book of Mormon text when the word would not even exist for another two thousand or so years. As a matter of fact the entire English language did not exist at the time the Book of Mormon plates were engraved. The simplest answer is that Joseph did not decide to use the word atonement. Rather, the Lord simply revealed to him the English translation of the book. During the translation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith seemed to simply read the text of the Book of Mormon by using his seerstone in the bottom of a hat (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A, *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon*). Apparently, it was the Lord himself or his assigned agent who was actually clothing the concepts on the plates with English words.

11 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.

verse 11 “**For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things.**” Here is a profoundly important principle. Try to imagine, if you can, a world without opposition. What would life be like? Would happiness be possible if there were no sadness? Would growth be possible if there were no adversity and no need to strive? With no ethical issues, could we learn to use our agency in an edifying manner? Indeed, would we in fact possess any meaningful agency? McConkie and Millet wrote: “No virtue can exist without its corresponding evil: without the evil of danger there could be no courage, without suffering there could be no sympathy, without poverty there could be no generosity, and so forth. Without darkness there could be no light, without cold there could be no hot, without depths there could be no heights. Thus there must be wickedness so there might be righteousness, death so there might be life, that which is satanic so there might be that which is godly” (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume 1, 195).

We are here in mortality to be tested, and this cannot occur without the existence of opposition. In fact we will learn that without opposition, man and God cannot even exist. Read on!

“all things must needs be a compound in one” The statement, “all things must needs be a compound in one” is simply a re-statement of the idea that there must be opposition. Man is a dual or “compound” being, having both a physical or “natural” self and a spiritual self. He must have a dual nature—he “must needs be a compound in one.” If man were only a natural or physical or temporal being (“if it should be one body”), then he would be entirely subject to natural law. He would have no agency. The natural law would be his sole determinant. There would be no concept of right or wrong, no wickedness or righteousness. The condition of man would resemble this hypothetical condition if there were no opposition in the world. He could not progress. Such a man might as well “remain as dead”—he might as well not even exist. There would be no purpose in creation. Indeed, God might as well not exist. He would have no purpose.

“nor corruption nor incorruption” The words *corruption* and *incorruption* are used in the Book of Mormon to contrast the nature of mortal things (corruption) and spiritual things (incorruption). In most cases “corruption” refers to the mortal body, which is subject to death and dissolution, and “incorruption” refers to the immortal body, which is resurrected, spiritual, and will abide forever (2 Nephi 9:7; Mosiah 16:10; Alma 5:15; 11:45; 12:18; 40:2; 41:4; Mormon 6:21).

12 Wherefore, it must needs have been created for a thing of naught; wherefore there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation. Wherefore, this thing must needs destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes, and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God.

verse 12 The pronoun “it” here seems to refer to the earth and the sum total of all creation. The purpose of all creation, as we understand it, is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man (Moses 1:39). Man cannot grow toward godhood without being able to exercise his agency in a world where there is opposition. If there were no opposition, the world would have been created in vain or “for a thing of naught.” God would have no purpose. His powers and other virtues would be negated. He would have no reason to be God.

There is, of course, opposition in the world, and it is precisely these opposites coupled with the agency of man that gives purpose to life and to the creation of the world. Man is the center and essence of the universe. He is not simply an accident of nature subject only to natural laws. Joseph Smith taught that happiness of man is the object and design of the world’s existence (*TPJS*, 55, 255). This world did not come into existence by chance, rather it was created by God for the mortal probation of man.

verses 13-15 These verses continue Lehi's defense of the proposition that there "must needs be" opposition.

13 And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away.

verse 13 This verse implies that the concepts of law, sin, righteousness, punishment, and God are so intimately interdependent upon one another that one cannot exist without the others. Intuitively it is easy to understand that if law didn't exist, there would be no sin. Without sin there could be no wickedness or righteousness. Hence there could be no misery or happiness. Less intuitively obvious, however, is the obligatory interdependence of God and the law. Could God exist even if there were no law? Or, could the law exist even if there were no God? God became God in a setting characterized by law, sin, punishment, righteousness, misery, happiness. He could have become God in no other way. Without these things there could be no God. If there were no God, then there could be no creation. Hence, there would be no earth and no man, indeed nothing would exist.

We ascribe to God the epitome of intelligence and the quintessence of spiritual gifts. It is notable that the very word *intelligence* implies the characteristic of agency. The word intelligence comes from the latin *intellegere* which is a variant form of *inter* meaning between and *legere* meaning to choose. Thus the word *intelligence* teaches that an intelligence possesses agency or the ability to choose.

14 And now, my sons, I speak unto you these things for your profit and learning; for there is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are, both things to act and things to be acted upon.

verse 14 "God . . . hath created all things" The Father did not "create" all things out of nothing or *ex nihilo*. As he began the process of creation, he was given, by the family of Gods, a vast repository of primal building blocks—elements (unorganized matter) and intelligences which he organized together. We may thus rephrase Lehi's statement, "God . . . hath organized all things.

"things to act and things to be acted upon" In one sense these may be regarded as the building blocks available to the Father as he began the process of creation. The "things to act" are the vast host of intelligences. They are capable of exercising their agency or acting for themselves. The "things to be acted upon" are the elements or matter. These are incapable of acting for themselves and are instead acted

upon. In spite of the implication of this verse, both of these entities are eternal. Neither was created, and neither can be destroyed. They can only be organized, reorganized, or disorganized.

15 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.

verse 15 The “eternal purposes” of God are “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The phrase “in the end of man” is perhaps best interpreted as meaning “in the life of man” or “in the lives of men.”

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

This verse simply states that in order to bring about his purpose—the eternal life of man, the presence on the earth of opposition—good and evil—is essential. Without an opportunity to sin, man cannot progress. Without an opportunity to excel in obedience, he cannot be exalted. It is notable that God created neither good nor evil. They have always existed and are characteristics of every individual intelligence. Intelligences have also always existed. Every intelligence has a “natural” self and a “spiritual” self. The natural self is the greatest source of evil in the universe. When the spiritual self has its way with us, the result is “good.”

“even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life” The “forbidden fruit” is symbolic of the world and its worldliness. The “tree of life” is symbolic of Christ and eternal life in his presence (see 1 Nephi 11:7). The “forbidden fruit” is “in opposition to the tree of life” since failing to overcome the world leads to failure to achieve the presence of God.

Note that the adjectives (“sweet” and “bitter”) modifying the phrases “forbidden fruit” and “tree of life” are in reverse order.

The specific nature of the forbidden fruit has not been revealed. Elder Bruce R. McConkie suggested that when Adam and Eve partook of this fruit they “complied with whatever the law was that brought mortality into being” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 86). The issue may not have been so much one of sin versus righteousness. God’s prohibition against partaking of the “forbidden fruit” may have been more of a statement of consequences—what would come about if and when they did partake. The Lord said that if Adam “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” (Joseph Fielding Smith, “Was the Fall of Adam Necessary?” *Improvement Era* 65 [April 1962]: 231).

16 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.

verse 16 “the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself” We often say that God has given to man his agency. Strictly speaking, this is not true. God did not give to any man his agency, as every man has always possessed agency. God also cannot remove a man’s agency. God did place man in a situation where his agency is operational—in mortality, man may use his agency to progress spiritually. See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 13, *Agency and Freedom*.

“man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other” Also we are instructed that in order for man to exercise fully his agency, both good and evil choices must be associated with some enticement. Certainly the Spirit of God and the “spirit of Christ” within each of us do entice a man to do good, but does God entice a man to do evil? Certainly not. The natural self of man is all the enticement a man needs to do evil. Indeed, the natural self of man is the greatest source of evil in the universe.

17 And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God.

verse 17 Satan would be allowed to come to earth to entice men to do evil. Let us not be guilty of being too simplistic, however, and failing to understand Satan’s role. Satan is not the creator or author of evil. The origin of evil resides deep within each of us and has always done so. It is our “natural self” or “natural-man self” (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapters 5 and 6, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self”* and *The Gospel and the Two Natures of Man*). While Satan did not create our natural self, he certainly rejoices in it. Because of Satan’s strategies and efforts, it is more difficult for us to resist our natural selves. See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 16, *The Role of Satan*.

Biblical references to the fall of Lucifer are very scarce and veiled (Isaiah 14; Revelation 12). We must look to modern-day revelation for a clear understanding (Moses 4:1-4 which is the same as JST Genesis 3:1-5).

“according to the things which I have read” Obviously Lehi had learned something of the plan of salvation from reading the brass plates. However, he was apparently not taught as many of the specific details of that plan as we have today in this final dispensation. It was necessary for him to “suppose” some of the details, while today we have been taught many of the specifics of the Grand Council, the rebellion of Lucifer, and his being cast out of heaven with a third of the hosts of heaven.

“[Satan] sought that which was evil before God.” Here is the essential reason for Satan’s fall from glory in the pre-existence. Knowing first hand of the

existence and preachings of the Father and the Son, he not only gave in to his “natural self,” but he began to contend openly against the teachings of the Father and the Son. In this case part of his underlying “natural” inclinations were profound fears that he would fail to return to his former place of prominence.

18 And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind. Wherefore, he said unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies, wherefore he said: Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.

verse 18 Here we learn that Satan’s very objective is to bring about “the misery of all mankind.” His motivation is a profound application of the old saw: “misery loves company.”

Note Satan’s statement to Eve. As he attempts to deceive her, he does so in a most effective manner. He combines truth and falsehood. The falsehood is, “Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die.” The second part of his statement, “Ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil,” is, of course, true.

“be as God” We know it is a righteous desire of all who cleave to gospel truths to seek to one day “be as God.”

19 And after Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit they were driven out of the garden of Eden, to till the earth.

verse 19 As mentioned previously, we are left to wonder and speculate as to the literal or symbolic nature of the “forbidden fruit.” Whatever the fruit was, it was rendered enticing, at least to Eve, by Satan’s verbal manipulations. On the other hand, we know that ultimately Adam and Eve’s choice to leave the garden was a deliberate one. They saw their loftiest responsibility as multiplying and replenishing the earth.

20 And they have brought forth children; yea, even the family of all the earth.

verse 20 “the family of all the earth” We believe that all human inhabitants of the earth are lineal descendants of Adam. In the premortal world, these were the spirit children of God and came into mortality on the path to progress toward godhood.

21 And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men. For he gave commandment that all men must repent; for he showed unto all men that they were lost, because of the transgression of their parents.

verse 21 “the days of the children of men were prolonged” The use of the word “prolonged” here is a curiosity since the time a man spends on this earth is certainly a relative thing. In other words, the days of the children of men were “prolonged” compared to what or to whom? The same concept is restated later in this verse—“their time was lengthened.” This same phraseology is used elsewhere, several times in the scriptures (Deuteronomy 4:40; 5:16,30; 6:2; 11:9; 30:18; 32:47; Isaiah 13:22; 53:10; Helaman 15:4,10; 2 Nephi 23:22; Alma 9:18). A study of these references suggests that the verb “prolonged” might also be interpreted as “given sufficient time.”

Apparently, the lives of Adam and his children before the Flood were lengthened so that no one died during Adam’s dispensation without first having had the opportunity to accept or reject the gospel (see D&C 29:42). Further, it would seem that in that dispensation the Lord was particularly inclined to send to the earth angels to preach his gospel (Moses 5:58; 7:27). Thus, through the preaching of Adam, Enoch, Noah, angels from heaven, and even God himself (see Moses 5:58), no one who died before the Flood died in ignorance. This longevity changed with the Flood (see Genesis 6:3), and it then became possible for people to die in ignorance.

The apostle Peter describes the missionary work in the spirit world as beginning among these disobedient antediluvian souls, those “which sometime were disobedient [not ignorant], when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah” (see 1 Peter 3:20). Elder James E. Talmage has explained:

The disobedient who had lived on earth in the Noachian [pre-Flood] period are especially mentioned as beneficiaries of the Lord’s ministry in the spirit world. They had been guilty of gross offenses, and had wantonly rejected the teachings and admonitions of Noah. . . . We are not to assume from Peter’s illustrative mention of the disobedient antediluvians that they alone were included in the blessed opportunities offered through Christ’s ministry in the spirit realm; on the contrary, we conclude in reason and consistency that all whose wickedness in the flesh had brought their spirits into the prison house were sharers in the possibilities of expiation, repentance, and release (*Jesus the Christ*, 672-73).

Also we are taught in modern revelation that when Christ introduced missionary work to the spirit prison almost immediately following his resurrection, he did not actually personally minister among the spirits in prison (D&C 138:18-20).

To this point in this chapter, Lehi has logically outlined the essential steps in man’s progression toward godhood. He “gave” man his agency (actually God placed man in a situation where man could use his agency to progress to become more like God—verse 16) and a set of commandments whereby man might progress. In order to make this agency operative in an especially meaningful way, he allowed Satan to operate in the world. Satan would encourage adherence to the enticing alternatives to the gospel plan. One other essential step remains. That is for mankind to fall from

God's presence into the obligatory state of probation where they will be tested in a setting where opposition abounds.

“he showed unto men that they were lost because of the transgression of their parents” Are all men really “lost” because of the sins of Adam and Eve? Only in the sense that they became mortal (subject to death) and temporarily separated from God.

To review: The Fall of man has a two-fold nature. (1) First, there is the fall of Adam. Adam transgressed, and by this transgression he brought two types of death into the world: physical death (all men must eventually die) and spiritual death (all men are temporarily separated from God during mortality). (2) Secondly, each man falls on his own. Man is not separated from God permanently because of Adam's sin. Only his own sins result in a lasting separation. No one lives without sin. A man's own sins result in his “permanent” spiritual death or separation from God. This spiritual death is actually “permanent” only until the law of justice is satisfied. The law of justice is very exact. If even one sin is committed, man cannot qualify for entry back into God's presence or indeed into any kingdom of glory.

verses 22-26 In all of the scripture, these five verses are unique in that they make clear truths about the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement that are found nowhere else in scripture.

22 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.

23 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.

verses 22-23 Here we are taught that if Adam had not fallen, “all things” would have remained forever in the state in which they had been created. This is usually interpreted to mean that all things, including Adam, Eve, plants, and animals were created in an innocent and paradisiacal state at least in the area specified to be the Garden of Eden. They would have remained so if Adam and Eve had not fallen. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

The initial creation was paradisiacal; death and mortality had not yet entered the world. There was no mortal flesh upon the earth for any form of life. The Creation was past, but mortality as we know it lay ahead. All things had been created in a state of paradisiacal immortality. It was of this day that Lehi said: “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” (2 Nephi 2:22). If there

is no death, all things of necessity must continue to live everlastingly and without end (“Christ and the Creation,” 9-15).

Some committed members of the Church, because of their scientific backgrounds, have questioned whether or not all things on the earth in every age of the earth were, in fact, created in an immortal or paradisiacal state (Trent D. Stephens and D. Jeffrey Meldrum, *Evolution and Mormonism*, 134-38). They point out that, while Elder McConkie’s interpretation of 2 Nephi 2:22 is one possible interpretation, “It has not received official sanction as a doctrine; and it has no explicit foundation in scripture. Furthermore, it is inconsistent with the fossil record and other well-established scientific data indicating a very old earth in which natural processes (life and death) have been at work for billions of years.”

Two other plausible explanations have been proffered for 2 Nephi 2:22:

1. Some have divided the period of the earth’s physical creation into two major eras:

a. The first is the period of preparatory creation when the earth was prepared for the advent of modern life forms including man on the earth. This period may well have lasted millions upon millions of years, and included the period of the dinosaurs and other ancient life forms. It was during this period that the fossil fuels, minerals, soil, precious metals, and other vital stores were accumulated upon the earth so that there might be “enough and to spare” (D&C 104:17) to support the family of man when they eventually arrived on the earth. During this period all life lived in a purely mortal form—subject to death. Following this creative era, once the earth was ready, all living things may have been removed from the earth.

b. The second period is the actual placement of modern life forms on the earth. All life forms placed upon the earth at the outset of this era (human, animals, and plants) initially existed in a paradisiacal or “spiritual” state.

After the fall of Adam, all forms of life became mortal.

2. Another explanation is that the creation story applies selectively to only a specific location on the earth—the Garden of Eden. Only in the Garden were living things all created in a “spiritual” or paradisiacal state. Only in the Garden was there no death prior to Adam’s fall.

The book of Moses explains that all things were “spiritual” in the day in which they were created. The word *spiritual* in this context may have two possible meanings:

1. The first is that all things were not subject to death or change. This meaning of spiritual is important and pertains in other verses of scripture. For example, Amulek described the resurrection as a state in which body and spirit are united “never to be divided; thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal, that they can no more see corruption” (Alma 11:45, italics added). This same meaning was intended by Paul. Speaking of the physical body, he said, “It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:44).

Those who do not understand this meaning of the word spiritual have concluded that Paul was saying that in the world to come we will exist only as spirits. We know of course that Paul intended to teach that resurrection is the inseparable union of spirit and an immortal and incorruptible body.

We thus learn that when the Lord described the Creation by saying that it was “spiritual in the day that I created it; for it remaineth in the sphere in which I, God, created it, yea, even all things which I prepared for the use of man” (Moses 3:9), we understand that the Lord may have been saying that there was no death or corruption among God’s creations, at least at the time of—or in the location of Adam, Eve, and the Garden.

2. The Lord has explained in D&C 29:34: “Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created.” Something that is “spiritual” in this context is not just temporal but has eternal implications.

“they would have remained in a state of innocence” “Innocence” means that they lived in a bland and naive state where there was little opposition and they had a limited concept of the difference between good and evil. Though Adam and Eve did have some knowledge of good and evil, in their innocent state, they had insufficient knowledge to enable them to grow or progress spiritually in an optimal way.

“they would have had no children” In the paradisiacal or spiritual state no living thing could enjoy the privilege of procreation.

It is sound logic that joy cannot exist in the absence of misery, and righteousness cannot exist when there is no possibility of sin.

24 But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.

verse 24 “all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things” The fall of man was planned in advance by God. Even though Adam and Eve were warned by God of the consequences of partaking of the forbidden fruit, they were given to act for themselves (see 2 Nephi 2:16), and God knew they would fall. It was all according to divine purpose.

25 Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.

verse 25 “Adam fell that men might be” This statement implies that Adam knowingly fell (transgressed) in order to enable the human family to come into mortality. He knew that in their original created state, he and Eve could not have posterity (Moses 5:10).

The apostate doctrine of original sin seems to be based in part on the notion that Adam and Eve’s disobedience was an act of overt rebellion against God, an attempt to

usurp the knowledge available only to the gods. This notion paints a dark and negative picture of Adam and Eve. The notion then evolved to the assumption that all mankind inherited their evil tendencies. How much more ennobling and soul-satisfying is the true doctrine of the fall and the true notion of Adam, the assurance that Adam “fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.” Adam’s and Eve’s actions in Eden were intelligently thought through, selfless, and nobly executed. There is nothing of evil or wickedness about their conduct in the garden.

We usually emphasize the negative effects of the fall of Adam. There are, however, two positive or desirable effects. The first has just been mentioned: they could procreate. The second is that they could distinguish good from evil. They could then possess a more comprehensive knowledge of good and evil and grow spiritually at a rate limited only by their own willingness to overcome their natural self and obey the Lord’s commands.

“men are that they might have joy” It is the purpose of man’s very existence to obtain true joy. This joy, however, can only be obtained by an individual who has the opportunity and the ability to choose between good and evil, and he selects the good. True joy exists only when there is spiritual growth. The ultimate joy man seeks is the joy of exaltation in the celestial heaven for eternity.

The reader should also be reminded that there is much poetry in the Book of Mormon but it is printed in prose form. This verse is a good example. If, for example, we wanted to emphasize the poetic structure of this verse we may arrange it:

Adam fell that men might be;
and men are, that they might have joy.

26 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.

verse 26 Here again is the expression “fulness of time” which refers to the period of Christ’s mortal sojourn.

If there had been no atonement, the fall of man would have been permanent. Man would never have had the freedom to return to God’s presence and realize his ultimate potential. He would have been subject to Satan’s buffetings forever. The atonement has enabled man to follow either God or Satan. Ultimately, however, all men will be blessed or not blessed according to their obedience to the commandments of God. Man has agency and can choose for himself, but he cannot escape the consequences of the eternal law.

27 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.

verse 27 In order to understand this verse, it is important to distinguish between two separate concepts, *agency* and *freedom*. It is suggested that the reader study the chapter, *Agency and Freedom* found in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 13, prior to continuing.

“men are free according to the flesh” This phrase seems to refer to man’s agency. The phrase “according to the flesh” in the Book of Mormon is often used to remind the reader that the current topic is literal and practical and not referred to in any figurative or symbolic sense. Hence, here in mortality—“according to the flesh”—man has his agency.

An alternate, but less likely, explanation of this phrase suggests that it refers more to freedom than to agency. The freedoms we possess here in mortality depend partly on our obedience to gospel law, but not entirely. Sometimes our circumstances here in mortality are such that limitations are imposed upon us by forces from without ourselves, forces that we cannot control. Freedom can be limited by physical laws or physical infirmities. It might also be compromised by the actions of others including government. Thus, “men are free,” that is, they have their freedom “according to the flesh”—according to the circumstances of their mortality. For clarity, we might even add to this phrase as follows: “men are free or not free according to the flesh.”

“they are free to choose liberty and eternal life” This expression, and the remainder of the verse, refers to the principle of *agency*. To summarize, agency is simply the right to choose among available alternatives. Agency is a free gift. We did nothing to earn it. We have always possessed it, and it cannot be taken from us.

This phrase does not, of course, mean to imply that man automatically has the freedom to choose eternal life. Rather, it means that man has the agency to choose whether or not to obey the commandments—to choose the course to eternal life.

The number of alternatives that any given man might have available to him might vary considerably. The blessing of having many alternatives has nothing to do with agency. Rather that blessing is freedom. Freedom is having abundant desirable alternatives. Freedom is not a free gift, however, but must be earned. In spiritual matters, we earn our freedom by exercising our agency and obeying the commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A man who is disobedient to the commandments of the Lord, will experience decreasing freedoms in spiritual matters.

“all things are given them which are expedient unto man” This comforting statement simply assures us that sufficient alternatives will be available to each and every man while they are here on earth to allow them to grow spiritually and obtain

exaltation if they might the righteous choices among their alternatives. No mortal will every find himself subject to conditions here on earth that would prevent him from exercising his agency in a way that will result in his spiritual growth and his ultimate exaltation. These guaranteed alternatives are here in the form of commandments of the Lord. These commandments, when obeyed, will eventually result in the freedom to choose to enter the celestial heaven.

28 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;

29 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.

verses 28-29 “choose eternal life . . . and not eternal death” The Book of Mormon does not teach the concept of “multiple heavens” or multiple degrees of salvation. Rather it teaches a simplistic view of the life hereafter which is living either with God (exaltation) or with Satan (in outer darkness) (see the commentary for Mosiah 2:33).

verse 29 “the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein” The Book of Mormon does not teach the doctrine of human depravity, but it does teach that man has a “fallen” or “natural” nature that is prone to disobedience and ingratitude. Within each individual is the “natural man” or “natural self” which tends to be attracted to things of the world. This natural side of man will lead all men to commit sin. Let us also not make the mistake of assuming that the “natural” inclinations of man began at the time of the fall. It seems clear that man’s natural self has always existed.

30 I have spoken these few words unto you all, my sons, in the last days of my probation; and I have chosen the good part, according to the words of the prophet. And I have none other object save it be the everlasting welfare of your souls. Amen.

verse 30 “I have chosen the good part, according to the words of the prophet.” In the previous two verses, Lehi urged his sons to choose good over evil. Here he seems to be saying that *he* has chosen the Lord’s way. The identity of “the prophet” is unknown but probably is Isaiah or perhaps Moses. There is probably a scripture written by a major prophet which refers to “choosing the good part” and which is lost to us today. It was probably this lost scripture to which Jesus referred to in Luke 10:42 when he spoke of choosing “that good part.”

Let me just add one thought at the conclusion of this chapter. If you are normal, you probably feel that you have just studied a truly complex chapter. In fact, you probably feel that in order to understand everything well in this chapter, you should

probably read it again, and then perhaps again. This is normal. I can assure you, however, that with repeated study, all of the concepts in this chapter are compatible with one another. They fit together seamlessly into “one great whole.”

Was Joseph himself—or any other man—the author of these materials? Of course not!

2 Nephi Chapter 3

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 3:11-12 Lehi's prophecy of the latter-day seer, Joseph Smith. But a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins.

In this chapter Lehi quotes prophecies originally made by ancient Joseph who was sold into Egypt (verses 5 through 21). He found these prophecies upon the plates of brass. These prophecies are not contained in the Bible. Why are they not found in the Bible? It would seem that two possible explanations might apply. First, perhaps they were never included in any detail in the Bible. After all, the Bible is the record or "stick" of Judah, not Joseph. It is the Book of Mormon and the plates of brass that are each the record or "stick" of Joseph (or Ephraim). It is in these latter two records that we might expect to find more of the prophecies of Joseph. Secondly, perhaps the biblical manuscripts did contain a detailed account of Joseph's prophecies, but they were lost from the biblical writings when many "plain and precious parts" were taken away (see 1 Nephi 13:24-29).

In this chapter we will speak of ancient Joseph and the prophet Moses. In order that we might be chronologically oriented relative to these two biblical figures, let us review a few dates having to do with these two great prophets (see the supplemental article, *Chronology of The Bible and the Book of Mormon*). The ancient prophet Jacob, or Israel, traveled to Egypt with his family to escape the famine in Palestine in about 1700 BC. Joseph, you will recall, had previously been exiled to Egypt by his resentful brothers. Joseph had achieved an important and influential position in the Pharaoh's government. In Egypt Joseph received his family warmly and provided sustenance for them. The Israelite exile in Egypt lasted from about 1700 to 1260 BC. In about the latter year, the prophet Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt into the wilderness. Joshua was finally allowed by the Lord to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land in 1220 BC. Here they were ruled initially by the Judges and then by the succession of kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. At Solomon's death in 931 BC the Israelites were divided as the rebellious military leader Jeroboam led many to the north where they established the Kingdom of Israel with its center in the city of Ephraim. The dominant tribe of this group was the tribe of Joseph and his birthright son Ephraim. Some of the Israelites remained behind in Judah under the leadership of Solomon's son Rehoboam. Here they became the Kingdom of Judah with its center in Jerusalem. The dominant tribe, of course, was that of Judah.

Let us not make the mistake of underestimating the importance and stature of ancient Joseph as a prophet. We know that he had a personal visitation from the Lord,

and he prophesied specifically of the Lord's raising up Moses to lead captive Israel out of bondage in Egypt (JST, Genesis 50:24). The Lord also covenanted with him regarding his posterity with a solemn oath (JST, Genesis 50:34). Joseph was moved to prophesy of his seed by virtue of this covenant, and prophesy he did. We will study at least a part of this prophecy in this chapter. Evidently there are some additional writings of Joseph that have never been made available to us. Joseph Smith reported that at the same time he received the record of Abraham from Michael Chandler, he also received a record of ancient Joseph which he apparently intended to translate, but it has never been made available to us (*HC*, 2:348, 350-51).

As you study this chapter, it is important to keep straight in your mind the first person or speaker of each verse you are studying. To simplify this task I will summarize the speakers: verses 1-5—Lehi to his son Joseph; verse 6—ancient Joseph; verses 7-13—the Lord is speaking to ancient Joseph; verses 14-16—ancient Joseph; verses 17-21—the Lord to ancient Joseph; and verses 22-25—Lehi to his son Joseph. As we come to these verses, I will again remind you of the speaker.

1 And now I speak unto you, Joseph, my last-born. Thou wast born in the wilderness of mine afflictions; yea, in the days of my greatest sorrow did thy mother bear thee.

verse 1 Lehi now turns his attention to his youngest son Joseph. Lehi is the speaker or first person in verses 1-5.

“wilderness of mine afflictions” Apparently both Joseph and his elder brother Jacob were born during the most difficult parts of Lehi's colony's journey in the wilderness. See the commentary for 2 Nephi 2:1. In all four standard works, this colorful phrase is unique to the Book of Mormon and is found only in this verse and in verse 3 of this chapter.

Regarding Lehi and Sariah's naming of their children, Hugh Nibley observed:

It should be noted in speaking of names, that archaeology has fully demonstrated that the Israelites, then as now, had not the slightest aversion to giving their children non-Jewish names, even when those names smacked of a pagan background. One might, in a speculative mood, even detect something of Lehi's personal history in the names he gave to his sons. The first two [Laman and Lemuel] have Arabic names—do they recall his early days in the caravan trade? The second two [Sam and Nephi] have Egyptian names, and indeed they were born in the days of his prosperity. The last two, born amid tribulations in the desert, were called with fitting humility, Jacob and Joseph. Whether the names of the first four were meant, as those of the last two sons certainly were, to call to mind the circumstances under which they were born, the names are certainly a striking indication of their triple heritage, and it was certainly the custom of Lehi's people to name their children with a purpose (Helaman 3:21; 5:6) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 76-77.)

2 And may the Lord consecrate also unto thee this land, which is a most precious land, for thine inheritance and the inheritance of thy seed with thy brethren, for thy security forever, if it so be that ye shall keep the commandments of the Holy One of Israel.

verse 2 Obviously, Lehi's blessing to Joseph and, indeed, most all of heaven's blessings, are conditional. Again, take note of the duration of this covenant. Does this mean the covenant will still be in force when the earth is in its terrestrial phase during the Millennium? What about during the earth's celestial phase?

"may the Lord consecrate also unto thee this land" Lehi may have been giving Joseph his specific "land of inheritance" within the broader land (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 1:30-32).

3 And now, Joseph, my last-born, whom I have brought out of the wilderness of mine afflictions, may the Lord bless thee forever, for thy seed shall not utterly be destroyed.

verse 3 Even though the Nephite nation will eventually largely be destroyed, Joseph is promised not only that his descendants will never be annihilated, but in a later verse he promised that his seed will also accept the Book of Mormon (verse 23). The doctrine that there are descendants of Joseph among today's native Central and perhaps North Americans is implied in a modern revelation to Joseph Smith (D&C 3:16-18). Are there descendants of the Nephites alive in this final dispensation? Weren't they all killed by the Lamanites? Following the Savior's visit to the New World, there followed a two-hundred-year period of peace, when the people joined together into one unified group in which there were no "-ites." After this so-called "mini-millennium" the people broke up into Nephite and Lamanite groups again. This time the division was not according to lineage but by righteousness or unrighteousness. The "Nephites" were those that wanted to live the commandments of God, and the "Lamanites" were those that did not (see 4 Nephi 1:38). Therefore, there were descendants of Laman, Lemuel, Nephi, Jacob, Joseph, and Zoram in both groups, and undoubtedly some of their descendants are among indigenous Americans today (see the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Myths*).

4 For behold, thou art the fruit of my loins; and I am a descendant of Joseph who was carried captive into Egypt. And great were the covenants of the Lord which he made unto Joseph.

verse 4 "I am a descendant of Joseph" It is interesting that Lehi uses the occasion of the blessing of his son Joseph to deliver a sermon on his ancestor, ancient Joseph "who was carried captive into Egypt." Lehi was a descendant of ancient Joseph's son Manasseh (see Alma 10:3), and Ishmael was of Ephraim (see *JD*,

23:184). Thus the Book of Mormon people represented both branches of Joseph's posterity.

Joseph "who was carried captive into Egypt" is the prototype of the gatherers of Israel. Remember how he delivered his brothers and saved their lives when they came out of famine-ravaged Canaan to Egypt. Joseph told his brothers: "God did send me before you to preserve life . . . to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (Genesis 45:5, 7). Not only was Joseph a great deliverer, but his actions were a type of the Savior's future deliverance, as he offered life to his brothers who had rejected him.

"great were the covenants of the Lord which he made unto Joseph" These covenants are contained in the verses that follow and are summarized as follows: A righteous branch of Joseph's descendants would be "broken off," that is, separated from the main body of Joseph's descendants. The "seed" or descendants of this branch would be scattered through wickedness, but they would not be completely destroyed. Rather, they would be delivered through another of Joseph's descendants, Joseph Smith, Jr., by means of the Book of Mormon. They would be taught their true identity as a branch of Israel. The Messiah would be manifest to them. They would be converted and drawn back into the Lord's Church. These covenants are not contained in the biblical record, and this fact has caused the gentile world to stumble over the truths restored to Joseph Smith.

verses 5-7 The prophecies of ancient Joseph contained in these verses were taken from the brass plates (2 Nephi 4:2). There is a remarkable similarity between the content of these verses and the content of JST Genesis 50:24-28. Pause for a moment and consider the question of why there should be such a similarity. Perhaps the concepts are similar because they are true and come from the same God. Or, perhaps, Joseph Smith learned these important concepts from the Book of Mormon, and this learning aided him in his revision of these verses in the book of Genesis 50. An even more interesting explanation has been suggested. It is likely that the JST serves, in some instances, an important restorative function, that is, in doing his inspired revision, Joseph restored knowledge and understanding which had been lost from the Bible since its original writing, especially that deletion and alteration which occurred at the hand of the great and abominable church (see 1 Nephi 13:39-40). Thus Joseph's revisions found in the JST today may occasionally allow us to see how those same scriptures might have been found in their original form such as would have been found on the brass plates. However, the reader should be cautious about assuming that Joseph's purpose, in producing the JST, was to restore the Bible text to its original form. One area in which the average member of the Church almost always misunderstands our theology is the relationship between the JST and the biblical text.

Just what is the JST? First of all, the JST is not canonized scripture except for JST Genesis 1-6 and Matthew 24, which are both found in the Pearl of Great Price and several assorted verses found in the section titled “Joseph Smith Translation, Excerpts Too Lengthy for Inclusion in Footnotes” found between the Bible Dictionary and the Gazetteer. The JST is not the LDS version of the Bible. The King James Version is and always has been. We believe that the JST is “inspired,” but that is not the same thing as saying it always restores the original texts of the biblical books. In 1828 the word *translation* was broader in its meaning than it is now, and the Joseph Smith translation (JST) should be understood to contain additional revelations, alternate readings, prophetic commentary or midrash, harmonizations, clarifications, and corrections of the original. Though some may object to this interpretation of the word translation, it is a matter of record that Joseph used the term this broadly to mean “render,” “interpret,” or “adapt.” How else than by granting this broader meaning of “translate” can the JST, which starts with the KJV English and ends up still in English, be considered a “translation” at all? Joseph Smith often saw more than one meaning in a passage and brought many of these explicitly to our attention by means of the JST. See the supplemental article in *Learning to Love the Doctrine and Covenants, Joseph Smith’s Inspired Revision of the Bible—The JST*.

5 Wherefore, Joseph truly saw our day. And he obtained a promise of the Lord, that out of the fruit of his loins the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel; not the Messiah, but a branch which was to be broken off, nevertheless, to be remembered in the covenants of the Lord that the Messiah should be made manifest unto them 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.

verse 5 Joseph saw Lehi’s day and prophesied among the seed of Joseph that there would rise up, in the words of Joseph’s father Jacob, a “fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall” (Genesis 49:22). In other words, a branch of the house of Joseph (representing both the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh) would be broken off and cross the ocean and come to the western hemisphere. These are the Lehites. They would eventually drift into “darkness,” but later, in the “latter days,” the Messiah would be manifest unto them, and his spirit would lift them “out of darkness unto light.”

“not the Messiah” In the Scriptures a “branch” often refers to the Messiah, as for example in Isaiah 11:1-5. But here, Lehi explains that Joseph did not refer to the Messiah, but to some one who was to be broken off from Joseph’s genealogical tree and yet to be remembered in the latter days.

“hidden darkness” This phrase may refer to the fact that the true identity of the remnant of Joseph of Egypt in the western hemisphere was unknown for many centuries until the Lord revealed it through Joseph Smith, Jr.

“out of captivity unto freedom” This phrase may have political as well as spiritual connotations.

6 For Joseph truly testified, saying: A seer shall the Lord my God raise up, who shall be a choice seer unto the fruit of my loins.

verse 6 The speaker in this verse is ancient Joseph. The “seer” seen by ancient Joseph is Joseph Smith, Jr. Probably the principal doctrine taught in chapter 3 is that Joseph Smith was a choice seer foreordained to come forth in the latter days.

7 Yea, Joseph truly said: Thus saith the Lord unto me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and he shall be esteemed highly among the fruit of thy loins. And unto him will I give commandment that he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins, his brethren, which shall be of great worth unto them, even to the bringing of them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers.

verse 7 Notice that beginning in this verse and ending in verse 13, ancient Joseph in Egypt is reporting a revelation from the Lord. Thus the speaker in these verses is the Lord who is speaking to ancient Joseph. Where did Lehi obtain this record of ancient Joseph? From the brass plates, of course (2 Nephi 4:1-2). It seems likely that Moses reported Joseph’s words on the plates of brass. This conjecture is based on 1 Nephi 5:11-14 which suggests that the earliest records contained on the plates of brass are “the five books of Moses.” Also, JST Genesis 50:24-38 has Moses quoting the writings of Joseph. Presumably, then, in a similar fashion Moses quoted the writings of Joseph on the plates of brass.

“he shall do a work . . . which shall be of great worth” This, of course, includes the restoration of the gospel and the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon.

“the covenants which I have made with thy fathers” The Abrahamic covenants are summarized in the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8.

8 And I will give unto him a commandment that he shall do none other work, save the work which I shall command him. And I will make him great in mine eyes; for he shall do my work.

verse 8 Joseph Smith, Jr., during his ministry, was commanded to give his primary attentions to spiritual matters rather than temporal or worldly affairs (D&C 24:9).

“I will make him great in mine eyes” Joseph will be given the keys of God’s earthly “kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; and for the fulness of times” (D&C 27:13).

9 And he shall be great like unto Moses, whom I have said I would raise up unto you, to deliver my people, O house of Israel.

verse 9 “And he shall be great like unto Moses” Moses was the great gatherer. Keep in mind the essential function of the restored gospel and Church in this final dispensation in gathering scattered Israel (the reader may wish to review the commentary for 1 Nephi 20).

10 And Moses will I raise up, to deliver thy people out of the land of Egypt.

verses 9-10 Here we have the Lord, through ancient Joseph, prophesying specifically of the great deliverer Moses. There are other ancient documents that have ancient Joseph prophesying of Moses. A second-century AD translation of the Bible into Aramaic, Targum Neofiti, has Joseph prophesying of the captivity of Israel in Egypt and their deliverance from captivity by “Moses, Aaron, and Miriam” (Martin McNamara, trans., *Tarfum Neofiti 1: Genesis* [The Aramaic Bible, vol. 1A] [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992], 182).

From the standard account in Genesis 50:24-25, it is clear that Joseph was aware that the Israelites would someday leave Egypt, though he says nothing about the bondage they would endure in the meanwhile. But *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 48 (attributed to Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrqnas, who lived in the latter half of the first century AD and through the first decades of the second century), citing the Genesis passage, has Joseph prophesying the bondage of the Israelites and their deliverance by God. The second century AD *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Genesis 50:24 has Joseph telling his family, “behold you will be enslaved in Egypt, but do not make plans to go up out of Egypt until the time that two deliverers come and say to you, ‘The Lord surely remembers you’” (Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis* [The Aramaic Bible, vol. 1B] [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992], 166).

verse 10 The world is not aware that the Lord raised up Moses to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt in fulfillment of a covenant he entered into with Joseph of Egypt (see also 2 Nephi 3:17). This verse is a record of that covenant with ancient Joseph.

It is likely that Moses descended from Levi, one of ancient Jacob’s sons.

11 But a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins—and not to the bringing forth my word only, saith the Lord, but to the convincing them of my word, which shall have already gone forth among them.

verse 11 In reading the first few phrases in this verse, emphasis should be placed on the word “thy.” After mentioning the prophet Moses in the previous verse, the Lord says, “But a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of *thy* loins” (emphasis added). The Lord here is speaking, of course, to ancient Joseph, and the seer, as previously mentioned, is Joseph Smith, Jr. Not only will he bring forth the Book of Mormon, but through the Book of Mormon the “seed of [Joseph’s] loins” will be convinced of the truth of the Bible (“my word, which shall have already gone forth among them”). Make careful note of this interesting point: This prophetic verse states that the Book of Mormon will be used to prove the truth of the Bible rather than the converse.

12 Wherefore, the fruit of thy loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins, and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins, and bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord.

verse 12 Moses initiated the record later continued by the seed of Judah—the Bible. Joseph Smith, of the “fruit of [the] loins” of Joseph of Egypt translated the Book of Mormon. These two records would eventually “grow together” to teach the latter-day seed of Joseph of Egypt about their true identity as a branch of Israel and about the covenants the Lord made with their fathers.

The reader may wish to review the supplemental article, *Biblical Prophecies of the Book of Mormon*.

Consider, for a moment, how important it is for the Book of Mormon to stand together with the Bible as a second witness. McConkie and Millet point out that, “In the historical sense, the Bible [by itself] has been a book of war and bloodshed as men and nations have quarreled over its meaning; innumerable martyrs have been left in its wake, and Europe was virtually torn asunder” (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume 1, 207-8). Alone, the Bible is subject to an almost endless array of interpretations. From it has come a “war of words and tumult of opinions” (JS-H 1:10). Speaking of his search to know which church he should join, Joseph Smith said that the teachers of religion “understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible” (JS-H 1:12). Resolution of this doctrinal contention comes in the union of the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

13 And out of weakness he shall be made strong, in that day when my work shall commence among all my people, unto the restoring thee, O house of Israel, saith the Lord.

verse 13 “And out of weakness he shall be made strong” “He,” of course, is the seer, Joseph Smith. Why does the Lord choose the weak things, or the weak men, of the earth through whom to perform his works? The answer is that it is vital that man learn to lean upon the true source of power, instead of leaning upon themselves. The Lord chooses people as his agents who could not possibly fail—even expending all their own resources—to demonstrate to all where the power really lies. In Judges 7:2 we read: “Lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.” Paul recorded: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent” (1 Corinthians 1:19). Of those whom the Lord calls to labor in his vineyard, Paul wrote: “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). Joseph Smith, Jr., was one of those “weak things” (see D&C 35:13-14, 17- 18). He came of humble circumstances and had natural weaknesses.

14 And thus prophesied Joseph, saying: Behold, that seer will the Lord bless; and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded; for this promise, which I have obtained of the Lord, of the fruit of my loins, shall be fulfilled. Behold, I am sure of the fulfilling of this promise;

verse 14 The speaker now changes again. In verses 14 through 16 the speaker is ancient Joseph. Here we learn that Joseph Smith was protected from serious harm until, in the Lord’s economy, it was expedient that he and his brother Hyrum should give their lives in order to seal their testimonies of the Book of Mormon and the restored gospel (D&C 71:7-10; 135:1).

15 And his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father. And he shall be like unto me; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation.

verse 15 Ancient Joseph continues to prophesy, and he confirms the identification of the “seer.” It is Joseph Smith, Jr., the son of Joseph Smith, Sr.

“the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth . . . shall bring my people unto salvation” The restored gospel in this final dispensation is, of course, the means for the gathering of scattered Israel. Review the commentary or introduction for 1 Nephi 20. An interesting meaning of the Hebrew name which is equivalent to Joseph, Asaph, is “he who gathers,” “he who causes to return,” or “God gathereth” (O. Odelain and R. Sequeineau, *Dictionary of Proper Names and Places in the Bible*, 40).

“he shall be like unto me” One far-reaching similarity between ancient Joseph and Joseph Smith, Jr., is that they were both gatherers and Saviors. Ancient Joseph gathered his family in Egypt and saved them from the famine. The Joseph of this dispensation began the gathering of the house of Israel that all who gather might be saved in the presence of God.

verses 16-18 These verses draw a parallel between the gathering function of the latter-day seer, Joseph Smith, Jr., and that of Moses.

16 Yea, thus prophesied Joseph: I am sure of this thing, even as I am sure of the promise of Moses; for the Lord hath said unto me, I will preserve thy seed forever.

verse 16 “I am sure of this thing” Ancient Joseph is confident of the Lord’s promise of a latter-day seer, just as he is convinced of the Lord’s promise to raise up Moses to lead captive Israel out of Egypt. This promise of the Lord is summarized in the following verse.

17 And the Lord hath said: I will raise up a Moses; and I will give power unto him in a rod; and I will give judgment unto him in writing. Yet I will not loose his tongue, that he shall speak much, for I will not make him mighty in speaking. But I will write unto him my law, by the finger of mine own hand; and I will make a spokesman for him.

verse 17 Once again the speaker changes. In verses 17 through 21, the Lord is speaking to ancient Joseph.

“a Moses” This refers to Moses himself.

“I will give power unto him in a rod” Moses’s rod played a role in many incidents during Moses’s ministry (Exodus 4:1-5,17,20; 7:15-18; 8:5,16-17; 9:23; 10:13; 14:16; 17:9).

“I will give judgment unto him in writing.” Moses was blessed with the gift of being able to write, yet:

“I will not loose his tongue” The gift of being able to communicate effectively with the spoken word was withheld.

“I will write unto him my law, by the finger of mine own hand” This is a reference, of course, to Sinai (Exodus 31:18) and the commandments Moses received there.

“I will make a spokesman for him.” This spokesman is Moses’s brother Aaron. The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible also contains this prophecy. It reads, “And I will make a spokesman for him” (JST Genesis 50:35).

18 And the Lord said unto me also: I will raise up unto the fruit of thy loins; and I will make for him a spokesman. And I, behold, I will give unto him that he shall write the writing of the fruit of thy loins, unto the fruit of thy loins; and the spokesman of thy loins shall declare it.

verse 18 The Lord is still speaking to ancient Joseph. The Lord is going to “raise [a man] up unto the fruit of thy [ancient Joseph’s] loins.” This man will also be a writer who shall write “unto the fruit of thy loins.” Apparently the Lord will raise up, for the benefit of ancient Joseph’s posterity, a writer. And that writer will have a “spokesman.” Some have suggested that the writer is Joseph Smith, Jr. who “wrote” or translated the Book of Mormon. Further, it has been suggested that perhaps the spokesman is a composite personality including Oliver Cowdery (D&C 28:3) and Sidney Rigdon (see D&C 100:9; 124:103-4; 35:19-23; *JD*, 25:126- 27), who were both important spokesmen for the Church.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has provided yet another interpretation of this verse: “The individual of the lineage of Joseph who would be raised up to write the record of Joseph (the Book of Mormon) is the prophet Mormon. The ‘spokesman’ of the word is Joseph Smith, Jr.” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 426.)

The phrase “fruit of thy loins” in its initial usage in this verse seems to refer to the latter-day descendants of ancient Joseph. The Lord will “raise up [a writer] unto” them.

Speaking of the “writer,” the Lord says, “he shall write the writing of the fruit of thy loins [the writings of the Nephite prophets], unto the fruit of thy loins [to the latter-day remnants of the tribe of Joseph].”

19 And the words which he shall write shall be the words which are expedient in my wisdom should go forth unto the fruit of thy loins. And it shall be as if the fruit of thy loins had cried unto them from the dust; for I know their faith.

verse 19 “the words which he shall write” The writer, then, is either Joseph Smith, Jr. or the prophet Mormon.

As in the previous verse, the phrase “fruit of thy loins,” which appears twice in this verse, has a different meaning with each usage. With the first usage, the meaning seems to be the latter-day remnant of the lineage of Joseph. In context, the meaning is that the Book of Mormon will go forth unto that remnant. The second usage of the phrase “fruit of thy loins” appears to refer to the ancient prophet writers of the Book of Mormon. It will be as if these authors cry unto “them”—the latter-day remnant of the seed of ancient Joseph—from the dust. Since the plates of the Book of Mormon were unearthed by Joseph Smith, the book is said to be as a “cry from the dust.”

“the words which are expedient in my wisdom” One of the definitions of *expedient* in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language is, “tending to promote the object proposed; fit or suitable for the purpose; proper under the circumstances.”

“for I know their faith” The Lord is aware of the virtue of the prophet writers of the Book of Mormon.

20 And they shall cry from the dust; yea, even repentance unto their brethren, even after many generations have gone by them. And it shall come to pass that their cry shall go, even according to the simpleness of their words.

verse 20 “And they shall cry from the dust” As in the previous verse, the Book of Mormon authors shall “cry from the dust.”

“even after many generations have gone by them” This phrase apparently refers to the centuries, or “many generations,” that the Book of Mormon plates lay sleeping in the dust before they were brought forth to “cry” repentance to the latter-day posterity of Joseph and to others. They will cry repentance in a forthright manner that is easy to understand.

21 Because of their faith their words shall proceed forth out of my mouth unto their brethren who are the fruit of thy loins; and the weakness of their words will I make strong in their faith, unto the remembering of my covenant which I made unto thy fathers.

verse 21 “Because of their faith their words shall proceed forth out of my mouth unto their brethren who are the fruit of thy loins” Because of the faith of the Book of Mormon prophets, they are able to perceive and communicate God’s mind to their latter-day progeny.

“the weakness of their words will I make strong in their faith” This phrase is reminiscent of D&C 1:24. Speaking of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord said, “These commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.”

“covenants which I made unto thy fathers” Again, you can review these covenants, the so-called Abrahamic covenants in the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8.

22 And now, behold, my son Joseph, after this manner did my father of old prophesy.

verse 22 The final speaker change in this chapter occurs here. In verses 22 through 25 the speaker, Lehi, is again speaking to his son Joseph.

“My father of old,” of course, is ancient Joseph.

23 Wherefore, because of this covenant thou art blessed; for thy seed shall not be destroyed, for they shall hearken unto the words of the book.

verse 23 “this covenant” This refers to the covenant the Lord has just outlined in 2 Nephi 3:18-21.

24 And there shall rise up one mighty among them, who shall do much good, both in word and in deed, being an instrument in the hands of God, with exceeding faith, to work mighty wonders, and do that thing which is great in the sight of God, unto the bringing to pass much restoration unto the house of Israel, and unto the seed of thy brethren.

verse 24 To whom does this interesting prophecy refer? Generally it has been thought to refer to Joseph Smith, Jr. However, Presidents Joseph Fielding Smith (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:251) and Spencer W. Kimball ("The Lamanites," *Improvement Era*, November 1947, 717, 762-65) have suggested this will be a future prophet yet to be raised up among the Lamanite people. The far-reaching extent of this prophecy will be better understood when it is fulfilled.

25 And now, blessed art thou, Joseph. Behold, thou art little; wherefore hearken unto the words of thy brother, Nephi, and it shall be done unto thee even according to the words which I have spoken. Remember the words of thy dying father. Amen.

2 Nephi Chapter 4

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 4:16-35 The Psalm of Nephi

1 And now, I, Nephi, speak concerning the prophecies of which my father hath spoken, concerning Joseph, who was carried into Egypt.

verse 1 “I, Nephi, speak concerning the prophecies . . . concerning Joseph” Nephi is about to write concerning some prophecies “concerning Joseph.” The next verse indicates that the prophecies not only concerned ancient Joseph, but were in fact written by him. But which prophecies are being referred to here? At least in part they are the ones discussed by father Lehi in the previous chapter as he blessed his son Joseph (2 Nephi 3:5-21).

2 For behold, he truly prophesied concerning all his seed. And the prophecies which he wrote, there are not many greater. And he prophesied concerning us, and our future generations; and they are written upon the plates of brass.

verse 2 Again we are reminded that ancient Joseph was truly one of the great prophets, yet the world does not regard him so. The reason is obvious. They do not have access to the “stick of Joseph”—the plates of brass and the Book of Mormon (see Ezekiel 37:15-19; D&C 27:5).

3 Wherefore, after my father had made an end of speaking concerning the prophecies of Joseph, he called the children of Laman, his sons, and his daughters, and said unto them: Behold, my sons, and my daughters, who are the sons and the daughters of my first-born, I would that ye should give ear unto my words.

verse 3 As is well known, when the words of the Book of Mormon were translated “by the gift and power of God,” there was no punctuation at all in the early manuscripts, and that is the way the translated text was delivered to E.B. Grandin’s print shop. Typesetter John Gilbert reported that when he sat down to prepare the text for publication, “every chapter . . . was one solid paragraph, without a punctuation mark, from beginning to end” (Royal Skousen, “John Gilbert’s 1892 Account of the 1830 Printing of the Book of Mormon” in *The Disciple as Witness: 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, 402). So he added punctuation and paragraphing as he went along. He did a good job, especially for someone reading the book for the first time, but there are a few sentences that could have been punctuated in more than one way, with slightly different results. The punctuation of the Book of Mormon does not

enjoy the same revealed status as the words themselves. Hence from time to time there are some verses in which it may be worth considering alternate punctuation.

This particular verse is a good example. Grant Hardy has speculated as to punctuation changes that might well be made here (*FARMS Insights*, volume 24, number 2, 2-3). Here the word *called* means summoned, but with the deletion of a couple of commas, the meaning shifts dramatically: “Wherefore, after my father had made an end of speaking concerning the prophecies of Joseph, he called the children of Laman his sons and his daughters, and said unto them . . .” In this latter reading, when Lehi “called the children of Laman his sons and his daughters,” he was actually adopting his grandchildren as his own children. This may seem counterintuitive, but it makes sense of the words that follow in that this same verse (“Behold, my sons, and my daughters, who are the sons and the daughters of my first-born”) as well as in verse 5, where he definitely refers to his grandchildren as his own sons and daughters. Even more compelling, in support of this suggested emendation, is the fact that Lehi’s actions echo those of the patriarch Jacob, who in a similar situation—giving last blessings and dividing territory—adopted the sons of his son Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) and made them independent tribes (see Genesis 48:1-6). Note also that Lehi similarly adopts the children of Lemuel in 2 Nephi 4:8-9.

As with other passages in the Bible, Genesis 48 has been thoroughly analyzed by generations of scholars. Adoption was rare in ancient Israel and is not mentioned in the Mosaic Law, but this instance seems fairly straightforward. Jacob says to his son Joseph: “And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. And thy issue, which thou begetteth after them, shall be thine, and shall be called after the name of their brethren in their inheritance” (Genesis 48:5-6). In fact, the placing of the children on Jacob’s lap, mentioned in verse 12 (“and Joseph brought them out from between his [Jacob’s] knees”), is often regarded as a part of an ancient adoption ceremony (see also Genesis 30:3). And Jacob specifically mentions that his actions are the result of a revelation about his descendants in the land of promise.

As he came to the end of his life, Lehi, like Jacob, is trying to prepare his family for a future in a new land. In particular, he is concerned about the children of his two oldest sons, Laman and Lemuel, who have already shown signs of rebellion. He adopts these grandchildren in an effort to tie them more closely to himself and to the covenant given by the Lord (in the following verse he reminds them of the terms of that covenant: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land”).

This adoption is a bold move, but it is not entirely new. It is part of the family history of a man who, after God called him to relive sacred history by traveling to a promised land, named his next two sons Jacob and Joseph. This was something of a departure in his family. None of the four older boys were named after patriarchs.

With the deletion of a few commas, the Hebrew roots of Lehi's last words come more clearly into focus. How was John Gilbert to know? For other examples of conjectural punctuation emendations, see the commentaries for Alma 54:23-24 and Alma 56:48.

4 For the Lord God hath said that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence.

verse 4 Here, again, is an important "vintage" Book of Mormon theme—the so-called promise-curse of the Book of Mormon. For a more complete elaboration of this theme see 2 Nephi 1:7, 9-10.

5 But behold, my sons and my daughters, I cannot go down to my grave save I should leave a blessing upon you; for behold, I know that if ye are brought up in the way ye should go ye will not depart from it.

verse 5 "if ye are brought up in the way ye should go ye will not depart from it" In this statement there is an implied commandment. It is that parents should train up and teach their children in the ways of truth and righteousness. In this manner the children will be given the best chance of holding fast to the gospel throughout their lives. The entire statement, however, creates the impression of a doctrinal proclamation. The implication is that if the parents provide the child with sufficient teaching and training, the child will never depart from the ways of truth. And if the child does rebel against the truth, perhaps the parental nurturing was somehow deficient. While it is true that a child brought up with gospel principles will often adhere to those principles throughout his life, it is by no means certain that he will do so. Adam and Eve were certainly conscientious and diligent parents who taught their children the truths of the gospel, yet at least one of their children rebelled. In Book of Mormon times, when the people of King Benjamin were all converted by his preaching, they surely must have taught their children the gospel; yet, many of them later fell away (see Mosiah 26:1-4). We may thus conclude that while this statement in verse 5 is a statement of doctrine, it is a doctrine that herein is incompletely elaborated. For a discussion of other such "incomplete" doctrinal pronouncements, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 3:7.

verses 6-7 Here Lehi pronounces a blessing upon the innocent children of Laman.

6 Wherefore, if ye are cursed, behold, I leave my blessing upon you, that the cursing may be taken from you and be answered upon the heads of your parents.

verse 6 "if ye are cursed, behold, I leave my blessing upon you, that the cursing may be taken from you" Father Lehi already has the premonition that the

Lamanites will bring upon themselves the “curse” of being cut off from the Spirit of the Lord by their own rebelliousness. He indicates, however, that this cursing is not intended to be eternal—“that the cursing may be taken [eventually] from you.” For further discussion of the curse and the mark of the curse, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:20-23.

“and be answered upon the heads of your parents” We would not, of course, expect that any child would be held accountable for the sins of a parent. Here Lehi reassures the righteous posterity of Laman that they will not be held accountable for the “cursing” placed upon their parents. It is implied further that the parents will be held accountable and punished for failure to teach their children. Ancient Israelite law placed upon the parents the obligation to teach the law to their children (Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:7; 11:8-9; 32:46; Exodus 12:26-27; 13:8-15).

7 Wherefore, because of my blessing the Lord God will not suffer that ye shall perish; wherefore, he will be merciful unto you and unto your seed forever.

verse 7 “because of my blessing the Lord God will not suffer that ye shall perish” Notwithstanding the unrighteous proclivities of Laman and Lemuel, their posterity are promised a choice blessing (see also verse 9). Their family line will never be destroyed to the point of extinction, and ultimately the Lord, in his mercy, will provide for them some type of blessing (“in the end thy seed shall be blessed”—verse 9), perhaps an opportunity to hear the gospel. This verse implies that these blessings will occur “because of [Lehi’s] blessing.” One is reminded of the verse in James: “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

8 And it came to pass that after my father had made an end of speaking to the sons and daughters of Laman, he caused the sons and daughters of Lemuel to be brought before him.

9 And he spake unto them, saying: Behold, my sons and my daughters, who are the sons and the daughters of my second son; behold I leave unto you the same blessing which I left unto the sons and daughters of Laman; wherefore, thou shalt not utterly be destroyed; but in the end thy seed shall be blessed.

10 And it came to pass that when my father had made an end of speaking unto them, behold, he spake unto the sons of Ishmael, yea, and even all his household.

verse 10 “it came to pass” In his editing for the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith removed at least forty-seven instances of this well-worked phrase from the text. In most cases, there were two or more examples of “it came to pass” in close proximity. In many cases, nothing new had, in fact, “come to pass.” One example is this particular verse. In the original manuscript this verse read, “and it came to pass that when my father had made an end of speaking unto them behold it came to pass that he spake unto the sons of Ishmael yea and even all his household.” This

phrase corresponds to the Hebrew word “way hí.” It seems that this phrase in Hebrew is simply a discourse marker which facilitates textual cohesion. Perhaps it should be considered equivalent to “and then” or “and so” (“The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?” a FARMS reprint, Royal Skousen).

11 And after he had made an end of speaking unto them, he spake unto Sam, saying: 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.

verse 11 “thou shalt inherit the land like unto thy brother Nephi . . . and thy seed shall be numbered with his seed” Here Lehi seems to be indicating that Sam’s posterity would not have a separate tribe or land of inheritance but would be merged with Nephi’s (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 1:30-32). The consequence is that in the Book of Mormon there are Nephites, Jacobites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, Ishmaelites, and Josephites but never any “Samites.” In the Book of Mormon text, we have only the barest sketch of Sam. He will later be referred to in the book of Alma as a “just and holy” man (Alma 3:6). We know nothing of Sam’s childhood, nor do we know how old he was when the events in 1 Nephi began. His name has Egyptian roots, and he was probably born in the days of Lehi’s prosperity (see Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 76). It is conjectured that Nephi was in his mid-teens when his family left Jerusalem. If so, then Sam must have been in his late teens or early twenties. He was a witness to the persecutions of his father in Jerusalem before the family departed into the wilderness, and he was present during the arduous journey to the New World. Early in their journey in the wilderness, while camped at the valley of Lemuel, Nephi wrote, “I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me.” Significantly, Nephi first shared this experience with his brother Sam. From this, one can deduce a special relationship of trust between these two brothers.

There are a couple of enigmatic incidents that involved Sam. While camped in the valley of Lemuel, Nephi and his brothers were sent back to Jerusalem to get Ishmael and his family. On their way back to valley of Lemuel, Nephi’s brothers Laman and Lemuel and others rebelled against Nephi, Ishmael, and others. Nephi’s brothers “did bind [Nephi] with cords, [and] they sought to take away [his] life” (1 Nephi 7:16). One cannot help but wonder where Sam was during this event. Was it simply a matter of being outnumbered? Was he restrained in some way? The record does not mention what Sam did. The problem was ultimately diffused by pleadings from Ishmael’s family. Also on the boat when the group “began to make themselves merry,” where was he when Nephi was tied up? It is obvious that Sam was generally a good and faithful man.

I have little on which to base my speculation, but I have wondered about the possibility of Sam's having been somewhat incapacitated, either mentally or physically.

12 And it came to pass after my father, Lehi, had spoken unto all his household, according to the feelings of his heart and the Spirit of the Lord which was in him, he waxed old. And it came to pass that he died, and was buried.

verse 12 Where was Lehi buried? In the land referred to in the Book of Mormon as the “place of the fathers’ first inheritance” (Alma 22:28). This is the coastal area where Lehi and his family initially settled.

13 And it came to pass that not many days after his death, Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael were angry with me because of the admonitions of the Lord.

verse 13 “not many days” Perhaps Lehi, while alive, had a restraining influence upon Laman and Lemuel. Immediately after Lehi's death, their suppressed rage erupted into a firm determination to kill Nephi.

“because of the admonitions of the Lord” As the next verse points out, Nephi had felt constrained to deliver these admonitions which might be expected to be poorly received.

14 For I, Nephi, was constrained to speak unto them, according to his word; for I had spoken many things unto them, and also my father, before his death; many of which sayings are written upon mine other plates; for a more history part are written upon mine other plates.

verse 14 “mine other plates” This phrase refers to the portion of the large plates of Nephi that reported Lehi's dealings with his older two sons. Was this part of the book Lehi? We don't actually know what title was given to the first part of the large plates of Nephi, if any title was given at all. The book of Lehi is actually the first part of *Mormon's abridgement* of the large plates of Nephi. Mormon wrote his abridgement onto the plates of Mormon. We already know that the large plates of Nephi contained “a more history part”—more of a historical emphasis than a spiritual one. Apparently the book of Lehi on the plates of Mormon extended from the family's time in Jerusalem to the reign of King Benjamin. It was this portion of Joseph's translation of the plates of Mormon that was lost by Martin Harris or his wife.

15 And upon these I write the things of my soul, and many of the scriptures which are engraven upon the plates of brass. For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children.

verse 15 **“upon these I write the things of my soul”** “These,” on the other hand, are the unabridged small plates of Nephi, from which we are now reading.

“my soul delighteth” This is an interesting phrase that is used in the Book of Mormon text only by the prophet Nephi. It is used ten additional times in Nephi’s writings. He may have obtained the expression from Isaiah’s writings as it is found also in Isaiah 42:1. If any one author had written the Book of Mormon, wouldn’t we expect to find this phrase scattered randomly throughout the Book of Mormon rather than finding it uniquely used by Nephi? Credit for this observation goes to Richard Rust, professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (FARMS Insights, No. 3, May 1992).

“my heart pondereth them” Do we “ponder” with the “heart” or with the mind? Apparently both are important processes, as a point of truth may be felt before it is understood. As we acquire a testimony of a spiritual concept, the initial step is often to develop a positive feeling for the idea in one’s heart. We might not even understand the truth at first, but we persist in mulling it over in our “heart.” Only later does the mind catch up. This process is alluded to by Matthew (Matthew 15:13). To be complete and firm, a testimony must be characterized by an understanding of both the heart and the mind (D&C 8:1-3).

verses 16-35 These verses contain a poetic segment of the Book of Mormon which has been called the Psalm of Nephi. A psalm is not a sermon or doctrinal exposition, but rather is a poem or a song of praise. It is a prayerful expression of a personal religious experience. Nephi’s psalm contains themes that have been found commonly in Hebrew literature. They include sorrow for sin, communion with and joy in God, the quest for perfection, humility when being reproved, and triumph over evil.

What factors provoked Nephi’s writing of this prayer? Some clues might be found in the text of the psalm itself. Before reading the psalm, consider the severe emotion Nephi was experiencing as he wrote it. He had just written of the death of his father (verse 12) and the renewed hatred of his brothers. Just how devastating was Lehi’s death to Nephi? Lehi was the only force holding the family together. Lehi was the only one who shared with Nephi the responsibility for spiritual guidance of their people. Without Lehi, Nephi was bereft and alone. His position of leadership must have seemed terribly lonely. Particularly so because his enemies had just renewed their commitment to oppose him. He had no father to turn to, so he turned to his Father in heaven, crying unto him for strength. As you read this psalm or prayer of Nephi, keep in mind this poignantly human element, and enjoy!

16 Behold, my soul delighteth in the things of the Lord; and my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard.

verse 16 “my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard” It seems likely that a prophet may receive a revelation and then spend the rest of his life coming to understand it. Nephi’s vision experience reported in 1 Nephi 11-15 probably provided him a lifetime of material for pondering.

17 Nevertheless, notwithstanding the great goodness of the Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works, my heart exclaimeth: O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.

verse 17 “my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities” Apparently Nephi’s sense of anguish over his own sins motivated the writing of his psalm. It seems somehow comforting to know that even the great prophet Nephi stumbled, just as each of us has, in his struggles with the “flesh.” We are left to wonder what specific sins produced his grief. Look in verse 27 for possible clues.

18 I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me.

verse 18 “I am encompassed about” It is interesting to note that the expression “encompassed about” is found only three times in all four standard works, and all three are in the Book of Mormon (see also Ether 3:2; 6:7). “Encompassed” means encircled or surrounded, but in these three verses of scripture the expression “encompassed about” implies something further. It suggests being surrounded by something that is threatening or dangerous and nearly overwhelming. In this case Nephi is “encompassed about” by temptation and sin.

The word *beset* here is similar in its meaning. Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *beset* as, “To surround; to inclose [sic]; to hem in; to besiege. To press on all sides, so as to perplex; to entangle, so as to render escape difficult or impossible; to waylay.”

19 And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted.

verse 19 Nephi’s heart is laden even to the point of making it difficult for him to experience joy, but then he remembers his most trusted friend—the Lord.

verses 20-25 In these verses Nephi refers to personal spiritual experiences, apparently all specific incidents, with which he has been blessed.

20 My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep.

21 He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh.

verses 20-21 Apparently Nephi has reference here to his experiences in the wilderness of Arabia before arriving at Bountiful and his experiences aboard ship reported in 1 Nephi 17:48 when he was filled with the power of God “even unto the consuming of [his] flesh.” What is meant by the phrase “consuming of my flesh”? The Prophet Abinadi had an experience which paralleled that of Nephi. When the priests of King Noah tried to seize him before he had a chance to deliver his complete message, he was transformed by the Spirit of the Lord so that his “face shone with exceeding luster, even as Moses’s did while in the mount of Sinai, while speaking with the Lord.” It seems logical that the process by which Moses, Abinadi, and Nephi were transformed is referred to here as the “consuming of my flesh.”

22 He hath confounded mine enemies, unto the causing of them to quake before me.

verse 22 This verse likely refers to Nephi’s experience with his rebellious brothers reported in 1 Nephi 17:53-55. In this context, to *confound* means to put to shame or to silence Nephi’s enemies.

verses 23-25 These verses refer to Nephi’s marvelous vision of the tree of life reported in 1 Nephi 11-15.

23 Behold, he hath heard my cry by day, and he hath given me knowledge by visions in the night-time.

24 And by day have I waxed bold in mighty prayer before him; yea, my voice have I sent up on high; and angels came down and ministered unto me.

25 And upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains. And mine eyes have beheld great things, yea, even too great for man; therefore I was bidden that I should not write them.

verse 25 “upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains” This is the only verse in all scripture that contains the beautiful phrase “upon the wings of his Spirit.” Was Nephi’s being “carried away” to a high mountain a literal or a figurative phenomenon? See the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:1.

26 O then, if I have seen so great things, if the Lord in his condescension unto the children of men hath visited men in so much mercy, why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken, because of mine afflictions?

verse 26 “the Lord in his condescension unto the children of men” To review the concept of “condescension of God,” see the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:16.

Nephi asks, “Since I have been a witness to the condescension of the Savior, why am I so troubled by my own trivial afflictions?”

“hath visited men in so much mercy” The 1830 printer’s manuscript has this phrase as “hath visited me in so much mercy.” It was the printer John H. Gilbert who changed “me” to “men.” This change may have been unconsciously influenced by the earlier occurrence of “men” on the same line. The correct text is “me,” with Nephi marveling at the Lord’s love for him.

We may summarize the meaning of this verse: If I am so highly favored of the Lord, and since I know that the Lord suffered immeasurably and is so merciful unto me, then why am I suffering so much?

27 And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul? Why am I angry because of mine enemy?

verse 27 Perhaps Nephi’s sense of spirituality or inner peace was disturbed by anger he felt against his older brothers, Laman and Lemuel, or perhaps he struggled, as all of us do, with other pulls of the flesh.

verses 28-33 We share a profound moment of insight with Nephi as he realizes that there is an alternate course of action. In the verses that follow he vows to eliminate from his mind the feelings that are eroding his inner peace.

28 Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul.

verse 28 “enemy of my soul” Here Nephi is speaking to his own inner soul, his “heart.” The enemy of his soul is his natural-man self including his unsatisfactorily controlled anger, and his giving in to the pulls of the flesh. The next verse confirms this conclusion.

29 Do not anger again because of mine enemies. Do not slacken my strength because of mine afflictions.

verse 29 Still speaking to his own heart, he urges himself to try to avoid anger and also to stop allowing guilt to undermine his inner peace.

30 Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation.

verse 30 “the rock of my salvation” The metaphor “rock,” which is found often in the scriptures, is usually interpreted as firm supporter, refuge, fortress, or one of impregnable strength. Here and in other verses (Deuteronomy 32:15; 2 Samuel 22:47;

Psalm 62:7; 94:22; Isaiah 17:10; and 2 Nephi 4:35) there is an additional implication or shade of meaning—the “rock” also implies author or source.

31 O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin?

verse 31 Again, Nephi’s “enemies” here and in verse 33 are likely his temptation to anger and perhaps his human inclination to respond to other pulls of the flesh.

32 May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite! O Lord, wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road!

verse 32 “low valley . . . plain road” These charming metaphors, which are not found elsewhere in the scriptures, apparently imply humility and purity.

33 O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies! Wilt thou make my path straight before me! Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way—but that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way, but the ways of mine enemy.

verse 33 “wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness” In his dedicatory prayer for the Kirtland temple, Joseph spoke of the first resurrection: “That when the trump shall sound for the dead, we shall be caught up in the cloud to meet thee, that we may ever be with the Lord; that our garments may be pure, that we may be clothed upon with *robes of righteousness*, with palms in our hands, and crowns of glory upon our heads, and reap eternal joy for all our sufferings” (D&C 109:75-76, emphasis added).

“Wilt thou make my path straight before me! Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way—but that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way” A hedge is planted to protect that which the hedge surrounds by blocking the intrusion of outsiders. To “hedge up the way” of someone is to block their path. Nephi pleads with the Lord to keep his escape route clear but asks the Lord to place blocks in the ways of his enemy.

The *straight path* in this verse is characterized by having no “stumbling block.” Thus, the meaning of straight in this verse is not not-crooked but rather clear or unencumbered. The use of the word straight (rather than strait) in this verse is appropriate as discussed in the supplemental article, *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

verses 34-35 Finally Nephi comes to the great truth that no man is redeemed by the arm of flesh—that each of us must put our ultimate trust in God.

34 O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm.

verse 34 “the arm of flesh” Scriptural examples of specific things which fit under this label include: weapons (Psalm 20:7; 44:6); governments or heads of government (Psalm 146:3; Isaiah 30:2); your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5); riches (Proverbs 11:28); the work of a man’s hands (2 Nephi 12:8); vanity (Isaiah 59:4); friends (Micah 7:5); teachers—unless he be a man of God (Mosiah 23:14); and persuasions of men (D&C 5:21).

“cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh” In what sense is such a man cursed? Does God do the cursing? In Hebrew culture a cursing is the consequence of breaking an oath, covenant, or contract. Here it would seem likely that the natural consequence of placing your trust in “the arm of flesh” is to suffer the “curse” which is to be cut off from the presence or Spirit of God. We learn here that a man who “maketh flesh his arm” is one who puts his trust in man and not God.

35 Yea, I know that God will give liberally to him that asketh. Yea, my God will give me, if I ask not amiss; therefore I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea, I will cry unto thee, my God, the rock of my righteousness. Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God. Amen.

verse 35 “if I ask not amiss” The Lord said, “Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name it shall be given unto you, that is expedient for you; and if ye ask anything that is not expedient for you, it shall turn unto your condemnation” (D&C 88:64-65).

The word *amiss*, in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language, is defined as “in a faulty manner; contrary to propriety, truth, law, or morality.”

“rock of my righteousness” See the commentary for verse 30.

2 Nephi Chapter 5

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 5 Nephi and his followers separate from the Lamanites and move to land of Nephi. They build a temple after the manner of the temple of Solomon. Nephi is commanded to make the small plates of Nephi and begin engraving upon them.

1 Behold, it came to pass that I, Nephi, did cry much unto the Lord my God, because of the anger of my brethren.

verse 1 Obviously Nephi had difficulty dealing with the rancor of his elder brothers to the point where he sought the Lord's counsel. He may well have been motivated by concern for their eternal welfare, but the next verse suggests that, in some large measure, fear might have also prompted his appeal to the Lord.

2 But behold, their anger did increase against me, insomuch that they did seek to take away my life.

3 Yea, they did murmur against me, saying: Our younger brother thinks to rule over us; and we have had much trial because of him; wherefore, now let us slay him, that we may not be afflicted more because of his words. For behold, we will not have him to be our ruler; for it belongs unto us, who are the elder brethren, to rule over this people.

verse 3 Here again, the animosity of Nephi's older brothers surfaces. This verse suggests that their resentment may have had at least in part a cultural origin. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:37 and 2 Nephi 1:28-29. This same resentment will become deeply ingrained in the cultural heritage of the Lamanite people and will surface again and again (see Enos 1:2; Mosiah 10:12-17; Alma 43:7-8; 54:17).

The notion that the eldest son had the right to rule after the death of his father was perhaps also preserved in the Nephite and Jaredite practice of often appointing a king's or chief judge's son, likely the eldest, to reign or preside after his father (e.g., Omni 1:23; Mosiah 1:2, 9-10; 11:1; 19:26; 29:6-7, 42; Alma 50:39; Ether 6:25).

4 Now I do not write upon these plates all the words which they murmured against me. But it sufficeth me to say, that they did seek to take away my life.

verse 4 "These plates," of course, are the small plates of Nephi.

5 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.

6 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.

verse 6 “and also my sisters” This is the first time Nephi mentions having sisters. When did they come onto the scene? There seem to be two possibilities. First, they could have been born to Lehi and Sariah either in the wilderness or even in the New World. In this case it seems a bit peculiar that their births were not mentioned, though this is probably compatible with oriental (eastern) custom which is decidedly male-oriented. Also, Lehi did refer to Joseph as his “last born” (2 Nephi 3:1). Again, though, neglecting to mention the birth of females is probably compatible with the custom of the time. Another possibility is that Nephi’s sisters were the wives of Ishmael’s two sons. If this be the case, it is remarkable that these sisters were willing to leave their husbands, provided they were still living, to go with Nephi. Keep in mind that Ishmael’s two sons and their wives did rebel against Nephi in the wilderness as they were coming out of Jerusalem to join Lehi in the wilderness (1 Nephi 7:6) (Sidney B. Sperry, “Did Father Lehi Have Daughters Who Married the Sons of Ishmael?” a FARMS reprint).

7 And we did take our tents and whatsoever things were possible for us, and did journey in the wilderness for the space of many days. And after we had journeyed for the space of many days we did pitch our tents.

verse 7 “journey in the wilderness” In our minds the word *wilderness* conjures up an image of an area which is uninhabited and contains little vegetation or animal life, like the desert area referred to in 1 Nephi 2:4. In other places in the Book of Mormon, as here, it is not likely referring to barren deserts, but more likely fertile areas that are “wilderness” because they are difficult to negotiate and sparsely populated or completely uninhabited (see also 1 Nephi 18:6, 24-25).

8 And my people would that we should call the name of the place Nephi; wherefore, we did call it Nephi.

verse 8 John L. Sorenson (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 141) and others interested in the geographic aspects of the Book of Mormon (e.g. Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 26) have selected the area of present-day Guatemala City as the likely site for “Nephi,” the city of Nephi. An ancient ruin in Guatemala City called Kaminaljuyu has been shown by archaeological studies to have originated at about this time in Book of Mormon history. The date of Nephi’s departure from the land of first inheritance and his establishment of the city of Nephi is not known but is estimated to be between 588 and 570 BC, probably about 580 BC. The city of Nephi will become the center of the larger land of Nephi. It will eventually be renamed the city of Lehi-Nephi. This land will serve as the Nephite

capital for some 360 to 380 years. In about 210 BC, the Nephite king Mosiah will lead the Nephites out of the land of Nephi “down” to the land of Zarahemla. Subsequent to that time, in the Book of Mormon story, the land of Nephi forms the center of Lamanite culture and activity.

The distance, as the crow flies, between the proposed sites for the land of first inheritance and the city of Nephi is about one hundred miles. However, the terrain is mountainous, Nephi would have had with him women and children and perhaps flocks. It might well have taken them twenty days or so to negotiate this distance. This twenty days is compatible with the “many days” mentioned in the previous verse.

Was this place they called Nephi already populated when Nephi and his people settled there? Would they join with others—indigenous people in the area? Perhaps so. Many have supposed that Nephi’s party found the future City of Nephi to be uninhabited because Nephi failed to mention other peoples. We know, however, that after his arrival in the new land, Nephi and his people would build a temple “after the manner of the temple of Solomon” (see verse 18). Such a building project would have been made easier if they were able to add to their numbers by joining with some indigenous peoples.

As mentioned, we will read that about 370 years from this time Mosiah and his followers will flee from the land of Nephi. They will travel north and settle in the city of Zarahemla. They will discover that the people of Zarahemla (the Mulekites) will already be established there. In fact the city will be named for the Mulekites’ leader, Zarahemla (Omni 1:18). Nephi was the first to establish the place called Nephi, and so it was originally called Nephi. Regarding this custom of naming places after the first to possess them, we will later read: “Now it was the custom of the people of Nephi to call their lands, and their cities, and their villages, yea, even all their small villages, after the name of him who first possessed them; and thus it was with the land of Ammonihah (Alma 8:7). It does seem possible that there may have been a major city populated with non-Nephites near the city of Nephi (see the commentary for Jacob 2:28).

9 And all those who were with me did take upon them to call themselves the people of Nephi.

verse 9 Here is the first mention of the people of Nephi or the “Nephites.”

10 And we did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses.

verse 10 It is important to keep in mind that Lehi and his righteous posterity believed in and kept the law of Moses which was an integral part of their cultural inheritance (see also Alma 30:3).

Note here that Nephi, in conveying the simple idea that his people kept the law uses three different words for the law: “judgments,” “statutes,” and “commandments.”

Why did he use more than one word? Do they not all mean the same? John W. Welch has pointed out that in Hebrew there are several words used to express slightly different semantic aspects of the word “law.” For example *judgment* in Hebrew is *mishpat* and the *mishpatim* are the standards of behavior required by God or the judgments or verdicts pronounced by God. A *statute* in Hebrew is felt to be synonymous with ordinance, and both are rendered *Huqqah* or *hoq*. These may be defined as accepted customs or cultural rules. *Commandment* in Hebrew is *Mitzvah* and refers to divine commandments in general (*bar mitzvah* means “son of the commandment”).

The law—the law of Moses itself—in Hebrew is the *Torah* which refers to teachings or instructions. A testimony or witness in Hebrew is *edut* and is often a monument, stela, or book of the law. When an author writing in Hebrew wants to refer to the law and be certain that he has covered all the bases, he often uses multiple terms such as Nephi does in this verse, and as do other Book of Mormon authors (see also 1 Nephi 17:22; Mosiah 6:6; Alma 8:17; 30:3; 58:40; Helaman 3:20; 15:5). (“Statutes, Judgments, Ordinances, and Commandments” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992] 62-65.)

Notice also, in this verse, the repeated use of the article *the*. Unlike English, in which a series of nouns can be introduced by a single definite article (the), Hebrew repeats the definite article for each noun. This kind of repetition is seen throughout the Book of Mormon. This verse is a prime example of this particular Hebraism.

11 And the Lord was with us; and we did prosper exceedingly; for we did sow seed, and we did reap again in abundance. And we began to raise flocks, and herds, and animals of every kind.

verse 11 “we did reap again in abundance” The Book of Mormon people had been previously blessed with an abundant harvest on their arrival in the promised land (1 Nephi 18:24). It obviously continued here in the land of Nephi.

12 And I, Nephi, had also brought the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass; and also the ball, or compass, which was prepared for my father by the hand of the Lord, according to that which is written.

verse 12 “which was prepared for my father by the hand of the Lord, according to that which is written” The Liahona is the only mechanical device, of which we have knowledge, which was constructed by the hand of the Lord for use by mortal man (see also Mosiah 1:16; Alma 37:38). A possible exception is the device used for translation, the Urim and Thummim. We are not really given to know the origin of this latter device.

“according to that which is written” This phrase also implies that Nephi had access to a scriptural reference to the Liahona, which is not available to us today. Perhaps it was contained on the plates of brass. It is interesting to note that there exists

an ancient tradition among those of Hebrew culture of divining with arrows (Hugh Nibley, "The Liahona's Cousins," a FARMS reprint). Perhaps this ancient tradition had its origins in scriptural writings.

13 And it came to pass that we began to prosper exceedingly, and to multiply in the land.

14 And I, Nephi, did take the sword of Laban, and after the manner of it did make many swords, 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.

verse 14 "the people who were now called Lamanites" This is the first mention of "Lamanites." If one contemplates carefully this phrase, one may find herein the implication that Lehi's brothers Laman and Lemuel probably allied themselves with other peoples who were already in the New World. Archeological evidence indicates that peoples already were settled in most parts of the western hemisphere at the time Lehi and his party landed there. They likely did not land on a pristine and uninhabited land. Perhaps the offspring of Laman and Lemuel merged and intermarried with the indigenous culture that was already in the New World. This might help to explain the mark of the dark skin that was later placed upon the Lamanites. Also it may help to explain why the population of the Lamanites was always larger than that of the Nephites (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, John L. Sorenson, 193; see also Jarom 1:6).

15 And I did teach my people to build buildings, and to work in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores, which were in great abundance.

verse 15 In times past, critics of the Book of Mormon have enjoyed pointing out that archaeologists have felt that metals were not used in Mesoamerica until AD 900. It is now known that metals were used in Mesoamerica in Book of Mormon times ("A Reconsideration of Early Metal in Mesoamerica," John L. Sorenson, *Katunob* 9 [March 1976]:1-18).

Where and when did Nephi acquire all these skills that he was able to pass along to his people? Certainly, his experiences in building the ship on which the Lehtes sailed to the New World could have contributed much to his practical abilities.

16 And I, Nephi, did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land, wherefore, it could not be built like unto Solomon's temple. But the manner of the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon; and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine.

verse 16 This is the first time temple building is mentioned in the Book of Mormon. For a summary of the temples mentioned in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary for Alma 16:13. We will learn that these temples are important buildings to the Nephite people. The Nephites will gather at their temples for their coronations, their covenant ceremonies, for religious instructions, important sermons, and to perform sacrifices and sacred ordinances.

Is it reasonable to suppose that a small group of people could build a temple “after the manner of the temple of Solomon”? After all, it took many years and considerable resources for the entire Israelite kingdom to build Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem. In relatively recent times, archaeologists have indeed found small Israelite temples, or “mini-temples” in Palestine constructed “after the manner” of the temple in Jerusalem. Israeli archaeologist Avraham Negev commented on one of these temples: “The most remarkable discovery at Arad is the temple which occupied the north-western corner of the citadel. . . . Its orientation, general plan and contents, especially the tabernacle, are similar to the Temple of Solomon” (“Arad: A Biblical City in Southern Palestine,” *Archaeology* 17 [1964]: 43-53). In other words, Nephi’s construction of a simpler version of Solomon’s temple in a remote location, once he had established his people in a permanent city, was not a unique event in Jewish history, but rather an expected occurrence.

Solomon’s temple was apparently distinctive in its design. It consisted of three rooms, one behind the other, on a straight line, and the building was the same width all along its length. The middle room was the largest, and the third or the innermost room was the most holy, being known as the Holy of Holies.

On the subject of temples built outside of Jerusalem, Brother Hugh Nibley wrote:

The Elephantine Papyri . . . show us a Jewish community living far up the Nile, whither they had fled for safety, possibly at the destruction of Jerusalem in Lehi’s day. In 1954 some of these records, the Brooklyn Aramaic Papyri, were discovered. . . . Perhaps the most surprising discovery about these Jews settled so far from home was their program for building a temple in their new home. Not long ago, learned divines were fond of pointing out that Nephi’s idea of building a temple in the New World was quite sufficient in itself to prove once and for all the fraudulence of the Book of Mormon, since, it was argued, no real Jew would ever dream of having a temple anywhere but in Jerusalem (*Since Cumorah*, 53).

17 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did cause my people to be industrious, and to labor with their hands.

18 And it came to pass that they would that I should be their king. But I, Nephi, was desirous that they should have no king; nevertheless, I did for them according to that which was in my power.

verse 18 It was appropriate that this group of Hebrew people, few in number though they were, should want a king to rule over them. In ancient Hebrew culture, the king had significant religious as well as political functions. Nephi's reluctance to become king may have been due to the negative experience he had with the kings in Jerusalem (Jehoiakim and Zedekiah) who opposed Lehi and the other prophets like Jeremiah and Uriah (Jeremiah 26). Despite the righteous rule of a few Book of Mormon kings (Mosiah, Benjamin, and Benjamin's son Mosiah), the prophet leaders of the Book of Mormon all counseled against an autocratic system of government because of the spiritual risks involved (see, for example, Mosiah 23:7-9, 12-13; 29:13, 16-17, 21-23).

It is not entirely clear from the text whether or not Nephi did in fact assume the monarchical role. It is likely he did acquiesce to the people's demand and become their king (see 2 Nephi 6:2). It is also clear that he anointed his successor to be king. It is unusual for an Israelite king to occupy that role without being anointed by a prophet, and at this point in time there is apparently no prophet available to anoint him. Even if he was not anointed king, he still filled all the kingly functions for the Nephites until he died. He set a pattern of kingship in the Nephite society that would last until the institution of the reign of the judges almost five hundred years later.

19 And behold, the words of the Lord had been fulfilled unto my brethren, which he spake concerning them, that I should be their ruler and their teacher. Wherefore, I had been their ruler and their teacher, according to the commandments of the Lord, until the time they sought to take away my life.

verse 19 It is clear that the Lord intended for Nephi to preside over his elder brothers (see 1 Nephi 17:48-55; 2 Nephi 1:25-29).

20 Wherefore, the word of the Lord was fulfilled which he spake unto me, saying that: Inasmuch as they will not hearken unto thy words they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And behold, they were cut off from his presence.

verse 20 It is likely that Nephi here is recalling his father's account of his vision of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8). It was during that experience that Lehi had revealed to him that Laman and Lemuel would not heed his advice and would likely be cut off (1 Nephi 8:17-18, 35-38).

“they were cut off from his presence” This is the prophesied curse that was to fall upon Laman and Lemuel and all those who chose to affiliate with them (1 Nephi 2:23). This phrase refers to being cut off from or losing the Spirit of the Holy Ghost. It would seem that one cannot suffer a greater loss in mortality than to lose the Spirit of the Lord. To be without the Spirit is to be in a wholly carnal state. It is to be “without God in the world” and, therefore “in a state contrary to the nature of happiness” (Alma 41:11).

21 And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.

22 And thus saith the Lord God: I will cause that they shall be loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities.

23 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.

verses 21-23 The “sore cursing” that came upon the Lamanites was not the “skin of blackness.” Rather the cursing was losing the Spirit or being cut off from the presence of the Lord (as stated in the previous verse). The Lord did not curse the Lamanites in this way, rather they cursed themselves by their own iniquities (Alma 3:19). It is apparent that the Lamanites would still have become what they did become even if they had never been marked with the “skin of blackness.” The dark skin was not, in and of itself, a curse. There is nothing inherently good or evil about the color of one’s skin. It is not only racist but completely false doctrine to believe that white skin is “good” or righteous and that black skin is somehow less than that. The dark skin here is only a mark or symbol that functioned to identify those who had separated themselves from the Spirit. The Lord intended that those with the dark skin remain separate from those with the lighter skin (Alma 3:8) and that they not intermarry. The mark was intended to protect the spiritually immature early Nephites from being overwhelmed by the false traditions of the Lamanites. Later on, at the time of the prophet Jacob (Jacob 1:14-16), the protection probably occurred in the other direction—that is, the Lamanites were probably protected from the spiritually fatal immoralities of the Nephites.

There can be no question that the altering of the Lamanites’ skin color was God’s will. God might well have brought this to pass, however, in a “natural” way. There is a precedent, after all, for God’s bringing about this type of curse in such a “natural” way. Cain’s posterity had a “blackness” come upon them after the Lord cursed their land “with much heat” (Moses 7:8). It has been suggested that the “skin of blackness” may have resulted because the descendants of Laman and Lemuel intermarried with the indigenous native population. This is perhaps not, in fact, the way it happened, however. Please note that Nephi is describing this skin of blackness as occurring in his own lifetime (verse 21). Thus, there has not been sufficient time for this black skin to occur by simple intermarrying and genetic mixing.

As stated in the commentary for 2 Nephi 4:6 above, it was never intended that the “curse” or the banishment of the Lamanites from the Lord’s presence be eternal. See the commentary for Alma 23:6-7.

For a useful summary of the history of the Lamanites, particularly regarding their skin color, see the commentary for Mormon 5:15.

24 And because of their cursing which was upon them they did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey.

verse 24 As Satan gained an ever greater hold over the Lamanites, they descended deeper and deeper into barbarism (see also Enos 1:20, Jarom 1:6, and Alma 17:14-15).

You might wonder if “subtlety” here is indeed a derogatory quality. It usually means having the ability to make fine distinctions. Another meaning of “subtle,” however, is crafty, sly, cunning, and devious.

“did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey” Apparently they hunted and killed animals for sport. This is a practice roundly condemned in the scriptures (JST, Genesis 9:10-11).

25 And the Lord God said unto me: They shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in remembrance of me; and inasmuch as they will not remember me, and hearken unto my words, they shall scourge them even unto destruction.

verse 25 Here is another of those verses that is difficult to understand unless we can keep the pronouns straight. Keep in mind that a “scourge” is a cause of affliction or a means of inflicting punishment or suffering. Thus, throughout the Book of Mormon, we will read how the pugnacious Lamanites will serve as a scourge, a constant reminder, an ever-present warning to the rebellious Nephites. The first “they” refers to the Lamanites. “Them” refers to the Nephites. The next “they” refers to the Nephites. The final “they” refers to the Lamanites, and the final “them” refers to the Nephites.

26 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did consecrate Jacob and Joseph, that they should be priests and teachers over the land of my people.

verse 26 To “consecrate” in this context is to “set apart” or “devote to.”

“that they should be priests and teachers over the land of my people” These were not the offices of priest and teacher as we know them today in the Aaronic priesthood. It is believed that the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood did not exist among the Nephites unless it was brought during Christ’s visit among them. From the time of Moses to the mortal advent of Jesus Christ, the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood could only be held by a descendant of the tribe of Levi. Levi was the third son of ancient Jacob, and thus Levi’s descendants constitute one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses and his brother Aaron were Levites. The Lord designated that this lesser priesthood was to be conferred only on men from the tribe of Levi. Also within the tribe of Levi only the direct descendants of Aaron should be designated to the highest office within that priesthood—the “priest.” The presiding priest, the “high priest,” could be called only from among the firstborn of the descendants of Aaron. There were no descendants of

Levi or Aaron among the Nephites. An interesting aside is that after the law of Moses was fulfilled by atonement of Jesus Christ the tribal restrictions applied to ordination to the Aaronic priesthood were no longer in effect. Subsequent to Christ's atonement, then, the Nephites could ordain non-Levite men to all of the offices in the Aaronic priesthood just as we do today in the Church.

There is good evidence that the Nephite leaders held the Melchizedek priesthood, since they performed the ordinances of the law of Moses which they could not have done unless they had priesthood authority. The Melchizedek priesthood could be held by an Israelite without regard to his tribal lineage. Also the Melchizedek priesthood encompasses all the powers and authorities of the Aaronic.

Joseph Fielding Smith explained that "the fact that plural terms priests and teachers were used indicated that this was not a reference to the definite office in the priesthood in either case, but it was a general assignment to teach direct, and admonish the people. Otherwise the terms priest and teacher would have been given in the singular" (*Answers to Gospel Questions*. 5 volumes. Salt Lake City. Deseret Book, 1963, 1:124).

The use of the word "priests" might have come from Joseph Smith himself. The word *priest* was used in his day to refer to any ordained minister or preacher (Joseph Smith, Jr. *HC*, 1:2).

27 And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness.

28 And thirty years had passed away from the time we left Jerusalem.

29 And I, Nephi, had kept the records upon my plates, which I had made, of my people thus far.

verse 29 The phrase "my plates" refers to the large plates of Nephi. Review the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

30 And it came to pass that the Lord God said unto me: Make other plates; and thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are good in my sight, for the profit of thy people.

31 Wherefore, I, Nephi, to be obedient to the commandments of the Lord, went and made these plates upon which I have engraven these things.

verses 30-31 The "other plates" and "these plates upon which I have engraven these things" are the small plates of Nephi. We are, of course, now reading and studying Joseph's translation of the unabridged small plates of Nephi. It has previously been pointed out that Nephi's account on the small plates of Nephi was likely begun a full thirty years after Lehi and his company left Jerusalem (verse 28).

We tend to read the record taken from the small plates of Nephi, especially 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi as though it were a daily journal. Instead it is a retrospective account.

32 And I engraved that which is pleasing unto God. And if my people are pleased with the things of God they will be pleased with mine engravings which are upon these plates.

verse 32 Again, “these plates” are the small plates of Nephi.

33 And if my people desire to know the more particular part of the history of my people they must search mine other plates.

verse 33 “mine other plates” These are the large plates of Nephi.

34 And it sufficeth me to say that forty years had passed away, and we had already had wars and contentions with our brethren.

verse 34 We know that Nephi made the small plates of Nephi and began writing upon them about thirty years after the people left Jerusalem (see verses 30 and 31 above). Thus we learn here that it took Nephi ten years to write the first twenty-seven chapters (1 Nephi plus the first five chapters of 2 Nephi).

2 Nephi Chapter 6

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 6-10 Jacob delivers an important two-day sermon to the Nephites.

In 2 Nephi chapters 6-10 we find a lengthy sermon delivered to the people by Nephi's brother Jacob. Jacob was born to Sariah some time during the eight years the family was traveling in the wilderness between Jerusalem and the land Bountiful. He was no stranger to hardships having traveled with his family in the wilderness. He was a first-hand witness of the rebellion of Laman and Lemuel. He was exceptionally sensitive and gifted in spiritual matters. Even as a youth he was visited by the Savior and "beheld his glory." He also was favored with "many revelations," and he "heard the voice of the Lord speaking to him in very word, from time to time" (2 Nephi 2:4; 10:3; 11:3; Jacob 7:5). He is indeed one of the major doctrinal teachers in the Book of Mormon. For a more detailed discussion of this great prophet, see the introductory comments for the book of Jacob.

Apparently Nephi appointed Jacob to speak at a special gathering of the people, and Nephi requested that his topic include those parts of Isaiah which we know as chapters 49 through 52. We are not told the exact nature of this gathering but assume it must have been some type of conference. Even though Jacob's sermon in 2 Nephi 6-10 occupies thirteen pages of the Book of Mormon text, we know that this account is only a portion of what Jacob said on that occasion. Jacob's complete discourse was so long that it took Jacob two days to deliver it, and Nephi was able to include only a part of the sermon on his "small" plates (2 Nephi 11:1). It seems obvious that Nephi had great respect for the spiritual and oratorical prowess of his brother Jacob.

1 The words of Jacob, the brother of Nephi, which he spake unto the people of Nephi:

2 Behold, my beloved brethren, I, Jacob, having been called of God, and ordained after the manner of his holy order, and having been consecrated by my brother Nephi, unto whom ye look as a king or a protector, and on whom ye depend for safety, behold ye know that I have spoken unto you exceedingly many things.

verse 2 "his holy order" This phrase refers to the higher or Melchizedek priesthood, and this verse seems to confirm the fact that the ordinations that Jacob and his brother Joseph received were ordinations in the Melchizedek priesthood (see also 2 Nephi 31:18; Alma 13:1; and Alma 43:2). As previously stated, the Aaronic priesthood under the law of Moses was held exclusively by the tribe of Levi, and as far as we know there were no Levites among the Book of Mormon peoples.

An important principle should also be stated here. With the priesthood comes order. When the priesthood exists upon the earth, the church organization also exists. Thus the Church of Jesus Christ exists here under the leadership of Nephi. We, however, know little about this church from the Book of Mormon.

Though the Book of Mormon is not explicit on this point, it seems certain that the Melchizedek Priesthood was received by worthy men beginning with Lehi and Nephi (see the Alma 13 and its commentary). It is by this authority that they baptized, confirmed, ordained, and offered sacrifices.

There are actually three priesthood-directed organizations, or churches, of varying structure established among the Nephites over a period of a thousand years:

1. The existence of the first of these churches is not specifically mentioned, though this verse provides evidence of its existence. It is apparent that Nephi functioned as the head of the church. Here we read of Nephi's ordaining and consecrating his brother Jacob to service in the church. We will later read of Nephi and his brethren "labor[ing] diligently" in testifying of Christ, the gospel, and its relationship to the law of Moses (2 Nephi 25:23-30; 31:1-33:1). After the deaths of Nephi and Jacob, other priests and teachers will be mentioned together with "exceedingly many prophets" (Enos 1:22; cf. Jarom 1:11).

It is interesting to observe the interactions between the church and the law of Moses. Although Nephi wrote, "The law [of Moses] hath become dead unto us" (2 Nephi 25:25), the law and its rituals were strictly observed (1 Nephi 4:15-16; 2 Nephi 5:19; Jarom 1:5), and a temple patterned after that of Solomon's was built (2 Nephi 5:16). This church will seem to come to an end prior to the eventual migration north of the Nephites out of the land of Nephi, led by the Nephite king Mosiah (Omni 1). Nephi's brother Jacob will write of the causes of the demise of the church (Jacob 1:15-16; 3:4). Following Jacob's death, the generations will come and go as unnamed prophets and priests will labor to persuade the Nephites to honor their covenants with God. In the end, these prophetic warnings will be to no avail. By about 280 BC, Amaron will write, "The more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed" (Omni 1:5).

We will learn that when the remnant of believing Nephites are led northward by king Mosiah in about 210 BC to the Land of Zarahemla, they will encounter the people of Zarahemla. This latter people had no scriptures and no belief in God (Omni 1:15-17; Helaman 8:21). Consequently, they had to be schooled in the preparatory law of Moses before they could receive the higher law of Christ. Thus, although the prophets knew of and were committed to Christ (Omni 1:26), the learning and the living of the preparatory law appears to have been the dominant religious concern of the people during the reigns of Mosiah and his son Benjamin.

2. The second church among the Nephites will appear when Alma, a priest of the wicked king Noah, is converted through the preachings of the prophet Abinadi (Alma 11-17). Alma will restore the gospel and the church among his converts. Alma and his

followers will be “called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward” (Mosiah 18:17; cf. Alma 5:3). This will be the first specific reference in the Book of Mormon to a church of God among the Nephites. When Alma and his followers arrive back in Zarahemla, they will join with the inhabitants of Zarahemla, many of whom having been prepared to enter into the covenants of the gospel and church by the ministrations of king Benjamin (Mosiah 4:3; 5:7). Benjamin will have appointed priests among his people to teach the gospel and remind the people of the oath they had made (Mosiah 6:3).

Upon Alma’s arrival in Zarahemla in about 120 BC, he will be authorized by king Mosiah to form branches or “churches” of the one “church of God” throughout “all the land of Zarahemla” and ordain priests to declare Alma’s doctrines (Mosiah 25:19-24; 26:8-12). Having “power and authority from God” (Alma 5:3) to restore the church in his day, Alma will be acknowledged by the Nephites in the land of Zarahemla as “the founder of their church” and the first presiding high priest (Mosiah 29:42, 47). According to Mormon, this will be “the first church which was established among them after their transgression” (3 Nephi 5:12; cf. Omni 1:12-13). When the senior Alma dies, the leadership of the church will be assumed by his son Alma (Mosiah 29:42-45). The office of elder will be mentioned for the first time in his administration (Alma 4:7; 6:1). This church will then struggle with apostasy for many decades, but remnants of the church will survive.

3. Whereas there had been a pronounced break between Nephi’s original church in the land of Nephi and the multi-branched organization established by Alma throughout the land of Zarahemla, the third church will be described in 3 Nephi 11-26 (at the time of Christ’s personal ministry among the Nephites) and will emerge out of Alma’s church, which still existed at the time of the great destructions accompanying Jesus’s crucifixion (3 Nephi 7:15-26). One dispensation will end and a new one begin. The law of Moses will be fulfilled with Jesus’s death (3 Nephi 15:3-5). For the first time, twelve disciples will be appointed to preside over the church (3 Nephi 11:18-22; 12:1; 18:36-37). Blood sacrifice will be replaced with a new ordinance, one that Jesus will personally introduce to commemorate his atonement: the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper (3 Nephi 18:1-11). This church will be formally named the Church of Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 27:3-10). It will thrive during the years following Christ’s personal appearance to the Nephites at Bountiful, but it will begin to fragment about AD 194 when a “small part” of the people will assume the name Lamanites (4 Nephi 1:20). From then on the church will rapidly deteriorate and ultimately be lost. In AD 360 the prophet Mormon will make one last effort to redeem the church, but his efforts will fail. The Church would not be restored until some fourteen hundred years later.

3 Nevertheless, I speak unto you again; for I am desirous for the welfare of your souls. Yea, mine anxiety is great for you; and ye yourselves know that it ever has

been. For I have exhorted you with all diligence; and I have taught you the words of my father; and I have spoken unto you concerning all things which are written, from the creation of the world.

verse 3 “I speak unto you again” In the previous verse Jacob points out to the people of Nephi that he has already “spoken unto [them] exceedingly many things.” It is clear that Jacob was a lively and energetic preacher of the gospel.

“all things which are written, from the creation of the world” Jacob is referring here to those things written upon the plates of brass. Jacob was also obviously a serious student of the scriptures.

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

verse 4 “I would speak unto you concerning things . . . which are to come” Contrary to the belief of modern biblical scholars, we believe that Isaiah and other prophets were at times granted the privilege of seeing events in the future. Most modern biblical scholars, on the other hand, have developed what might be termed a *naturalistic* bias. For example, they believe that it cannot be concluded that any event had or has a divine or supernatural cause. They also feel that prophecy can only be interpretive and not predictive. That is, a prophet cannot possibly know, preach, or write in specific terms about an event before it occurs. Such naturalistic thinking has been applied to the Book of Mormon by modern-day scholars. For example Blake Ostler, in order to explain the several specific prophecies of Christ’s birth and ministry in the Book of Mormon has developed what he calls the “expansion theory” (“The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, [Spring 1987] 20:66-123). He concludes that specific references to Christ and his message must be “expansions” added after the time of Christ. He says, “The Christian motifs in the Book of Mormon require either that a Christian has been at work during some stage of the compilation or that it is Christian in origin.” He then concludes that these “expansions must [have] come from Joseph Smith.” Those of us committed to the authenticity and integrity, in absolute terms, of the Book of Mormon as an ancient document might well recognize the seeds of apostasy in Ostler’s “expansion theory.”

“I will read you the words of Isaiah.” In this chapter, Jacob quotes Isaiah 49:22-26 (verses 6-7, 16-18). In the next two chapters, 2 Nephi 7-8, Jacob quotes Isaiah 50, 51, and 52:1-2. Then in chapters 9-10 he provides us with a commentary on these writings of Isaiah.

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

verse 5 “Concerning all the house of Israel” We must keep in mind that biblical prophecy is concerned with more than just the Jews. The house of Israel includes the other tribes as well.

Here Jacob confirms the validity of applying the teachings of Old Testament prophets to ourselves, a process called “likening the scriptures,” even though those prophets may have been mainly preaching and prophesying to their own people about problems of their own day (see also the commentary for 1 Nephi 19:23).

Jacob also appropriately reminds his listeners that they are a branch of the house of Israel.

verses 6-7 Here Jacob quotes Isaiah 49:22-23.

6 And now, these are the words: Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

verse 6 The phrase “I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people” refers to the Lord’s delivering the everlasting gospel to the great Gentile nation in the latter days (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 15:13). This great Gentile nation will then take the gospel message to those of the house of Israel—the Lamanites, the Jews, and other scattered Israelites. Scattered Israel, including its sons and daughters, will be nourished and gathered by the Gentiles. This missionary work or gathering is represented by the phrase, “they [the Gentiles] shall bring thy [Israel’s] sons in their [the Gentiles’] arms, and thy [Israel’s] daughters shall be carried upon their [the Gentiles’] shoulders.”

The concept of the “standard” may have had its beginnings as the Israelites were led by Moses from Egypt to Palestine. As the Israelites prepared to march they would gather in ranks or tribes. To aid in this gathering, a representative of each tribe would raise a banner or “standard” high on a pole around which the tribes could rally and quickly find their places (Numbers 2). In like manner, Israel will gather around the standard of the gospel in the latter days.

7 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their faces towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

verse 7 There is a sign that awaits the gathering Israelites in the latter days: The very elect and righteous among the “Gentiles” (the “kings” and “queens”) will bow down to the Israelites and humbly serve them and teach the gospel to them without shame, for true humility is seen among the disciples of Christ. Hence the verse may be restated: “And the very elect of the Gentiles shall be thy (Israel’s) nursing fathers and mothers; they (the very elect of the Gentiles) shall bow down to thee (Israel) with their face towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy (Israel’s) feet; and thou (Israel) shalt know that I am the Lord; for they that wait for (serve and trust in) me (the elect of the Gentiles) shall not be ashamed.”

This verse implies the more specific suggestion that some government(s) of the Gentiles will support the effort of gathering the scattered remnants of Israel.

8 And now I, Jacob, would speak somewhat concerning these words. For behold, the Lord has shown me that those who were at Jerusalem, from whence we came, have been slain and carried away captive.

verse 8 Jacob here reports a vision in which the Lord made known to him the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon. Nephi had previously had a similar vision (2 Nephi 1:4; see also 2 Nephi 25:6-10).

Babylon’s practice in that day was to forcibly relocate conquered peoples, particularly the upper classes. The mass deportations and relocations were probably based on a belief that persons removed from their homelands and struggling to provide for daily needs elsewhere would be easier to control. A sense of national identity will be weakened in a new land, and national gods were frequently viewed as having power only in their home states, being thus unable to help their people in a foreign environment.

It is notable that the young future prophets Ezekiel and Daniel were among those taken at that time, and soon they will proclaim the Lord’s word among their fellow expatriates (e.g., Ezekiel 1:1-3).

During the Exile, Babylonia became a spiritual and intellectual capital of Judahite life. In their new environment, the people reinterpreted their religion in light of new realities: exile from their promised land, the demise of their Davidic rulers, worship without a temple, and eventually religion without prophets. Over the next few centuries, Judaism was born, with such distinctive characteristics as rabbis and rabbinical schools, worship in synagogues, and veneration of the law. The term “Jews” in the modern sense is properly used to designate the people of Judah from the point of the Exile onwards.

After conquering Babylon in 539 BC, king Cyrus of Persia announced to the Babylonian Jews that they could return to their ancestral homeland. Some moved to Judah, now in the Persian empire, but most by then were second-or third-generation citizens of Babylon and chose not to uproot themselves to go to a land that they had

never known. Those who did return rebuilt Jerusalem and its temple (Ezra 1-6; Nehemiah 1-7). By the time of Jesus, Jerusalem with its temple had become the Jews' spiritual capital, but two-thirds of the world population of Jews lived outside the land of Israel, and the center of intellectual life was to a large degree in Mesopotamia. Thousands of Jews still live in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) into the twentieth century AD.

“now I, Jacob, would speak somewhat concerning these words” An interesting observation has been made with the word *words* contained in this phrase and *words* found in 2 Nephi 33:4. The Printer's Manuscript reads “things” at both locations. All other editions (except the 1830 edition at 2 Nephi 33:4), however, have changed this to read “words.” As it turns out, either rendering is a good reading. The Hebrew word from which this word is taken is accurately translated either “things” or “words” (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, Deseret Book Company and FARMS, 78-79).

While we are discussing the particulars of this verse, it may also be pointed out that the word *whence* means “from what place.” The word *from* just prior to *whence* is thus redundant.

9 Nevertheless, the Lord has shown unto me that they should return again. And he also has shown unto me that the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, should manifest himself unto them in the flesh; and after he should manifest himself they should scourge him and crucify him, according to the words of the angel who spake it unto me.

verse 9 “the Lord has shown unto me that they should return again” Jacob also saw in vision the gathering of Israel which followed the Babylonian captivity (for a summary of the “gatherings” and “scatterings” of Israel see the commentary for 1 Nephi 20-22). This gathering occurred in 539 BC when the Babylonian empire was conquered by Cyrus, King of Persia. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their ancestral homes.

Jacob was also shown in vision the mortal advent of the Savior.

“according to the words of the angel” We are not given to know this angel's identity.

10 And after they have hardened their hearts and stiffened their necks against the Holy One of Israel, behold, the judgments of the Holy One of Israel shall come upon them. And the day cometh that they shall be smitten and afflicted.

verse 10 “the judgments of the Holy One of Israel shall come upon them” This verse seems to refer to the final scattering of Israel in AD 70 after the Savior's mortal ministry. Some four years previously the Jews had revolted against ruthless Roman leadership. Rome retaliated in force, and in August of AD 70, Jerusalem fell. Hundreds of thousands of its inhabitants were slaughtered or died from the famine incident to the siege, and thousands more were sent to the arena as victims for Roman

entertainment, sold into slavery, or forced into exile. The Jerusalem temple was burned to the ground, and Jerusalem itself was leveled. The scattering of Israel was thus complete.

“the day cometh that they shall be smitten and afflicted” From the time of this final scattering the Jews became wanderers, a people without a country, a nation without a home.

11 Wherefore, after they are driven to and fro, for thus saith the angel, many shall be afflicted in the flesh, and shall not be suffered to perish, because of the prayers of the faithful; they shall be scattered, and smitten, and hated; nevertheless, the Lord will be merciful unto them, that when they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered together again to the lands of their inheritance.

verse 11 “many shall be afflicted in the flesh, [yet] shall not be suffered to perish” Even though the Lord allows Israel to be scattered and even persecuted, his protective hand will ever remain over them. The prayers of the faithful of Israel shall be instrumental in this protection.

“when they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered together again to the lands of their inheritance” Note the plural form of the word “lands.” This refers to the final latter-day gathering of Israel in Zion or Palestine in the eastern hemisphere and to Zion the New Jerusalem in the western hemisphere. It is an important principle that no one has the right to return to their covenant lands of inheritance until they have accepted Christ as their Savior and dedicated their lives to the pattern and example he set.

Have the Jews in Palestine today begun “to come to the knowledge of their Redeemer”? President Joseph Fielding Smith made an interesting observation regarding this question:

They have accepted him as one of their great teachers; they have said that, “He is Jew of Jews, the greatest Rabbi of them all,” as one has stated it. When the gospel was restored in 1830, if a Jew had mentioned the name of Christ in one of the synagogues, he would have been rebuked. Had a rabbi referred to him, the congregation would have arisen and left the building. And so, we see the sentiment has changed. Now I state this on Jewish authority that they are beginning to believe in Christ, and some of them are accepting the gospel. But in the main they will gather to Jerusalem in their unbelief; the gospel will be preached to them; some of them will believe. Not all of the Gentiles have believed when the gospel has been proclaimed to them, but the great body of the Jews who are there assembled will not receive Christ as their Redeemer until he comes himself and makes himself manifest unto them (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:9).

Thus, the Jews will not fully accept Christ until the onset of the Millennium.

12 And 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, and do not unite themselves to that great and abominable church, they shall be saved; for the Lord God will fulfil his covenants which he has made unto his children; and for this cause the prophet has written these things.

verse 12 “blessed are the Gentiles” Review the role of the Gentiles (non-Jews) in the latter days in the commentary for verses 6-7 above.

“The prophet” in both instances in this verse is Isaiah.

“that great and abominable church” This is the entity described by Elder Bruce R. McConkie: “the world; it is all the carnality and evil to which fallen man is heir, it is every unholy and wicked practice; it is every false religion, every supposed system of salvation which does not actually save and exalt man in the highest heaven of the celestial world. It is every church except the true church, whether parading under a Christian or a pagan banner” (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:552). It is especially anyone who makes war against the saints.

“they shall be saved” The word “saved” here probably does not refer to exaltation. More is required for exaltation than simply failing to fight against Zion. This promise which the Lord has extended to those who “shall repent and fight not against Zion” is not exaltation but rather an assurance that they will not be destroyed when the wicked perish. Today, we know that they will inherit a kingdom of eternal glory.

“the Lord God will fulfil his covenants . . . and for this cause the prophet has written these things” God will fulfil his covenants, and that is why Isaiah wrote of them.

13 Wherefore, they that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord shall lick up the dust of their feet; and the people of the Lord shall not be ashamed. For the people of the Lord are they who wait for him; for they still wait for the coming of the Messiah.

verse 13 “they that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord shall lick up the dust of their feet” It is easy to misread the first sentence of this verse. It speaks of those who fight against two things: (1) Zion, and (2) the covenant people of the Lord. This verse suggests that the day will come when those who have fought against Zion and against God’s covenant people will voluntarily or involuntarily humble themselves abjectly before the chosen people of the Lord.

“the people of the Lord shall not be ashamed” Those who are truly the Lord’s people will never be ashamed of their Lord.

14 And behold, according to the words of the prophet, the Messiah will set himself again the second time to recover them; wherefore, he will manifest

himself unto them in power and great glory, unto the destruction of their enemies, when that day cometh when they shall believe in him; and none will he destroy that believe in him.

verse 14 “The prophet,” again, is Isaiah.

“the Messiah will set himself again the second time to recover them” This refers to the second gathering of Israel. The classification of the “gatherings” of Israel is somewhat variable from place to place in the scriptures (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 20-22). In this verse the original gathering of Israel to the land of Palestine under the leadership of Moses and Joshua is ignored as the first gathering. It seems to be assumed that the first took place following the Babylonian captivity. Some have even suggested that the time of Christ’s mortal ministry constituted a “gathering.” After all, the keys of gathering were given by Moses to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration at that time. Certainly this was an attempted gathering when the Lord “set his hand” to gather Israel. It turned out to be, however, a gathering that did not quite succeed. This second gathering, then, is that which is occurring in this latter day and is now in progress as Israel gathers to the gospel and to the stakes of Zion.

“he will manifest himself unto them in power and great glory, unto the destruction of their enemies” This refers to the great destructive cleansing of the earth prior to the Savior’s second coming. This destruction occurs during the “second gathering” described here in this verse. This destruction is described in the following verse.

“when that day cometh when they shall believe in him; and none will he destroy that believe in him” Some people will be spared in the great destruction in the latter days. We learned in verse 12 of this chapter that those spared in the final cleansing of the earth are those who do not fight against Zion—those of both celestial and terrestrial ilk.

15 And they that believe not in him shall be destroyed, both by fire, and by tempest, and by earthquakes, and by bloodsheds, and by pestilence, and by famine. And they shall know that the Lord is God, the Holy One of Israel.

verse 15 This verse describes the fate of those who were part of the great and abominable church, those who war against Zion in the latter days.

verses 16-18 Here Jacob quotes from Isaiah 49:24-26.

16 For shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?

verse 16 The speaker in this verse is Israel herself. The “prey” is also Israel, and the “mighty” symbolizes Israel’s captors throughout her long dispersion. All of this prophecy on the gathering of Israel seems too much to believe. Therefore, Israel asks, “Is it really possible to free imprisoned Israel from her captors?”

17 But thus saith the Lord: Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for the Mighty God shall deliver his covenant people. For thus saith the Lord: I will contend with them that contendeth with thee—

verse 17 The Lord reassures Israel that not only is it possible, it will be done! The “mighty” and the “terrible” are scattered Israel’s oppressors. The Lord will “contend with them.”

18 And I will feed them that oppress thee, with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine; and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

verse 18 Isaiah comments upon the fate of those who war against the Israelites in the last days. Those Israelites spoken of here are those who have been converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ and have thus learned of their own true identity and their proper place in the chosen or royal family. The fate of those who contend against Israel is graphically described, “I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine.” The specific meaning of these phrases is given by Nephi in 1 Nephi 22:13: Those who afflict Israel shall eventually become internally divided and make destructive war upon each other.

2 Nephi Chapter 7

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 7-8 Isaiah 50-51

In chapters 7 and 8, Nephi's brother Jacob quotes chapters 50, 51, and 52:1-2 of the book of Isaiah. In these chapters Isaiah speaks specifically to covenant Israel. Let us proceed with Isaiah chapter 50.

verses 1-3 Israel has drifted away from the Lord and has suffered much punishment, but there is no cause to fear that this separation will be permanent. These verses are a call to Israel to return to the Lord and make him their strength. There is likely no specific time period to which Isaiah's counsel applies since Israel has been estranged from the Lord almost continuously since Isaiah's day. Isaiah is speaking messianically, that is, as if he were the Lord.

1 Yea, for thus saith the Lord: Have I put thee away, or have I cast thee off forever? For thus saith the Lord: Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement? To whom have I put thee away, or to which of my creditors have I sold you? Yea, to whom have I sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.

verse 1 The Lord, through Isaiah, introduces the metaphor of a marriage between God and Israel, with Israel being the bride, or the children of the bride, and the Lord being the bridegroom.

"Have I put thee away, or have I cast thee off forever?" These two questions (1) "Have I put thee away?" and (2) "have I cast thee off forever?" have identical meanings. The Lord is saying, "Do you really think that I put my people Israel away permanently like a man who divorces his wife?" The reference here is to Hebrew law which held that a man who found his wife to be unworthy could legally and permanently "put her away" or divorce her by presenting her with a "bill of divorcement." He could not divorce her without presenting her with a legal bill of divorcement (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). The implication of these questions is whether or not the separation between the Lord and Israel is permanent like a divorce or only a temporary one.

"Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement?" The reference to "your mother's divorcement" (emphasis mine) implies that the Lord is speaking to the descendants of those Israelites who were estranged from the Lord. A "bill" is a scroll or document providing evidence of something. The Lord continues, "If I intended to put you away permanently, then where are the divorce papers that prove that I divorced your mother and thus you yourselves?" The implication is that the separation between

God and Israel is not a permanent “divorce,” but only a temporary separation. Again, Isaiah’s time framework is indefinite, but he may have reference here to the Babylonian captivity between 586 BC and 538 BC.

“To whom have I put thee away, or to which of my creditors have I sold you?” “Do you really think I sold you into captivity like a man selling his own children into slavery?” In Isaiah’s day, if a man was pressured by his creditors he had the option of selling his children into a state of indentured servitude temporarily until the debt was paid. Also in that day if the man died without clearing his debt, the creditor could take the man’s children as payment of the debt. The meaning of this analogy is that the Lord is in debt to no one and therefore was not forced to sell Israel as slaves.

“for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away” Finally the Lord avers that Israel, actually her “mother,” had been put away, but no one but Israel herself was responsible for her separation from God. She sold herself into captivity. Her sins and apostasy resulted in the rift.

2 Wherefore, when I came, there was no man; when I called, yea, there was none to answer. O house of Israel, is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem, or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make their rivers a wilderness and their fish to stink because the waters are dried up, and they die because of thirst.

verse 2 “when I came, there was no man; when I called, yea, there was none to answer” When the Lord came to Israel willing to redeem her from captivity, no one requested his help, and they even rejected him. They separated from him because of their sins. Again, this statement might apply to any time period. In almost every generation there are few or even none to receive the Lord. It does fit nicely with the period of the Lord’s mortal ministry. Though Isaiah is speaking in the past tense, he may well be prophesying of events yet in the future. This is the principle of the “prophetic perfect” verb tense.

Another possibility is the context of the second coming. Evidence for this is found in the fact that Isaiah 50:2-3 are repeated, with some changes in D&C 133:66-69, and the latter verses have obvious reference to the Lord’s second coming. The Israelites are like Amulek before he repented: “I was called many times and I would not hear” (Alma 10:6).

“is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem, or have I no power to deliver?” The hand and arm of the Lord are symbols of his power. He who has a “shortened hand” is weak and powerless. The Lord is asking, “Am I so weak that I cannot redeem Israel”? The answer is, of course, “certainly not!” The opposite of the shortened hand is the Lord’s stretching out or extending his hand or arm to deliver his people. His hand is indeed stretched out and not shortened.

“Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make their rivers a wilderness and their fish to stink because the waters are dried up, and they die because of thirst”

The Lord then confirms that he does, of course, have sufficient power, and he illustrates this power by recalling the miracles which the Lord performed at the time of the exodus from Egypt. He dried up the sea with his command (Exodus 7:21; 14:26-31). He turned the rivers into a desert so that the fish in them died for lack of water; and (in verse 3) he darkened the sky as if it were mourning for the dead (Exodus 10:21).

When Oliver Cowdery produced the printer’s manuscript from the original manuscript, he made, on the average, two or three changes per manuscript page. These changes were mostly simple errors and do not significantly affect the text of the Book of Mormon. The errors frequently occurred in groups suggesting that Oliver was tired. In this verse and in verse 4 there are some examples of simple errors that were made that have remained in the text even until our present edition. For example two phrases contained in this verse in the original manuscript read: “I make *the* rivers a wilderness” and “they *dieth* because of thirst” (emphasis added). In verse 4: “he *wakeneth* morning by morning” and “he *wakeneth* mine ear” (“Piecing Together the Original Manuscript,” Royal Skousen, a FARMS reprint).

3 I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.

verse 3 The dark sky heralds the coming judgments, as well as Christ’s second coming. The Lord said in Matthew 24:29-30: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then . . . they shall see the son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

Elder Bruce R. McConkie gave another interpretation:

“I clothe the heavens with blackness” (Isaiah 50:3), and there is no more revelation. . . . Thus saith our God. Such is his promise, spoken prophetically of our day. And here, given in modern times, is his announcement that as he spake, so has it come to pass: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, darkness covereth the earth, and gross darkness the minds of the people, and all flesh has become corrupt before my face (D&C 112:23) (*Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man*, 39).

“Sackcloth” is the clothing of mourning. Perhaps this symbolizes the mourning of the wicked at the second coming of Christ. Or it may symbolize the mourning of the righteous over the wickedness of the earth.

verses 4-9 Isaiah now stops speaking messianically. That is, he stops speaking as if he were the Lord. These verses contain another “servant song,” a poetic statement of a righteous and devoted servant or missionary of the Lord. The servants who are the objects of these servant songs are usually the Savior or another individual

who is a type of Christ. Here the servant describes how he was rejected by the people. Whether or not a specific identity of this servant is intended is unknown. Perhaps the most acceptable identity of this particular servant is Jesus Christ himself. Some of the events described in the servant song are similar to those experienced by the Savior during his mortal ministry.

Others have suggested that the servant might be Isaiah. A more universal application to all righteous servants of the Lord also seems appropriate as well.

4 The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season unto thee, O house of Israel. When ye are weary he waketh morning by morning. He waketh mine ear to hear as the learned.

verse 4 “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season” The Lord God (the Father) has given the servant (probably Jesus) the power to speak. We may alternatively word this verse, “The Father has taught me what to say to the people of Israel at an appropriate time—‘in season.’ He has blessed me with knowledge and eloquence.” This servant intends to be a missionary for the Lord among those of captive and scattered Israel, and his daily responsibility is to hear and speak the words of God.

“When ye are weary he waketh morning by morning.” Though Israel would rather slumber spiritually, the Father repeatedly awakens her to his word of truth and righteousness.

“He waketh mine ear to hear as the learned.” The Father speaks to and teaches his servant in continuing revelation.

5 The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.

verse 5 The Lord God through revelation has given me great understanding, and I have not turned away from him.

verses 6-7 These two verses are particularly messianic; that is to say, they particularly suggest that the “servant” is the Savior.

6 I gave my back to the smiter, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

verse 6 Apparently this servant’s responsibility is to hear and speak the words of God, and this obligation will not be accomplished without adversity. The verse may be interpreted as, “I exposed my back to those who would beat me, and I did not stop them when they insulted me by pulling the hairs out of my beard and by spitting in my face.” In Isaiah’s day the beard was regarded as a sign of dignity and respect. To pluck hairs out of the beard was to show utter contempt. The servant submitted himself to great

insult for his testimony, and there was no inclination for retaliation. These torments are, of course, reminiscent of Christ during his arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

“I hid not my face” The servant did not try to hide or escape from persecution. Nephi wrote of Christ: “And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men” (1 Nephi 19:9).

7 For the Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded. Therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.

verse 7 “Confounded” means disgraced. Their insults cannot hurt me because of the help I receive from the Father. I am able to brace myself to withstand the insults, and I know that I will not be disgraced.

8 And the Lord is near, and he justifieth me. Who will contend with me? Let us stand together. Who is mine adversary? Let him come near me, and I will smite him with the strength of my mouth.

verse 8 **“he justifieth me”** The “Lord” (the Father) will validate all that the servant has done in his ministry and will hold him blameless.

“Who will contend with me?” If the Father is willing to defend me, then who would dare bring charges against me or fight with me.

“Let us stand together.” The servant appeals to the Father to stand by him and defend him.

“Who is mine adversary?” With the Lord God standing by me, who would dare become my adversary?

“I will smite him with the strength of my mouth.” With the Father’s help, I can effectively answer any of my adversary’s accusations.

9 For the Lord God will help me. And all they who shall condemn me, behold, all they shall wax old as a garment, and the moth shall eat them up.

verse 9 **“all they shall wax old as a garment, and the moth shall eat them up”** One of the definitions of *wax* in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language is, “To pass from one state to another; to become.” My accusers will all be destroyed as cloth is destroyed by time and moths.

verses 10-11 Isaiah ends this chapter by admonishing Israel to follow the “servant”—either Christ or his prophets.

Two classes of people are contrasted in these two verses. One class consists of those who fear the Lord and obey his servant (verse 10). They will not walk in spiritual darkness but will have spiritual light. The other class consists of those who seek to be

spiritually self-sufficient, relying on themselves instead of on God. They attempt to create their own light (verse 11), but their efforts produce no more than sparks when compared to the bright light that comes from God. Those in this latter group will eventually receive judgments from the Lord that result in sorrow.

10 Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light?

verse 10 To walk “in darkness” is to be without spiritual light.

Isaiah asks, “Who fears the Lord and obeys God’s servant, yet still walks in darkness?” The answer is, No one. The implication is that since Israel is walking by her own light rather than God’s, her people were obviously not fearing God and obeying his servant.

11 Behold all ye that kindle fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks, walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks which ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand—ye shall lie down in sorrow.

verse 11 Once again, Isaiah speaks messianically, or as though he were the Lord.

“Behold all ye that kindle fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks, walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks which ye have kindled.” This expression refers to those who walk in their own way, according to their own will, rather than according to the will and direction of the Lord.

As a side note here, Dr. Royal Skousen has argued persuasively that Oliver Cowdery misheard Joseph Smith’s dictation of this passage. Though the text of the original manuscript for this passage is missing, he suggests that it should more appropriately read “kindle a fire” which, of course, sounds very similar and is consistent with Isaiah 50:11.

“This shall ye have of mine hand—ye shall lie down in sorrow.” To “lie down” probably means to die. You shall die in spiritual misery.

Latter-day revelation provides evidence that the proper context for 2 Nephi 7 (Isaiah 50) is the last days at the time of the second coming. D&C 133, the so-called appendix to the Doctrine and Covenants records prophecies of the latter-day, pre-millennial period:

And upon them that hearken not to the voice of the Lord shall be fulfilled that which was written by the prophet . . . Malachi: For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

Wherefore, this shall be the answer of the Lord unto them: In that day when I came unto mine own, no man among you received me, and you were driven out. When

I called again there was none of you to answer; yet my arm was not shortened at all that I could not redeem, neither my power to deliver. Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea. I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish stink, and die for thirst.

I clothe the heavens with blackness, and make sackcloth their covering. And this shall ye have of my hand—ye shall lie down in sorrow.

Behold, and lo, there are none to deliver you; for ye obeyed not my voice when I called to you out of the heavens; ye believed not my servants, and when they were sent unto you ye received them not. Wherefore, they sealed up the testimony and bound up the law, and ye were delivered over unto darkness. These shall go away into outer darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Behold the Lord your God hath spoken it. Amen (D&C 133:63-74).

2 Nephi Chapter 8

Chapter 8 consists of Jacob's quoting Isaiah's writings from the plates of brass. These writings correspond to Isaiah 51 and Isaiah 52:1-2 of our modern day book of Isaiah.

It seems likely that the events in this chapter are most appropriately placed in the last days. The Lord calls to his people Israel, and perhaps most specifically to members of his Church, asking them to hearken to his words. At the conclusion of the last days, as the Lord ushers in the Millennium, he will bring an end to the fallen condition of the earth. He will renew the earth and restore it to its Edenic or millennial state. The Lord will dwell among his people. As the events of the last days unfold, the Lord assures us that if we are righteous, we need not fear the works of man. The Lord is greater than any man, and he will help us. He reminds us of his works of power in times past. By that same power he will bring Zion and fulfill all his promises to her.

verses 1-2 In these verses, Isaiah reminds his people of their heritage, namely that they are descended from Abraham with whom important covenants of great posterity and lands were made. Here Isaiah again is speaking messianically, as though he were the Lord.

1 Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness. Look unto the rock from whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit from whence ye are digged.

verse 1 **"Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness."** Listen to me and follow me, all of you that seek exaltation. To "follow after righteousness" is to choose the good and godly way of life, to follow our God in all things.

"Look unto the rock from whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit from whence ye are digged." Look to your ancestry, your origins, your noble heritage. Remember the rock and quarry from whence you came. Israel had her beginnings in father Abraham, and Israel must keep the covenants that God made with him.

2 Look unto Abraham, your father, and unto Sarah, she that bare you; for I called him alone, and blessed him.

verse 2 **"she that bare you"** For Nephites and Lamanites also, of course, Abraham was their ancestor, their "father," and Sarah was "she that bare you" (cf. Alma 13:15).

"for I called him alone, and blessed him" These phrases have reference to the unique Abrahamic covenant which the Lord made with Abraham alone. With this covenant the Lord blessed the house of Israel.

3 For the Lord shall comfort Zion, he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody.

verse 3 It is likely that these events are millennial and refer to the millennial restoration.

Isaiah's reference here to "Zion" is somewhat problematic. The reader must decide which definition of Zion is applicable. Isaiah may have had reference to latter-day Jerusalem. Jerusalem was laid waste by Babylon in 586 B.C. and by Rome in AD 70. Or perhaps Isaiah may have envisioned latter-day Zion, the "New Jerusalem," and those Israelites who gather there. In this latter case the term "Zion" would refer to latter-day gathered Israel. Perhaps both meanings are appropriate. Isaiah was certainly shown by revelation the future scatterings of Israel. Keep in mind that Assyria captured the northern ten tribes between 732 and 722 BC which was during Isaiah's lifetime. Thus the scattering and laying waste to Israel was very much a current and pertinent topic. If the reader desires to study a detailed discussion of the concept of Zion, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 27, *Zion*.

"For the Lord shall comfort Zion" "he will comfort all her waste places" Jerusalem, which was wasted, will be blessed and restored. Also the Lord will show compassion to those latter-day Israelites who are scattered and assist them in gathering and build them up physically and spiritually.

"he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord" The land of Jerusalem or Israel, which has long been as desolate as a desert, will be made into a fruitful garden like Eden. Actually the whole earth will be changed. The tenth Article of Faith states: "The earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory." In a more spiritual and metaphorical vein, when we truly come to Zion, which implies a union with one another and with our God, the wilderness and desert areas of our souls will be renewed and blessed.

"Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody" In contrast with the sorrow and misery suffered by the exiled Israelites who have been wandering in sin, among gathered Israelites—in latter-day Zion—there will be songs of thanks and rejoicing and praise unto God.

4 Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation; for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light for the people.

verse 4 "Hearken" and "give ear," of course, mean *listen*.

"My people" are likely all of Israel, or perhaps in a more narrow sense, particularly those who have gathered unto the Lord.

"a law shall proceed from me" The Lord, "our lawgiver" (Isaiah 33:22), will reveal the gospel law. He will restore his gospel to the earth.

“I will make my judgment to rest for a light for the people” The Lord’s “judgment” (justice or law) is a “light” in that it is steady, reliable, and true. Also the Lord himself is a light or beacon for the people. It would seem that the phrase “to rest for” may mean “to act as.”

5 My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arm shall judge the people. The isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.

verse 5 “My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth” The time of my second coming is at hand.

“mine arm shall judge the people” The Lord’s “arm” refers to his power. The Lord’s arm of judgment is his justice. The Lord himself will be our judge: “He employeth no servant there” (2 Nephi 9:41).

“The isles shall wait upon me” The word “isles” refers to *scattered Israel* and perhaps in this case *gathering Israel* wherever they may be found on the earth. These look to me.

“on mine arm shall they trust” To trust in the arm of the Lord is to trust in the Lord himself. This is in contrast to the arm of flesh, or the ability of man (including our own selves), in which we must never trust.

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath; for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment; and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner. But my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

verse 6 “Lift up your eyes to the heavens” Here, clearly, the Lord speaks of his second coming and the events surrounding it. In this verse, when the Lord speaks of the heavens’ and earth’s passing away, he is foretelling the events either immediately prior to the Millennium or after the Millennium. This latter time is before the earth’s celestial transformation.

“heavens shall vanish” Though the earthly heavens and the earth itself as we know them seem permanent, they will vanish or “pass away” when the Lord comes again in glory. They will be replaced by new heavens (2 Peter 3:10; 3 Nephi 26:3; D&C 45:22) and a new earth—a terrestrial or paradisiacal earth and heavens. It is difficult, if not impossible, for us—with our current limited state of understanding—to understand the meaning of a “new heaven” or “new heavens.”

“like smoke” Smoke is visible in the air only briefly and then vanishes.

“the earth shall wax old like a garment” This phrase is good example of a figure of speech known as a simile (see the introductory commentary for Jacob 5).

It is part of Latter-day Saint theology that the earth is a living entity with a spirit (or spirits) and a body (or bodies), and that it will die and then be resurrected. Though

heaven and earth will pass away, just as all clothing deteriorates and disintegrates, the Lord and his righteousness continue forever.

7 Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart I have written my law, fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

verse 7 “ye that know righteousness” Again Isaiah speaks messianically to the Lord’s people—his Church.

“in whose heart I have written my law” We are truly of God when not only our acts reflect obedience to God’s law but when our hearts—meaning our true feelings, desires, attitudes, and intentions—are all turned to do his will. When we submit ourselves to God, he writes his law in our hearts even as he wrote the law on tablets of stone in Moses’s day.

“fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings” For those of you who accept the Lord there will be inevitable opposition, but do not be afraid when people taunt and insult you.

8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool. But my righteousness shall be forever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

verse 8 “the moth shall eat them up like a garment” All things earthly, including the godless men who would reproach the Lord’s people, are transitory and subject to corruption and decay, as is a garment. But the Lord’s righteousness is permanent and never ends.

“from generation to generation” This phrase symbolizes forever.

verses 9-11 Now the first person or speaker changes. Isaiah is no longer speaking messianically as though he were the Lord. The speaker is Israel herself, especially those of Israel who “follow after righteousness.” They cry unto the Lord for assurance that he will indeed bring the promised blessings.

9 Awake, awake! Put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days. Art thou not he that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?

verse 9 “Awake, awake!” Please awaken to our plight, Lord, and help us!

“Put on strength, O arm of the Lord . . . as in the ancient days.” The Hebrew reads “clothe yourself with strength.” Use thy power and authority to save us, as you did in ancient times. The phrase “ancient days” here has reference to the time of Moses—the miracles in Egypt, the exodus, the wanderings in the wilderness, and the entry into Palestine.

“Rahab” Was it not you who cut the dragon Rahab into pieces? At the time of Isaiah an ancient myth existed regarding the creation of the world. According to the myth, Rahab the dragon was vanquished by the Lord and cut in two, to form the heaven and the earth. Rahab signified chaos. Chaos is overcome through creation. In other words, the question being asked here might be “Was it not you who created heaven and earth?”

Alternatively the symbol of Rahab the dragon was commonly used to refer to Egypt. Perhaps Isaiah is reminding the people of the Lord’s victory over Egypt when he worked his miracles there. The next verse suggests that this latter was Isaiah’s intent.

In any case the point of the imagery here is that the Lord has power over all of the elements and all of his enemies.

10 Art thou not he who hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?

verse 10 Here, clearly, Isaiah has reference to the Lord’s miracles in leading the Israelites out of Egypt. God dried up the sea so the children of Israel could cross.

“the ransomed” To “ransom” is to obtain the release of a captive by paying the price. “The ransomed” are obviously the Israelites whom the Lord rescued from bondage in Egypt, which is a type for the bondage of sin from which Christ ransomed humankind.

11 Therefore, the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy and holiness shall be upon their heads; and they shall obtain gladness and joy; sorrow and mourning shall flee away.

verse 11 As were the ancient Israelites at the time of Moses, scattered Israel will be ransomed and redeemed in the latter days. As the Latter-day Saints gather in Zion, they will sing and shout for joy.

The “everlasting Joy and holiness” which “shall be upon their heads” suggests priesthood ordinances, specifically the ordinances of the temple.

As the Israelites gather, they will do so with great rejoicing, as they will realize that the prophecies are being fulfilled. This joy will even displace the sorrows resulting from Israel’s trials.

verses 12-16 In these verses Isaiah again speaks as though he were the Lord and asks scattered Israel three questions. He then answers them in reverse order. The three questions are: Why do you fear mortal man? Have you forgotten your Creator? Why fear your oppressors? The answers are (in reverse order): You will be freed from your oppressors. I am the great Creator. You are my people, and I will teach and protect you.

12 I am he; yea, I am he that comforteth you. Behold, who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of man, who shall die, and of the son of man, who shall be made like unto grass?

verse 12 “I am he that comforteth you” I am the one who strengthens you.

Why should you fear mortal man and his offspring who are no more enduring than grass? Grass, of course, withers quickly and dies easily as do humans. The expression “son of man” (without a capital “m”) refers not to Jesus Christ but to the offspring of mortal man.

13 And forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth, and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor?

verse 13 The first sentence in this verse is complex, and its construction makes it difficult for the reader to realize that he is reading a question. This question contains two separate ideas. The first is, “Have you forgotten the Lord who created you—the same who created heaven and earth?” The second is, “Why should you live in constant fear of the fury of those who oppress you and those who seem ready to destroy you?”

“and hast feared continually every day” And hast thou feared continually? Scattered Israelites throughout history have often lived as scattered and fragmented groups living among other dominant cultures. In this situation, living outside of Zion and outside of the comfort and protection of a major body of Israelites, they have often lived as a repressed and oppressed minority. They have been regarded by those who rule over them with suspicion and even jealousy.

“And where is the fury of the oppressor?” This question is really the Lord’s first answer: Their fury can no longer touch you.

14 The captive exile hasteneth, that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail.

verse 14 “The captive exile hasteneth, that he may be loosed” Again, the “captive exile” is scattered Israel. The captive’s period of exile hastens to its conclusion, and he is freed.

“and that he should not die in the pit” He will not be allowed to die in exile. The “pit” is a place of captivity, such as a dungeon. It can also refer to Sheol, the place of the dead.

“nor that his bread should fail” He will not be allowed to starve in exile—to suffer for lack of nourishment, either physical or spiritual.

15 But I am the Lord thy God, whose waves roared; the Lord of Hosts is my name.

verse 15 This verse seems to have a few words missing. What was probably intended was “I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea whose waves roared” as is found in Isaiah 51:15 (“Conjectural Emendation and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” Stan Larson, a FARMS reprint).

“I am the Lord thy God” “the Lord of Hosts is my name” Here is the answer to the second question. The phrase “Lord of Hosts” implies that he is the ruler over great numbers on earth and in heaven, even a great heavenly army.

16 And I have put my words in thy mouth, and have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion: Behold, thou art my people.

verse 16 “And I have put my words in thy mouth” I have provided you with instruction, with my gospel, and with ongoing revelation.

“and have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand” Even though the Lord has allowed his people to be scattered and punished, he has provided them a measure of protection to keep them from being destroyed.

“that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth” As the Lord created the heaven and the earth originally, so will he create a new heaven and a new earth in the millennial day.

“and say unto Zion: Behold, thou art my people” The Lord avers that those of Israel are indeed his chosen people. He has not forgotten them.

He thus answers the first question by saying, “You are my people. I have not forgotten you. You have no need to fear any mortal man.”

verses 17-23 Here Isaiah seems to admonish a specific part of scattered Israel, those descended from the land of Judah—largely the Jews. Because of an incessant and almost refractory tendency to apostatize from the truths of the gospel, the ancient Jews were many times punished. They were carried captive to Babylon. Later, some were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Soon, however, their spiritual fabric would rend again to the point where most of them would reject Christ during his mortal ministry. Because of their iniquity they would again be scattered under the fist of Rome. However, dispersion and persecution will not be their permanent lot. These verses provide promise that the Lord will again bless and gather them as they return to Christ.

17 Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury—thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling wrung out—

verse 17 “Awake, Awake, stand up” Rouse yourself, O Judah, and get up! Hearken to the voice of God.

“which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury” You have drunk the cup the Lord gave you to drink. The “cup of his fury” is his judgments. You have suffered the relentless oppressions the world has heaped upon you. And no one but you is to blame.

“thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling wrung out” “Dregs” refers to the last vestiges, the sediment remaining at the bottom of a cup of wine; the last remaining, unwanted part of something. You drank the cup of the Lord’s punishment down to the last drop (“those drops wrung out”), and it made you reel and stagger. The “cup” here is a symbolic expression for the bitter or poisonous potion typifying experiences of suffering.

18 And none to guide her among all the sons she hath brought forth; neither that taketh her by the hand, of all the sons she hath brought up.

verse 18 There is no one among your people to take you spiritually by the hand and lead you. This verse explains the sorry spiritual state of the Jews. They have no prophets or inspired leaders among their own people (“among all the sons she hath brought forth”). Since there is no one among her own people, she must look elsewhere for spiritual guidance, perhaps to the other remnants of Israel or even to the Gentiles. Unfortunately, there has been an unyielding proud tendency not to do so.

19 These two sons are come unto thee, who shall be sorry for thee—thy desolation and destruction, and the famine and the sword—and by whom shall I comfort thee?

verse 19 **“These two sons are come unto thee, who shall be sorry for thee”** Perhaps these two sons are the two witnesses who will be instrumental in keeping enemy armies from totally defeating the Jews (Revelation 11:1-6). These will be sent by the Lord because there is no priesthood leadership among the Jews. John the Revelator describes two great servants of God who will stand and fight for Jerusalem against the armies of the world. For three and one-half years they will have power over the heavens, earth, and their enemies. Then they will be killed (Revelation 11:3-13). Joseph Smith prophesied concerning these two witnesses, calling them “two prophets that are to be raised up to the Jewish nation in the last days, at the time of the restoration (D&C 77:15).” Elder Bruce R. McConkie suggests that these two prophets may be Latter-day Saints, perhaps members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles or of the First Presidency (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:507-11). For a more complete discussion of the two prophets, see the subtitle “Two prophets in Jerusalem to prophesy, die, and be lifted up after three days” in the section titled “Signs of the Seventh Seal—Prior to the Lord’s Second Coming” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 26, *Signs of the Lord’s Second Coming—Those that Punish and Cleanse*.

“thy desolation and destruction, and the famine and the sword” A threefold calamity has befallen you—your lands have been devastated by war, your people have starved, and many of your people have fallen by the sword.

“by whom shall I comfort thee?” There is no one to offer you sympathy and comfort.

20 Thy sons have fainted, save these two; they lie at the head of all the streets; as a wild bull in a net, they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of thy God.

verse 20 “Thy sons have fainted” The Jews have no spiritual leadership among their own people.

“save these two; they lie at the head of all the streets; as a wild bull in a net” These two “sons” or prophets are depicted as a “wild bull in a net.” A bull may be captured, but it is still dangerous until it is worn down or killed. While these two cannot stop the eventual overthrow of Jerusalem, they somehow stay off the destruction until they are finally subdued and killed.

“they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of thy God” They have been imbued with and they wield the power of God’s anger.

21 Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, and not with wine:

verse 21 “Hear this, you who stagger as though you were drunk.” The Jews are depicted as being drunk and afflicted, not with wine but because they have drunk from the cup of the wrath and punishment of God.

22 Thus saith thy Lord, the Lord and thy God pleadeth the cause of his people; behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again.

verse 22 “Your Lord defends you and says, I am removing the cup which I gave you in my anger—the ‘cup of my fury.’” You will no longer have to drink this “wine” of punishment that renders you drunk and afflicted.

Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *dregs* as, “The sediment of liquors; grounds; feculence; any foreign matter of liquors that settles to the bottom of a vessel.”

23 But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; who have said to thy soul: Bow down, that we may go over—and thou hast laid thy body as the ground and as the street to them that went over.

verse 23 “I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee” I will give the same “wine” or punishment or judgment to those who unrighteously oppress you.

“who have said to thy soul: Bow down, that we may go over—and thou hast laid thy body as the ground and as the street to them that went over” The

oppressors of the Jews are characterized as those who made them lie down in the street so that they might trample them, and the Jews had complied with their request. In some ancient societies, the vanquished were forced to lie on the ground while the victor walked over them.

verses 24-25 In this chapter's concluding verses, Jacob quotes from Isaiah 52:1-2. Again, the first person is either Isaiah or the Lord. It would now appear that he is speaking more to gathering Israel in general and not just to the Jews.

24 Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean.

verse 24 Here is the rallying cry for the latter-day scattered Israel, particularly to their priesthood leaders, to gather Israel.

“Awake, awake” While scattered you have been spiritually sleeping. Here is a call for the covenant people of the Lord to measure up to their responsibilities in the Abraham covenant.

“O Zion . . . O Jerusalem” Zion and Jerusalem are the two capital cities of the Lord's latter-day kingdom. They symbolize all of his gathered covenant people.

“put on thy strength” Roust out your priesthood leaders (see D&C 113:7- 8).

“put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city” Jerusalem (the Jews) must increase in beauty and holiness before the Lord in preparation for their gathering. They must replace her slave garments with beautiful garments, perhaps the garments of royalty and dignity or the holy garments of the temple.

“for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean” They must also purge themselves of those who are disobedient and unrighteous, including disbelieving Gentiles, who will not gather.

25 Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit down, O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

verse 25 **“Shake thyself from the dust”** The Lord's people must rid themselves of “the dust” which represents sin, humiliation, and servitude.

“arise, sit down” The Lord's people are instructed to get up out of the dust, where slaves must sit, and sit instead in a place of honor, as on a throne.

“loose thyself from the bands of thy neck” These bands hold an individual captive. Here these bands are the curses of God placed upon scattered Israel. These curses are removed as members of the house of Israel return to the Lord and repent of their sins. You will be able to free yourselves from the curses that God has placed upon you.

2 Nephi Chapter 9

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 9 Jacob's two-day sermon includes teachings on the atonement.

2 Nephi 9:8-9 If there had been no atonement, our spirits must become like him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies forever.

2 Nephi 9:21 And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, Who belong to the family of Adam.

2 Nephi 9:28-29 Intellectualism. When men are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.

2 Nephi 9:41 The keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel.

Keep in mind that we are still studying the lengthy sermon delivered by Nephi's brother Jacob. Jacob's discourse in this chapter is in fact a commentary on 2 Nephi 7 or Isaiah 50. Commenting on 2 Nephi 7:1-3, Jacob teaches that the Jews will be restored to the true church of God and be reestablished in the land of Palestine (2 Nephi 9:2). In 2 Nephi 7:4-9, Jacob sees a prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth. He teaches of the fall of man and the Lord's atonement (2 Nephi 9:4-27). Jacob uses 2 Nephi 7:10-11 as a text to exhort his people to give heed to revelations and the truths of the gospel and not to rely upon their own wisdom (2 Nephi 9:28-43). Finally, using the end of verse 11 of 2 Nephi 7, Jacob exhorts mankind to repentance, and he discourses on the final judgment, the time when all mankind will stand before God to be judged (2 Nephi 9:44-54).

Before studying this chapter, please read *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord's Atonement*, and volume 2, chapter 2, *Consequences of the Savior's Atonement*. The several scriptural passages that are especially useful in helping us to understand the Lord's atonement are contained in these chapters and also in 2 Nephi 2, Mosiah 3, and Alma 12, 34, and 42.

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

verse 1 "I have read these things" Jacob has reference to chapters 7 and 8 of 2 Nephi which are actually chapters 50 and 51 of the book of Isaiah. Verse 54 of this

chapter suggests that Jacob read these two Isaiah chapters from the brass plates and then delivered chapter 9 as a major oral address or sermon on one particular day.

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

verse 2 “that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God . . . [and] be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance” Keep in mind that “gathering” has two separate components, spiritual and temporal. This phrase refers to both. A people is gathered spiritually as they accept Christ and join his church. They may be then gathered temporally to a “land of promise” or to a “land of their inheritance.” Here Jacob might be prophesying of the return of the Jews from captivity in Babylon during the time period 538 to 515 BC, though a latter-day final gathering in Palestine seems more likely when the Jews will accept Jesus as their Messiah. Also, as discussed below, Jacob’s use of the term “Jews” here may include more than just the tribe of Judah.

“shall be established in all their lands of promise” The members of the tribe of Judah have been promised one specific land as their “land of inheritance,” the land of Palestine. In this phrase Jacob uses the word “lands” in its plural form which is even further emphasized by the modifier “all.” Also in the next verse Jacob seems to apply this promise of restoration to a “land of inheritance” to his contemporaries whom he is addressing there in the western hemisphere. It would thus seem likely that Jacob may have intended his use of the word “Jews” to include more than just the tribe of Judah. He seems to be including at least the tribe of Joseph to which he and his brethren belong. The promised land of the tribe of Joseph is the western hemisphere. The term “Jews” here likely refers to all those who inhabited the kingdom of Judah, which may have included people from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. It may, in fact, include all of scattered Israel.

3 Behold, my beloved brethren, I speak unto you these things that ye may rejoice, and lift up your heads forever, because of the blessings which the Lord God shall bestow upon your children.

verse 3 Obviously Jacob believes that the promises of restoration promised to the “Jews” apply to the descendants of his own tribe, the tribe of Joseph whom he refers to here as “your children.”

4 For I know that ye have searched much, many of you, to know of things to come; wherefore I know that ye know that our flesh must waste away and die; nevertheless, in our bodies we shall see God.

verse 4 Jacob now changes the subject and begins to discourse on the doctrines of the fall, the atonement, and resurrection.

“ye have searched much” A sobering question that might be asked of any member of the Church in this latter day is, “When was the last time you made a sincere and diligent effort to search, through prayer and scripture reading, for spiritual truths?”

“our flesh must waste away and die” Because of the fall of Adam, decay and death are the literal inheritance of every human being on this earth. There is no escape, and there are no exceptions.

“nevertheless, in our bodies we shall see God” Jacob introduces his discussion of the doctrine of the resurrection which will continue in verses 5-7 that follow. Please note that the first time the doctrine of the resurrection was given to the earth was not during the mortal ministry of Christ. The doctrine was understood by Adam (Moses 5:10) and likely by all subsequent prophets.

5 Yea, I know that ye know that in the body he shall show himself unto those at Jerusalem, from whence we came; for it is expedient that it should be among them; for it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him.

verse 5 **“in the body he shall show himself to those at Jerusalem”** The phrase “in the body” suggests that this verse applies to Christ’s appearances following his resurrection. Christ in his resurrected body, of course, did show himself to his disciples in Jerusalem. Also, he will yet appear to those at Jerusalem at his second coming.

“for it is expedient that it should be among them” This provocative phrase suggests that there was a particular reason why the resurrected Lord appeared to those “at Jerusalem,” or in the area of Jerusalem. What is that reason? Perhaps he appeared to these particular people as a witness to the world that whereas he was at one time subject to death and to those in the area of Jerusalem who executed him, now he has demonstrated to people in the same area that death and all men are subject to him.

“it behooveth the great Creator . . . that all men might become subject unto him” Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines behooveth as, “To be necessary for; to be fit for; to be meet for, with respect to necessity, duty, or convenience.” Christ’s ordeal in Gethsemane and on the cross was absolutely essential according to the law of justice and served to qualify him to be able to cleanse each of us of our sins as we repent and obey his commandments.

verses 6-16 These verses are among the most valuable in all scripture in providing truths about the Fall and the Atonement.

6 For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil 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; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord.

verse 6 “death hath passed upon all men” The death inherited from the fall of Adam is of two kinds, physical and spiritual.

Intuitively we all understand physical death—the separation of body and spirit. Spiritual death is spiritual alienation from God. It may or may not imply a physical separation from God. Some have distinguished a first spiritual death from a second spiritual death. The separation from God we experience because of the fall of Adam is temporary, and we are not to blame. This is the “first spiritual death.” When a person reaches the age of accountability, understands the difference between good and evil, and commits sin, he suffers the “second spiritual death.” It is the same spiritual death suffered by all accountable individuals. If such a person fully repents, accepts the gospel, and is properly baptized of water and of the Spirit, he can be spiritually born again through the cleansing action of the Holy Ghost and he may qualify to enter God’s presence. In our lifetime we will all likely experience many second spiritual deaths and, through sincere repentance, many rebirths.

Because of *Adam’s* sin, we are (1) all obligated to suffer physical death and (2) we are all assigned a temporary physical and spiritual separation from God. All are redeemed unconditionally from both of these by the Savior’s resurrection. Thus, all will be resurrected, and all will be returned to the presence of God, at least long enough to be judged.

Because of *our own* sins, however, we suffer a “permanent” spiritual death, we become “permanently” separated from God. This “permanent” alienation has a solution. Read on!

“merciful plan of the great Creator” This is the “plan of salvation.” Man has always had a deep need to discern some design, purpose, pattern, or plan regarding his existence. This has been referred to as man’s “architectonic” need. That our God is a God of order and has a well defined plan for the redemption of his children is clear from other references in the Book of Mormon. The “plan of salvation” is also mentioned in the Book of Mormon in Jarom 1:2, Alma 24:14, and Alma 42:5. The same plan is referred to by other names several times in the Book of Mormon including: “the way of deliverance of our God” (2 Nephi 9:11), “the plan of our God” (2 Nephi 9:13), the “eternal plan of deliverance” (2 Nephi 11:5), “the great plan of redemption” (Jacob 6:8),

“the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:25), the “plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8), and the “plan of mercy” (Alma 42:15). It is interesting to note that nowhere in the Bible is it even mentioned that God has a plan for the salvation of his children. We know, however, that Old and New Testament authors knew about the plan of salvation. We read, for example, in the books of Abraham and Moses in the Pearl of Great Price about the pre-earth life and the Grand Council that we attended there. In these books, these concepts are mentioned but briefly. Evidently they were assumed to be common knowledge among those for whom these books were originally written. Peter’s reference to Christ’s visit to the spirit world also illustrates this point. He obviously did not intend to give a discourse on the subject. Rather, his reference to spirit prison was only used in making another point (1 Peter 3:18-19).

“To fulfil” this plan of salvation is to be resurrected and exalted and return to the presence of God. This verse might be made slightly clearer by removing the comma after the word Creator. We might also add “in order” prior to the words “to fulfill.” Then we would read, “In order to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator there must needs be a power of resurrection.” In other words, God’s plan for us cannot be fulfilled without our being resurrected.

“there must needs be a power of resurrection” The power of resurrection resulted from Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross and is given freely to all men born into mortality—all will be resurrected.

“the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall” At first reading, this phrase suggests that the resurrection resulted from the fall. This is not the case. Rather, the resurrection was *made necessary* by the fall. Adam’s sin, also referred to as the fall of Adam, resulted in the inevitable physical death of all men born into mortality. Thus, it became necessary that man be eventually resurrected.

“the fall came by reason of transgression” Many would distinguish between transgression and sin. Transgression implies simply breaking of a law, whereas sin implies willful disobedience. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that Adam and Eve were not guilty of sin—only transgression. He said, “I never speak of the part Eve took in this fall as a sin, nor do I accuse Adam of a sin” (Doctrines of Salvation 1:114). Joseph Smith said, “Adam did not commit sin in eating the fruit, for God had decreed that he should eat and fall” (*The Words of Joseph Smith*, 63). Adam and Eve knowingly broke a commandment so that they might become parents to the children of God. They knowingly partook of the fruit. They had to deliberately break one commandment in order to keep a greater one. They were, then, were guilty of transgression and not sin.

“they were cut off from the presence of the Lord” This phrase is discussed in the commentary for the phrase “death hath passed upon all men” at the beginning of this verse.

7 Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement—save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, 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.

verse 7 What is an “infinite atonement” or “infinite sacrifice” (Alma 34:10)? Actually the Savior’s atonement is infinite in a number of ways:

1. It is infinite because of the scope and comprehensiveness of its coverage. The effects of the atonement extend to all of the worlds that Christ has created and to all mankind therein (Moses 1:33; 7:30; see also McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine*, 65; Marion G. Romney, “Jesus Christ, Lord of the Universe,” 46). Elder McConkie observed: “Just as the creative and redemptive powers of Christ extend to the earth and all things thereon, as also to the infinite expanse of worlds in immensity, so the power of the resurrection is universal in scope. Man, the earth, and all life thereon will come forth in the resurrection. And the resurrection applies to and is going on in other worlds and other galaxies” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 642).

What about other forms of life? What about the animals, the plants, the lower forms of life? And what about the earth itself with all of the “inanimate” materials that constitute the earth? Are these not simply embodied intelligences? Are they not also subject to the fall of Adam, and do they not maintain their agency and are they not capable of sin and thus capable of sinning and falling on their own? Do not all intelligences have their agency and the opportunity to test themselves against opposition? Will they all experience a temporal death? And what about a spiritual death? Are they not all also in need of the blessings of the atonement? They are.

Elder Joseph Fielding Smith spoke directly to this point: “It is a very inconsistent notion which is held by some, that the resurrection will only come to human souls, that the animals and plants have no spirits and therefore are not redeemed by the sacrifice of the Son of God, and hence they are not entitled to the resurrection” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5:7). The Lord promised that “all old things shall pass away, and all things shall become new, . . . both men and beasts, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea” (D&C 29:24). President Brigham Young wrote: “Christ is the author of this Gospel, of this earth, of men and women, of all the posterity of Adam and Eve, and of every living creature that lives upon the face of the earth, that flies in the heavens, that swims in the waters, or dwells in the field. Christ is the author of salvation to all this creation; to all things pertaining to this terrestrial globe we occupy. . . . he has redeemed the earth; he has redeemed mankind and every living thing that moves upon it” (*JD*, 3:80-81). Elder Bruce R. McConkie, in discussing the “heresy” of believing that man was the end product of evolution, said: “When those who espouse this view talk of a fall and an atonement, they falsely assume such applies only to man rather than to the earth and all forms of life, as the scriptures attest” (“Seven Deadly Heresies,” *Devotional*

Speeches of the Year [Provo: BYU Press, 1980], 7-8). Elder Talmage shared similar feelings: “We learn from scripture that Adam’s transgression brought about a fallen condition, not of mankind alone, but likewise of the earth itself. In this and in numerous other epochal events, . . . nature is seen to be in intimate relation with man” (*Essential James E. Talmage*, 211).

The inanimate earth also is experiencing a life cycle analogous with that of man. It was created or “born” spiritually when the intelligences that inhabit the inanimate materials of the earth were embodied with bodies of spirit matter. It experienced a mortal creation or birth when the spirit earth was embodied with mortal matter. In the early period of the earth’s creation, the earth was located “near Kolob,” that great star near the throne of God, and thus not in its present solar system (John Taylor, *The Mormon*, August 29, 1857). At the time of the fall of Adam, the earth fell from its original location into its present solar system (*JD*, 17:143; see also *JD*, 9:317; *Mormon Doctrine*, 212). The earth experienced its baptism by the flood at the time of Noah. Perhaps its “baptism by fire and the Holy Ghost” will occur prior to the Lord’s second coming, and it is possible that at that time all of the telestial elements will be purged from the earth. Finally, at the end of the thousand years, the earth will die, shed all of its terrestrial elements, and be resurrected with a celestial eternal body. It will return back the presence of God and become the abode of all celestial beings. The prophet Joseph explained: “The earth shall be rolled back in pristine purity, into its primeval orbit, and the inhabitants thereof dwell upon it in perfect peace and righteousness” (*Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow*, 333).

Joseph Fielding Smith spoke of the death of the earth and its subsequent quickening or resurrection made possible only by the atonement: “The earth, as a living body, will have to die and be resurrected, for it, too, has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:74). Thus, we may conclude that animals, fish, fowl, trees, and even the “inanimate” earth itself are heirs to the plan of redemption. So all-inclusive and so glorious are the atonement’s far-reaching powers that every form of life will “praise the name of the Lord” (Psalm 148:13; see also Revelation 5:7-9, 13), and “declare his name forever and ever!” (D&C 128:23; see also D&C 77:2-3).

2. It is infinite because of its completeness and depth. It is infinite not only in *who* it covers, but *what* it covers. It covers all sins except for the sin against the Holy Ghost. There is no escape for those guilty of the unpardonable sin. This is not because the atonement lacks in any degree in its infinite nature, but rather because these souls rejected the gift of repentance that had been offered. To reject a gift is not to disprove its existence. One is reminded of the friend of Galileo who refused to look through his telescope “because he really did not want to see that which he had so firmly denied.” Simply put, the atonement can open the door to salvation if we will but turn the key.

The atonement completely overcomes a universal reality, in fact the most universal reality of which we are aware, physical death and the first death. The latter is

the temporary spiritual death due to the fall of Adam. It also makes possible the overcoming of the second spiritual death—the spiritual death due to a man’s own sins—for all mankind.

3. It is infinite because of its timelessness. Its effects are timeless—that is, they apply to people born from the time of Adam to the end of the Millennium and even before and after. It applies to all of God’s creations, past, present, and future. In the premortal council the Savior covenanted with the Father to perform the atonement. John Taylor wrote, “A covenant was entered into between him and his Father, in which he agreed to atone for the sins of the world” (*Mediation and Atonement*, 97), and hence he became known as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8; see also Moses 7:47). Even though he did not actually atone until his mortal ministry, his covenant, his pledge was considered good enough by those who enforce the demand of the law of justice. God “cannot break” a covenant (D&C 84:40). And what about the premortal world? Do those spirits need the blessings of the atonement? Do the blessings of atonement apply there? In the premortal world there is good and evil. There is agency and a need for repentance. There is spiritual growth and a lack of spiritual growth. Hence the blessings of the atonement are vital there as well. Orson Pratt believed and taught: “We see no impropriety in Jesus’s offering himself as an acceptable offering and sacrifice before the Father to atone for the sins of his brethren, committed, not only in the second, but also *in the first estate*” (*The Seer*, 1 [number 4]: 54, italics mine). The Doctrine and Covenants seems to confirm this notion: “Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning [referring to our spirit birth]; and God having redeemed man from the fall [referring to the atonement], men became again, in their infant state [referring to mortal birth], innocent before God” (D&C 93:38). Every man was also innocent at the moment of his birth into mortality. This includes those born before the Savior’s atoning experience in Gethsemane and at Calvary. Nevertheless this innocence at birth was and is possible only by virtue of the Lord’s infinite atonement. And, finally, what about the post-mortal spirits? Of course the atonement is operative there as well (see D&C 138:19, 58).

4. It is infinite because its source was infinite. The atonement was wrought by a divine, immortal, infinite being who made a perfectly sinless offering. The one who atoned was a God who is infinite in knowledge, power, and glory. He had committed no sin and therefore was not subject to the fall of Adam. He was able to die, yet he was not inevitably subject to death. He had power over death, yet he laid down his life voluntarily.

5. It is infinite in the extent of suffering endured by the Redeemer. He came to know the sum total of the human plight, not just because he witnessed it, but because he embraced and experienced it. The Savior’s plunge into humanity was not a toe-dipping experience. It was a total immersion. He did not experience some pains and not others. His life was not a random sampling, a spot audit. It was a total

confrontation with—and internalization of—every human experience, every human plight, every human trial. Somehow his sponge alone would absorb the entire ocean of human affliction, weakness, and suffering. For this descent he would fully bare his human breast. There would be no godly powers exercised that would shield him from one scintilla of human pain. “He suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him” (D&C 18:11). His suffering was something far deadlier than death.

Christ’s atonement was a descent into the seemingly “bottomless pit” of human agony. He experienced the sufferings of the most wretched of all sinners. He descended beneath the cruelest tortures devised by man. He experienced the agony of loneliness, the burden of depression, the pain of inadequacy, the suffering of infirmities and sickness. He suffered all sorrow, all mental, emotional, and physical hurt, and all weakness of every kind that afflicts mankind. He knows the depth of sorrow from bereavement. He knows the widow’s anguish. He understands the agonizing parental pain when children go astray. He has felt the striking pain of cancer and every other debilitating ailment heaped upon man. Impossible as it may seem, he has somehow taken upon himself those feelings of inadequacy, sometimes even utter hopelessness, that accompany our rejections and weaknesses. There is no mortal condition, however gruesome or ugly or hopeless it may seem, that has escaped his grasp or his suffering. The Lord has reminded us of our inability to fully empathize. While speaking to the prophet Joseph Smith he described his own sufferings: “How sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not” (D&C 19:15). For a more complete discussion of this most essential aspect of the Lord’s atonement, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement*.

It is also clear that no mortal man could have withstood that which the Savior suffered and remained alive for the entire ordeal. Death would have come to other men as a welcome relief long before the intensity and duration of this infinite ordeal had reached its zenith. Joseph Fielding Smith testified: “I do not care what his fortitude, what his power, there was no man ever born into this world that could have stood under the weight of the load that was upon the Son of God, when he was carrying my sins and yours. . . . [It] was beyond the power of mortal man either to accomplish or endure” (*Doctrines of Salvation* 1:130-31).

The very name *Gethsemane* has possibly symbolic significance. *Geth* or *gat* in Hebrew means “press,” *shemen* means “oil.” Olive oil is created when seasoned olives are placed on a stone in strong bags. Then they are crushed with a huge stone to press out the oil. Brother Truman Madsen has observed that, “the symbolism of the place is inescapable” (“Olive Press,” *Radiant Life*, 58).

We say that the Savior has experienced the suffering of the vilest sinner. Do sinners suffer because of their sins? If a sinner espouses a sinful way of life, does he not come to equilibrium with sin and even take pleasure in it? No, he does not. Every law has both a blessing and a punishment affixed to it. Whenever the law is obeyed, a

blessing is given that results in happiness (joy). Whenever the law is disobeyed, a punishment is given which results in unhappiness (misery). Thus “wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10) and it never will be (see 2 Nephi 2:13). Samuel the Lamanite included the same thought in these words to the wicked Nephites: “Ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain; and ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head” (Helaman 13:38). The sinner is miserable, and the ultimate sinner, Satan himself, is the most miserable of all. True happiness lies only in living the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must also add to the sinner’s burden the pain of him who is committed to repent—the guilt, the remorse, the embarrassment, and the shame.

But the Savior suffered more than the unhappiness and misery of the vilest sinner. He also suffered all of the adversities and vicissitudes which any individual on earth can ever suffer. It is these adversities that often lead to sin. In a world without adversity, without opposition, there would be no temptation or need to sin. Every adversity, in its way, is a temptation to sin. The Lord experienced all adversities including those that lead to sin and those that result from sin.

In the course of his divine descent Jesus was assaulted with every temptation inflicted on the human race. After our futile attempts to explain the awesome depths of this unspeakable experience, we come back again to those simple but expressive words of the scriptures, “He descended below all things” (D&C 88:6).

An important part of the human experience is to confront temptation. It comes to all. On occasion it roars like thunder. On others it whispers in subtle, soothing tones. With chameleon-like skill it camouflages its ever-present nature, but it is there, always there. Every temptation proves a crossroad where we must choose between the high road and the low road. We are always choosing, always taking sides. That is part of the human experience—facing temptations on a daily, almost moment-by-moment basis—facing them not only on the good days but on the days we are down, the days we are tired, rejected, discouraged, or sick. The Savior drank from the same cup. He faced every temptation of the flesh. As Paul said, he “was in all points tempted like as we are” (Hebrews 4:15).

We know that the Savior did not yield to temptation; he literally gave no heed to them (Mosiah 15:5; D&C 20:22). Some may contend that the Savior cannot empathize with those who succumb to temptation because he never yielded and, therefore, he could not understand the apparently unique circumstances of those who did. The fallacy of such an argument is exposed by C. S. Lewis:

No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of

a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because he was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means—the only complete realist (*Inspirational Writings of C. S. Lewis*, 337-38).

What role, if any, did Satan have in the process of the Savior's atonement? Probably no role at all. It was an experience wholly orchestrated by the Father (3 Nephi 11:11; D&C 76:107).

Skeptics have also wondered if Christ really had to exercise faith while he was here upon the earth. Does not each of us here on earth confront those moments in life when faith and the reason of the world are seemingly incompatible, and we must choose between the two? Did the Savior, with his infinite faculties, both spiritually and intellectually, ever really face that dilemma? Was there ever a time he did not know the end from the beginning? Like all other mortals, did he ever have to choose faith in God over his own powers of reason? Was this, too, a part of his experience? If not, did he truly experience the totality of the human plight?

C. S. Lewis spoke of Christ's foreknowledge preceding his impending death.

It is clear that this knowledge [of his death] must somehow have been withdrawn from him before he prayed in Gethsemane. He could not . . . have prayed that the cup might pass and simultaneously known that it would not. That is both a logical and psychological impossibility. You see what this involves? Lest any trial incident to humanity should be lacking, the torments of hope—of suspense, anxiety—were at the last moment loosed upon him—the supposed possibility that, after all, he might, he just conceivably might, be spared the supreme horror. There was precedent. Isaac had been spared: he too at the last moment, he also against all apparent probability. . . . But for this last (and erroneous) hope against hope, and the consequent tumult of the soul, the sweat of blood, perhaps he would not have to be the very Man. To live in a fully predictable world is not to be a man (*Joyful Christian*, 171-72).

To live a fully predictable life, a life devoid of anxiety, suspense, and faith, is a pseudo-human life—it is no more than a façade. But this is clearly not the case with the Savior. Never was more faith required of any man, at any hour, than when the Savior, hanging on the cross, faced the terrifying aloneness of the moment when the Father withdrew his spirit and left him comfortless. More faith was required of him than was ever exacted from any mortal.

It is clear that the Savior's suffering was physical, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional pain of the highest order, all wrapped into one. It was of such colossal magnitude that it caused "even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore" (D&C 19:18). It is also clear that he did not live out his mortal

sojourn and atonement with a divine shield to protect him from life's sufferings. He lived life much as a man. Paul wrote, "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren" (Hebrews 2:16-17). Alma taught that "the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh" (Alma 7:13). The Savior voluntarily let his humanity take precedence over his divinity. His godhood was summoned for one reason only. It was to hold off the unconsciousness and death that would have brought an earlier end to his suffering had he only the strength of a man. He simply brought a larger cup to hold the bitter drink.

It is notable that during the Savior's ordeal in Gethsemane, an angel came from heaven for the purpose of "strengthening him" (Luke 22:43-44). Who was this divine messenger? Elder Bruce R. McConkie suggests it was Michael or Adam ("The Purifying Power of Gethsemane," *Ensign*, May 1985, 9). While we do not know for certain the identity of this heaven-sent comforter, there are at least four reasons why it may indeed have been Adam. First, Adam was a co-creator of this earth with Jehovah. He was also the patriarch of mortal man. He would surely have had a keen interest in man's ultimate destiny. Certainly he had a vested interest to see that this earth was not created in vain. Second, it seems appropriate that he who triggered in part the need for the atonement would now be the agent to assist him who pled for its redemption. Third, as taught by Joseph Smith, Adam has a presiding role in the hierarchy of divine beings, since all "angels are under the direction of Michael or Adam" (*TPJS*, 168). No messenger would be more suited to strengthen and bless than he who was the presiding archangel. Fourth, Adam enjoyed a unique relationship with the Savior. Not only did he join with him in the creation process, but likewise as he led the heavenly forces in battle (Revelation 12:7). Now, once again, Adam might momentarily stand beside him as the Savior participated in the most crucial battle of all. Adam could not take the Savior's place (for the Savior must bear this alone), but what he could do, he no doubt wanted to do. Perhaps he was there to console him, to comfort him, to support him, maybe even to give him a blessing. The scriptural account is silent as to the nature of the exchange between Christ and his angelic comforter. Perhaps this was one of those moments so sacred it was not to be recorded in the annals of man. Certainly this was a moment of transcendent pathos. It would not be surprising to learn that each wept and transmitted an intensity of love known only by the gods and angels. Surely this was a sacred, intimate, and eternal friendship. Perhaps the angel offered words of comfort and reassurance. Or perhaps the strength of his silent presence was sufficient. Whatever the divine exchange may have been, the Savior found sufficient strength, in the midst of unfathomable suffering, to press on.

For reasons that are not clear to us, Christ had to shed his blood during the process of atoning in order for the process to be valid (Leviticus 17:11; 1 John 1:7; 1 Nephi 12:10). This he did when he sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane, when he

was flogged, when his hands and wrists and feet were nailed to the cross, and when his side was pierced with a sword. John Taylor observed, “Why it was necessary that his blood should be shed is an apparent mystery. . . . Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins; but why this? Why should such a law exist? It is left with us as a matter of faith” (*JD*, 10:114). Paul does give us a partial insight into why blood must be shed. While speaking of animal sacrifices under the Mosaic law and the redeeming powers of blood, he adds: “It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these” (Hebrews 9:23). He seems to be saying that animal sacrifices are an earthly prototype or counterpart of heavenly sacrifices, but that Christ is the actual or “better” sacrifice that satisfies all heavenly requirements for purification.

Near the end of the Savior’s experience on the cross, he uttered, in a moment of ultimate pathos, that never-to-be-forgotten cry, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). This was no rhetorical question. It was the earnest pleading of a divine being, who, under intense pain and stress, sought answers and comfort in his hour of need. The Spirit of God had been withdrawn from him. Why was it necessary for the Father to withdraw his Spirit? Apparently, if it had not been withdrawn, Christ would not have fully known the full extremity of all human agony. Elder James E. Talmage wrote: “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, leaving to the Savior of men the glory of complete victory over the forces of sin and death” (*Jesus the Christ*, 612). There was something in the comprehensiveness of his sacrifice—something in the depth of it—that required him to sever all mortal and heavenly ties, and to stand alone, absolutely alone.

Questions have been repeatedly asked about the extent of his suffering: “Why did he have to suffer so much?” “Was the extent of his suffering carefully measured and meted out?” “Are we certain that he did not suffer more than was necessary?” B. H. Roberts wrote: “It is inconceivable that either God’s justice or his mercy would require or permit more suffering on the part of the Redeemer than was absolutely necessary to accomplish the end proposed. Any suffering beyond that which was absolutely necessary would be cruelty, pure and simple, and unthinkable in a God of perfect justice and mercy” (*The Truth, The Way, The Life*, 428).

6. It is infinite because of the motivation of the Redeemer. His motivation was pure. He was motivated by an infinite and incomprehensible love, mercy, and grace for us.

This was a personal and not a mass atonement. Somehow, every soul was individually (as well as cumulatively) accounted for, suffered for, and redeemed for. Christ tasted “death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). Isaiah suggests that Christ may have envisioned each of us as the atoning sacrifice took its toll—“when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed” (Isaiah 53:10; see also Mosiah 15:10-

11). Just as he listens to our prayers one by one, so, perhaps, he suffered for us, one by one. C. S. Lewis wrote: “He [Christ] has infinite attention to spare for each one of us. He does not have to deal with us in the mass. You are as much alone with him as if you were the only being he had ever created. When Christ died, he died for you individually just as much as if you had been the only man in the world” (*Quotable Lewis*, 248). Moses’s vision of the world may offer some insight on how the pains and infirmities of countless individuals could be perceived in a relatively short time, perhaps even concurrently. Moses saw the numerous inhabitants of the earth, but the scriptures make it clear this was not merely some mass panoramic vision. To the contrary, the sacred record reads, “There was not a soul which he beheld not; and he discerned them by the Spirit of God” (Moses 1:28).

7. It is infinite because of the infinite blessings it bestows. See the supplemental article, *Justification and Sanctification*.

“this corruption could not put on incorruption” For a discussion of the terms *corruption* and *incorruption*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 2:11. Were it not for the infinite nature of the atonement, fallen man could never be resurrected, that is, the mortal body (corruptible or corruption) should never become immortal (incorruptible or incorruption).

“Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration.” If there had there been *no atonement made*, we would all have been subject eternally to the “first judgment.” What is this “first judgment”? It was: “Thou shalt surely die!” (Genesis 2:17). The first judgment is the physical and spiritual deaths which were the decreed consequences of Adam and Eve’s transgression in the Garden of Eden. We would live forever in our spirit bodies separate from God and subject to the will of Satan (see verse 8 and 9 below).

“this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more” If there had been no infinite atonement, there would be no resurrection of the body. There would also have been another major consequence had there been no atonement. See the next two verses.

verses 8-9 Also without the atonement, “Our spirits, stained with sin, unable to cleanse themselves, would be subject to the author of sin everlastingly; we would be followers of Satan; we would be sons of perdition” (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 130). Now don’t make the mistake of regarding these verses as just so much rhetoric. They are vitally important verses that spell out what our eternal fate would have been had not Christ suffered the agony in Gethsemane and on the cross. We would have all become sons of perdition! We would all have lived in our spirit bodies with Satan forever. The reason is simple. Without the Savior’s atoning sacrifice, there could be no law of mercy, and every being would be subject to only the law of justice. By this law “no unclean thing can enter the presence of God” (1 Nephi

15:34; Alma 11:37). There could have been no exceptions to this tenet of the law of justice, and there would have been no kingdom of glory available to any of the Father's children. This doctrine is taught repeatedly in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 2:39; 15:19; 16:4; Alma 34:9, 35) but is not clearly taught in any of the other standard works. See also the commentary for Mosiah 15:19.

8 O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! For behold, if the flesh should rise no more our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more.

9 And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself; yea, to that being who beguiled our first parents, who transformeth himself nigh unto an angel of light, and stirreth up the children of men unto secret combinations of murder and all manner of secret works of darkness.

verse 9 “angel of light” We know that Satan has the ability to deceive man by appearing to be a light-giving messenger of God (see D&C 129:8). Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *beguiled* as, “Deluded; misled by craft; eluded by stratagem.”

10 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.

verse 10 “that monster, death and hell” The “monster” in this case is not Satan, but rather Jacob has personified “death and hell” and referred to them as “that monster.” “Death and hell” refer to physical and spiritual death.

11 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.

verse 11 “the way of deliverance of our God, the Holy One of Israel” Here is another name for the plan of salvation (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:6). In this verse, however, this phrase seems to refer to one specific aspect of the plan of salvation—the Lord's atonement.

12 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.

verse 12 Because of the atonement of the Savior, “spiritual death shall deliver up its dead.” That is, those who have sinned now have an opportunity to be reunited with their God. We now know that this will happen in a kingdom of glory.

“which spiritual death is hell” This phrase speaks of spiritual death or the estrangement of man from God, and it refers to this state as “hell.” Though we may enjoy, from time to time, the ministrations of the Spirit of the Holy Ghost, all of us in this mortal life are in a state of spiritual death, separated from God. Also those who pass into the spirit prison after this life are in the same state.

The phrase “death and hell” generally refers to the combination of physical death and spiritual death. This combined state delivers up its captives. Hell delivers “its captive spirits” only on conditions of their repentance and obedience. “The grave,” on the other hand, delivers up “its “captive bodies” to be resurrected unconditionally without any effort or merit on the part of him who is resurrected. The overcoming of both of these deaths is possible only because of Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

13 O how great the plan of our God! For on the other hand, the paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous, and the grave deliver up the body of the righteous; and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect.

verse 13 “the plan of our God” Another name for the plan of salvation. See the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:6 above.

“For on the other hand” In the previous verse we have just discussed the “captive spirits” who can earn their way out of spiritual death on condition of their repentance. “For on the other hand” those spirits who are in the paradise of God have already earned their exaltation. Their trial is over. They will be resurrected and exalted in the Kingdom of God.

“the spirit and the body is restored to itself again” The construction of the phrase seems awkward since the two nouns “spirit and the body” are the antecedents of the singular verb “is” and the singular reflexive pronoun “itself.” In the Church today, we have a singular name for the combination of the spirit and body. It is the soul of man (D&C 88:15). In this phrase the “spirit and the body” are obviously regarded as a single entity, the soul. The same type of construction is found in Alma 11:43: “The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in *its* perfect form” (emphasis added).

“all men become incorruptible, and immortal” The resurrected body which all men will receive will not be subject to infirmity, alteration, imperfection, error, or impurity, and it will live forever (see Mormon 6:17).

“they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect” The scriptural concept of “perfect knowledge” apparently refers to that sure knowledge which a man obtains when he is able to corroborate and confirm a fact with his own senses. In contrast, in order to “know” a fact that cannot be perceived with the senses, one must exercise faith. The knowledge thus obtained is, by definition, imperfect knowledge (see Alma 32:26, 29; Ether 3:20). After a person is exalted, his knowledge of God and other eternal verities will become “perfect knowledge” since he will be able to verify his knowledge with his senses. He will know, for example, that Jesus Christ lives because he can see him and speak to him and touch him. This is the same way we learn things here on earth, but in the hereafter our knowledge will be purer, loftier, more permanent, indeed more perfect.

14 Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness.

verse 14 “we shall have a perfect knowledge” After our resurrection, we will perceive “perfectly” our performance in mortality relative to the commandments of God. All pretense, all denial, all that is false will be stripped away. We will see ourselves as God sees us. For those who have wasted the days of their mortality this will be a confrontation of exquisite pain never to be forgotten. For those who have been wise in the use of their probationary period it will be a moment of affirmation and satisfaction. It seems likely that this perfect self knowledge is essential so that we may be able to strip away from us everything that is unbecoming and begin in earnest our growth toward godhood.

The term “perfect knowledge” does not refer to a fulness of knowledge or omniscience. Our knowledge in mortality will rise with us. We will not know all things at the time of our resurrection. Rather, will come to know all things as God knows them “in due time” (D&C 93:19).

“being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness” In a previous verse, this terminology was used to describe those blessed to come forth in the morning of the first resurrection (see 2 Nephi 4:33 and its commentary). Perhaps to be “clothed with purity” or to wear “robe of righteousness” is to have a celestial eternal body.

15 And it shall come to pass that when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal, they must appear before the judgment-seat of the Holy One of Israel; and then cometh the judgment, and then must they be judged according to the holy judgment of God.

verse 15 “when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, inasmuch as they have become immortal” This phrase refers to the resurrection. Here Jacob teaches that after the resurrection, all must come before Christ to be judged. Is this really the proper sequence? Does the judgment come after the resurrection?

First, it may seem self evident to you, but let us define resurrection. Resurrection is simply the inseparable union of the spirit with an eternal body (see Alma 11:45; D&C 138:17). Actually, the judgment occurs concomitantly with the resurrection. The type of immortal body in which we come forth in the resurrection *is* the judgment. We will come forth in a celestial body, a terrestrial body, or a telestial body. As we stand before the “judgment seat” of Christ, we will do so in our immortal bodies. The judgment will have already been made. Thus, this final judgment is, at least for those righteous destined to inherit a degree of glory, in a sense a formality—a simple declaration of their blessed eternal state. For the wicked, however, those who will go with Satan to outer darkness, it will be a dramatic moment of confrontation and humiliation when they will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord and that his judgments are just.

The sequence of resurrection. All men are not resurrected at the same moment. There exists a pre-defined order and sequence in which man is resurrected. Let us summarize this sequence. The apostle Paul said, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But *every man in his own order*” (1 Corinthians 15:22-23; italics added).

Two resurrections. Actually there are two separate resurrections. One is the first resurrection (also called the “resurrection of the just”), and the other is the second resurrection (also referred to as “the resurrection of damnation” or “the resurrection of the unjust”).

The first resurrection. The first resurrection is divided into two parts: the “morning of the first resurrection” and the “afternoon of the first resurrection.” Those who merit a celestial body come forth in the “morning” of the first resurrection. These are they who once resided in paradise, those who bore the title “just men made perfect,” those referred to as “the just” (D&C 76:17), meaning that they are justified, ratified, sealed, and approved of God. These are they who have had their calling and election made sure—they who have received the promise by revelation that they shall be equal with him in “power, might, and dominion” (see D&C 76:95). Those who come forth in this resurrection will live with God and enjoy eternal life which is God’s life.

The morning of the first resurrection began at the time of the resurrection of Jesus, and it is likely continuing at the present time. The final phase of the “morning” is the major resurrection that will occur at the time of Christ’s second coming just prior to the Millennium. Of course, those who live during the Millennium and merit celestial glory will receive their celestial bodies during the millennial period (see D&C 132:19). Actually the phrase “morning of the first resurrection” refers not so much to a time as to

a quality of resurrection. In other words, those who inherit the celestial kingdom rise in the morning of the first resurrection, whether they are resurrected at the time of Christ, at his second coming, during the Millennium, or sometime in between these events.

Those who will inherit a terrestrial body arise in the “afternoon” of the first resurrection. The afternoon of the first resurrection begins some time after the onset of the Millennium and ends before the end of the thousand years. As mentioned, it is during this phase that those bound for the terrestrial glory will receive their bodies. These are called “Christ’s at his coming” (D&C 88:99). These are they “who have received their part in that prison which is prepared for them, that they might receive the gospel, and be judged according to men in the flesh” (*Ibid.*). These have accepted Christ but not to the degree that would result in their exaltation.

The second resurrection. The second resurrection begins at the end of the Millennium. The first to come forth in the second resurrection are those who have been cleansed of their sins and have thus earned the telestial glory. Then, finally, those who have earned no glory and who are destined to spend the rest of eternity with Satan in outer darkness come forth with their bodies. Even “hell” or the spirit prison cannot purge these of their filth. They were given a sure witness and knowledge of heaven’s secrets, but they denied it all and came out in open rebellion striving to destroy the church. Thus, they “crucify Christ afresh.” Their fate is unknown, but some have speculated that they may eventually experience dissolution of their resurrected bodies and exist forever as naked or disembodied intelligences in outer darkness. It has been suggested that in the absence of the life-sustaining powers of God’s Spirit, sons of perdition will eventually become disorganized and return to “native element” (*JD*, 1:349-52; 5:271; 7:358-59). However, scripture declares that “the soul can never die” (Alma 12:20) and that in the resurrection the spirit and the body are united “never to be divided” (Alma 11:45; cf. 12:18; D&C 93:33). The ultimate fate of sons of perdition will be made known only to those who are partakers thereof and will not be definitely revealed until the last judgment (D&C 29:27-30; 43:33; 76:43-48; *TPJS*, 24).

16 And assuredly, as the Lord liveth, for the Lord God hath spoken it, and it is his eternal word, which cannot pass away, that they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still; wherefore, they who are filthy are the devil and his angels; and they shall go away into everlasting fire, prepared for them; and their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever and has no end.

verse 16 “his eternal word, which cannot pass away” His word will never cease to be relevant, applicable, and binding (see verse 17).

“they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still” The Book of Mormon here simplifies our post mortal destiny into two possibilities only—those who “are righteous and shall be righteous still” and “they

who are filthy shall be filthy still.” The Book of Mormon makes no mention of the three degrees of glory. The former group—“they who are righteous”—likely refers to those who are exalted in the celestial kingdom. The precise identification of this latter group is problematic—“they who are filthy shall be filthy still.” These could be only those who go with Satan and his angels to live in outer darkness forever, though the sweeping application of this penalty here suggests that it may also refer to a large group of people—those who enter that part of the spirit world we call spirit prison.

The remainder of this verse outlines the fate of the “filthy” in graphic, if somewhat hyperbolic, images.

Another idea that seems to be expressed in this verse is that our death does not change our basic nature. After death we will possess precisely the same motivation, disposition, spiritual inclinations, and desires that we possessed here on earth.

“as a lake of fire and brimstone” There are several references in the Book of Mormon to the suffering of those in the spirit prison and also those who eventually go with Satan as sons of Perdition (2 Nephi 9:26; 2 Nephi 28:23; Jacob 3:11; Jacob 6:10; Mosiah 3:27; Alma 12:17; Alma 14:14). They shall be cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone where there shall be “weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.” Brimstone is sulfur, and what could be more noxious than burning sulfur? The “lake of fire and brimstone” is, of course, figurative or symbolic. Joseph Smith taught the meaning of this symbolism as he spoke of the spirit prison: “A man is his own tormenter and his own condemner. . . . The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone” (*TPJS*, 357). “The great misery of departed spirits in the world of spirits . . . is to know that they come short of the glory that others enjoy and that they might have enjoyed themselves” (*Ibid.*, 310-11). It is thus easy to understand why we maintain that hell is both a place—either the spirit prison or outer darkness (less often, the telestial kingdom) and a state—a condition of the mind characterized by keen realization of what might have been.

As we understand the “spirit prison” today, there is another reason it might be referred to as “hell.” Those spirits who failed to be granted a state of paradise at their deaths are placed under a clear and challenging obligation. They must learn about, confess, and commit and covenant to follow and obey Jesus Christ. And they have a precise deadline. They must repent and commit themselves to Jesus Christ prior to the resurrection and final judgment. If they do not, they will remain “filthy still” (see also Mormon 9:14; D&C 88:35) and they will go with Satan and his angels forever. This awesome obligation and deadline can often be most challenging. So much so, that it may be referred to as “hell.”

17 O the greatness and the justice of our God! For he executeth all his words, and they have gone forth out of his mouth, and his law must be fulfilled.

verse 17 “O the . . . justice of our God!” It is sobering to know that each of us will be dealt with by an all-knowing God who is perfectly just. And justice is certainly an important factor in our final judgment. How do we measure up relative to the commandments of God? What do we really deserve? What are our real motivations and desires and feelings? We can hide nothing.

18 But, behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and their joy shall be full forever.

verse 18 It is sobering to learn that more than just a passive belief is necessary in order to earn our exaltation. We must actively endure the “crosses”—the challenges and problems and lusts, of the world. They are “crosses” in that they are contrary to our spiritual nature and must be resisted with determination, overcoming all obstacles.

To “despise the shame” of the world is to go on clinging to the iron rod in spite of the mockery and scorn that flow over us from the multitudes in that great and spacious building seen by father Lehi.

“the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world” We doubtless knew of the possibility of our exaltation in the pre-mortal world.

19 O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel! For he delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment.

verse 19 There is a unique LDS definition of *salvation*. Joseph Smith crystallized it into a crisp statement: “Salvation is for a man to be saved from all his enemies” (*The Words of Joseph Smith*, Ehat and Cook, 205-07). In other words, salvation means to be placed beyond the power of all our enemies. Then Joseph continued in his definition and explained that these “enemies” are death, hell, and the devil. In this case, it might be difficult to know specifically what Joseph had in mind by “death” and “hell,” but we can speculate. “Death” is physical death or separation of body and spirit. “Hell” is either spirit prison or outer darkness.

Consider the following question: By this definition of salvation, is a person who inherits the telestial kingdom “saved”? Is he placed beyond the power of death? Of course. He has been resurrected and will never again be separated from his immortal body. Is he protected from the devil and from hell? Yes. He has been redeemed from the devil and has been placed in a kingdom of glory. Thus he is indeed “saved.”

The terms “salvation” and “saved,” when used in scripture, almost always mean “exalted.” It is this definition that pertains in statements such as, “There is no gift

greater than the gift of salvation” (D&C 6:13); or “salvation consists in the glory, authority, majesty, power, and dominion which Jehovah possesses and in nothing else” (*Lectures on Faith*, Joseph Smith, Jr., vol. 7:9). Even our own third Article of Faith intends this meaning when it states: “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”

Is it possible to be saved in the celestial kingdom and yet not exalted? Yes, those who do not wish to comply with the law of eternal marriage become, in the celestial heaven, “ministering angels” who live “separately and singly without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity” (D&C 132:16-17). For further discussion of this subject, see chapter 7 of volume 3, *Salvation*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

“lake of fire and brimstone” See the commentary for this phrase in verse 16.

“endless torment” This term, as in this verse, is used by Jacob (see also verse 26 and Jacob 6:10), Nephi (2 Nephi 28:23), and Mormon (Mosiah 28:3). Similar expressions are used by other Book of Mormon authors. For example, “eternal torment” is used by Alma (Mosiah 27:29; Alma 36:12) and “never-ending torment” is used by an angel and king Benjamin (Mosiah 2:39; 5:5). For the devil and his angels, those who are sons of perdition, this torment is truly endless, eternal, and never-ending in the usual sense of those terms. Through accepting the atonement of Jesus Christ, however, all others will be released from such suffering in time. The younger Alma, for example, will explain that he suffered “eternal torment” (Alma 36:20-21).

How something “endless,” “eternal,” and “never-ending” can come to an end is explained in D&C 19 where we are taught that “Endless” and “Eternal” are names for God. Thus “endless” punishment and “eternal” punishment simply refers to God’s punishment (see the commentary for D&C 19:4; see also D&C 19:10-12). These terms have nothing to do with the duration of the torment.

20 O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it.

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

verse 21 “that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice” To be saved in a lesser kingdom or exalted in the celestial sphere, one must be obedient and repentant—in other words “hearken unto his voice.”

“he suffereth . . . the pains of every living creature” While we cannot comprehend the extent of suffering, qualitatively or quantitatively, that Christ experienced as he atoned in Gethsemane and on the cross, this verse attempts to give some idea as to the quantitative magnitude of his agony. It certainly was not his fear of death or even the physical torture of crucifixion that caused the large part of his

suffering. Somehow during the process of atonement he suffered, and thus came to know intimately, every kind of suffering experienced by the inhabitants of earth (see also Alma 7:11-12; Hebrews 2:18). For further discussion of this subject, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord's Atonement*.

“both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam” We have additional truth on this matter. We know that Christ’s atonement was efficacious not only for mankind on this earth, but for the human family on other earths as well. In his poetic version of D&C 76, the Prophet Joseph wrote of the many worlds the Savior had organized:

Whose inhabitants, too, from the first to the last,
Are sav’d by the very same Savior of ours;
And, of course, are begotten God’s daughters and sons
By the very same truths and the very same powers.

The Book of Mormon is silent on this doctrine.

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

23 And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God.

24 And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned; for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it.

verses 23-24 Keep in mind that one of the most important tools available to Joseph Smith to aid in his learning the gospel in 1828 and 1829 was the text of the Book of Mormon itself. As he translated, he likely clung to every word of doctrinal discourse he translated. He was obviously an apt pupil and very much prepared to “soak up” every word of gospel teaching he encountered. As you read these two verses, imagine how Joseph and Oliver Cowdery might have reacted as they pondered their meaning. Would they have had a desire to be properly baptized? How would they have felt about the importance of faith, repentance, and enduring to the end?

Was the ordinance of baptism practiced among the Nephites? Most certainly it was. There can be no mistaking that the Book of Mormon teaches that baptism for the remission of sins is a fundamental principle of the gospel (see also 2 Nephi 31:5-13;17). We know that baptism has been practiced since the time of Adam (Moses 5:58; 6:52, 64-65).

“they must be damned” To be *damned* is to be judged and found to be unworthy and therefore condemned to some eternal disadvantaged state. The Book of

Mormon speaks of damnation in two contexts: (1) being denied a fulness of salvation (exaltation or eternal life); and (2) being delivered up to the devil for eternity (perdition or outer darkness).

The verb *to damn* comes from a Latin root meaning “to condemn,” or “to pronounce guilty.” It is unrelated to the similar verb *to dam*, meaning to stop or to block. There exists a common confusion of these two verbs. This probably has arisen since the effect of being *damned* might also be to be *dammed* in one's spiritual progress. President Spencer W. Kimball, for example, stated that to be “damned means stopped in progress” (“Marriage and Divorce,” an address, 29). Thus, those who, through the exercise of their agency, choose darkness over light are stopped in their progress of acquiring light and truth” (D&C 93:27). They literally descend toward hell and darkness (2 Nephi 26:10). Joseph Smith taught that “if we are not drawing towards God . . . we are going from him and drawing towards the devil. . . . As far as we degenerate from God, we descend to the devil and lose knowledge, and without knowledge we cannot be saved; thus, we are damned!” (HC, 4:588).

We may summarize this matter. To be “damned” does not merely mean having one's progress stopped. It means to be condemned, to be judged guilty or worthy of punishment. In a spiritual sense it means being declared guilty of sin, the exact opposite of being “justified” or declared innocent of sin. In answer to the question, “Will everybody be damned, but Mormons?” the Prophet responded, “Yes, and a great portion of them [the Mormons], unless they repent, and work righteousness” (TPJS, 119).

25 Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him.

verse 25 “condemnation” A censure or penalty invoked by those who keep the law of justice upon all those who violate a commandment. For one to receive condemnation, a law must first exist, one must be subject to that law, and one must of his own volition trespass that law. The degree of condemnation one receives is related to the light and knowledge one possesses (D&C 82:3).

“where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement” This phrase may well lead to some confusion. It would seem that the central purpose of the verse is to emphasize the vital necessity of law. Where there is no law, there can be no punishment or condemnation. How, then, might we explain this specific phrase? See the commentary for verses 25 and 26 below.

26 For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment; and they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel.

verses 25-26 These verses introduce an important doctrine, but if we take the verses at their face value, then the doctrine they describe is a bit confusing. Let us analyze the verses. First, what spiritual blessing is promised to those spoken of in the verses? They are “restored to that God who gave them breath.” In other words, they are promised exaltation in the presence of God. Next, just who are these people who are promised their exaltation? They are “those who have not the law given to them.” Do the verses make sense, then? Those who do not have an opportunity to hear and accept the law are promised their exaltation! No, of course they don’t make complete sense. There is something missing. What is the missing concept? These verses actually apply to those who did not have the opportunity to receive the law on this earth but who would have embraced the gospel had they had the chance.

Here, then, is an important doctrine. We already know that the promise of exaltation is extended to those who hear and accept and endure in the gospel on this earth. In addition, the full benefits of the atonement of Christ (including exaltation in the presence of God hereafter) are extended also to all those who lived on the earth but had no opportunity to receive the law of the gospel or to participate in its saving ordinances but who would have fully accepted the gospel had they had the opportunity to hear it (see also Mosiah 3:11; Moroni 8:22; D&C 137:5-9). Indeed, in all the human family, no one will be denied a blessing because of circumstances beyond that person’s control. No one will be condemned for not observing a commandment or participating in an ordinance of which that person was ignorant. Our Lord knows all things. Only he is the perfect judge of all mankind (John 5:22). His qualification to judge was perfected in him through his suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross and through his atoning death (Alma 7:11-12; Hebrews 2:18). Because he atoned, he is the perfect judge (perfectly just) of all mankind, including those who died having not adequately heard of Jesus Christ or the law.

It should be noted that no man of accountable age dies in perfect ignorance since the spirit of Christ, that spiritual entitlement given to all men as they come into mortality, provides all men an intuition that urges obedience to the law.

This doctrine is corroborated in D&C 137:5-9 where we are taught: “All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God; also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who would have received it with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom; for I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts.”

There is an old saying: “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” The intended meaning of this old adage is that all manner of good intentions are of little value if they are not translated into meaningful actions. There is much truth in this aphorism if the reason the pure intentions are not converted to action is procrastination. However, we have just learned that if an individual is prevented from converting his noble intentions to honorable actions by external circumstances, then he will be judged by an all-knowing Lord as if he had translated his thoughts to actions.

In his helpful article, “Redemption Through the Holy Messiah,” found in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 115-30, Brother Robert L. Millet quoted Elder Dallin H. Oaks to illustrate this point:

When someone genuinely wanted to do something for my father-in-law but was prevented by circumstances, he would say: “Thank you. I will take the good will for the deed.” Similarly, I believe that our Father in heaven will receive the true desires of our hearts as a substitute for actions that are genuinely impossible.

Here we see [a] contrast between the laws of God and the laws of men. It is entirely impractical to grant a legal advantage on the basis of an intent not translated into action. “I intended to sign that contract” or “We intended to get married” cannot stand as the equivalent of the act required by law. If the law were to give effect to intentions in lieu of specific acts, it would open the door for too much abuse, since the laws of man have no reliable means of determining our innermost thoughts.

In contrast, the law of God can reward a righteous desire because an omniscient God can discern it. As revealed through the prophet of this dispensation, God “is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (D&C 33:1). If a person refrains from a particular act because he is genuinely unable to perform it, but truly would if he could, our Heavenly Father will know this and can reward that person accordingly (“The Desires of Our Hearts,” in *Brigham Young University 1985-86 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* [Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Publications, 1986], 30).

What is the practical application of this doctrine? It would seem likely that, at death, the people to whom these verses apply are heirs of exaltation. They are either admitted immediately into “paradise” in the world of spirits or perhaps they are placed temporarily in the spirit “prison” where their ordinance work is done for them, and they enter into paradise.

Why are these individuals not simply placed in the spirit prison where they will surely eventually manifest their celestial nature? Is it not possible for those who are assigned to the spirit prison to eventually repent and embrace the gospel and endure in it to a point where they will come to merit exaltation in the presence of God? It is apparent from studying the scriptures that those assigned to spirit prison are those who are judged to be destined to inherit the terrestrial or telestial kingdoms or the state of outer darkness. This mortal life is the probationary state, and when we die a vital “partial judgment” will be made by God, assigning us to our exaltation or to a lesser

glory (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 448). We are taught in Alma: “For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors” (Alma 34:32). See also the verse commentary for Alma 34:32 and Alma 12:24; 42:10, 13. It would seem that it is most unlikely or even impossible that an individual pass from the spirit prison into exaltation. Conversely, is it possible to fall from the state of paradise and lose one’s exaltation? Apparently that will not happen. Once a person has achieved the state of paradise in the world of spirits, his mortal probation period is ended, and he will no longer be at risk of falling.

Does this doctrine help us to understand D&C 137:10?: “And I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven.” Perhaps it does. Many have chosen to interpret this verse at face value. Others have been troubled by its sweeping implications. When viewed in the context of the world’s history, which includes extensive backward cultures with high infant mortality rates, then those who earn their way to the celestial kingdom by dying before the years of accountability may even outnumber all of those who inherit other kingdoms. Also, when the verse is accepted without qualifications, one must assume that God must have intended and sanctioned each of those premature deaths. Certainly our God is capable of directing a righteous spirit, who has no need of a probationary experience, into each of those infant bodies who would suffer death before the age of eight years. But this is a degree of intervention and influence that does not quite square with the general manner in which God seems to deal with the family of Adam. In addition, one might ask the question: Even though the millions of children that have died before the age of accountability are sinless, will each of them be suited for and be comfortable in the celestial kingdom? Might some of them be more “at home” in another degree of glory? Some feel that D&C 137:10 must be interpreted in light of D&C 137:5-9, quoted above. Those spiritually innocent children who would have accepted the gospel, according to the judgment of an omniscient God, had they tarried upon the earth will enter the state of “paradise” and later return to their God. Others will surely be judged as deserving of a lesser glory.

verses 27-38 These verses have been referred to as Jacob’s ten commandments and are couched in negative terms. These are vastly important and summarize the most important principles of the Nephite religion. For the Book of Mormon peoples, these “ten woes” function indeed as the ten commandments. A state of “wo” is a condition of deep suffering from misfortune, calamity, affliction, or grief. The ten woes may be paraphrased as follows:

1. Wo unto them who know God’s laws and commandments yet transgress them because they think they are learned and wise. Their wisdom is foolishness, and they shall perish (verses 27-29).

2. Wo unto the rich. Because they are rich, they despise the poor. Their treasure is their God, and their treasure shall perish with them (verse 30).
3. Wo unto the deaf who will not hear, for they shall perish (verse 31).
4. Wo unto the blind who will not see, for they shall perish also (verse 32).
5. Wo unto the uncircumcised of heart, for a knowledge of their iniquities shall smite them at the last day (verse 33).
6. Wo unto the liar, for he shall be thrust down to hell (verse 34).
7. Wo unto the murderer who deliberately kills, for he shall die (verse 35).
8. Wo unto them who commit whoredoms, for they shall be thrust down to hell (verse 36).
9. Wo unto those who worship idols, for the devil of all devils delights in them (verse 37).
10. Wo unto all those who die in their sins, for they shall return to God, behold his face, and remain in their sins (verse 38).

27 But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state!

verse 27 “wo unto him” In his book *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, biblical scholar David E. Aune sets forth the various formulaic expressions that characterize prophetic speech in the Old Testament (see Donald W. Parry, “Thus Saith the Lord: Prophetic Language in Samuel’s Speech,” *JBMS* 1/1 [1992]:181-83). These expressions serve to formally introduce vital, sacred utterances and to announce that the Lord is the source behind them. The Book of Mormon prophets used the same formulas in their prophetic discourse. This particular expression, “wo unto . . .” is called the woe oracle (Isaiah 5:8, 11, 20; Habakkuk 2:9, 12, 15). About forty examples of this formula are found in the Book of Mormon (e.g., 1 Nephi 1:13; 2 Nephi 15:21). Often part of a judgment speech, it is used to pronounce anguish and distress upon a person or group of people.

Here Jacob warns the person who sins against light. “For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation” (D&C 82:3).

“wasteth the days of his probation” From man’s viewpoint, the length of time we spent living as spirits in the pre-existence was virtually infinite. Apparently Joseph Smith taught that our lives there lasted about 2,555,000 years (letter of W.W. Phelps to William Smith, December 25, 1844 in *Times and Seasons*, vol. 5, 758 and letter of Oliver Cowdery to William Frye, *Messenger and Advocate*, Kirtland, December 1835, vol. 2, 235-37). Imagine the time and effort spent in developing our talents and preparing for this mortal phase. Imagine the longing and waiting and anxiety we must have experienced as we anticipated coming to the earth to engage the vital trials

awaiting us here. The duration of this mortal trial is relatively only an instant. The key moment is now. We have prepared almost an eternity for this brief season. Are we now to waste this day of our probation?

28 O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.

verse 28 Jacob warns those who “refuse to acknowledge the true Source of all knowledge and wisdom, but choose instead to worship at the shrine of intellect” (Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 126). Intellectualism is not necessarily wisdom. Man’s understanding cannot supplant God’s counsel. Man cannot lean on his own sophistication and logic in matters of the Spirit.

Not all truths are of the same worth. It may be more important, for example, to know that seat belts reduce the chance of dying in an automobile accident than to know that toilet paper costs one penny per roll less at Dan’s Food Store. Also one type of truth may be more important than another. There are, for example, secular truths and spiritual truths. Secular truths are learned through the five senses and are often helpful and very important. Spiritual truths cannot be learned through the natural senses, rather they may only be learned Spirit to spirit, by revelation from the Holy Ghost. It is impossible to be exalted in the celestial kingdom without learning some spiritual truths. One cannot truly know that Jesus is the Christ, for example, except one has this knowledge revealed by the Holy Ghost. Spiritual truths are revealed only to those who strive and seek to obey the commandments of God, whereas secular truths can be learned without regard to moral status. The Apostle Paul taught that it is impossible for the natural man to truly know spiritual truths (1 Corinthians 2:14).

“that cunning plan of the evil one” Satan would have us trust in things of the earth—materialism, wealth, and intellectualism—rather than things of the Spirit. An individual ensnared in worldliness to the exclusion of things of the Spirit is guilty of the sin of pride. The word *cunning* here has a negative meaning: deceitful, designing, tricky. This is in contrast to its meaning in 2 Nephi 13:3.

29 But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.

verse 29 Properly channeled intellect, however, is vastly important as is affirmed in this verse. It would be very difficult to acquire a testimony of Jesus without striving first to know something of his life and mission. We are commanded, after all, to seek learning “by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118).

We must be competent but resist pride. Joseph F. Smith firmly declared, “Of those who speak in his name, the Lord requires humility, not ignorance” (*Gospel*

Doctrine, 206). All are susceptible to the pervasive curse of pride, but scholars are above average in the pride category. We know by sad experience that when people get a little power, their natural disposition is to exercise unrighteous dominion (D&C 121:39), and clearly, knowledge is a form of power.

We must learn with a purpose, and then give purpose to our learning. The bridge between faith and reason is purposeful activity. Study gives us facts, truth, and knowledge. Faith gives us values, goodness, and objectives. Both are necessary. Knowledge, in and of itself, is morally neutral until it is put to work in support of some chosen purpose. There is a trouble with truth: Satan knows a lot of truth. He knows the laws of physics, physiology, psychology, and social behavior. What he lacks is the willingness to do what is good. That conviction comes through the light of Christ and with faith in Jesus. Without the love of Christ, truth is dangerous. No one, scholars included, operates above the moral law. We will read in Alma 32 that what we learn when we plant the seed is not that the seed is true but that it is good. We should know that the gospel is both good and true, for our knowledge will “operate toward [our] salvation or condemnation as it is used or misused” (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 206).

30 But wo unto the rich, who are rich as to the things of the world. For because they are rich they despise the poor, and they persecute the meek, and their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their God. And behold, their treasure shall perish with them also.

verse 30 This verse does not condemn all of those “who are rich as to things of this world.” Rather it rebukes those who allow their earthly treasures to become their principal motivation and loyalty, their idol, indeed “their god.” The danger does not lie in riches, in and of themselves. The prophet Jacob will point out that nothing would please the Lord more than to have everyone rich: “Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free in your substance, that they may be rich like unto you” (Jacob 2:17).

31 And wo unto the deaf that will not hear; for they shall perish.

32 Wo unto the blind that will not see; for they shall perish also.

verses 31-32 Those who are spiritually deaf and blind in the face of ample revealed knowledge and abundant evidence of God’s hand in our physical world were described aptly by the Lord: “They are walking in darkness at noon- day” (D&C 95:5-6).

33 Wo unto the uncircumcised of heart, for a knowledge of their iniquities shall smite them at the last day.

verse 33 The “uncircumcised of heart” are those who have spiritual impurities which need to be cut away. These fail to yield their hearts to God. It was father Lehi’s

contemporary, Jeremiah, who commanded the Israelites to “circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart” (Jeremiah 4:4).

“a knowledge of their iniquities shall smite them at the last day” See the commentary for verse 14 of this chapter.

34 Wo unto the liar, for he shall be thrust down to hell.

verse 34 We have mentioned previously that the word “hell” may refer to one of three states or places. Here it seems to refer to either spirit prison or the telestial kingdom. In other places in scripture it may refer to outer darkness where Satan and his adherents will spend eternity.

35 Wo unto the murderer who deliberately killeth, for he shall die.

verse 35 The word “die” here probably refers to the state of spiritual death or separation from God experienced by those in the telestial kingdom. The premeditated shedding of innocent blood is a “sin unto death” (1 John 5:16- 17) meaning a sin for which there is “no forgiveness” (D&C 42:79). Is this true? Is the shedding of innocent blood the same as “the unpardonable sin”? Can a man not repent and be cleansed of this sin?

The ultimate and “unpardonable sin” is to shed the only completely innocent blood, the blood of Jesus Christ. Once an individual has been converted to the divinity of Jesus Christ by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost and has come to know God and have an absolute witness, then that individual has a most serious and binding obligation. If he should ever turn altogether against the Church and come out in open rebellion against it, then he is guilty of the unpardonable sin. It as though he “crucifies [Christ]” afresh or “assent[s] unto [his] death” (D&C 76:35; 132:27). Such an individual will be resurrected but will not inherit a kingdom of glory. Rather he will spend eternity with Satan and his angels.

The unjustified shedding of human life is the “unforgivable sin” second only to the unpardonable sin in its gravity. A murderer may repent and be cleansed in the post-mortal life, and he may be admitted to a kingdom of glory, the telestial kingdom. He cannot, however be forgiven to the point of being worthy for the celestial (or even the terrestrial) kingdom. He may become a “servant of the Most High; but where God and Christ dwell they cannot come” (D&C 76:112).

Some have suggested that this verse condones capital punishment for murderers. See a discussion of this question in the commentary for Alma 34:12.

36 Wo unto them who commit whoredoms, for they shall be thrust down to hell.

verse 36 Again, most adulterers will inherit the telestial kingdom. This is the first use of the word “whoredoms” in the Book of Mormon. It will be used twenty- six more

times before the book's end. It is the general Book of Mormon term for unchastity in all of its forms.

37 Yea, wo unto those that worship idols, for the devil of all devils delighteth in them.

verse 37 Those who “worship idols” are those whose primary dedication and loyalty are attached to things other than Jesus Christ and his gospel. What are some of these idols? How about power, influence, wealth, careers, titles, offices, social status, and fashions?

The “devil of all devils” is Satan.

38 And, in fine, wo unto all those who die in their sins; for they shall return to God, and behold his face, and remain in their sins.

verse 38 “In fine” means in conclusion or in summary.

“all those who die in their sins” These are unrepentant at death—those who have not repented of their sinful nature.

This verse may be interpreted to be referring to the final judgment of God. In this case these individuals shall eventually “return to God” after a period of suffering in the spirit prison. They will stand before him and “behold his face” at the great final judgment. The judgment they receive will be fairly suited to each individual. These will receive a lesser kingdom or be cast out to outer darkness.

Another possibility is that this verse refers to an earlier event, the so-called “partial judgment” that occurs immediately upon a man's death (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 448). In this judgment we are assigned to either paradise or prison. Who is the gatekeeper who renders this judgment? It seems likely that this judgment is made by an all-knowing Jesus Christ (see 2 Nephi 9:41 and the commentary for Alma 40:11-12).

“remain in their sins” It is apparent that a man's nature and character, relative to belief and obedience of gospel principles, is no different after his death than it is prior—indeed, “their works shall follow them” (D&C 59:2).

39 O, my beloved brethren, remember the awfulness in transgressing against that Holy God, and also the awfulness of yielding to the enticings of that cunning one. Remember, to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually-minded is life eternal.

verse 39 **“O, my beloved brethren”** Remember that Jacob is delivering this sermon to his fellow Nephites.

“to be carnally-minded is death” Carnal means “of the flesh” or “of the world.” Clearly, he who is “carnally-minded” will suffer eternal separation from God. Who is this unfortunate soul? What does it mean to be “carnally-minded”? Perhaps the primal and

most fundamental challenge of mortality is the incessant struggle of having to choose between things of the world and things of the Spirit. Literally, such decisions are required of us each and every day. The pattern of choices we make gradually begins to define our eternal character. The “judgment of God” does not take place at a finite point in time. Rather it occurs gradually and insidiously as we make the myriad decisions required of us in mortality. How will we choose today? Will we decide for the world or for the Spirit? Will we select immediate gratification, convenience, pleasure, ease, and expediency even though a spiritual “principle” may be slighted here and there? Or will we manage to stick to the principle even if it means self denial? There is no black and white on the spectrum of carnal versus spiritual. There is every shade of grey, and our shade may change a little every day. It is a dynamic and constantly fluid process. The key seems not so much to be our absolute position along this spectrum, rather the quality of our motivations and the velocity and direction in which we are moving. He who manages to travel a considerable distance down the road toward things of the Spirit is never completely immune to a change in direction, but the likelihood of his “going back” diminishes.

40 O, my beloved brethren, give ear to my words. Remember the greatness of the Holy One of Israel. Do not say that I have spoken hard things against you; for if ye do, ye will revile against the truth; for I have spoken the words of your Maker. I know that the words of truth are hard against all uncleanness; but the righteous fear them not, for they love the truth and are not shaken.

verse 40 “for if ye do, ye will revile against the truth” This statement teaches an important truth about people who will not accept the gospel. Those who reject the gospel truths do not usually do so in an indifferent or passive way. There is a tendency for those who reject principles of truth to “revile against [that] truth.” It would seem that man cannot usually reject the gospel without some element of ambivalence. There is a basic spirit in all man, perhaps the spirit of Christ, that is not completely suppressed even in those who openly reject the gospel. This spirit produces in them a nagging, itching awareness, however subtle it may be, that they are rejecting their own eternal nature. The frustration produced by this ambivalence often results in angry rejection of the gospel and a need to self justify.

“**your Maker**” To whom does this phrase refer? Is it God the Father or his son Jesus Christ? It probably refers to Jehovah or Jesus Christ (see 3 Nephi 22:5, wherein Jesus himself quoted Isaiah chapter 54 which refers to Jesus as “thy maker”).

41 O then, my beloved brethren, come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that his paths are righteous. Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him, and the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel;

and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name.

verse 41 “**the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him**” Brother Paul Hoskisson has questioned the use of “straight” in this phrase. He suggests that *strait* may be more appropriate. Please see the discussion of this issue in the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

The tradition in Christianity that Peter is the keeper of the gate is false and without scriptural foundation. Not only is the Savior the “keeper of the gate,” but he is the gate. Only by coming to him and to his gospel is a man admitted into a degree of glory. He waits at the gate, not only to sanction us, but also to welcome us. How humbling yet thrilling to contemplate a personal audience with our Savior. He will be there in person to greet us, as “he employeth no servant there.”

Your author has frequently pondered the question, “But which gate?” Will we encounter the Savior at the time of our death when we are subjected to the “partial judgment” (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 448)? Or, must we wait until we present ourselves, clothed in our resurrected eternal body, at the celestial gate? Certainly the importance of the discerning judgment made at the time of the “partial judgment” requires the participation of the one true judge (John 5:22). Only time will provide the answer to my question, but I yearn to see him and kneel before him. And, the sooner the better!

42 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.

verse 42 Notice this sweeping condemnation of those who are “puffed up” because of their supposed “learning,” “wisdom,” and “riches.” Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *puffed* as, “inflated with vanity or pride.” The gatekeeper will keep the gate closed to them.

“they are they whom he despiseth” The Lord “despiseth” (regards with contempt or scorn) the sin of pride, not the individual who is proud.

“come down in the depths of humility” This is the first mention of the word *humility* in the Book of Mormon. Humility may be defined as the realization of one’s dependence upon God, and a willingness to seek and follow his will. It is the opposite of pride, as the proud man often evidences loftiness, haughtiness, and stubbornness of heart. Humility is a gift of the Spirit, and can only be experienced when one has deliberately “put off the natural man” by obeying in spite of the “natural” pulls of his flesh.

43 But the things of the wise and the prudent shall be hid from them forever—yea, that happiness which is prepared for the saints.

verse 43 Those proud individuals described in the previous verse will never be able to comprehend spiritual truths which are understood by those who are spiritually “wise” and “prudent.”

It would seem that some of those in the world who are truly intellectual and learned are inclined to acquire humility as they gains knowledge. It has been your author’s experience that the truly great intellects—those who are considered “world class”—are inclined to be humble and not “lifted up” in pride. They readily admit to those things which they do not know or understand. They have come to sense the inadequacy of man compared to the vastness of the knowledge yet to be learned. They also come to yearn for a higher meaning, a loftier purpose. This humility is vital, for without it a man is unreceptive to the Spirit. He cannot be taught spiritual truths.

44 O, my beloved brethren, remember my words. Behold, I take off my garments, and I shake them before you; I pray the God of my salvation that he view me with his all-searching eye; wherefore, ye shall know at the last day, when all men shall be judged of their works, that the God of Israel did witness that I shook your iniquities from my soul, and that I stand with brightness before him, and am rid of your blood.

verse 44 Here we learn from Jacob the importance of obeying gospel principles when they are taught by a prophet. By declaring the message, the prophet discharges his responsibility and clears his skirts of the responsibility of other men’s sins, leaving the hearer without excuse. The hearer will obey or be damned.

“I take off my garments, and I shake them before you” The word *garments* is used frequently in the Book of Mormon, and it may well relate to the temple ordinances. To “shake” one’s garments is a figurative expression for absolving oneself of responsibility of another’s sins by teaching them spiritual truths and issuing an appropriate warning for them to repent. The prophet shakes the sinner’s iniquities from his soul and is thus “rid of [his] blood.”

Keep in mind that the symbol of the “all-searching eye” is associated today with the temple, the place where we prepare ourselves to enter his kingdom. No unclean thing can enter his presence and nothing can be hidden from his eyes.

45 O, my beloved brethren, turn away from your sins; shake off the chains of him that would bind you fast; come unto that God who is the rock of your salvation.

verse 45 We shouldn’t pass by this verse without calling to mind the imagery found in the vision of Enoch reported in Moses 7:26: “[Enoch] beheld Satan; and he had a great chain in his hand, and it veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness; and he looked up and laughed, and his angels rejoiced.”

46 Prepare your souls for that glorious day when justice shall be administered unto the righteous, even the day of judgment, that ye may not shrink with awful fear; that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness, and be constrained to exclaim: Holy, holy are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty—but 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.

verse 46 See the commentary for verse 14 of this chapter.

“that ye may not shrink with awful fear; that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness” Jacob pleads: “Oh, that you do not present yourself at the final judgment with great fear and awful regret for your sins.”

47 But behold, my brethren, is it expedient that I should awake you to an awful reality of these things? Would I harrow up your souls if your minds were pure? Would I be plain unto you according to the plainness of the truth if ye were freed from sin?

48 Behold, if ye were holy I would speak unto you of holiness; but as ye are not holy, and ye look upon me as a teacher, it must needs be expedient that I teach you the consequences of sin.

verses 47-48 To “harrow up” is to vex or cause mental distress.

God’s teachings are provided to a people in a timely and relevant manner. A rebellious people are less likely to be instructed in holy and sacred matters, and are more likely to be taught of sin and its consequences.

49 Behold, my soul abhorreth sin, and my heart delighteth in righteousness; and I will praise the holy name of my God.

verse 49 “my soul abhorreth sin” One spiritual reward given, over time, to the repentant individual who makes a sincere effort to live righteously is a diminished desire to sin and an increased affinity for righteous living (Mosiah 5:1-2). This reward comes in the form of gifts of the Spirit (attributes of God) which are inevitably associated with a purging of evil from the soul. This process has been referred to as sanctification. The Holy Ghost is the sanctifier. Sanctification is a two step process. When an individual overcomes his or her natural self and obeys a commandment, the Holy Ghost (in his role as Holy Spirit of Promise) both (1) purges an increment of the natural self from the soul of the obedient and (2) justifies the individual—removes the penalty of sins committed prior to the latest act of obedience. A person in mortality is never completely unsanctified or entirely sanctified. A wide spectrum exists between the unholy and the holy. Eventually an individual may be sanctified to the point where he will hate worldliness and sin and love righteousness. Such an individual is unlikely to succumb to temptation.

verses 50-51 Here Jacob quotes Isaiah 55:1-2.

50 Come, my brethren, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

verse 50 Here Isaiah invites all mankind to partake of a free gift. The gift is portrayed symbolically as a drink of three different liquids, water, wine, and milk. The water is to satisfy the thirst or fulfill the need of man. The wine was traditionally used in times of rejoicing. The milk provides strength, nourishment, and growth. Using Isaiah's words, Jacob is here concluding his sermon on the atonement by inviting all to come to Christ and accept his redemption.

51 Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy. Hearken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken; and come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted, and let your soul delight in fatness.

verse 51 Why waste your money on worldly things of no lasting value?

We are urged to "feast upon that which perisheth not." Christ is the "living water" and the "bread of life" (John 4:13; 6:47-51) whose gifts and teachings are of supreme eternal worth and are free to all men. Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *fatness* as, "That which gives fertility; the privileges and pleasures of religion; abundant blessings."

52 Behold, my beloved brethren, remember the words of your God; pray unto him continually by day, and give thanks unto his holy name by night. Let your hearts rejoice.

53 And behold how great the covenants of the Lord, and how great his condescensions unto the children of men; and because of his greatness, and his grace and mercy, he has promised unto us that our seed shall not utterly be destroyed, according to the flesh, but that he would preserve them; and in future generations they shall become a righteous branch unto the house of Israel.

verse 53 "how great the covenants of the Lord" For a discussion of the Lord's "technique" of asking us to enter into covenants with him, see *Covenants and Covenant Making* in chapter 3, volume 2 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

"how great his condescensions unto the children of men" For a discussion of the condescension of God, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:16.

"our seed shall not utterly be destroyed" This covenant was originally made with Lehi (see 1 Nephi 13:30). Even though the Gentiles will eventually scatter and

abuse the descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples, the Lord will never allow those peoples to become extinct.

“according to the flesh” This promise is not to be understood in mere figurative or metaphorical terms. Rather, it will find literal fulfillment among Lehi’s descendants.

54 And now, my brethren, I would speak unto you more; but on the morrow I will declare unto you the remainder of my words. Amen.

verse 54 Jacob’s reference here is apparently to his teachings contained in the following chapter.

2 Nephi Chapter 10

This chapter contains more of Jacob's personal commentary on the Isaiah passages which he has just quoted in 2 Nephi chapters 6 (verses 7, 14, and 16-18) and chapters 7 and 8.

1 And now I, Jacob, speak unto you again, my beloved brethren, concerning this righteous branch of which I have spoken.

verse 1 “this righteous branch of which I have spoken” The point has been made previously that the families of Lehi, Ishmael, and Zoram and all their descendants comprised a “righteous branch” of the house of Israel, specifically from the tribe of Joseph. Jacob has just made mention of this entity in 2 Nephi 9:53.

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

verse 2 “promises unto us according to the flesh” Again, these promises were not extended by the Lord in any figurative or symbolic sense. Rather they are intended literally.

“our children shall be restored” Jacob teaches that after a long period of apostasy, his descendants will repent and gain access to the priesthood and to revelation and to the Church of Jesus Christ and thereby become a “righteous branch” of the house of Israel with a true knowledge of Christ.

Again, we may speculate as to the specific time period being referred to here. This period of restoration might be the mini-millennium following the Savior's appearance to the Nephites at Bountiful. “That which will give them a true knowledge of their Redeemer” may be Christ's personal visit to the earth at that time. Also this prophecy might have application in this final dispensation.

3 Wherefore, as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ—for in the last night the angel spake unto me that this should be his name—should come among the Jews, among those who are the more wicked part of the world; and they shall crucify him—for thus it behooveth our God, and there is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God.

verse 3 “as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ . . . should come among the Jews” Jacob previously taught of Jesus's mortal ministry among the Jews in 2 Nephi 6:9.

“Christ . . . should come” Most all commentaries on the Book of Mormon state that this is the first time the word “Christ” is used in the Book of Mormon (excluding the title page which was written by Moroni much later). In our current edition, and in all editions of the Book of Mormon since 1837, this is the first time the word “Christ” is found. However, in the first edition of the book in 1830, the verse 1 Nephi 12:18 (which was on page 28 of the 1830 edition) contained the name “Jesus Christ” in place of “the Lamb of God” which is found in the current edition. This change was probably made by Joseph Smith, Jr., some time after 1830.

Here the prophet Jacob prophesies that Jesus’s name or title will be “Christ” which means “the anointed one” or “the Messiah.” This verse has been the cause of some ridicule by critics of the Book of Mormon. The word “Christ” is a word of Greek origin (“Christos”) and would not have been in common usage in Palestine at the time Lehi left Jerusalem. Common Greek (“koine” Greek) was not commonly spoken in the Middle East, until after Alexander the Great conquered most of the known world, including Palestine, in about 330 B.C. The word “Christ” is not, found in the Old Testament of the King James Version of the Bible (except in several chapter headings of the LDS version).

The simple answer to this criticism is that when Joseph and Oliver “translated” the Book of Mormon in the spring of 1829, Joseph simply read the words written on his seerstone, placed in the bottom of a hat. And he read the word “Christ” (see the chapter *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, appendix A).

Prior to the elucidation of the process of translation of the Book of Mormon, we spoke often of the translation process consisting of Joseph’s somehow coming to understand a concept and then putting it into his own words. We cannot exclude an element of Joseph’s own vocabulary entering into the “translation” of the Book of Mormon, but mostly Joseph simply read and dictated.

This verse is one of the many examples of detailed and specific prophecy contained in the Book of Mormon. Since many people do not believe that a prophet actually can foretell specific events beyond his own historical horizon, verses like this have caused some criticism of the Book of Mormon. Other examples of specific and detailed prophecy contained in the Book of Mormon include “Mary,” the mother of Jesus (Mosiah 3:8; see also Alma 7:10), Nazareth, Jesus’s boyhood home (1 Nephi 11:13), and John the Beloved (1 Nephi 14:19-27). For a more complete summary of specific prophecies regarding the Savior, see the commentary for Mosiah 15:5-7.

“in the last night the angel spake unto me” We have mentioned previously that this sermon was delivered by Jacob on two successive days. Apparently the night which separated these two days was one never to be forgotten!

“there is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God” Let us never be guilty of allowing ourselves to believe or preach the unqualified half truth that

the Jews crucified our Savior. Keep in mind that most of Jesus's adherents during his mortal ministry were Jews. The vast majority of Jews in Jerusalem did not even know that Jesus was being crucified, and they likely would have dealt with him in a more gentle way if it had been up to them. Christ's crucifixion was engineered by a relative few of the Jewish leaders, largely Pharisees and Sadducees, whose positions of power and influence were threatened by Jesus. It is these few to whom this verse refers. It is specifically these who were "the more wicked part of the world."

"they shall crucify him" Jacob was not the first prophet to announce in scripture the crucifixion, that is, death on a cross, of Jesus. Enoch saw in vision "the Son of Man lifted up on the cross" (Moses 7:55), as did Zenock (1 Nephi 19:10). Crucifixion, the execution and public humiliation by hanging on a cross, seems to have had its origins in ancient Phoenician (Canaanite) and Persian cultures. It was not practiced by the Hebrews but may well have been known to them. If you wish to review the practice of Crucifixion, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 14, *Crucifixion*.

4 For should the mighty miracles be wrought among other nations they would repent, and know that he be their God.

verse 4 Jesus's "mighty miracles" were a powerful testimony to the world of his divinity—a testimony which the few wicked Jewish leaders rejected. Other nations, however, would have been more inclined to acknowledge Jesus as God.

5 But because of priestcrafts and iniquities, they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that he be crucified.

verse 5 "because of priestcrafts" "Priestcrafts" and "priestcraft" are words with a rather specific meaning. If a man represents himself as a priesthood or church leader, yet his primary motive is personal popularity, power, or financial gain rather than the selfless serving of his fellow man, then he is guilty of practicing priestcrafts or priestcraft. In other words, if his primary motive is worldly—the stuff of pride—then he is guilty of priestcraft. Might this occur within the Church of Jesus Christ as well as without the Church? What would you think might be the antithesis of priestcraft? How about selfless service in the kingdom of God?

6 Wherefore, because of their iniquities, destructions, famines, pestilences, and bloodshed shall come upon them; and they who shall not be destroyed shall be scattered among all nations.

verse 6 Scattering of the Lord's chosen occurs only when they fail to accept and abide gospel principles or when they apostatize from the truth. The descendants of the tribe of Judah will be scattered and persecuted because of their rejection of Jesus Christ and his gospel, not because they crucified Christ. The Jews as a nation and a

tribe and a culture did not crucify the Savior, rather a few of their wicked leaders did (see the commentary for verse 3 above). The contiguity of this verse to the preceding three verses might lead to the mistaken notion that the Jews have suffered persecution over the years because they were somehow guilty of plotting his crucifixion. The ultimate heinous aberration of this idea is that the historical persecution of the Jews has somehow been deserved.

verses 7-9 These verses promise a day of restoration to the Jews and, by implication, to the rest of scattered Israel.

7 But behold, thus saith the Lord God: When the day cometh that they 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.

verse 7 Here Jacob begins to speak messianically—that is, as if he were the Lord. He will continue to speak messianically through verse 19.

Here we learn that the Jews will be restored “in the flesh” (literally and not figuratively) to their homeland Palestine according to the Abrahamic covenant only when they accept Jesus as the Messiah. We may thus conclude that those Jews who constitute the present Zionist movement in the land of Israel have no permanent claim over the land and, indeed, will not have until they accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah and Lord.

8 And it shall come to pass that they shall be gathered in from their long dispersion, from the isles of the sea, and from the four parts of the earth; and the nations of the Gentiles shall be great in the eyes of me, saith God, in carrying them forth to the lands of their inheritance.

verse 8 “isles of the sea . . . and . . . four parts of the earth” These terms refer simply to scattered Israel, wherever they may be found upon the earth. See also verse 21.

“the nations of the Gentiles shall be great in the eyes of me” Keep in mind that the Gentiles who inhabit the great Gentile nation and who accept the gospel shall, in the latter days, have a vital role in preaching the gospel to scattered Israel and gathering them back to “Zion.” See the introductory comments for 1 Nephi 20. The use of the word “nations” here in its plural form is intriguing. Perhaps the reference is to those Gentiles who accept the gospel in their homelands prior to emigrating to that singular great Gentile nation, the United States of America.

9 Yea, the kings of the Gentiles shall be nursing fathers unto them, and their queens shall become nursing mothers; wherefore, the promises of the Lord are great unto the Gentiles, for he hath spoken it, and who can dispute?

verse 9 The interpretation of this verse has been previously given—see the commentary for 2 Nephi 6:7. Please see that commentary. For the convenience of the reader, I will repeat part of that commentary here:

There is a sign that awaits the gathering Israelites in the latter days: The very elect of the “Gentiles” (the “kings” and “queens”) will bow down to the Israelites and humbly serve them and teach the gospel to them without shame, for true humility is seen among the disciples of Christ. Thus a magnificent and vital role is prophesied for the “Gentiles” in the latter days. Keep in mind that many of these Latter-day Gentiles will be descendants of the house of Israel. The strict Book of Mormon definition of Gentile includes all those not of the tribe of Judah, or those who did not live in Palestine in the days of Lehi. Thus, those scattered Israelites, in those days, were considered Gentiles.

10 But behold, this land, said God, shall be a land of thine inheritance, and the Gentiles shall be blessed upon the land.

verse 10 “this land” In the broadest sense this phrase likely refers to the western hemisphere or the Americas. The land, however, which will become the great Gentile nation is the United States of America.

Here Jacob is speaking to his people and to their descendants, the seed of ancient Joseph. North America is a promised land for this segment of the house of Israel.

verses 11-14 Here again is the same conditional promise we read in 2 Nephi 1:7. If the land’s inhabitants remain righteous they will never be captured and will remain free of the oppression of monarchic governments.

11 And this land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles, and there shall be no kings upon the land, who shall raise up unto the Gentiles.

12 And I will fortify this land against all other nations.

13 And he that fighteth against Zion shall perish, saith God.

14 For he that raiseth up a king against me shall perish, for I, the Lord, the king of heaven, will be their king, and I will be a light unto them forever, that hear my words.

15 Wherefore, for this cause, that my covenants may be fulfilled which I have made unto the children of men, that I will do unto them while they are in the flesh, I must needs destroy the secret works of darkness, and of murders, and of abominations.

verse 15 Here the Lord declares war upon those forces of evil described in the next verse.

16 Wherefore, he that fighteth against Zion, both Jew and Gentile, both bond and free, both male and female, shall perish; for they are they who are the whore of all the earth; for they who are not for me are against me, saith our God.

verse 16 “whore of all the earth” Here is a clear definition of this entity which has essentially the same meaning as the “kingdom of the devil” (1 Nephi 22:22-23) and the same as the “great and abominable church” as defined in 1 Nephi 14. These titles all refer to those who fight against the kingdom of God.

17 For I will fulfil my promises which I have made unto the children of men, that I will do unto them while they are in the flesh—

verse 17 The Lord, through the prophet Jacob, prefaces two promises which shall find literal fulfillment. These are explained in the two verses that follow.

18 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.

verse 18 “I will afflict thy seed by the hand of the Gentiles” Here Jacob prophesies of the persecution of the native American Indians (including, or perhaps especially, those of Mesoamerica) by the early European American settlers, both in North and perhaps especially in Central America.

“I will soften the hearts of the Gentiles” After these native Americans are “scattered . . . and . . . smitten” (1 Nephi 13:14) before the Gentiles, some of the Gentiles will be touched by the Spirit. They will become more sympathetic toward the native Americans. Some of these Gentiles will accept the gospel, and be “numbered among the house of Israel.”

19 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.

verse 19 Nevertheless, Jacob outlines what is possible for the descendants of the Book of Mormon people if they should repent and accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord will consecrate the lands of the western hemisphere unto them forever. Why does he say *forever*? This mortal phase will not last forever. Perhaps the same lands will belong to the descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples even after the world has been celestialized and become the eternal abode of those of the celestial glory.

“a choice land . . . above all other lands” In all of the scriptures this expression or variations of this expressions are used only to describe the Americas (1 Nephi 2:20; 13:30; 2 Nephi 1:5; Ether 2:7,10,15; 9:20; 13:2). Is there something of

hyperbole here? Or is this expression actually true in absolute terms? It is food for thought.

“I will have all men that dwell thereon that they shall worship me” The Lord, again through the prophet Jacob, outlines the ideal situation: “I would that all men who dwell thereon should worship me.” This, of course, will not actually come to pass.

A simplified definition of worship is imitation. A man tends to imitate that person he worships.

This is the last verse wherein Jacob speaks messianically—as though he were the Lord.

20 And now, my beloved brethren, seeing that our merciful God has given us so great knowledge concerning these things, let us remember him, and lay aside our sins, and not hang down our heads, for we are not cast off; nevertheless, we have been driven out of the land of our inheritance; but we have been led to a better land, for the Lord has made the sea our path, and we are upon an isle of the sea.

verse 20 “we have been driven out of the land of our inheritance” Jacob doubtless speaks here of Palestine. When Joshua led the Israelites into Palestine in about 1407 B.C., the belief was doubtless prevalent that they were being directed by God to their “Promised Land.” Thus that area was the “land of [their] inheritance.”

“we are upon an isle of the sea” As Jacob studied Isaiah’s writings, he doubtless learned that Isaiah’s figurative term for the location of scattered Israel, wherever they may find themselves in the world, was “upon the isle (or isles) of the sea.” In fact, Isaiah on one occasion addressed scattered Israel as “O isles” (see Isaiah 49:1). It is, of course, also possible that the Nephite people, never having explored the land in its entirety, did believe that they were on an island. Notice also the use of this term in the following verse.

One of Jacob’s favorite themes, perhaps from his own experience living in exile, was the preservation of scattered Israel, the idea that God would never abandon his chosen people. He had been exiled twice—first wandering with his family across the desert and great sea—then fleeing from the first settlement in America even deeper into the wilderness (see 2 Nephi 5:5-6). He seems to take special comfort in the promises made to the Israelites. He obviously acknowledged that he and his people were among those of scattered Israel.

21 But great are the promises of the Lord unto them who are upon the isles of the sea; wherefore as it says isles, there must needs be more than this, and they are inhabited also by our brethren.

22 For behold, the Lord God has led away from time to time from the house of Israel, according to his will and pleasure. And now behold, the Lord

remembereth all them who have been broken off, wherefore he remembereth us also.

verses 21-22 “wherefore as it says isles” Here Jacob is calling attention to the plural form of the word “isle.” His meaning is clear. He is suggesting that there are other pockets of scattered Israelites in other “isles of the sea” throughout the world.

23 Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life.

verse 23 “ye are free to act for yourselves” You have your agency which is a sacrosanct characteristic that each man has always possessed, and it cannot be taken away.

24 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh; and remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved.

verse 24 “after ye are reconciled unto God” Here the phrase “reconciled unto God” means simply to obey the commandments as best you can.

Usually, when it is found in the scriptures, the phrase “reconciled unto God” means to be justified—to be considered by God to be worthy of exaltation in the celestial kingdom. For a more complete discussion of this concept, see the discussion of the “law of justice” in the introductory commentary for Alma 5 and in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

“it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved” This is a most vital and important concept. It cannot be properly understood without understanding the concepts of “law of justice,” “atonement,” “law of mercy,” and the “grace of God.” Please review these most important concepts in the same two references mentioned in the previous paragraph.

25 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, that ye may praise him through grace divine. Amen.

verse 25 “may God raise you from death” Here the term “death” refers to physical death or the separation of the body and spirit.

“everlasting death” This refers to spiritual death or the separation of man from God due to the sins of each individual, and not that due to the fall of Adam..

“that ye may praise him through grace divine” You will have the opportunity to enter “the eternal kingdom of God” and praise him face to face only because of his “grace divine”—that incomparable love which he has for us that impels him to forgive us our sins even though we are unworthy.

2 Nephi Chapter 11

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 11:2-4 And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words. For I will liken his words unto my people, and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word. Nevertheless, God sendeth more witnesses, and he proveth all his words. Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him.

1 And now, Jacob spake many more things to my people at that time; nevertheless only these things have I caused to be written, for the things which I have written sufficeth me.

verse 1 Nephi is now once again the speaker or “first person.”

2 And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words. For I will liken his words unto my people, and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him.

verse 2 “for my soul delighteth in his words” Nephi seems to have had a great bond with the prophet Isaiah. Both of them had been residents of Jerusalem, and thus they shared a common cultural background. Both were familiar with the manner of teaching among the Jews and had special insight into the teachings of the ancient prophets (see 2 Nephi 25:5). They both had seen the Savior and had sweeping visions of the destiny of the earth. They were both “prophets of the restoration,” that is many of their writings dealt with latter-day events leading to the establishment of the kingdom of God.

“for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him” The word verily means really; in truth; in fact. Isaiah really did see the Lord.

3 And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word. Nevertheless, God sendeth more witnesses, and he proveth all his words.

verse 3 “I will send their words” “Their” refers to Isaiah’s and to Nephi’s brother Jacob’s words or writings.

“by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word” This passage may simply be a validation of the Lord’s law of witnesses, or it may be a prophetic foreshadowing of the three witnesses to the latter-day Book of Mormon plates (see also 2 Nephi 27:12; Ether 5:2-4). Furthermore, the phrase, “God sendeth more witnesses” may foreshadow the eight additional witnesses of the plates. For a more detailed discussion of the law of witnesses, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 29:8.

Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah have been considered by some to be the three great witnesses of the Book of Mormon. The testimonies of these three eye-witnesses of the Savior are contained on the small plates of Nephi. Is it possible that we would not have these testimonies had Martin Harris not lost the 116 pages of manuscript? This is a meaningless question since the Lord knew that he would lose them and that the small plates would be substituted for them. As fascinating as it would be to be able to read that lost manuscript, it is apparent that the small plates of Nephi contain materials that are even more important than that lost portion (D&C 10:45). It might even be that the central purpose of the small plates of Nephi is to bring to us the testimonies of these three witnesses.

Have you considered the faith of these great pre-advent prophets? As we exercise our faith in him today, we have advantages over them. For example, we have available to us the benefit of eye-witness scriptural accounts of the Savior’s ministry and miracles. Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah had not the faith-enriching benefit of a Christ who already had come in the flesh. They had only a faith and consummate hope of his eventual birth centuries later. Their tremendous faith earned them the ultimate privilege of being allowed to see the Christ.

4 Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him.

verse 4 “all things . . . the typifying of him” A “type,” or something that “typifies,” is a symbol or pattern of something else. The law of Moses is replete with “types” of Christ. Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: “It follows that if we had sufficient insight, we would see in every gospel ordinance, in every rite that is part of revealed religion, in every performance commanded of God, in all things Deity gives his people, something that typifies the eternal ministry of the Eternal Christ” (*The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ*, 378).

Let us now summarize the types and shadows of Christ that are contained in the law of Moses and should be visible to all of the righteous who lived under that law.

It should not be surprising that the law of Moses includes many things that are symbolic of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the very purpose of the law of Moses was to be a prophetic series of types, shadows, symbols, and prefigurations of him. And not just the

law of Moses alone—indeed the scriptures are clear that all things bear witness of him. Nephi wrote, “We did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses. . . . Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the *typifying* of him” (2 Nephi 5:10; 11:4, italics added). The prophet Moses wrote, “And behold, all things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath: all things bear record of me” (Moses 6:63).

A great deal of material, primarily rabbinic refinement and commentary on the original Mosaic writings, has been added to the original law of Moses. In fact, so much was added in the first millennium of its existence, and so obscure became its original requirements even in that relatively brief period of time, that while living in mortality he who had given the law in its purity was repeatedly accused of breaking some minute aspect of it. This complexity in and occasional confusion about the development of the Mosaic code as presently taught poses challenges for the student of the Old and New Testaments even today. Elder Bruce R. McConkie outlined the dilemma this way: “We cannot always tell . . . whether specific sacrificial rites performed in Israel were part of the Mosaic system or whether they were the same ordinances performed by Adam and Abraham as part of the gospel law itself. Further, it appears that some of the ritualistic performances varied from time to time, according to the special needs of the people and the changing circumstances in which they found themselves. Even the Book of Mormon does not help us in these respects. We know the Nephites offered sacrifices and kept the law of Moses. Since they held the Melchizedek Priesthood and there were no Levites among them, we suppose their sacrifices were those that antedated the ministry of Moses” (*The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978], 436).

This possibly confounding factor notwithstanding, let us consider several aspects of the law of Moses which are clearly symbolic of Jesus Christ:

1. Moses (like Isaac, Joseph, and so many others in the Old Testament) was himself a prophetic symbol of the Christ who was to come. As the Father said to him, speaking through Jehovah, “I have a work for thee, Moses, my son; and thou art in the similitude of mine Only Begotten; and mine Only Begotten is and shall be the Savior, for he is full of grace and truth” (Moses 1:6). As the children of Israel were fleeing Egypt and making their way to the promised land (note the Messianic prefiguration of delivering, of saving, of rescuing a covenant people from the sins and evils of the unbelieving world), Moses told them: “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.

. . . And the Lord said unto me, . . . I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him” (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19). Just what is it the Lord will *require* of him who does not believe in and follow the Lord? We will learn that it is spiritual death.

This Prophet (note the upper case *P* in the text) who would be raised up like unto Moses is, of course, Jesus Christ. As the footnotes in the LDS edition of the scriptures indicate, this passage from Deuteronomy is quoted, with some variation, twice in the New Testament, twice in the Book of Mormon, and once in the Pearl of Great Price. In every instance, those references make it clear that Christ is the future prophet to whom they refer. The earliest of those declarations comes from Nephi, who said, “This prophet of whom Moses spake was the Holy One of Israel; wherefore, he shall execute judgment in righteousness” (1 Nephi 22:21). Not surprisingly, the most authoritative declaration of this truth also comes in the Book of Mormon from the lips of the resurrected Savior himself. To the Nephites gathered at his feet, Christ said, “Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be cut off from among the people” (3 Nephi 20:23; see also Acts 3:22-23). This “cut[ting] off from among the people” is surely being cut off eternally from the people of God—spiritual death.

2. The law of Moses included a host of “performances and ordinances” such as sacrifices and offerings that were directly linked with the future atonement of Christ and were meant to be in every way “a similitude of him.” The sacrifices were performed in similitude of the coming sacrifice of their Messiah. The rituals out of which they gained forgiveness of sins were tokens of what was to be in the life of him whose atonement made forgiveness possible. Their every act, every ordinance, every performance pointed the hearts and minds of believing worshipers forward to Jesus Christ and him crucified. All this was understood by those among them who were faithful and true. The rebellious and slothful were like their modern counterparts, unbelieving, nonconforming, unsaved.

Paul named several of the Mosaic ordinances and performances and said they were a “shadow of heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:4-5). The “meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation,” he said, were designed as “a figure [a symbol or type] for the time then present.” He spoke of the various formalities involved in sprinkling blood as “patterns” of things of a much higher nature. Perhaps Amulek’s statement is the clearest and best of them all. He said: “This is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last

sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:14).

Sacrifice was a way of worship in Israel. The divine decree, given to Adam, that men should repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore, was still in force among them. Compliance with that decree still required them to “offer the firstlings of their flocks” as sacrifices in “similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” (Moses 5:5-8).

3. Feast of the Passover. At the time appointed for their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, the Lord commanded each family in Israel to sacrifice a lamb, to sprinkle its blood on their doorposts, and then to eat unleavened bread for seven more days—all to symbolize the fact that the destroying angel would pass over the Israelites as he went forth slaying the firstborn in the families of all the Egyptians; and also to show that, in haste, Israel should go forth from slavery to freedom. As a pattern for all the Mosaic instructions yet to come, the details of the performances here involved were so arranged as to bear testimony both of Israel’s deliverance and of her Deliverer. Among other procedures, the Lord commanded, as found in Exodus 12:

a. “Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year,” signifying that the Lamb of God, pure and perfect, without spot or blemish, in the prime of his life, as the Paschal Lamb, would be slain for the sins of the world.

b. They were to take of the blood of the lamb and sprinkle it upon the doorposts of their houses, having this promise as a result: “And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you,” signifying that the blood of Christ, which should fall as drops in Gethsemane and flow in a stream from a pierced side as he hung on the cross, would cleanse and save the faithful; and that, as those in Israel were saved temporally because the blood of a sacrificial lamb was sprinkled on the doorposts of their houses, so the faithful of all ages would wash their garments in the blood of the Eternal Lamb and from him receive an eternal salvation.

c. As to the sacrifice of the lamb, the decree was, “Neither shall ye break a bone thereof,” signifying that when the Lamb of God was sacrificed on the cross, though they broke the legs of the two thieves to induce death, yet they brake not the bones of the Redeemer, “that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken” (John 19:31-36).

d. As to eating the flesh of the sacrificial lamb, the divine word was, “No uncircumcised person shall eat thereof,” signifying that the blessings of the gospel are reserved for those who come into the fold of Israel, who join the Church, who carry their part of the burden in bearing off the kingdom; signifying also that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood, as he said, shall have eternal life and he will raise them up at the last day” (John 6:54).

e. As “the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt” because they believed not the word of the Lord delivered to them by Moses and Aaron, even so should the Firstborn of the Father, who brings life to all who believe in his holy name, destroy worldly people at the last day, destroy (spiritual death) all those who are in the Egypt of darkness, whose hearts are hardened as were those of Pharaoh and his minions.

4. Feast of Pentecost. One of the three great feasts to which all the males of Israel must go each year was the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of the Harvest, or, as we are wont to say, the Feast of Pentecost. It came fifty days after the beginning of the Feast of the Passover. The burnt offerings of Pentecost included a sin-offering and a peace-offering, indicating that the great purpose of the feast was to gain a remission of sins and obtain a reconciliation with God.

With the closing of the Old and the opening of the New Dispensation, the Feast of Pentecost ceased as an authorized time of religious worship. And it is not without significance that the Lord chose the Pentecost, which grew out of the final Passover, as the occasion to dramatize forever the fulfillment of all that was involved in the sacrificial fires of the past. Fire is a cleansing agent. Filth and disease die in its flames. The baptism of fire, which John promised Christ would bring, means that when men receive the actual companionship of the Holy Spirit, then evil and iniquity are burned out of their souls as though by fire. The sanctifying power of that member of the Godhead makes them clean. In similar imagery, all the fires on all the altars of the past, as they burned the flesh of animals, were signifying that spiritual purification would come by the Holy Ghost, whom the Father would send because of the Son. On that first Pentecost of the so-called Christian Era such fires would have performed their purifying symbolism if the old order had still prevailed. How fitting it was instead for the Lord to choose that very day to send living fire from heaven, as it were, fire that would dwell in the hearts of men and replace forever all the fires on all the altars of the past. And so it was that “when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:1-4). For further discussion of the imagery of sanctification by fire and the Holy Ghost, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18, *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*.

5. Feast of Tabernacles. Another of the three great feasts at which the attendance of all male Israelites was compulsory, the Feast of Tabernacles, was by all odds Israel’s greatest feast. Coming five days after the Day of Atonement, it was thus celebrated when the sins of the chosen people had been removed and when their special covenant relation to Jehovah had been renewed and restored. Above all other occasions it was one for rejoicing, bearing testimony, and praising the Lord. In the full sense, it is the Feast of Jehovah, the one Mosaic celebration which, as part of the

restitution of all things, shall be restored when Jehovah comes to reign personally upon the earth for a thousand years. Even now we perform one of its chief rituals in our solemn assemblies, the giving of the Hosanna Shout, and the worshipers of Jehovah shall yet be privileged to exult in other of its sacred rituals.

Also known as the Feast of Booths, because Israel dwelt in booths while in the wilderness, and as the Feast of Ingathering, because it came after the completion of the full harvest, it was a time of gladsome rejoicing and the extensive offering of sacrifices. More sacrifices were offered during the Feast of the Passover than at any other time because a lamb was slain for and eaten by each family or group, but at the Feast of Tabernacles more sacrifices of bullocks, rams, lambs, and goats were offered by the priests for the nation as a whole than at all the other Israelite feasts combined. The fact that it celebrated the completion of the full harvest symbolizes the gospel reality that it is the mission of the house of Israel to gather all nations to Jehovah, a process that is now going forward, but will not be completed until that millennial day when “the Lord shall be king over all the earth,” and shall reign personally thereon. Then shall be fulfilled that which is written: “And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations . . . shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain” (Zechariah 14:9-21). That will be the day when the law shall go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Manifestly when the Feast of Tabernacles is kept in that day, its ritualistic performances will conform to the new gospel order and not include the Mosaic order of the past.

6. The Day of Atonement. Now we come to the heart and core and center of the whole Mosaic structure, namely, the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the law of Moses is all about. The law itself was given so that men might believe in Christ and know that salvation comes in and through his atoning sacrifice and in no other way. Every principle, every precept, every doctrinal teaching, every rite, ordinance, and performance, every word and act—all that appertained to, was revealed in, and grew out of the ministry of Moses, and all the prophets who followed him—all of it was designed and prepared to enable men to believe in Christ, to submit to his laws, and to gain the full blessings of that atonement which he alone could accomplish. And the chief symbolisms, the most perfect similitudes, the types and shadows without peer, were displayed before all the people once each year, on the Day of Atonement.

On one day each year—the tenth day of the seventh month—Israel’s high priest of the Levitical order, the one who sat in Aaron’s seat, was privileged to enter the Holy of Holies in the house of the Lord, to enter as it were the presence of Jehovah, and there make an atonement for the sins of the people. In the course of much sacrificial symbolism, he cleansed himself, the sanctuary itself, the priesthood bearers as a whole, and all of the people. Sacrificial animals were slain and their blood sprinkled on the

mercy seat and before the altar. Incense was burned, and all of the imagery and symbolism of the ransoming ordinances was carried out.

One thing, applicable to this day only, is of great moment. Two goats were selected, lots were cast, and the name of Jehovah was placed upon one goat. The other was called Azazel, the scapegoat. The Lord's goat was then sacrificed as the Great Jehovah would be in due course, but upon the scapegoat were placed all of the sins of the people, which burden the scapegoat then carried away into the wilderness. The high priest, as the law required, "lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat" and confessed "over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat." The goat then bore upon him "all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited," even as the Promised Messiah should bear the sins of many. "For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you," Moses said, "that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord" (Leviticus 16).

We know that sins are remitted in the waters of baptism. Baptisms were the order of the day in Israel. We know also that provision must be made for repentant persons to free themselves from sins committed after baptism. We see in the annual performances of the Day of Atonement one of the Lord's provisions for renewing the covenant made in the waters of baptism and receiving anew the blessed purity that comes from full obedience to the law involved. In our day we gain a similar state of purity by partaking worthily of the sacrament of the Lord's supper.

The symbolism and meaning of the ordinances and ceremonies performed on the Day of Atonement are set forth by Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews. He calls the tabernacle-temple "a worldly sanctuary," wherein sacrificial ordinances were performed each year by Levitical priests to atone for the sins of men and prepare them to enter the Holy of Holies. These ordinances were to remain "until the time of reformation," when Christ should come as a high priest of "a greater and more perfect tabernacle," to prepare himself and all men, by the shedding of his own blood, to obtain "eternal redemption" in the heavenly tabernacle. The old covenant was but "a shadow of good things to come . . . For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. . . . But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews 9 and 10). How perfectly the Mosaic ordinances testify of him by whom salvation comes and in whose holy name all men are commanded to worship the Eternal Father forevermore!

For a more complete discussion of the law of Moses, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 16, *The Law of Moses*.

5 And also my soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers; yea, my soul delighteth in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death.

verse 5 “the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers”

God covenanted with the forefathers of the house of Israel that he would gather and redeem their descendants in a future time. This would occur in the latter days.

The “great and eternal plan of deliverance from death” seems to refer specifically to the atonement and perhaps, in a more general way, to the plan of salvation. The concepts of “grace,” “justice,” and “mercy” are allied concepts and are reviewed *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 2, *Consequences of the Lord’s Atonement*.

6 And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish.

verse 6 Without the atonement, “Our spirits, stained with sin, unable to cleanse themselves, would be subject to the author of sin everlastingly; we would be followers of Satan; we would be sons of perdition” (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 130). See also the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:8-9.

7 For if there be no Christ there be no God; and if there be no God we are not, for there could have been no creation. But there is a God, and he is Christ, and he cometh in the fulness of his own time.

verse 7 “if there be no Christ there be no God” If there were no Savior to redeem man from his fallen state, then all mankind would be doomed to spend eternity with Satan, and none could qualify to spend eternity with God in his presence. Thus God would have no purpose, no reason to exist.

“if there be no God we are not” Mankind could not have been born as his spirit offspring, eventually to inherit a physical body.

“But there is a God, and he is Christ, and he cometh in the fulness of his own time.” Here is the grand testimony of the Book of Mormon: Christ is God, the God of the Old Testament. He is also the God of creation and the God of our salvation.

“he cometh in the fulness of his own time” We have previously read of the period of Jesus’s mortal ministry referred to as the “fulness of time” (2 Nephi 2:3,26). Here, we read a variation of that term.

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

verse 8 Nephi must have believed that the following quotations from Isaiah (2 Nephi 12 through 24) were of tremendous value, since the space on the small plates of Nephi was limited, and he was very selective about what he chose to include on these plates (1 Nephi 19:6).

2 Nephi Chapter 12

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 12-24 Isaiah 2-14

This chapter is the first of thirteen consecutive chapters which Nephi will quote from the book of Isaiah (Isaiah 2-14). You may find it helpful, as you prepare to study these chapters, to read the two supplemental articles which are intended to provide background material to assist your study of the Isaiah materials in the Book of Mormon. These articles are, *Historical Setting of the Book of Isaiah*, and *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah*.

One might well ask the question: Why did Nephi feel it important to quote such a large quantity of the writings of Isaiah on the small plates of Nephi? Why is it that these writings were judged to be so vital both to the Nephites and to latter day Israelites? Let's consider a few reasons. First, Isaiah died less than a hundred years before Lehi and his family left Jerusalem. Thus, he was regarded as an almost contemporary prophet, and his writings were likely considered by the Nephites to be pertinent and relevant. Second, the Nephites were an important branch of the house of Israel, and Isaiah often wrote of the destiny of the house of Israel (2 Nephi 6:5) and of God's covenants and promises to the house of Israel. Third, Isaiah frequently wrote of the coming of Jesus Christ the Messiah, a subject obviously dear to the hearts of Nephi, Jacob, and other righteous Nephites (2 Nephi 11:2-4). Finally, Isaiah also treated the themes of repentance and the judgments of God and key events relating to the latter days, themes valuable to Nephi and the other Book of Mormon prophets who will quote from Isaiah's writings.

verses 1-5 These verses contain a prophecy that speaks to us in this final dispensation. The principle themes of these verses are the gathering of Israel, temples, and temple service. Joseph Smith summarized the connection between the gathering of Israel and temple service: "The object of gathering the Jews, or the people of God in any age of the world . . . was to build unto the Lord a house whereby he could reveal unto his people the ordinances of his house and the glories of his kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation" (*HC*, 5:423).

1 The word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

verse 1 "The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw" This statement and other similar statements (for example, see 2 Nephi 18:5: "The Lord spake also unto me, again, saying") indicates prophetic authority.

Please note that when the following material was revealed to Isaiah, he “saw” it. How did he “see” the word? Perhaps he saw in vision the things described in his prophecies and then recorded them in a scroll or book. Or perhaps he saw them written out on a scroll or in a vision of a heavenly book as did Lehi (see 1 Nephi 1:11-14) or Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon (D&C 76:11-12, 28).

“concerning Judah and Jerusalem” This vision of Isaiah certainly deals primarily with Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah. The latter had been in existence for about 200 years at the time of this writing. But Isaiah’s prophecies also deal with the entire house of Israel, including the lost ten tribes, as the Book of Mormon abundantly testifies. Nephi wrote, “Hear ye the words of the prophet [Isaiah] . . . which were written unto all the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 19:24; 2 Nephi 6:5, 3 Nephi 23:2).

Using his typical dualistic approach, in this chapter, Isaiah insightfully connects major problems in Judah during his day with important prophecies of conditions and events in the latter days.

verses 2-4 One interesting point is that the wording of Isaiah 2:2-4 is also found, with only slight variation, in Micah 4:1-4. Micah was a prophet who was a contemporary of Isaiah. He lived in a rural village twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. Why the similar wording? Did Micah borrow the words of his mentor Isaiah? Did they both borrow the words of an older prophet? Did they both see the same heavenly vision, and were they inspired to record it in essentially the same words?

2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, 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.

verse 2 When are the “last days”? Secular biblical scholars generally believe that this term refers to the meridian of time, or the period of Christ’s ministry. We know, however, that the “last days” are the “latter days” or this final dispensation. The term also includes the Millennium.

“it shall come to pass in the last days” What exactly is being prophesied to occur in the last days? The two verses that follow this one do itemize the things that will occur. Is the establishment of “the mountain of the Lord’s house . . . in the top of the mountains” specifically prophesied to occur in this verse? For reasons that are not clear, Joseph Smith translated one phrase in this verse as “*when* the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established” instead of “that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established” (from the KJV). This leaves this awkward sentence without a subject. In spite of this, it seems likely that the intent of the verse is that the establishment of the temple or temples is an integral part of the prophecy.

The phrase “mountain of the Lord’s house” refers to the temple or temples of God.

The temples “shall be established in the tops of the mountains,” but which mountains? This prophecy might be fulfilled in one of four ways:

1. The temple in Salt Lake City and other nearby temples are certainly located in the tops of the Rocky Mountains. Might the expression “all nations shall flow unto it” refer to the great family history organization to which people of all nations flow in order to do ancestral research? In the dedicatory prayers of both the Salt Lake and the Idaho Falls temples, mention was made of the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in verse 2.

2. The day is yet in the future when a temple will be built on that “Mount Zion” which is “the city of New Jerusalem” in Jackson County, Missouri (D&C 84:2-4).

3. When the Jews gather in old Jerusalem, they will assemble in “the mountains of the Lord’s house” (D&C 133:13), and a temple will be built there in the mountains of Judea as a part of the final work of restoration (Ezekiel 37:24- 28).

4. This prophecy may refer to all of the Lord’s temples built in these latter days (McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, 275). This interpretation might explain how “all nations” could flow to the temple of the Lord, for it is quite impossible that all peoples could come to a temple or temples in the mountains of North America.

Perhaps more important than the location of any specific temple, this prophesied sign is the latter-day establishment of the temple ordinances.

“shall be exalted above the hills” Spiritually, the temples represent, figuratively, the highest point on earth, which symbolically connects heaven and earth. It is where God’s word is revealed to his prophet.

“all nations shall flow unto it” For something to “flow” up a mountain, there must needs be a power operating stronger than gravity, certainly the power of God and the drawing power of the temple. People of all nations shall come to the temples to receive their blessings. Joseph Smith taught that “there should be a place where all nations shall come up from time to time to receive their endowments” (*TPJS*, 367).

3 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.

verse 3 Both expressions, “the mountain of the Lord” and “the house of the God of Jacob,” also refer to the temple or temples of God.

“he will teach us of his ways” In the temples we have the opportunity to be close to the Spirit of God. Through the mediation of the Spirit we may receive personal revelation (see Isaiah 54:13) or the Spirit may confirm to us the truth of the scriptures and the truths of the revelations given through his apostles and prophets. Once we learn his ways, we are able to “walk in his paths,” that is, walk the walk of Jesus Christ.

This verse seems to differentiate between two separate headquarters of the church in the latter days, “Zion” (the New Jerusalem in the western hemisphere) and

“Jerusalem.” Those remnants of Israel that are of the house of Joseph, those descendants of the other ten tribes, and Gentiles that become church members are to gather to Zion, and the Jews to Jerusalem: “Let them therefore who are among the gentiles flee unto Zion. And let them who be of Judah flee unto Jerusalem” (D&C 133:12-13).

“out of Zion shall go forth the law” What “law”? Which “Zion”? Zion is a title often used to describe both Old and New Jerusalem. In this dispensation, some church general authorities have interpreted this passage. Each has suggested that “Zion” refers to the latter-day Church of Jesus Christ with its headquarters in the United States of America. Elder Mark E. Petersen, for example, identified the general conferences of the Church as the fulfillment of this passage—especially as these conferences are broadcast to the world by radio and television (*Why the Religious Life*, 200-01, 305-07). President George Albert Smith taught a broader concept as he dedicated the Idaho Falls temple. He taught the “going forth” of the “law” as the establishment in the world of governments similar to our divinely-inspired constitutional form of government (*Improvement Era*, October, 1945, 564). The prophet Joseph Smith equated the “law” with the theocracy of Jesus Christ who will rule during the Millennium from Zion in Jackson County, Missouri, which serve as the seat of government (*TPJS*, 248-52).

“and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” In what sense will the word of the Lord proceed forth from Jerusalem? Joseph Smith taught the manner in which the Lord’s word would proceed forth: “Moses received the word of the Lord from God himself; he was the mouth of God to Aaron, and Aaron taught the people, in both civil and ecclesiastical affairs; . . . so will it be when the purposes of God shall be accomplished [during the Millennium]; when ‘the Lord shall be king over the whole earth’ and ‘Jerusalem his throne.’ ‘The law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem’” (*TPJS*, 252).

4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks—nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

verse 4 This verse depicts the cleansing judgments of God that will usher in the Millennium. Weapons of destruction are turned into tools of production, symbolizing millennial peace. During the Millennium, peace will prevail. We will have a world without war.

“And he shall judge among the nations” The Hebrew term *hokiyach* means to “settle the case.” Here and in the King James Version it is translated *judge*. When the Savior makes his “great and dreadful” appearance on the earth, he will be the judge of the world (John 5:27; Acts 10:42; Hebrews 12:23).

“Plowshares” are the cutting blades of a plow.

A “pruninghook” is a tool with a hooked blade that is used for pruning plants.

“Swords” and “spears” represent war and destruction, and “plowshares” and “pruninghooks” represent peace and prosperity (*TPJS*, 248).

“neither shall they learn war any more” Not only will the nations destroy their weapons and convert them into useful implements, but also they will not even learn—study or gain knowledge of—war.

5 O house of Jacob, come ye and let us walk in the light of the Lord; yea, come, for ye have all gone astray, every one to his wicked ways.

verse 5 “for ye have all gone astray” This verse, interpreted literally in a prophetic sense, might be taken to imply that there would be a complete apostasy before the time of establishment of the “mountain of the Lord’s house.” An alternate interpretation, however, might be that Isaiah’s attention has shifted from the future back to his own people. He is rebuking them for their pride and idolatry.

verses 6-9 Isaiah presents a list of sins committed by Israel including practicing false temple worship (verse 6), seeking after earthly riches (verse 7), building up arms and weaponry (verse 7), worshiping idols (verse 8), and indulging in pride (verse 9). People in our day are also guilty of such sins.

6 Therefore, O Lord, thou hast forsaken thy people, the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and hearken unto soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers.

verse 6 “O Lord” This expression is not found in the King James Bible and indicates that Isaiah is addressing the Lord in prayer.

“thou hast forsaken thy people” The term “forsaken” carries the sense of abandoning the house of Israel and leaving them without the Spirit of God and without revelation through prophets.

“they be replenished from the east” “East” is ordinarily the sacred direction. Holy temples are oriented eastward and the Lord at his second coming will come from the east (Matthew 24:27). Here, however, the Israelites have sought to be spiritually directed (replenished) by apostate religious systems from heathen countries in the east, especially Assyria and Babylonia.

The “Philistines” were a group of people who occupied southwest Palestine and who often warred against Israel.

“hearken unto soothsayers” Soothsayers are persons who pretend to prophesy or predict the future—false prophets.

“they please themselves in the children of strangers” The Hebrew *sepiyqu* means to “clasp hands.” Another possible translation of this phrase is that the Israelites shake hands with and enter into covenants with people outside the house of Israel

(“strangers”) who are unsavory people. This phrase might also refer to God’s command not to intermarry with those outside the house of Israel.

7 Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots.

verse 7 “Silver,” “gold,” and “treasures” are symbolic of worldly materialism. The Lord’s people are ever commanded to seek him rather than the riches of this world.

“Horses” and “chariots” are symbolic of warfare and military might.

Isaiah’s repeated use of the word “full” here and in the following verse corresponds to the phrase “fully ripe” which implies completely wicked and fully ready for destruction by the Lord (see Alma 37:31; 45:16; D&C 101:11; 43:26; and 26:17).

8 Their land is also full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made.

verse 8 “Idols” are both the heathen deities constructed of wood and stone and also more abstract things that men become excessively devoted to, including worldly wealth, honors of men, and things of the flesh.

verses 6-8 We may summarize these three verses: For thou, O Lord, hast withdrawn thy blessings and influence from thy chosen people because they have become filled with false religious ideas. They have accepted the paganistic and idolatrous teachings of false mystics from the East. They have come to believe in fortune tellers as do the Philistines, and they have entered into covenants with unsavory people outside the house of Israel—foreigners. These foreigners bring a coarser, baser influence to Israel which damages Israel’s spirituality. The Lord’s chosen have filled their land with all manner of worldly possessions. The form of worship among some Israelites has even deteriorated to a point of idol worship, probably including the institutional fornication which was part of the ancient fertility cults.

9 And the mean man boweth not down, and the great man humbleth himself not, therefore, forgive him not.

verse 9 The “mean man”—the common or ordinary man—has not been humbled, neither has the man of importance. Both are guilty of pride. Therefore, Lord, do not forgive them. Isaiah is still praying to the Lord.

verses 10-22 These verses contain one of the greatest prophecies recorded in the standard works of Christ’s second coming and his judgments on the proud.

10 O ye wicked ones, enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for the fear of the Lord and the glory of his majesty shall smite thee.

verse 10 “The “wicked ones” are obviously the wicked of the earth.

This verse presents a scenario similar to one in Revelation 6:15: “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountain” due to their “fear of the Lord.”

“**the glory of his majesty**” The terms “glory” and “majesty” refer to God’s royalty and kingship.

11 And it shall come to pass that the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.

verses 10-11 Here Isaiah begins an elaborate warning and threat that extends to the end of chapter 12. The time frame for these verses is not at first apparent. The sectarian scholars still cling to the idea that Isaiah is looking forward to the “Messianic age,” or the time of the Savior’s mortal ministry. It seems clear, however, that instead they refer to his second advent, his second coming, that pre-millennial period of cleansing when the telestial-bound souls will be purged from off the earth, and all the rest will be abased and humbled before the Lord’s power and majesty when he appears to all the world in glory.

“Lofty looks” and “Haughtiness” refer to pride.

These warnings likely apply specifically to those who remain on earth after the great purging of the wicked. Hence their meaning becomes: O ye wicked ones (since those of telestial merit have already been purged, this greeting is likely directed to the proud and worldly who are deserving of a terrestrial, reward), even though you hide in the rocks or in the dust (John the Revelator foretells the same event in Revelation 6:15-16), you will not escape. All those who do not humble themselves shall be forced into a state of humility by the power and glory of the Lord’s coming. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ. It is better for us to humble ourselves than to be “compelled to be humble” (Alma 32:13-15).

In this hour the Lord alone shall be exalted.

verses 12-16 These verses stress the universal application of the pre-millennial purging and humbling to be dealt to the “proud” of all nations. Isaiah uses symbolisms to represent the major flaws in the character and institutions of ancient Israel.

12 For the day of the Lord of Hosts soon cometh upon all nations, yea, upon every one; yea, upon the proud and lofty, and upon every one who is lifted up, and he shall be brought low.

verse 12 The term “Lord of Hosts” means Lord of Armies. It implies ruler over great numbers. The same title is found in the Doctrine and covenants as “Lord of

Sabaoth” (D&C 87:7; 88:2; 95:7). *Sabaoth* means hosts or armies and should not be confused with Sabbath.

The Lord’s hosts or armies consist of ancient Israel, which was called “the armies of the living God” (1 Samuel 17:26, 36); the hosts of heaven, also called armies (Daniel 4:35; Revelation 19:14; D&C 88:112); and the latter-day Church, described as being “terrible as an army with banners” (D&C 5:14) and “the army of Israel” (D&C 105:26, 30-31; 109:73). As the Lord’s army, we are equipped with the “whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11-17; D&C 27:15-18), spiritual armor designed to assist us to use light and truth in the battle against the forces of evil. Jehovah is the “captain” (2 Chronicles 13:12), “leader” and “commander” (Isaiah 55:4), and “man of war” (Exodus 15:3) who will lead us against the armies of evil.

The “day of the Lord of Hosts” is the second coming of the Savior and all those happenings associated with that magnificent event.

Throughout the writings of Isaiah, the phrases “day of the Lord,” “in that day,” “day of visitation,” “day of his fierce anger,” “and day of the Lord’s vengeance” are found more than fifty-five times, underscoring how frequently Isaiah’s writings emphasize the last days and the second coming.

As part of this “day” and prior to his actual coming, the wicked will be purged from off the earth. Among those who remain will be many proud and haughty whose arrogance will be stripped away. This is the Lord’s day. All who remain to inhabit the earth will humbly acknowledge him as Lord.

“soon cometh” The implication of this phrase is that we must always be prepared for the Lord’s coming, for he will come “soon” or “quickly” (D&C 33:18; 34:12; 49:28)—he will come unexpectedly.

“upon all nations” The Lord’s judgment will be universal.

13 Yea, and the day of the Lord shall come upon all the cedars of Lebanon, for they are high and lifted up; and upon all the oaks of Bashan;

verse 13 “the day of the Lord” This is the same as “the day of the Lord of Hosts” in the previous verse.

The “cedars of Lebanon” and the “oaks of Bashan” are symbols of both worldly strength and material splendor. Those who are mighty and strong and wealthy will be brought low.

The oak forests of Bashan are located east of the northern part of the Jordan River. The hardwoods of cedar or oak were rare in Palestine and to own them was a status symbol.

14 And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills, and upon all the nations which are lifted up, and upon every people;

verse 14 In this context the “high mountains” and “hills” represent apostate temple systems that attempt to imitate the Lord’s true temple, the “mountain of the Lord” (Isaiah 2:2-4).

15 And upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall;

verse 15 The “high tower” and “fenced wall” represent man’s misguided trust in man made defenses—leaning on the arm of flesh. A “fenced wall” is also a wall around a city.

16 And upon all the ships of the sea, and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures.

verse 16 The “ships” represent the people’s commercial enterprises. The “ships of Tarshish” were probably used as an analogy by Isaiah to represent wealth and economic prosperity. The precise location of Tarshish is unknown, but it was probably a prosperous and bustling Mediterranean seaport. Perhaps because of the city’s connection with wealth and affluence, the destruction of Tarshish and its ships symbolizes the Lord’s judgment on the proud and arrogant.

The term “pleasant pictures” is more correctly translated in modern translations as “pleasant ships.” These were apparently the pleasure boats in which the wealthy traveled throughout the Mediterranean.

Isaiah thus prophesies that in that pre-millennial period, the Lord will abase all these superficial symbols of wealth and power. The general theme that God’s justice will ultimately prevail and triumph over evil is probably the most important theme found in Isaiah’s writings (see also 2 Nephi 13:1-8, 10-26; 14:1- 6; 15:5-6, 25-30; 17:17-25; 18:6-8; 19:1-21; 20:5-19, 24-27; 21:6-9, 14-16; 23:1-22; and 24:1-21).

Contained in this verse is an interesting point which testifies of the Book of Mormon’s authenticity as a translation of an ancient document. If you compare this verse with the King James Version of Isaiah 2:16, you will note a phrase not present in the latter—“upon all the ships of the sea.” Apparently this phrase was contained in the Isaiah writings on the brass plates. Yet for some reason it did not make it into the King James Version. It is intriguing that the phrase “upon all the ships of the sea” is found in another version of the Old Testament, the ancient Greek version called the Septuagint. Tradition has it that this version was translated from the Hebrew into Greek by seventy elders (thus the name Septuagint, meaning seventy and the common symbol used for this version—LXX) probably some time before the third century BC. There is no evidence that the twenty-three year old Joseph Smith possessed or even knew about the Septuagint when he translated the Book of Mormon. If he had had access to it, he would not have been able to read it since it was written in Greek. It is of further interest that the same verse in the Greek does not contain the phrase “upon all the ships of

Tarshish.” Thus the Book of Mormon contains the most complete translation of this verse.

17 And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.

18 And the idols he shall utterly abolish.

verse 18 To “abolish” means to destroy.

19 And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for the fear of the Lord shall come upon them and the glory of his majesty shall smite them, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.

verses 17-19 A reiteration of the fate of the proud and worldly. The earth’s proud and wicked attempt to hide in the cavities of the earth because they feel more comfortable, as do moles and bats in darkness. They try to hide from God and his glory, and they find themselves in Satan’s domain, beneath God and his saints’ dwelling place.

Again, those being addressed here are not the wicked telestial souls who will be purged from the earth. Rather this prophecy pertains to those terrestrial individuals who qualify to remain to receive Christ at his second coming but who need be brought low and humbled in his great day.

Verse 19 refers to the display of the Lord’s power, when he comes in glory, which will cause the earth to tremble. Many prophets have placed earthquakes in the context of the end of the earth (Ezekiel 38:19-20; JS-M 1:29; Revelation 6:12-17; 16:18).

Might it be that the haughty and proud terrestrial souls that inhabit the earth at the time of the Lord’s second coming in glory will become aware of the terrible destruction occurring and that this is what causes them to hide.

20 In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which he hath made for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats;

verse 20 The imagery of this verse is striking. The people will bury their idols in the ground (the habitation of moles) or pile them in caves (the habitation of bats). The irony here is that people who lusted after these beautiful material objects made of precious metals, will throw these precious items to animals who are blind from living so long in darkness and who will not be able to see or appreciate them at all. They will cast away their idols when they realize how meaningless they are.

21 To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for the fear of the Lord shall come upon them and the majesty of his glory shall smite them, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.

verse 21 “Clefts of the rocks” are crevices or caves into which the wicked will flee in order to hide from the Lord. Perhaps these “clefts” and “ragged” rocks will result from the earthquakes in verse 19.

22 Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?

verse 22 **“Cease ye from man”** Isaiah exhorts Israel to stop placing confidence in man and his status symbols and idols and trust in the Lord. This is one of the most important themes in all of the writings of Isaiah (see also 2 Nephi 17:1-16; 18:1-4, 9-15; 20:24-34; 24:32).

“whose breath is in his nostrils” Man is never more than a few breaths away from death. Therefore, anyone who leans on the arm of flesh may see his support disappear in an instant.

“wherein is he to be accounted of” How much is he worth? Is he worth patterning your life after?

2 Nephi Chapter 13

Chapter 13 is taken from Isaiah's writings which are found in Isaiah chapter 3. Isaiah continues his set of prophecies of destruction. In Isaiah's day, perhaps he had in mind the pending destruction of the southern kingdom of Judah. In this chapter Isaiah makes a series of prophecies that will eventually find fulfillment on at least four different occasions: (1) Although Jerusalem was spared when Assyria attacked and pillaged Judah in 701 BC, much of the country around Jerusalem was destroyed. (2) In 586 BC, Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians. (2) In AD 70, the last great scattering of the Jews occurred when Jerusalem was demolished by the Romans. (3) In the latter days Jerusalem will find itself under siege for three and one half years during the great battle of Armageddon (for a summary of the essential facts surrounding this great final battle, see the introductory commentary for chapter 14 below). Some students of Jewish history even suggest fulfillment in the Nazi holocaust.

Isaiah prophesies that anarchy and ruin will come upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah, during each of these periods of destruction, because of the sinful nature of their inhabitants, whose speech and actions are directed against the Lord and his commandments. Their sins are likened to the sins committed in Sodom before its destruction (verses 8-9).

Anarchy may also come because of the Lord's removing the supply of bread and water (famine or drought). In Isaiah's day, the culture of the people was predominantly an agrarian one. The fertility of the land was therefore of utmost concern, and the threat of famine was particularly poignant. One specific awful fulfillment of this prophecy was the devastating famine that occurred during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in AD 70. Josephus's account includes an instance in which a woman roasted her suckling child for food (*Wars of the Jews*, 6:3).

Anarchy may also come by the loss of righteous leadership in the region, for we are told that God will remove the region's individuals who have earned honor and status in the community. In their place, children and base types will become the rulers (verses 4, 12).

We have mentioned the possible ancient settings where these prophecies of destruction apply. As always, we may wish to draw a latter day application as well. Perhaps this chapter also warns latter-day covenant people that the Lord will not allow them to prosper in wickedness. It particularly warns that they must avoid pride, vanity, selfishness, worldliness, and oppression of the needy. It should remind them that true joy is found in trusting in the Lord's plan of happiness and in the Lord's covenants, for the worldly selfish avenues one might pursue will surely pass away, leaving only sorrow.

1 For behold, the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem, and from Judah, the stay and the staff, the whole staff of bread, and the whole stay of water—

verse 1 “from Jerusalem, and from Judah” These refer to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah. In a symbolic sense, these can also refer to an apostate people in the latter days who will be subjected to such judgments as are detailed here.

“the stay and the staff” The word “stay” means protector, and the “staff” is the support or walking stick. When the two are used together, an entirety or wholeness is implied. Thus, Isaiah seems to be prophesying that the Lord will withdraw all his support from Israel. Probably this includes more than just physical support—likely spiritual support as well. In the Old Testament, the Lord is repeatedly referred to as the “stay” and “staff” (see Isaiah 48:2; Micah 3:11; Isaiah 26:3).

“bread” “water” These are perhaps representative of all forms of physical nourishment, but they also have spiritual connotations in reference to the Lord, who is metaphorically the “bread of life” (John 6:35) and the “living water” (John 4:6-14; 7:37-38).

Thus, this prophecy foresees both physical and spiritual famine.

2 The mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient;

3 The captain of fifty, and the honorable man, and the counselor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator.

verses 2-3 In a time of crisis, it is a serious affliction to be without reliable leadership. Isaiah prophesies that in the hour of Israel’s distress, they will find themselves without any leadership.

The several following terms are used in the sense that a totality of the leaders will be removed. These include “the mighty man”—political or governmental leader; “the man of war” and the “captain of fifty”—military leader; “the judge”—civic leader; “the prophet”—the religious leader; “the prudent”—the man who practices divination; “the ancient”—the older wise man from whom one may seek guidance; “the cunning artificer”—the skilled craftsman (*cunning* can also have a negative meaning as in 2 Nephi 9:28); “the eloquent orator”—the individual gifted in the ability for public speaking. The reader may decide for himself who is meant by the “honorable man” and the “counselor.”

It is evident that Judah will be relieved of anyone with any leadership ability, whether it be military, social, or cultural. This, in fact happened during the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC when Nebuchadnezzar, according to Josephus, “slew such as were in the flower of their age, and such as were of the greatest dignity. . . . He also took the principal persons in dignity for captives . . . among whom was the prophet Ezekiel” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 10:6).

4 And I will give children unto them to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them.

verse 4 Who are the “children” or “babes” that will rule over Israel? There seems to be at least three plausible interpretations of this verse.

1. With the leaders of society killed or taken into captivity, only the poor, weak masses remained. Therefore, the “children” or “babes” which shall rule over Israel may refer to people of childish understanding who can hardly face successfully the challenge of bringing order to anarchy.

2. The “children” or “babes” may be Gentiles who, between the time of Isaiah and today, have ruled over Israel for some 2,500 years. The land of Palestine itself has been controlled by a succession of “Gentiles” including, to name but a few, the Babylonians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, the Turks, and the British. Also, the Jews have been scattered among the Gentiles of the world who have ruled over them. The terms “children” or “babes” are terms of derision used by Israelites to refer to those without the house of Israel.

3. The verse may lend itself to a literal interpretation. Many of the Jewish kings before the Babylonian captivity came to rule at a very early age. For example the wicked Manasseh succeeded his father Hezekiah at age twelve. Amon, the son of Manasseh, came to Israel’s throne at age twenty-two. Josiah came to the throne at age eight after his father Amon was murdered. Jehoahaz reigned only three months when he was twenty-three years old. Jehoiakim became king at age twenty-five. Jehoiachin was eighteen, and also reigned for only three months. Zedekiah, the last king of Judah took office at age twenty-one.

Jacob or Israel had blessed Judah with the political leadership of all the house of Israel until the birth of Christ (see Genesis 49:8, 10). This leadership should have been exercised through the priesthood (see *TPJS*, 157). Since, in Old Testament times, the priesthood was not bestowed until age thirty (see Numbers 4:3), and since all of these leaders but one were referred to as “evil” in the Bible, it is obvious that these “children” or “babes” ruled without the priesthood.

5 And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbor; the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honorable.

verse 5 The entire culture will collapse to the point where people, because of a lack of love for one another, will “oppress” one another, even their neighbors. To “oppress” is to tyrannize, trample down, or to trouble. Children will “behave . . . proudly”—show no deference or honor for and even show arrogance towards their elders. The honorable men will command no respect even among “the base,” those who are inferior, vile, wretched, and vulgar. A state of anarchy is portrayed.

6 When a man shall take hold of his brother of the house of his father, and shall say: Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler, and let not this ruin come under thy hand—

verse 6 “a man shall take hold of his brother of the house of his father” In this time of social lawlessness, fathers will desert their families leaving them in upheaval. In such a situation, leadership of the family would fall upon the eldest brother—the one with the “clothing,” the cloak of authority or “Simlah.” Others in the family will plead with the eldest brother to lead them in this difficult time lest they should come to ruin.

On a national level, no one will want to rule the people because of the hopeless state of anarchy that has beset Judah and Jerusalem. In desperation the people will importune the man with “clothing” to rule over them. Perhaps his clothing indicates some degree of wealth or preparedness. The people desperately hope that someone will help to limit or reverse the “ruin” (political, economic, and spiritual) that has beset them. In the midst of ruin and “childish” rule, Isaiah prophesies that the people will be willing and anxious to accept any sort of credentials as a prerequisite for leadership.

7 In that day shall he swear, saying: I will not be a healer; for in my house there is neither bread nor clothing; make me not a ruler of the people.

verse 7 The eldest brother will refuse the honor of being the “healer,” however, because he and the family are in abject poverty. There are not even provisions sufficient to sustain his own family. A healer is someone who binds up wounds or sores.

8 For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen, because their tongues and their doings have been against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory.

verse 8 The meaning of this verse is obvious. “Their tongues and their doings” means their speech and their actions. The term “to provoke the eyes of his glory” is translated in the New American Standard Bible as “to rebel against his glorious presence.” It is to defy or anger the Lord.

9 The show of their countenance doth witness against them, and doth declare their sin to be even as Sodom, and they cannot hide it. Wo unto their souls, for they have rewarded evil unto themselves!

verse 9 The “show of their countenance,” the very appearance of the faces of the people of Judah, will betray their sins and witness against them. What sins might be seen in the appearance of a face? The “sin as Sodom” is generally held to be homosexuality. In ancient times those participating in degenerate sexual fertility rites, sacramental intoxications, and the taking of hallucinogenic drugs from exotic plants

usually identified themselves with peculiar hair styles, bizarre beards, and decorative embellishments, including marks in the flesh. All these the Lord strictly forbade (see Leviticus 19:27-28). Evil imposes its own demeanor upon him who persists in it. Contrariwise, we are taught that the born-again person receives the image of Christ in his countenance (see Alma 5:14).

Sodom, of course, was a city destroyed by the Lord because of its sexual iniquity and other forms of pride. The mention of “Sodom” in this verse is a type of all wicked cities that suffer the judgments of God.

“for they have rewarded evil unto themselves” A better translation is provided by the New International Version: “They have brought disaster upon themselves.”

10 Say unto the righteous that it is well with them; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.

verse 10 Here is the only note of hope in this entire pronouncement which extends from verses 1 through 15. In the midst of all this degeneracy, the few righteous are affirmed by the Lord with the phrase, “it is well.” This is a statement of approval and blessing (Mormon 7:10; Moroni 7:47; D&C 124:110). These righteous are promised that they will eventually “eat the fruit of their doings,” that is, reap their spiritual rewards no matter how severe their trials may be. Paul said it another way: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

11 Wo unto the wicked, for they shall perish; for the reward of their hands shall be upon them!

verse 11 How simple, yet profound, it is to read that the wicked will reap “the reward of their [own] hands.” They will suffer the consequences of their actions.

12 And my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they who lead thee cause thee to err and destroy the way of thy paths.

verse 12 A reiteration of the fact that “children” will rule over Judah (see the commentary for verse 4). The essential meaning here would seem to be that Judah’s leaders will not hold the priesthood. The phrase “and women rule over them” implies either that they will literally be ruled over by women who do not hold the priesthood, or that their leaders will be as weak as women—an insult in ancient Israelite culture. It would appear that Isaiah and the entire ancient Israelite culture of his day were avowedly chauvinistic.

The phrase “destroy the way of thy paths” is perhaps more clearly translated “confuse the direction of your paths.”

13 The Lord standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people.

verse 13 The setting is a divine courtroom scene. The defendant is the house of Israel. The Lord stands as both attorney/advocate/prosecutor and judge. The Lord arises to “plead” with his chosen people. To “plead” means to contend with or to take issue with. He then stands to judge the people. Standing was important in the ancient Israelite courtroom, where the judge stood to pronounce judgment.

14 The Lord will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people and the princes thereof; for ye have eaten up the vineyard and the spoil of the poor in your houses.

verse 14 The Lord’s judgment will likely fall first and hardest upon the apostate “ancients” or older men, who should know better, and the corrupt “princes” or political leaders who have combined to eat up “the vineyard”—exploit the nation. The “spoil [or plunder] of the poor in your houses” means, “You have stolen by taxes or fraud the essentials of life from impoverished people.”

15 What mean ye? Ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor, saith the Lord God of Hosts.

verse 15 The Lord is addressing these influential leaders among his chosen people. He says, “What do you mean by, or how can you possibly justify crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor in the dirt, that is, oppressing the poor?” These phrases may refer to actual physical abuse or to economic hardships due to insufferably high taxes and duties imposed on the poor. According to the law of Moses oppressing the poor was a grievous offense (e.g., Exodus 22:21-24; Deuteronomy 15:7-11).

verses 16-26 The remaining verses of chapter 13 enumerate the sins of ancient Israel and, indeed, those of our own dispensation. Some have applied a narrow interpretation to these verses and have viewed them as a denouncement of the vain and vulgar womanly fashions of the day. It seems likely that the meanings are far more inclusive.

16 Moreover, the Lord saith: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet—

verse 16 “daughters of Zion” The term “daughters of Zion” does not really refer to “women,” but rather it is a metaphor, a Hebrew idiom, which refers to Israel—those who are espoused, or under covenant, to Jehovah. The singular form, daughter of Zion, is used more commonly (Lamentations 1:6-8; 2:8-11; Zechariah 9:9; 2 Nephi 8:25) and refers to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah. This phrase may also be used as a personification for Jerusalem (e.g., Isaiah 1:8).

“Haughty” means proud, vain, and arrogant. A person who is haughty treats others as if they were lower than himself. He is proud of self and scornful of others. Haughtiness is an outward manifestation of a self-perceived higher status and is diametrically opposite to humility.

“Stretched forth necks” may refer to haughtiness or an air of affectation. This expression portrays women who look sideways to see if others notice their beauty as they prance along the way or as they look upwards with high heads in a proud manner. The expression denotes a people who pay idolatrous heed to others rather than to God above.

“Wanton eyes” are flirtatious or seductive eyes open to lustful things but not to spiritual things.

“Walking and mincing” is a type of walking with short steps used by women who love to display their physical charms and to make their ankle jewelry tinkle as they walk. It is the type of walking typical of one who is advertising one’s person for sale. Perhaps the application of this phrase should not be limited to women. It is likely more descriptive of the type of life a person leads rather than the actual physical movement of his or her gait. To refer to a person as “walking and mincing” implies that the person is worldly, lewd, and unchaste.

“Making a tinkling with their feet” means to adorn oneself with anklets that contain bells and make a tinkling noise. Anciently this practice was characteristic of a woman desirous of attracting attention often for unwholesome purposes.

17 Therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts.

verse 17 The phrase “smite with a scab the crown of the head” means to cause a disease which results in baldness. For the “woman” who is being used here as a symbolic analogy, it implies a great disgrace which will come to her.

“the Lord will discover [make bare] their secret parts” This expression implies a singular and ultimate disgrace. Figuratively, the “woman” will be subjected to the indignity of being stripped naked and held up to the leering gaze of the crowd. This phrase is a metaphor for humiliation. Isaiah is prophesying that the whole earth shall see in detail the shame and great wickedness of the unrighteous in Israel.

verses 18-23 In these verses, several items of apparel are mentioned which the Lord will take away because of Israel’s sinfulness. They are all symbols of the vanity and iniquity of the people. There is perhaps a significant symbolism in some of the items mentioned. In the commentary for these verses, the possible secondary or figurative meanings will be suggested, though they are included only for interest. We have no way of knowing whether or not Isaiah had in mind symbolic meanings.

18 In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments, and cauls, and round tires like the moon;

verse 18 “In that day” This expression refers to any day in which the unfaithful of Israel are brought down or humbled by the Lord.

“the Lord will take away the bravery” The term “bravery” might be misleading here. It is better translated “beauty, finery, or ostentation.” A modern translation of Isaiah renders this phrase, “the Lord will snatch away their finery” (NIV).

“Tinkling ornaments” are bangles or bracelets.

“Cauls” are headbands.

“Round tires like the moon” are necklaces shaped like a crescent moon which were worn on the necks or heads of men, women, and even camels. These “moonstones” were symbolic of purity.

In context, Isaiah is saying that the real beauty and splendor of Zion (perhaps the priesthood of God) shall be removed and lost. All that will be left will be the tinkling of ornaments—outward form or show with no substance. Isaiah is making reference to the fact that sacred teachings had been replaced by the workings of magic, astrology, soothsaying, pride, arrogance, and vain piety. The humble worshipper had been replaced by the signs of piety and pretended holiness.

19 The chains and the bracelets, and the mufflers;

verse 19 “Chains” are dangling earrings. “Mufflers” are a woman’s veils.

20 The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the ear-rings;

verse 20 “Bonnets” are ornamental head coverings. “Ornaments of the legs” may refer to “stepping chains” which were worn by women fastened to a band around each ankle which forced the wearer to walk elegantly with short feminine steps. Bells were often fastened to this chain to make sounds while walking.

There is another, perhaps more far-reaching, meaning. The same Hebrew term is used in 2 Samuel 5:24 to describe a sound heard in the trees which indicated that God was going to fight the battles of Israel. Isaiah may have had both meanings in mind: Not only would the Lord take away the attractions of women, but he would cease to fight Israel’s battles.

“Headbands” is an interesting word which apparently has little to do with a band worn about the head. The Hebrew word actually means a band or sash worn about the waist. In Isaiah 49:18, the same term is used to describe a binding or tying together of children to parents. Is it possible that Isaiah might have intended a veiled reference to the sealing ordinances. Keep in mind the context. Isaiah is here saying that all these things will be taken away because of the wickedness of the people.

“Tablets” is translated from two words in Hebrew which are more accurately translated “receptacles for intimate things.” Modern translations have translated the term “perfume bottles.” These “receptacles for intimate things” at the time of Isaiah may have evolved into the Jewish custom of wearing Tefillah or Phylacteries which were small boxes or containers worn on the left arm or forehead. These were secured to the body by leather ties. They contained tiny scrolls containing certain passages of scripture.

“Ear-rings” is translated from the Hebrew word meaning amulet, charm, or superstitious ornament upon which magical formulae or phrases were inscribed. They were worn about the neck or in their ears (see Genesis 35:4), and were an apostate tradition.

21 The rings, and nose jewels;

verse 21 “Rings” refers to signet rings—that type of ring which is pressed into a soft substance to affix a seal of authority. In context perhaps Isaiah was saying that the Lord would remove his seal or his authority.

“Nose jewels” are nose rings, another type of amulet or charm like the “ear-ring” except that it is worn in the nose.

22 The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping-pins;

verse 22 “Changeable suits of apparel” may refer to a splendid or costly garment or robe which was worn on only special occasions. Could it be that Isaiah had reference to temple clothing? Remember, Isaiah is saying that all these things will be taken away.

“Mantels” are capes—large sleeveless tunics that covered the entire body worn by men over other clothing. The same term is used in Exodus 28:31 to refer to the garment worn by the high priest in the temple.

“Wimpels” are cloaks

“Crisping-pins” are pouches or purses.

23 The glasses, and the fine linen, and hoods, and the veils.

verse 23 “Glasses” are mirrors.

“Fine linen” refers to linen undergarments.

“Hoods” are tiaras or jeweled crowns—religious hats for men. The same term in Zechariah 3:5 is translated “mitre” as in the Catholic bishop’s mitre.

“Veils” are shawls, large hoods worn over a woman’s head and shoulders. In context the term probably meant that a protective covering of divine protection would be removed, and the people would be left uncovered and conquered.

24 And it shall come to pass, instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle, a rent; and instead of well set hair, baldness; and instead of a stomacher, a girding of sackcloth; burning instead of beauty.

verse 24 This verse contains more information on the devastated condition of Israel after the prophesied purgings.

The “sweet smell” implies the artificial aromas of perfumes. These will be replaced by rottenness, putrefaction, and poverty.

A “girdle,” is a wealthy man’s sash or expensive belt. It will be replaced with a “rent” which is a rope by which the man will be led as a slave.

“Well-set hair,” is a fancy, artificially twisted hair-do. “Baldness”—the Hebrew root means to make naked, to shame, or to carry away into exile.

A “stomacher,” is a grand robe of significant beauty, whereas a “girding of sackcloth,” is a rude or coarse garment worn for mourning.

“Burning” is a term which refers to the branding or scarring as might have been inflicted upon a slave by a conqueror.

Verse 24 implies that the artificially or superficially beautiful people will be stripped of their trappings and will be killed or taken away into exile, slavery, and bondage.

25 Thy men shall fall by the sword and thy mighty in the war.

verse 25 The men in Judah will be killed in the destruction or war.

26 And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she shall be desolate, and shall sit upon the ground.

verses 25-26 That the destruction outlined in these verses will come through invading armies is supported by these verses.

“The war” means simply “in battle.”

Notice that in verse 26 Jerusalem is again personified as a woman, in this case a fallen woman. Her gates or entrances will cry out that there is nothing inside—only desolation. She will be left “lamenting,” crying and mourning and sitting upon the ground “desolate” or alone. Sitting upon the ground is a visible symbol of those who mourn. Most all her people will be dead or carried away captive.

The destruction of Israel prophesied in this chapter will be followed by a restoration. Isaiah prophesies of the restoration and blessings that would be poured out upon a righteous remnant of Israel, called the “branch of the Lord” (2 Nephi 14:2). The Lord will cleanse and purify his people in the millennial day (2 Nephi 14:4), and he will manifest his presence among them as he did in the days of the Exodus with a cloud of smoke by day and a flaming fire by night (2 Nephi 14:5; cf. Exodus 13:21).

2 Nephi Chapter 14

This chapter is a translation of Isaiah's writings which are also found in Isaiah chapter 4. In verses 2-6, Isaiah describes a period of peace that follows the purging and cleansing of the house of Israel. Perhaps a latter-day or pre-Millennial time frame is most appropriate for these verses.

Let us review the facts that will surround the great last war against the Jews—the Battle of Armageddon (see Revelation 16:16). This battle will take place, in part, near the city of Megiddo, perhaps in the Jezreel Valley nearby. A powerful coalition of gentile nations (Gog and Magog) will sweep down upon Judah from the north in the latter days and lay siege to Jerusalem for three and one half years (see Revelation 11:2; Daniel 7:25).

Two prophets of God will use the power of the priesthood to hold back the attacking hosts, but finally the Lord will allow them to be killed. Half of the city of Jerusalem will be ravished and conquered. Just as the invading forces are about to sweep down upon the rest of the city, the two prophets will be raised up from the dead, and the Savior will appear upon the Mount of Olives to rescue his people in a great display of power (see Revelation 11:3-13; D&C 45:48).

At the first opportunity the Jews will gather round their Messiah in great rejoicing. Apparently he will “withhold his glory” or not reveal his glory as resurrected beings are able to do when they wish (see Hebrews 13:2), and the Jews will look upon him as a mortal until someone notices the evidence of deep wounds in his hands and feet. They will then ask him the meaning of these, and he will tell them that these are the wounds “with which I was wounded in the house of my friends” (Zechariah 13:6; D&C 45:51-53).

For the first time the Jews will realize that their Messiah really did come in the meridian of time, and that he was rejected and crucified by their ancestors. Then all the people will mourn for thirty days. It is of note that there is currently no missionary work being done in modern-day Israel. In the Church today, a prevalent feeling exists that no substantial conversion of the Jewish people will occur until the time of the Lord's second coming.

Finally, after a period of cleaning up (seven months burying the dead and seven years burning the discarded weapons), the people will enjoy a glorious period of peace and prosperity which Isaiah describes in verses 2-6 of this chapter. It is likely that this period of peace occurs prior to the great purging of the telestial elements from the earth which will occur at the time of the Lord's second coming in glory. For a more complete discussion of the battle or battles at Jerusalem and their relationship to the great destructive purging of the earth by fire at the second coming of the Lord, see the subtitle, “The Battle at Jerusalem” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 4, chapter 26, *Signs of the Lord's Second Coming—Those that Punish and Cleanse*.

1 And in that day, seven women shall take hold of one man, saying: We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by thy name to take away our reproach.

verse 1 This verse fits in context better at the end of chapter 13. Interestingly both the JST and the Hebrew Bible place this verse there. Note that the “fallen woman” motif is continued in this verse.

“And in that day” See the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 13 for suggestions as to the time periods to which these prophecies apply. Perhaps most appropriately they apply to a pre-Millennial setting following Armageddon.

“seven women shall take hold of one man” Following the great war which results in the destruction of Israel, very few men will be left to marry (2 Nephi 13:25), or at least very few will be capable of fathering children (the effects of nuclear war?). Isaiah foresees the time when several women will approach one man desiring a polygamous type of relationship.

“We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel” The women even offer to remain economically independent rather than to make the man responsible for their care. The “reproach” that they desire to remove from themselves is the stigma or disgrace of being unmarried and childless. Women in ancient Israel needed a husband not only to provide for the family but also to father a son so that the family inheritance could be passed on and to ensure that there would be someone to care for them in their old age. Hence singleness and childlessness were viewed as a “reproach.” The number “seven” may be literal or symbolic (*seven* is symbolic of perfection).

In periods of rebellion and unrighteousness, some women seek to avoid childbearing and motherhood, wanting to remain “liberated” from such responsibilities. However, in the humiliated state described herein, women will abandon such ideas and become desperate to have children.

This verse has been interpreted by some as a prophecy of plural marriage to be practiced in the latter-day Church. However, a close examination suggests that Isaiah was not prophesying of plural marriage as practiced under the authority of the priesthood. Note, for example, that the women are proposing to the man, and they are offering to remain economically independent. Both of these points are incompatible with the eternal principle of eternal marriage.

2 In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious; the fruit of the earth excellent and comely to them that are escaped of Israel.

verse 2 “In that day” Again, as in verse 1, this phrase seems likely to refer to this final dispensation. There seems to be two latter-day events referred to here that will bless specific groups of righteous Israel. The first is the latter-day restoration of the gospel. The second is the great purging of the people of the earth to occur at the time of the Lord’s second coming in glory. This latter event, however, will bless the lives of

both the terrestrial and celestial-bound people of earth, since it is only the wicked that will be purged.

This specific verse has been interpreted in two, quite distinct, ways.

1. According to the first interpretation, the word “branch” should be capitalized. It is a symbolic name for the Messiah. At his second coming, he will be “beautiful and glorious,” that is, he will appear in all his glory. He will be spiritual food (“fruit”) for the “escaped of Israel.” These are the scattered remnants who are then gathered or gathering. These remnants include people from all of the tribes of Israel. “Comely” means pleasant to look at, attractive, fair.

2. An alternate interpretation seems more likely for the term “branch” in the context of this verse. “Branch” refers to the descendants of Joseph, or, more generally, to Israel, or to the people of the Lord. The prophet Lehi, who was a descendant of Joseph commented on the fulfillment of this blessing: “Wherefore, Joseph [who was sold into Egypt] truly saw our day. And he obtained a promise of the Lord, that out of the fruit of his loins the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel; not the Messiah, but a branch which was broken off” (2 Nephi 3:5). According to this interpretation, Isaiah sees the day when this “branch” will be purged (just before the second coming of the Lord) and then become righteous (“beautiful and glorious”). This seems most likely to refer to the latter-day restoration of the gospel. The “fruit of the earth” that blesses the survivors of the great purging probably represents the blessings of the restored gospel including the temples.

“to them that are escaped of Israel” These are the blood of Israel—perhaps those who survive the great purging at the time of the Savior’s second coming and who also have the fulness of the restored gospel.

3 And it shall come to pass, they that are left in Zion and remain in Jerusalem shall be called holy, every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem—

verse 3 Some have interpreted this verse as meaning that the only ones left on earth after the purging by fire are the “holy” or the celestial-bound saints living in Zion—either in the New Jerusalem or in Old Jerusalem. Actually, we know that those purged from the earth will be the telestial-bound souls, the “wicked.” Those remaining on the earth will include those “honorable” souls worthy of the terrestrial glory as well as those worthy to be called saints—the “holy” who, if they persist in righteousness, will live with the Savior in the celestial heaven.

“written among the living” Those who are counted among the mortal living—those who survived the great war of judgment.

4 When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning.

verse 4 The reference to “daughters of Zion” is not limited to the females of Israel but is a figurative reference to all people of the house of Israel. The “washing away the filth” and “purging the blood of Jerusalem” and the “burning” recall the ancient techniques of sacrifice in which the offerings were rinsed to remove impurities. Then they were sacrificed by blood letting or burning.

The “filth” of the children of Israel—their iniquity (including us in our dispensation)—will be washed away by the ordinance of baptism (1 Nephi 20:1; Alma 7:14) and cleansed by the blood of Jesus (Malachi 3:2-3; Hebrews 9:22; Revelation 7:14), a process in which the Holy Ghost plays a prominent role. The Hebrew word for *filth* has reference to human excrement (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 844). This term is used symbolically to emphasize the terrible nature of the sins of Israel, and the impurities found within the “daughters of Zion.”

“spirit of judgment and . . . the spirit of burning” As we strive to become acquainted with our Savior through studying the scriptures, we may perceive some of the scriptural descriptions of him as being contradictory. On the one hand he is “judging” and “burning” and trampling the wicked underfoot (Isaiah 63:3-4; D&C 133:50-51) while during his mortal ministry he seemed more loving, long suffering, lenient, and quick to forgive (Matthew 18:21-22; John 8:3-11). It would seem that both assessments are correct and merit our thoughtful consideration. Even in his judgmental mode, the Savior has our eternal benefit—indeed, our exaltation—in mind. God’s fire destroys the wicked while at the same time purging the humble and repentant.

verses 5-6 When Moroni visited Joseph Smith in September 1823, he quoted Isaiah 4:5-6 which verses correspond to these next two verses (*Messenger and Advocate* 1 [April 1835]: 110). He said this prophecy would soon find fulfillment. Obviously this prophecy has direct relevance for us. In these verses there is reference to temples and the implication that saints become holy through temple worship. There is also a description of the function of Zion in the latter days.

5 And the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory of Zion shall be a defense.

verse 5 “every dwelling-place of mount Zion” In this verse Isaiah suggests that every individual home in Zion and every gathering of the saints is, in a way, a temple, emphasizing the sanctity of Zion and her people in this glorious day.

“a cloud and smoke by day” These are elements connected with a theophany or the presence of God. The cloud emphasizes the Lord’s glory. The people of the latter-day Zion will be so righteous that they will all enjoy such blessings as the presence of the Lord (Exodus 13:21-22).

“shining of flaming fire by night” This is the presence of God.

“defense” Defense is protection. The word “defense” should read “canopy” or “protective covering.” Hence Zion and her inhabitants will be protected by God from spiritual harm in the same way that individuals are protected from physical injury or harm by seeking shelter during the heat of the day or in great storms.

In this latter day, the Lord will place upon all the temples or “mount Zions,” and upon all the saints in Zion, a “cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night.” This is not a new phenomenon. The “cloud” is identified in D&C 84:5 as the “glory of the Lord,” and it will fill the temples of God in that day. Similarly, the “flaming fire” also represents his glory. These manifestations of the Lord’s glory will serve as a defense for those in Zion against a tumult of destruction and wickedness outside of Zion.

6 And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and a covert from storm and from rain.

verse 6 “there shall be a tabernacle or a shadow” The “tabernacle,” in a historical context, is a holy yet temporary place of shelter (“a shadow”), often a tent. For protection and safety in this latter day the saints will flee not to one place but to “holy places” (D&C 87:8). These places are the stakes of Zion. In Moses’s day, the “cloud” filled only the “Holy of Holies” in the “tabernacle,” but in this latter time Isaiah saw that the Lord in the “cloud and flaming fire” would manifest himself to all the saints in Zion. In the latter-day “tabernacles” or latter-day temples, the saints will find refuge, peace, protection, and succor.

“covert” While the word “covert” is usually used as an adjective in which case it means hidden or secret, as a noun it means a shelter or protected place. In modern-day revelation Zion is called “a city of refuge” and “a place of safety.” It will be a “land of peace,” and “the terror of the Lord also shall be there, insomuch that the wicked will not come unto it . . . and it shall be the only people that shall not be at war one with another. And it shall be said among the wicked: Let us not go up to battle against Zion, for the inhabitants of Zion are terrible; wherefore we cannot stand” (D&C 45:66-70; 115:6). Jesus, of course, is our ultimate refuge and shelter from life’s battles (Isaiah 25:4).

“from storm and from rain” These are symbols of God’s judgments on the wicked (Psalm 83:15). The storms remove the wicked from their places as chaff is removed from the wheat (Job 21:18; 27:21), while the righteous, like wheat, are gathered into protected units and preserved in the Lord’s temples and other holy places.

2 Nephi Chapter 15

Chapter 15 is a translation of Isaiah's writings which are also found in Isaiah chapter 5. This chapter may be outlined as follows:

Verses 1 through 7 comprise the parable of the vineyard, sometimes called the Song of the Vineyard. Isaiah's parable of the vineyard has been described by various commentators as a "little masterpiece," "a passage of singular beauty and grace," and "the finest example of the prophet's art and skill in the whole book of Isaiah. In this parable, Isaiah illustrates that although God has done everything possible for his people, they still reject him. This is one of many scriptural parables and allegories used to describe the relationship between the Lord (the owner of the vineyard) and the house of Israel (the vineyard). See, for example Romans 11:17-24; Jacob 5; and D&C 101:43-62. It is also a love poem (verse 1) that features the bridegroom (the Lord) and his bride (the house of Israel).

Verses 8 through 25 contain a series of six pronouncements, or six woes, upon wicked Israel. In this section Isaiah lists Israel's major sins and warns of destruction, desolation, and scattering. Again, the foreseen destruction may find its fulfillment on at least four different occasions: (1) From 732-722 BC when the Assyrians routed the northern kingdom of Israel in Samaria and carried their most influential citizens captive back to Assyria. Also in 701 B.C., Assyria destroyed much of Judah and besieged Jerusalem. (2) In 586 BC Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians. (3) In AD 70 Jerusalem was demolished by the Romans. (4) In the latter days there will be the battles against Jerusalem and the destruction of the wicked by fire at the time of the Lord's second coming.

Finally, verses 26 through 30 conclude the chapter with the promise of an ensign to the nations, a gathering of Israel, and a mighty army of soldiers (or missionaries) bringing peace to Israel.

The symbolism in the parable of the vineyard includes the following:

vineyard—the House of Israel

choice vine—the people of Israel from whom the Lord expects much

choice grapes—the righteous of the House of Israel

wild Grapes—the wicked Israelites who have broken their covenant.

master of the vineyard—Jehovah

1 And then will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved, touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill.

verse 1 "And then" It is interesting to note that the King James version of this verse (Isaiah 5) begins with the word "now" instead of "and then." The Book of Mormon's inspired modification temporally connects this verse to the previous chapter

and identifies the time period being referred to in chapter fifteen as the future rather than the days of Isaiah. While Isaiah may be speaking of the specific judgments and destructions to come upon Judah, the pronouncements of judgment and the promises spoken of in verses 26 through 30 definitely have an apocalyptic flavor—that is, they refer to the last days just before the Lord’s second coming.

“will I sing” The first person is Isaiah. He is about to sing a love song to his “well-beloved” master of the vineyard, Jehovah. The parable of the vineyard begins as a love song. Isaiah speaks (sings) about the vineyard and its master using third person narration. The vineyard represents the house of Israel, and its master is the Lord Jehovah.

“touching” Touching is better translated “concerning” or “about.”

“vineyard” This term represents the house of Israel, the Lord’s covenant people in all ages.

“very fruitful hill” This is better translated “very fertile hill.” The Hebrew literally means “a horn, a child of fatness,” likely referring to a horn-like mountain peak with exceptionally fertile soil. This is a metaphor for the promised covenant land of Israel where God planted his vineyard, or the house of Israel.

Isaiah is about to sing a love song to the Lord. Isaiah’s song will describe the destruction of the vineyard which represents the scattering of the tribes of Israel. What destruction was Isaiah prophesying of? Here’s one of those double, triple, or even quadruple applications. He may have had reference to Assyria’s conquering of the northern kingdom, Babylon’s conquering of Judah, Rome’s conquering of Judah, or the Lord’s great destruction of the wicked at his second coming.

2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine-press therein; and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

verse 2 “he fenced it” The master put up a fence and planted the best available grape vines which represent the people of the house of Israel. He has great expectations of these vines.

An alternate reading is based on the fact that the Hebrew reads *yerazeqehu* which is “he dug up the soil” rather than “fenced it” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 740).

“choicest vine” The Lord lovingly cultivated his vineyard and planted in it the “choicest vine” which represents the people of the house of Israel, or perhaps more specifically the tribe of Judah. The “choicest vine” in Isaiah’s time was a special variety, the soreq bluish-red grape instead of the more common variety, the gephen grape. The soreq produced a red wine famous for its bouquet and taste.

“built a tower” The Lord built a watchtower in the midst of the vineyard which was a common practice in ancient Palestine. From the “tower” watchmen, could watch for impending danger to the vineyard, such as wild animals or thieves. Metaphorically, these watchmen are the prophets who watch for impending danger and evil and then warn the children of Israel (Ezekiel 3:17; 33:1-7; D&C 101:43-62). Some have speculated that the “tower” might refer to Solomon’s temple.

“also made a wine-press therein” The Lord expected an abundant harvest, so he also made a winepress, a machine used to press grapes into wine. The winepress is a powerful image or symbol of Jesus’s atonement (Isaiah 63:1-6; D&C 76:107).

“it brought forth wild grapes” He looked for the vineyard to produce choice grapes, but instead, it produced only “wild grapes” (from the Hebrew word meaning stinking, sour, worthless things)—which are bitter and virtually useless for pressing into wine. The Hebrew phrase for “wild grapes” might better be translated “sour grapes” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 93). Choice grapes represent the righteous. Sour grapes symbolize those who have fallen from the covenant and left God’s kingdom.

3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.

verse 3 Notice now that the first person is no longer Isaiah, but rather the Lord. In the final verses of this chapter, Isaiah will switch back to a third person narration.

“O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah” Although the inhabitants of Judah are the immediate audience for Isaiah’s song, the song may be sung to all Israel throughout all generations.

“I pray you” Please.

“judge . . . betwixt me and my vineyard” “Betwixt” is archaic for “between.” The Lord appeals to his audience. He is about to ask, “What could I have done more?”

4 What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes it brought forth wild grapes.

verse 4 The Lord addresses Isaiah’s reading audience and asks them to judge between the master and the people of the house of Israel represented by the vineyard. They will certainly judge the master blameless and above reproach, and they will empathize with his disappointment in the small, sour grapes. A poignant comparable verse evidences the Lord’s great compassion: “The Lord of the vineyard wept, and said . . . What could I have done more for my vineyard?” (Jacob 5:41).

“when I looked that it should bring forth grapes” This might be more smoothly translated “when I hoped that it would bring forth grapes.”

“it brought forth wild grapes” The wild or sour grapes symbolize evil people who reject Christ and his atonement. These sour grapes will be trodden down by the Lord in great fury at the time of his second coming, causing his robe to be red (D&C 133:50-51).

5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard—I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down;

verse 5 The expression “go to” is generally a positive expression of send-off and an encouragement similar to “God speed” or “good luck.” Its use here is puzzling.

The “hedge” and the “wall” signify God’s protection of the house of Israel. God will remove them so that wild beasts and invading armies may trample the vineyard. He will allow his people to be destroyed by their enemies.

“Eaten up” is from the Hebrew *leba’er* which means “to be burned” or “consumed” (*Ibid.*, 128-29). This may refer to the eventual burning of the wicked of Israel at his second coming.

6 And I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

verse 6 Finally, the master resolves that he will destroy the vineyard. Rather than uprooting the vines, however, he simply tears down the protective walls and allows travelers to trample, and animals to eat up the vines. This process of abandoning the vineyard exemplifies the judgments of God, who usually doesn’t destroy or severely punish a wicked person, but rather simply leaves him alone to face the challenges of life and the buffetings of Satan without the protection of the Spirit.

“it shall not be pruned nor digged” The master will not hoe, weed, or otherwise cultivate. In other words, he will remove the blessings usually given to those in his earthly kingdom.

“briers and thorns” These represent the world and its inhabitants bereft of the Lord’s blessings which he is wont to bestow upon the people of his kingdom. Here this phrase may be a metaphor referring to another people displacing the covenant people. For example, following 722 B.C., pagan peoples were introduced into the northern kingdom (2 Kings 17:24), and after the destruction of the temple by the Romans in AD 70 foreign peoples inhabited the lands of the southern kingdom.

“I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.” We have our first indication that this Lord of the vineyard is more powerful than a normal mortal landowner. “Rain” represents revelation and the word of God.

Spiritually, the house of Israel (the vineyard) became a wasteland through apostasy and rejection of the kindnesses, love, and care of the Master of the vineyard. God would not have laid waste the vineyard had it been fruitful.

7 For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant; and he looked for judgment, and behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry.

verse 7 This final verse of the parable gives its interpretation: The vineyard represents the House of Israel. The “pleasant plant” or choice vine is the people of Israel from whom the master expects much. It may also represent Judah whom the Lord expected to provide leadership to Israel.

The people of Judah will receive a punishment commensurate with their sins. The last three lines of this verse are a type of word play that cannot be appreciated because of the translation into English. Isaiah illustrates the irony of Judah’s disobedience by using words in Hebrew which sound alike but have opposite meanings: and he looked for judgment (justice), [Hebrew: *mishpat*] but behold, bloodshed; [Hebrew: *mispach*] for righteousness, [Hebrew: *tsedakah*] but behold, a cry (a cry of distress)! [Hebrew: *tse’akah*] (from the New American Standard Bible, emphases added)

The irony here is that the Lord expected much of the tribe of Judah, but his expectations were not to be realized. Thus he (the Lord) looked among the people of Judah for justice (fair play, consideration), but he saw only bloodshed. The Lord had promised Israel that he would hear them cry (Exodus 22:23; Genesis 18:20-21).

This style of parable is a powerful device in which the audience unknowingly condemns itself before they realize that they themselves are the ones being spoken about. Isaiah’s parable of the vineyard condemns Israel for failing to serve the Lord.

verses 8-25 Now Isaiah will accuse Israel by presenting “six woes” or six specific areas in which Israel has serious spiritual troubles or deficiencies, and thus stands condemned before the Lord. Specifically, “woe” means severe anguish and distress resulting from God’s judgments, which will come upon the guilty in all ages of the world, including our own. He also pronounces three major punishments that are to fall upon Israel—the desolation of their land, their scattering throughout the world, and the hell of spirit prison.

verses 8-10 The first woe speaks out against the improper use of land.

8 Wo unto them that join house to house, till there can be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!

verse 8 In ancient Israel there was a law governing ownership of property called the “law of the Jubilee.” This law specified that a family’s lands were to remain with that family as a perpetual inheritance and were not to be sold. Although drought, sickness,

or economic setback might require a farmer to sell his land or indenture himself to cover his losses, the year of Jubilee, every fifty years, was established during which all debts were forgiven and lands returned to the original owners. A Zion society is based upon the individual ownership of property and cannot exist when a wealthy few monopolize the land and means of production.

In Isaiah's time, this law was abused by wealthy landowners who bought up lands until those lands bordered one another ("join house to house") thus creating a monopoly. Thus the poor small farmers were displaced as their lands were absorbed and the wealthy farmer had sole ownership of large tracts of land. The poor, meanwhile, having no land ("there can be no place"), were forced to move to the cities or live on the property as indentured servants or slaves. Judah's penalty for this practice is to be "placed alone in the midst of the earth" or scattered among the nations of the earth.

The expression "join house to house," then, has the general meaning to covet and to steal other people's property or to obtain property through legal but unethical means. Or even to take any advantage of others for material gain.

Monte Nyman, in his book *Great are the Words of Isaiah* (43-44), suggests that the phrases "join house to house" and "no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth" imply a warning against that a people's or any people's allowing a strong form of central government to control property thus forfeiting individual rights.

9 In mine ears, said the Lord of Hosts, of a truth many houses shall be desolate, and great and fair cities without inhabitant.

verse 9 The Lord had told Isaiah (in his ears) that the day would come when the beautiful and lavish homes of the wealthy few would be uninhabited. This would occur because the land would be cursed by the Lord and become unproductive, desolate, and uninhabitable.

Brother Nyman (*Ibid.*) further suggests that this verse confirms the warning that if Judah gives up her individual personal freedoms to a strong central government, her people will be scattered—her "great and fair" cities will be left desolate.

10 Yea, ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and the seed of a homer shall yield an ephah.

verse 10 The meager harvest which the land would yield is graphically portrayed.

The phrase "ten acres" is derived from the Hebrew phrase "ten yokes." "Ten yokes" is the amount of land ten yoke of oxen can plough in a day and equals about five modern-day acres.

A harvest of grapes from this much land would ordinarily yield dozens of gallons of wine. In its cursed condition, however, this parcel of land yields only one "bath." A

“bath” is a Hebrew unit for measuring liquid and equals about five and one half gallons or one barrel of wine.

A “homer” is a Hebrew unit of capacity—about six bushels. A “homer” of seed will yield only one “ephah” of seeds when harvested. An “ephah” is just over a bushel. Thus the ground yields only one sixth of the expected harvest.

verses 11-17 The second woe condemns those who, with evil intent, eat, drink, and make merry.

11 Wo unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink, that continue until night, and wine inflame them!

verse 11 This verse condemns alcohol abuse. It is well recognized today that a man who feels a need for alcoholic drink in the morning hours is in an advanced stage of alcoholic addiction. After drinking all day, he is roaring drunk by evening. “There shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us” (2 Nephi 28:7).

12 And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.

verse 12 This verse condemns not only the people’s drinking, but the riotous lifestyle associated with it. At their feasts they had musical instruments for merry making.

A “viol” or lyre is a type of harp with three to twelve strings. A “tabret” or timbrel is a type of drum or tambourine. A “pipe” is a flute.

“feasts” In this context “feasts” does not refer to religious feasts and festivals but to bacchanalian (a drunken feast) revelry.

Worldly music, lightmindedness, and a raucous lifestyle displaces in their minds the things of the Spirit.

13 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.

verse 13 “my people are gone into captivity” Note the use of the “prophetic perfect” verb tense. Even though he is prophesying of events in the future, Isaiah speaks in the past tense. This was common verb construction form among the Hebrew prophets.

This verse teaches us that this worldly lifestyle and its attendant disregard of spiritual understanding (“knowledge”) leads to “captivity,” hunger, and “thirst” (Alma 12:9-11).

On a personal or physical level, alcohol leads to physical addiction (“captivity”) and continual craving (“thirst”). On a national level, the Lord warns of consequent captivity by the Assyrians (they captured the northern ten tribes between 732 and 722 BC), the Babylonians (they captured Judah in 587 B.C.), and perhaps others. This because the “honorable men” or leaders failed to listen to the prophets. On a spiritual level, this lifestyle leads to spiritual captivity with hunger and “thirst” representing a loss of the Spirit. “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). The wicked lack an understanding of Jesus Christ and the power of his atonement. They do not partake of the “bread” (John 6:33, 48) and “waters” (Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13; 1 Nephi 2:9; Ether 12:28) of life which refer to Jesus Christ.

14 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.

verse 14 The people’s raucous lifestyle will cause the spirit prison (“Sheol” or “hell”) to swell its ranks (“enlarge herself, and opened her mouth without measure”) with the merry makers (those “that rejoiceth”) and all their trappings (“their glory . . . and their pomp”).

15 And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled.

verse 15 Both the “mean man” (the common, average, or ordinary man) and the “mighty man” (the haughty man of some worldly prominence and ability) shall be humbled in “hell.” All wicked individuals, regardless of social status, will be humbled when God’s judgments come upon them.

“the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled” This phrase refers to those who covet, lust, and are greedy.

16 But the Lord of Hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness.

verse 16 This verse contains two parallel statements separated by a comma.

“the Lord of Hosts shall be exalted in judgment” This statement stands in sharp contrast to the idea in the previous verse that wicked men will be brought and humbled. A reminder that in spite of all manner of apostasy and worldliness, that eventually the Lord, Zion, and the things of the Spirit will prevail. This prevalence will begin at the Lord’s second coming.

“God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness” The New International Version of the Bible presents a better reading of this phrase: “God will show himself holy by his righteousness.”

17 Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat.

verse 17 The destruction portrayed in earlier verses has become so complete that where the “vineyard of the Lord” once stood, lambs and goats now graze. The “waste places of the fat ones” likely refers to the now desolate lands, or ruins, of the once rich and prosperous but wicked covenant people (“the fat ones”), now inhabited by another people.

The warnings and judgments of this verse echo the words given by Moses in Deuteronomy. Moses told Israel that the Lord was giving them a bountiful land for which they did not need to work. Because it was a free gift, he warned them to “beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of Bondage” (Deuteronomy 6:12). He later warned them that if they did forget the Lord, then: “The Lord shall bring a nation against thee . . . and he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed” (Deuteronomy 28:49, 51).

“strangers” The Hebrew scribe apparently mis-wrote *gariym*, “strangers” for *gadiym*, “goats.” “Goats” parallels lambs in this synonymous parallelism.

verses 18-19 The third woe is directed against those who are wicked and mock God and his divine plan.

18 Wo unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope;

verse 18 The third woe deals with the person who makes no attempt to hide his great iniquity. The common thief is at least recognized as such and is condemned for his sins by everyone. However, on a grander scale, the man who has won great material wealth, prestige, and status by his far greater iniquity wears the trappings of his iniquity with vain pride (he draws “iniquity with cords of vanity”). He pulls around his large burden of sins as animals pull a loaded cart (he pulls his “sin as it were with a cart rope”).

19 That say: Let him make speed, hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it.

verse 19 He has lost the Spirit to the point where he has the incredible audacity to dictate to the Lord and challenge him and even presume to judge his works. Rather than humbly waiting upon the Lord and receiving a spiritual witness according to the Lord’s schedule, the proud one throws a challenge with the same spirit as that offered to Alma by Korihor: “If thou wilt show me a sign, that I may be convinced that there is a God, yea, show unto me that he hath power, and then will I be convinced of the truth of thy words” (Alma 30:43).

“let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come” Let’s hear the advice or counsel of this supposed Holy One of Israel.

verse 20 The fourth woe speaks out against liars and those who fight against the things of God.

20 Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

verse 20 The meaning of the fourth woe is clear and requires no amplification. Without the Spirit there can be no power of eternal discernment. Thus: Abortion is good—it is the right of a woman to do with her own body what she will. Giving birth to more than one or two children is evil. Domesticity is a stifling condition of woman who needs to get out of the house and become liberated. Physical appetites are normal and their mutual satisfaction, between “consenting adults,” is the natural thing. Wealth, pleasure, and status are all to be sought for. “Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil” (Moroni 7:14).

verse 21 The fifth woe deals with conceited individuals who believe themselves to be wise.

21 Wo unto the wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight!

verse 21 In pronouncing the fifth woe, Isaiah warns that intellectualism is not necessarily wisdom. Man’s understanding cannot supplant God’s counsel. Man cannot lean on his own sophistication and logic in matters of the Spirit (see also 2 Nephi 9:28).

verses 22-23 The sixth woe accuses those who give bribes and belittle the righteous.

22 Wo unto the mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink;

verse 22 In the sixth woe, Isaiah uses mockery, and he also employs the symbolism of “strong drink” as the antithesis of righteousness. He speaks to men who would boast of their strength. He, in effect, says, “You are strong and mighty and heroic and valiant all right—heroic at drinking wine, and champions at mixing drinks.

23 Who justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!

verse 23 **“justify the wicked for reward”** You are drunk with your own ambition. To further your position, you would acquit the guilty for a bribe and deprive the innocent of his rights.

“take away the righteousness of the righteous” You deprive the good man of his legal rights. You cheat him. Actually this expression may imply more than simply a warning against cheating others. “The righteous” is Jesus Christ (see 1 John 2:1,29). Isaiah condemns those who would refer to Jesus as only a “great teacher” or a “super star.”

24 Therefore, as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, their root shall be rottenness, and their blossoms shall go up as dust; because they have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

verse 24 After defining and pronouncing the six woes, Isaiah then pronounces the judgments which will rapidly come, one after another.

Stubble is straw left on the ground after harvest. Chaff is husk after the wheat is winnowed. The Lord has referred to the gathering of the saints as the “harvest” (see D&C 101:64). After the harvest, the stubble and chaff remain. Thus, this analogy likening the wicked to the stubble and the chaff is apt, and likening their fate to a stubble fire is certainly descriptive.

In the second part of the verse, an analogy is employed wherein an individual is likened to a plant. His “roots” are his progenitors, his “blossom” refers to his descendants. Since he has denied the Lord (“the Holy One of Israel”), he has denied the priesthood with its sealing power. This will result in a disintegration or decay (“rottenness,” “blossoms shall go up as dust”) of his family as an eternal unit (see JSH 2:38-39 and 3 Nephi 25:1-6). He will not be allowed posterity.

25 Therefore, is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them; and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

verse 25 “he hath stretched forth his hand against them” It seems more likely that rather than the Lord’s actively smiting his people, he simply withdraws his protective support leaving them vulnerable. He thus allows the natural enemies of the people to do the punishing.

“the hills did tremble” Even the earth’s elements respond to the power of God.

“their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets” The corpses of the people were regarded as garbage. The setting is likely one of war.

Isaiah concludes this verse with a two-fold promise: “For all this his anger is not turned away” and “his hand is stretched out still.” Likely the idea is intended that while the Lord’s judgment and punishment still hang over the people and there can be no mistaking his anger at them, his hand is always stretched forth to help them and receive them if they accept him. An analogous verse which confirms this interpretation is 2

Nephi 28:32: “Wo be unto the Gentiles, saith the Lord God of Hosts! For notwithstanding I shall lengthen out mine arm unto them from day to day, they will deny me; nevertheless, I will be merciful unto them, saith the Lord God, if they will repent and come unto me; for mine arm is lengthened out all the day long, saith the Lord God of Hosts.”

Two modern translations support an alternate and quite opposite interpretation of the second of these two phrases. Today’s English Version of the Bible renders them: “Yet even so the Lord’s anger is not ended; his hand is still stretched out to punish.” Also the Jerusalem Bible: “Yet his anger is not spent, still his hand is raised to strike.”

verse 26-30 If taken in a contemporary historical context at the time of Isaiah, these verses probably describe the Assyrian army with all their terrible power. They struck with speed, seemed to need no rest, and did not pause long enough to take off their shoes. Their weapons were ready, their roar was like that of a lion, and when they seized their prey, none could stop them. Their destruction was so swift and complete that even in daylight, there was darkness (perhaps from the smoke of burning cities) and gloom (defeat) that hung over the people. God’s judgment was wrought upon Israel by the Assyrians between 732 and 722 BC when Assyria conquered the northern kingdom in Samaria and carried away the Ten Tribes. Also in 701 B.C., Assyria destroyed much of Judah and besieged Jerusalem.

Scriptural evidence is strong, however, that Isaiah intended also another meaning for these verses. He apparently foresaw the latter days just prior to the Savior’s second coming.

This section introduces two divine activities that will attract members of the house of Israel to gather to their lands of promise. He will hold up a flag, or standard, unto all the nations of the earth around which Israel may rally. Also he will attract the attention of Israel through a “hiss” or a whistle. These activities symbolize the manner by which the earth’s inhabitants will be called to Zion in the latter days after they accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. We will learn in this section that nothing will impede those who come to Zion.

26 And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth; and behold, they shall come with speed swiftly; none shall be weary nor stumble among them.

verse 26 “he will lift up an ensign to the nations” In these latter days the Lord will lift up an “ensign to the nations” from afar off which will inspire and exhort members of the house of Israel to gather to their promised lands. The word “ensign” means a signal, a standard, a flag, or a rallying point. This “ensign” is the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Various aspects of the restored gospel which will serve as a “standard” to the world in that day are: (1) The gospel teachings and covenants will

serve as “a standard for my people, and for the gentiles to seek to it” (D&C 45:9). (2) The powers of the priesthood including missionary work will serve as “an ensign, and for the gathering of my people in the last days” (D&C 113:6). (3) The Book of Mormon will “hiss forth [whistle or ring out] unto the ends of the earth, for a standard unto my people, which are of the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 29:2). (4) Zion. The people that gather unto the Church in that latter day will live a lifestyle that contrasts with that lifestyle lived by the rest of the world. Thus the people themselves will serve as an “ensign” to the nations (see D&C 115:5-6).

Using this “ensign,” the Lord will signal or whistle or “hiss,” unto Israel who are scattered in all parts of the earth. This will doubtless occur by the promptings of the Spirit.

Then, “they shall come with speed swiftly”—scattered Israel shall gather to Zion swiftly.

In this dispensation, the initial gathering to Zion (on the western hemisphere) and to Jerusalem has been slow and fraught with much trial and suffering. Certainly the pace of gathering is quickening, however. Perhaps the suggestion is implicit herein that the day will come when the pace of gathering will be even more accelerated.

verses 27-29 Imagine yourself in Isaiah’s day being shown in vision the latter-day gathering of Israel which will surely take place by modern modes of transportation. You would, of necessity, describe the phenomenon using symbols extant in your own day.

27 None shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken;

verse 27 Those gathering to Zion will come so fast—on an airplane—that during their journey they will not have to sleep or grow weary, and they won’t even have to change clothes en route! The “girdle of their loins” is their waist cloth. “Nor the latchet of their shoes be broken.” Isaiah obviously did not foresee the role of the present government’s TSA.

28 Whose arrows shall be sharp, and all their bows bent, and their horses’ hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind, their roaring like a lion.

verse 28 Once gathered in Zion, this mighty army of the Lord will turn their attention to spreading the gospel throughout the world. Armed with God’s power (the priesthood) and his word, their “arrows are sharp” and “all their bows bent” with excitement. A “bent bow” is one that is strung and ready.

In Isaiah’s day, it was not customary to shoe horses with metal shoes. Thus firmness and solidity of a horse’s hoof—“like flint”—was a very desirable quality. Here

Isaiah comments on the quality of this army of missionaries. Not only are they strong but fast (“wheels like a whirlwind”) and bold (“their roaring like a lion”).

29 They shall roar like young lions; yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry away safe, and none shall deliver.

verse 29 This army of young missionaries (“young lions”) shall preach with authority (“roar”).

The phrase “carry away safe” is translated correctly from the Hebrew. The Hebrew verb carries with it the idea of “to place in safety or to escape from danger.” This is awkward for modern translators or commentators. How can a lion lay hold of prey and carry it away “safe”? Some modern translations have omitted the idea of “safety.” Being aware of the verse’s latter-day and missionary context, however, it is easy to understand. The “prey” or converts shall be “carried away” safe to Zion. Zion will serve as “a defense, and . . . a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth” (D&C 115:5-6).

“none shall deliver” No one will take their “prey” from the gathering missionaries.

30 And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea; and if they look unto the land, behold, darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof.

verse 30 “they shall roar against them” *They* refers to the young lions, the young missionaries. These missionaries will “roar” or preach against them, or those who would try to take their prey from them (see the phrase “none shall deliver” in the previous verse).

Some, of course, will not believe. The missionaries will encounter, in that day, considerable corruption. They shall preach (“roar”) against the wicked and the wickedness. This verse presents a contrast between the light of the gospel and the darkness of the apostate condition of the earth. Much evil and darkness will shroud the light of God’s work in the last days. The “land” is the land of the wicked which will contain great sin and wickedness to the point of “darkness and sorrow.” Spiritual light will not be found among these unrighteous peoples.

2 Nephi Chapter 16

In this chapter (Isaiah 6), Isaiah describes how he received his call to be the Lord's prophet through a direct vision from the Lord in the year 742 B.C. In that year, times were perilous for Judah. King Uzziah, who had righteously ruled Judah for over forty years, had died earlier that same year, and his son Jotham ruled in his stead. Jotham was not particularly wicked, but he was the first of a series of less able and less righteous rulers. Socioeconomically, Israel had become divided into a poor oppressed class and a wealthy and generally corrupt one. Spiritually, many Israelites continued to observe traditional religious practices, but their hearts had turned from the Lord. Also in that same year, Assyria, under the capable leadership of Tiglath-Pileser III or Pul, as he is known in the Bible, had been threatening Palestine for three years.

As a general outline, chapters 12 through 15 of 2 Nephi serve to emphasize Israel's separation from the "master of the vineyard," and chapters seventeen through twenty-one promise deliverance and the "millennial day." Chapter sixteen serves to connect the first group with the second. Chapter sixteen easily divides into two parts. Isaiah's vision of the Lord comprises verses 1 through 7, and his actual call is found in verses 8 through 13.

There is no need to suppose that the full priesthood authority of the office of prophet was given to Isaiah during this vision experience alone. This authority must have come through proper priesthood channels, though we are not given a record of his actual ordination.

Joseph Smith informs us that Isaiah's vision was also a time when his calling and election were made sure and he was given the gift of the Second Comforter, Jesus Christ (*TPJS*, 150-51). For more discussion of this phenomenon, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*.

1 In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

verse 1 "In the year that king Uzziah died" As stated above, king Uzziah died in about 742 B.C. Details of his reign are recorded in 2 Kings 15:1-7 where his name is rendered Azariah, and in 2 Chronicles 26.

Isaiah relates his story in the first person. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord Jehovah sitting upon a high and lofty throne. His "train," or the skirts of his robe, "filled the temple." Isaiah was likely in the temple in Jerusalem at the time of this vision, but it seems likely that the "temple" here referred to is the throne room or holy of holies of the heavenly or celestial temple.

2 Above it stood the seraphim; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

verse 2 Attending the Lord and standing above his throne were animal-like creatures that reside in God's presence called seraphs or seraphim. The singular form is seraph. Seraphim are apparently a high order of animals that serve the Lord in his heavenly court. Their name comes from the Hebrew root *sarap*, which means "to burn." The name seraphim is plural and therefore means "the burning ones" or "bright, shiny ones" which likely refers to their glory.

Isaiah describes them as having three pair of wings. With one pair ("twain" means two), the seraphs cover their faces (one modern translation renders it "veil their presence"), with another pair they cover their legs (the same translation renders it "conceal their location"), and with the third pair they fly about. Exactly why the seraphim covered their face and feet and whether this covering is symbolic or literal is unknown. Below, in verse 6, Isaiah will describe them as having "hands" also.

Actually the wings themselves could be figurative here rather than literal. D&C 77:4 describes the wings as being symbolic of the power to move or to act.

Many animals and plants live in God's presence, and it is likely that we have never heard of or seen many of them. John the Revelator saw and heard such animals in God's presence (Revelation 5:8-14), and Joseph Smith recorded how these animals praised and glorified God (*TPJS*, 291-92).

In D&C 109:79, Joseph Smith describes Seraphs in God's presence. Joseph refers to them as "bright, shining seraphs." Joseph also taught that God dwells in "everlasting burnings" and that righteous beings (human and animal) dwell with him in a state of continual burning or glory (*TPJS*, 372-73, 347, 361).

Another type of winged heavenly creature that deserves mention is the cherub (singular) or cherubim (plural). Ezekiel teaches that cherubim also have hands and faces (Ezekiel 10:7, 14). Mesopotamian tradition and art represent them as winged bulls with human faces, but this need not necessarily correspond with the truth.

An alternate explanation of seraphim and cherubim is that they are angels in the celestial presence of God who belong to the human family, and that the descriptions of their non human parts ("wings") is only figurative and symbolic. Perhaps their "wings" are figurative representations of their power to move and to act.

3 And one cried unto another, and said: Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.

verse 3 One of the seraphs cried unto another praising God.

"Holy, holy, holy" This threefold exclamation also plays a significant role in John the Revelator's vision of the heavenly temple (see also Revelation 4:8). This cry of "holy, holy, holy" may refer to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

verse 4 Isaiah describes a door whose posts, or foundations, moved or trembled as one seraph spoke. Perhaps the trembling or quaking was also due to God's presence. What door? Perhaps this is the door leading into the Holy of Holies of the celestial temple, or perhaps the heavenly doorway leading to the celestial kingdom itself. The concept of a door leading into God's presence (the "pearly gates") is spoken of in other scriptural verses (John 10; 2 Nephi 9:41; Isaiah 22:22).

The "smoke" that filled "the house," the temple, is likely the same as the "cloud of darkness" that filled the temple at the dedication of Solomon's temple. A cloud of darkness filled the temple and then became a radiant medium of glory as the Lord appeared (1 Kings 8:10-12). Thus the smoke could be a symbol of the glory of God (Exodus 19:18).

5 Then said I: Woe is unto me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips; and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.

verse 5 Recognizing that he is in the presence of the Lord, Isaiah is struck with his own feelings of unrighteousness and unworthiness, the immensity of his personal sins ("woe is me; I am lost!"), and the realization of his own mortal weakness ("for I as a man of unclean lips"). The expression "unclean lips" means unworthiness. It seems likely that Isaiah's confession comes, not from a life that is grossly sinful, but rather from the profound humility resulting from his finding himself in the Lord's presence.

It is interesting that the usual reactions of a man on finding himself in a divine presence are often marked feelings of unworthiness, fear of judgment, or even impending destruction. Often the first message given to such a favored man is "Fear not" or "Peace be with you." After this, the favored mortal usually feels comfortable—free from guilt, and he regards the visitation to be a blessing not a condemnation (Exodus 3:6; Judges 6:22-23; Moses 6:31-32; Helaman 5:43- 48; JS-H 1:17).

6 Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar;

verse 6 "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me" The original text of the Book of Mormon contains Hebrew-like constructions that have been removed from the text of the Book of Mormon because of their non-English character. An example of a typical Hebrew form is the double plural form "seraphims." It was found in both the original text of the Book of Mormon and is also found in the King James Bible (Isaiah 6:6). It has been removed and replaced by the more appropriate English form, seraphim.

“having a live coal in his hand” The live coal (fire) here suggests a purifying agent such as the cleaning power of the Holy Ghost.

The “altar” here is a place where sacrifices are offered in similitude of the atonement. If the vision is of the Jerusalem temple, this altar could be the great altar for burnt offerings in front of the temple or the incense altar in the holy place before the veil.

7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said: Lo, this has touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

verses 6-7 The “live coal” represents divine fire and the cleansing or purging power of the atonement just as our ordinances of baptism and the sacrament represent the same. By touching Isaiah’s lips, the coal not only purged him from being a “man of unclean lips” but it also consecrated him to speak in righteousness as a mouth piece of the Lord (Jeremiah 1:9).

The word “purged” here actually means to be removed through ritual washing.

8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said: Here am I; send me.

verse 8 Now, forgiven of his sins and worthy to be in God’s presence, Isaiah overhears the Lord’s voice addressing an unknown congregation—perhaps a heavenly council. The plural pronoun “us” suggests that there were others in God’s heavenly throne room. In John’s vision of the heavenly temple (Revelation 4-5), we read of exalted saints and others near God’s throne in heaven (Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7).

Isaiah volunteers for the calling even before it is directly offered to him in a manner reminiscent of the Lord’s own response in that Great Council in the pre-existent phase of our existence (Abraham 3:27). Although some great prophets like Enoch, Moses, and Jeremiah were initially reluctant to accept their prophetic callings, Isaiah responds without hesitation.

verses 9-10 During his mortal ministry, the Savior will later refer to these verses of scripture as he explains to his disciples why he veils the truths in his teachings by teaching in parables (Matthew 13:10-15). Apparently Jesus intended that those who were spiritually sensitive should understand his teachings, while those who were spiritually deaf should not. The implication is that the latter group had not earned the privilege of hearing a clear and explicit explanation of sacred truths. Another suggested reason for parables is that in using parables as a teaching method, the Savior was mercifully protecting the unprepared from being held responsible for those teachings.

9 And he said: Go and tell this people—Hear ye indeed, but they understood not; and see ye indeed, but they perceived not.

verse 9 The Lord charges Isaiah to go and preach the gospel to the people. Implicit in this charge, as evidenced by the following verse, is the idea that Isaiah should preach and write in a partially hidden or veiled form which would be difficult for the spiritually hard hearted or disbelieving to understand. He further prophesies that they will in fact hear and see but not comprehend:

And he (the Lord) said (to Isaiah), Go and tell this people (the Lord's charge to Isaiah): Hear and see indeed. And what will be the response of the people? They shall neither understand nor perceive.

As has been noted previously, notice the use here of the "prophetic perfect" verb tense. Even though he is prophesying of events in the future, Isaiah speaks in the past tense ("they understood not; and . . . they perceived not"). This was common verb construction form among the Hebrew prophets.

10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes—lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted and be healed.

verse 10 At first reading it seems that Isaiah is here being charged to deliberately confuse the people because the Lord does not want them to repent and be "healed" spiritually. We know that this cannot be true. The Lord wants all of his children to eventually repent and return to his presence. There can be no mistaking, however, that the Lord is charging Isaiah to teach and write in such a way that the truths contained in his teachings will not be easily understood by the spiritually unprepared. Isaiah is commanded to deliberately keep them in the dark. There is no question but that Isaiah responded to this charge. His writings are, in fact, difficult to understand. His style, symbolism, and poetry are not interpreted readily. Now we know that he intended his writings to be difficult to understand.

"Fat hearted" means "hard hearted" or unresponsive to the gospel message.

"lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" It seems clear that the Lord did not want part of Isaiah's audience to fully understand Isaiah's teachings at that particular time. A valid question is why not? It is clear from this verse and from Christ's teachings in Matthew 13:10-15 that certain sensitive gospel truths are not for the eyes and ears of the unworthy. We do know from Christ's earthly ministry that it is possible to cast "pearls" before "swine" (Matthew 7:6). The intent of Christ's warning not to cast "pearls" before "swine" which are the spiritually unprepared and unworthy would seem to be to protect those truths from being trampled under foot—that is, ridiculed and cheapened.

This verse, however, implies that if an unprepared and unworthy individual were to hear a clear explanation of precious truths, it may result in his untimely conversion. Is this true? Is it possible that a man may be converted too easily, without sufficient effort on his part, by a premature, too-clear explanation of gospel truths? It would seem

to be most unlikely that an unworthy “hard hearted” individual would be converted even on hearing important and precious truths explained clearly.

We are still left with this verse’s strong implication that an unworthy or unprepared individual might be converted and “healed” by an untimely, presumably premature, clear presentation of gospel truths. What is the answer to this dilemma? The problem is created by the word *lest*.

The solution to this misinterpretation is simple. The first part of the verse states that the people of Isaiah’s day will be insensitive and unresponsive to the eternal truths of Isaiah’s message because of their rampant iniquity and the grossness of their hearts. Hence, “For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed.” The word *lest* may be interpreted here as “were it not so.” In other words, Were it not so that this people’s hearts were unresponsive, then “they [would] see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and [would] understand with their heart, and [would] be converted, and I [would] heal them.

11 Then said I: Lord, how long? And he said: Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate;

verse 11 After he was called, Isaiah asked the Lord how long he would prophesy and preach before his words would be understood and believed. The Lord answered that Isaiah’s prophecies would not be understood until after Judah was ravaged, its cities depopulated, and its land left desolate. To what specific time period is this likely referring? See the commentary for verse 13 below.

12 And the Lord have removed men far away, for there shall be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

verse 12 Another event prophesied by Isaiah to occur before the people of Judah would begin to repent was that its inhabitants would be scattered to far places leaving even the formerly populated areas in the midst of the land uninhabited. This is an allusion to the scattering of Israel that will occur between 732 and 722 BC, 587 B.C., and AD 70.

“the Lord have removed men far away” This expression refers to the scattering of Israel. Note the past perfect tense used in referring to future events.

“a great forsaking in the midst of the land” The Lord will be forsaken by his people, and therefore his people will not be allowed to remain in the “midst of the land.” Rather, they will be scattered.

13 But yet there shall be a tenth, and they shall return, and shall be eaten, as a teil-tree, and as an oak whose substance is in them when they cast their leaves; so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.

verse 13 Finally, Isaiah prophesies that a righteous remnant (a “tenth”) of Judah shall return to Jerusalem. This could refer to those of Judah who returned from Babylonian captivity in about 538 B.C. and rebuilt the temple which had been leveled by Babylon. It might also refer to a few righteous in Israel after the Roman purging in AD 70 or even a few righteous there today or in the future those who repent, return to the Lord, and receive the spiritual gifts necessary to understand Isaiah. This verse does not seem to have reference to the gathering of the lost ten tribes of Israel since they will not return as a “tenth” but as a great host which shall have greatly multiplied (Isaiah 54:1-3).

In this verse this remnant is compared to the shoots of a teil tree or an oak tree. A teil tree is a linden tree which is a tree of fine white grain and dense heart-shaped leaves. It has the ability to sprout up new shoots even from an old stump which has been cut down. The oak also has the ability to regenerate after it has shed its leaves and been pruned.

The remnant of Judah that returns to Jerusalem shall have been “eaten,” that is, pruned or purged of its unrighteous elements. Those who return will likely be of a new generation.

Even though the “tree” of Judah has been defoliated, pruned, or its stump burned up, its stump still maintains the capacity for growth—the essence of life, the “holy seed.” The “holy seed” are those righteous, covenant few who maintain the ability to regenerate this chosen line of people and to spread the message of Christ’s gospel to the world. The “holy seed” could also refer to the Savior. The word *substance* refers to the results or consequences of the regeneration of the holy seed.

It is probably fair to conclude that the general pattern of the call of a prophet of God is illustrated in this chapter by the call of the prophet Isaiah. Every prophet has been called in a heavenly council, thus the authority for each call may be traced directly to the throne of God (*TPJS*, 365).

2 Nephi Chapter 17

Chapter seven of the book of Isaiah, which is the source of 2 Nephi 17, is often called the “Virgin Birth” chapter or the chapter of the Immanuel Prophecy, and it is often quoted at Christmas time. Let us review the historical setting for this chapter.

Isaiah’s vision and calling, spoken of in chapter 16, had occurred about 742 BC, the year the good King Uzziah died of leprosy. Uzziah had ruled Judah since 783 BC. He was succeeded by his son Jotham who was also a righteous king who ruled until about 736 BC. When Jotham died, his unrighteous son Ahaz succeeded him and ruled until about 715 BC. Ahaz was eventually to apostatize completely from the truths of the gospel and even embrace the heathen cult of the Canaanites and “burn his children in the fire, after the abomination of the heathen” (2 Chronicles 28:3). The events of 2 Nephi chapter 17 took place before he had degenerated that far, in fact they probably occurred during the first year or two of his rule.

In about 745 BC, a capable leader had gained the throne in Assyria. This was Tiglath-Pileser III or “Pul” as he is called in the Bible. Under his leadership, the terrible Assyrian army began moving out from Nineveh (capital city of Assyria) and sought to force the small Palestinian nations to the southwest into a state of vassalage and tribute. To avoid a massacre and blood bath, for which the Assyrian army was infamous, some nations volunteered to pay tribute. One of these nations was the Kingdom of Israel (inhabited by the northern ten tribes) led by King Menahem. After the death of Menahem in 738 BC, his son Pekahiah succeeded him and intended to continue paying tribute to Assyria. Menahem’s son, however, was assassinated by Pekah, the captain of the guard who thus became king of Israel in a military coup in about 737 BC. Pekah refused to pay tribute. In fact, he wrote a letter to King Ahaz of Judah and to King Rezin in Damascus, Syria urging that they join together in a federation to resist and fight the Assyrians (Rezin had already been paying tribute to the Assyrians). Rezin agreed to join with Pekah and Israel, but Ahaz of Judah did not. Rezin will eventually be killed in a battle against Assyria (2 Kings 16:7-9). Pekah would reign over the kingdom of Israel for about five years and then be murdered by his successor to the throne, named Hosea. It will be during King Hosea’s reign that the northern tribes of Israel (the ten tribes) will be captured and deported by Assyria.

Because Ahaz refused to join their alliance, Pekah and Rezin decided to attack Judah and replace Ahaz with a leader more sympathetic to their anti-Assyrian policies, a man known only as the son of Tabeal. It was under the gloom of this impending assault on Jerusalem that the events in chapter 17 took place.

The war between the anti-Assyrian coalition and Judah was to be a bitter one. In one battle, Pekah’s army slew 120,000 men of Judah and took 200,000 captives in one

day (see 2 Chronicles 28:6-15). It appeared that Judah would fall. Reports of enemy successes in the north caused Ahaz to fear greatly for the safety of Jerusalem.

As chapter 17 opens, Judah had already been attacked by the combined armies of Israel and Syria, but Ahaz's forces had been successful in repulsing the attack. Expecting further attacks and realizing that Jerusalem's most vulnerable strategic point of military assault was its water supply, Ahaz was out inspecting the city's water system.

Before beginning our study of chapter 17, it should be noted that the prophecy contained therein was literally fulfilled in the days of the prophet Isaiah. Nevertheless, it likely also has a direct application for us today. Assyria is a type and symbol of the warring nations that will exist in the latter days shortly before the Lord's second coming. The message we may take from this chapter is that if we trust in the Lord's words, as communicated to us by his prophets, rather than rely on the arm of flesh, we will be protected during the wars in the last days.

verses 1-2 In order to understand the various references to places in chapter 17, let us review the names by which the nations involved in this incident were called. A nation might be referred to by the name of its king, its capital city, or its predominant tribe:

Nation	Judah	Syria	Israel
King	Ahaz, of the house of David	Rezin	Pekah, son of Remaliah
Capital City	Jerusalem	Damascus	Samaria
Predominant Tribe	Judah	Aram	Ephraim

1 And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it.

verse 1 "Ahaz the son of Jotham" Remember, that Jotham was a righteous king and was the son of Uzziah. Ahaz is also the father of Hezekiah who will turn out to be a righteous king of Judah.

"Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel" In the Book of Mormon "Israel" is most often used in reference to all of the descendants of Jacob, especially in the phrase "house of Israel" and the titles of Deity such as "God of Israel" and "Holy One of Israel." In this verse, however, Isaiah uses the term *Israel* in referring to the descendants of Jacob in the northern kingdom as opposed to those in the southern kingdom of Judah (see also 2 Nephi 19:8, 12, 14; 21:12).

"went up toward Jerusalem" Jerusalem, of course, is at higher elevation than the surrounding country side.

“but could not prevail against it” As stated in the introduction, as this chapter opens, there had already been a preliminary attack on Jerusalem which had been repelled.

2 And it was told the house of David, saying: Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.

verse 2 The “house of David” refers to the kings of the Davidic dynasty in Judah including Ahaz. Ahaz and the people of Judah had heard of the initial successes of their enemy, and both Ahaz and his people were shaken and frightened (“his heart was moved, and the heart of his people”) like trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.

“Confederate with” means united with or in league with.

3 Then said the Lord unto Isaiah: Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou and Shearjashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller’s field;

verse 3 Isaiah is instructed to take his son, Shear-jashub and meet with Ahaz. The name of Isaiah’s son means “a remnant shall return.” This boy was to become a living symbol to the Jews (2 Nephi 8:18) and a reminder to the Israelites that a remnant would return to their land and to their God (2 Nephi 6:11-13).

At the time of Isaiah’s visit, Ahaz is inspecting the city’s water supply to the east of the city. The only water source for Jerusalem was the Gihon Spring located just outside the city wall in the Kidron Valley. This external water supply made Jerusalem more vulnerable to attack since an enemy could cut off the water supply without having to enter the city. Since Ahaz would be deciding how to protect the water supply from the two invading forces, this would be an opportune time for Isaiah to deliver his message regarding how the city might be protected by the Lord.

Isaiah will find Ahaz at the end of the “conduit” which means canal, aqueduct, or tunnel. In this case it is likely the aqueduct or canal that carried water from a pool formed by the Gihon spring in the Kidron valley that borders the eastern side of ancient Jerusalem. This pool was on the road to the fuller’s field. A “fuller” is a launderer, one who cleans, shrinks, and bleaches newly shorn wool and newly woven cloth before it is used in making garments. Perhaps he also cleaned the finished clothing. Thus, the fuller located his plant near a water supply. Also a field was used in which the material was sun bleached. Because of its unpleasant odors, the fuller’s plant was located outside the city walls. This particular fuller’s field is thought to have been located at the confluence of the Hinnom and Kidron valleys to the south of Jerusalem.

In biblical times the concept of the fuller’s cleansing is used metaphorically in referring to persons who are cleansed of evil (Psalm 51:7; Jeremiah 2:22; 4:14). The

messenger of the Lord is a “refiner” or “fuller” (Malachi 3:2). The garments of the transfigured Christ are whiter than any fuller could make them (Mark 9:3; Matthew 17:2).

4 And say unto him: Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be faint-hearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah.

verse 4 Isaiah is instructed to say to Ahaz, “take heed” (be careful, watch for danger), “be quiet” (keep calm), and “fear not, neither be faint-hearted” (don’t be afraid).

Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *firebrand* as, “An incendiary; one who inflames factions, or causes contention and mischief.” The two angry kings of Israel and Syria are likened to “two tails of these smoking firebrands.” The other meaning of the word *firebrand* is the smoldering remains of a piece of wood or a torch that has been burned. When it has served its purpose and burned out, it becomes nothing but a “smoking firebrand” with tails of smoke rising from its spent ashes. The implication is that while these kings were once burning fires with the power to consume (firebrands), the days of their power are numbered. They are now merely “two tails of . . . smoking firebrands.” They had been or would soon be spent, and they were no longer to be feared. In other words don’t lose heart because of the smoke of these two burned out kings. Also don’t be frightened by the anger of Rezin and Pekah. Note the scorn Isaiah evidences as he refers to Pekah. Isaiah refers to him as “the son of Remaliah” rather than calling him by name.

Isaiah is commanded to say to Ahaz, in effect, “Don’t be afraid of (“for”) these two burned out kings. Also don’t be afraid of (“for”) the anger of Rezin of (“with”) Syria and Pekah.

5 Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying:

verse 5 Because Syria, Israel, and Israel’s leader Pekah have plotted your ruin, saying:

6 Let us go up against Judah and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, yea, the son of Tabeal.

verse 6 To “vex” is to disturb, and to “breach” is to make a hole by continual attacks. Let us invade Judah, terrorize it, tear it apart, and divide it among ourselves. We will make Tabeal’s son king over Judah.

Tabeal or Tabeel was apparently a Syrian whose son would function as a puppet king over Judah while it was controlled by Israel and Syria. Tabeel’s son apparently fought with the armies of Israel and Syria.

verses 7-9 The divine pronouncement in these verses contains five segments—three prophetic and two historical. The combination of history and prophecy is characteristic of Isaiah’s writings.

The three prophetic segments are: (1) The alliance’s goals will not come to pass. (2) Within sixty-five years, Ephraim (Israel) will be scattered. (3) If you (Ahaz and Judah) do not believe, you will not be protected.

The fulfillment of the first prophecy came to pass because Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul) attacked Syria and Israel in 732 BC, distracting these two countries from their assault on Judah. The second prophecy began to be fulfilled between 732 and 722 BC (within twelve or thirteen years of the time the prophecies were made) when Assyria besieged Samaria, and Samaria fell. After the Israelite captives were taken from Samaria to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, large groups of Israelites fled from Assyria to the remote areas northward and became the ten lost tribes of Israel. Within about fifty years of their leaving Assyria, they were scattered so widely that many tribes no longer existed as cohesive groups. Therein was Isaiah’s prophecy to Israel fulfilled and just within the prescribed time table. The third prophecy or warning was not heeded by Ahaz. Rather than rely on the Lord, Ahaz relied upon the Assyrians for deliverance. Consequently Judah found herself paying tribute to Assyria to avoid annihilation.

The two historical segments are merely statements of historical fact that are self explanatory: (1) For the head (center or capital) of Syria is Damascus, and the head (king) of Damascus is Rezin. (2) For the head (center) of Ephraim (Israel) is Samaria, and the head (leader) of Samaria is Remaliah’s son (Pekah).

7 Thus saith the Lord God: It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.

verse 7 “Thus saith the Lord” This phrase is found some forty-six times in the writings of Isaiah and introduces prophetic language—prophecy. Its purpose is to announce both the divine authority and the origin of the revelation (*Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, a FARMS publication, “Nephi’s Keys to Understanding Isaiah,” Donald W. Parry, 54).

Now, the prophetic message of comfort is delivered to Ahaz and Judah: The feared destruction of Jerusalem will not take place, it will not happen.

In subsequent verses, Isaiah will pronounce a fate upon Israel that Israel sought to impose upon Judah—a destruction and scattering.

8 For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus, Rezin; and within three score and five years shall Ephraim be broken that it be not a people.

9 And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah’s son. If ye will not believe surely ye shall not be established.

10 Moreover, the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying:

11 Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depths, or in the heights above.

verses 10-11 In order to prove the authenticity of his words, Isaiah invites, even commands Ahaz in the name of the Lord to ask for a sign. Not just any sign but a spectacular sign (“either in the depths, or in the heights above”). This situation is obviously somewhat unique and different from the setting in which divine signs are usually given to mortals. Ordinarily signs are not given to the wicked but only to the righteous (see D&C 63:9). The Savior’s once said of signs, “an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign” (Matthew 12:39). Ahaz was not deserving, but for the sake of the Lord’s chosen people he was offered a sign.

12 But Ahaz said: I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.

verse 12 To “tempt” is to test or to try. Ahaz refused to ask for a sign even when the prophet of the Lord gave him the opportunity. This verse makes Ahaz’s refusal sound almost virtuous—he refused to put the Lord to a test. However, it is probable that Ahaz refused to ask for a sign because he had no confidence in the Lord. He was more inclined to place his trust in the military protection of the king of Assyria. Ahaz quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 (“Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God.”) in order to justify his act of refusing the proffered sign. The irony of quoting a scripture out of context in refusing to follow the prophet of the Lord further evidences his disbelief.

13 And he said: Hear ye now, O house of David; is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?

verse 13 Isaiah is speaking. Again, addressing Ahaz as “house of David,” Isaiah expresses his exasperation at Ahaz’s intransigence. To “weary” is to wear out. The word is used to indicate that someone has had enough of an opponent’s argument. “It is one thing for you to frustrate me, but will you frustrate the Lord as well”?

verses 14-25 These verses contain the best known and most quoted prophecy in all of the Isaiah’s writings, the Immanuel Prophecy. Simply stated, as a sign to Ahaz and the people of Judah, Isaiah prophesies the birth of a male infant to a virgin who will name the child “Immanuel.” The Hebrew appellation *Immanuel* literally means “with us [is] God,” clearly foreshadowing the coming of God himself into the world (Matthew 1:21-23). Actually the Immanuel Prophecy consists of three parts or segments, each a “sub-prophecy” in its own right. Each segment is contained in a separate verse (verses 14, 15, and 16). Verse 14 contains the prophecy that the infant will be born, verses 15 and 16 prophesy more about the child Immanuel.

One might assume, as many have, that Isaiah’s prophecy refers to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ in the meridian of time. Secular biblical scholars, however, have objected to this interpretation, claiming that such a sign—the miraculous birth of a

Messiah more than seven centuries later could hardly have served as a sign to Ahaz or to Ahaz's Judah. We will consider this question further in the next verse.

14 Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign—Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

verse 14 Here is the important first segment of the Immanuel Prophecy. An interesting question, then, is whether the Immanuel Prophecy is a Messianic prophecy—a prophecy of the future birth of Jesus Christ—or a prophecy having to do with a male child to be born in the days of Isaiah. It seems most likely that the prophecy will find application in both time periods. An interesting ancillary question is: What meaning did Isaiah himself intend or understand for this prophecy? Did he know of the virgin birth of the Lord, or did he have in mind only a contemporaneous application? Again, Isaiah was an inspired prophet of God and surely knew of the future birth and ministry of the Savior (Jacob 4:4; 3 Nephi 23:1-3).

To reiterate the question, then: Is the Immanuel Prophecy a Messianic prophecy, or was its fulfillment to occur in the eighth century BC, or is it both? Let us explore the scriptural and “reasonable” evidences.

Let us first consider the evidences supporting the idea that the sign was to occur in Isaiah's day.

1. A careful reading of verses 13 and 14 certainly leaves the impression that Isaiah intended for the sign to be witnessed by his contemporaries in Judah. Ahaz and his people needed to develop faith in the fact that the Lord could deliver them from Pekah and Rezin. The sign seems to have been intended to engender that faith.

2. Some maintain that the Hebrew word *almah* which is translated “virgin” in the King James Bible is actually more correctly translated “young woman of marriageable age.” And, if Isaiah had intended to make clear the idea of a miraculous virgin birth, he would have used the more specific Hebrew term *bethulah* which means “virgin.” The biblical scholars that have raised this objection do concede however, that the “young woman of marriageable age” might be a virgin. Others contend that the Hebrew *almah* does indeed mean “virgin.”

3. Isaiah promised the sign when Jerusalem was being threatened by the Syro-Ephraimite coalition. The Immanuel Prophecy goes on to promise that before the child Immanuel is old enough to know good from evil, the threat will be removed (verse 16).

As to what particular event, or which particular child in Isaiah's time might have fulfilled this prophecy, only speculations can be made. It has been suggested that Isaiah's second son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz might have been intended. This suggestion would depend upon a rather contrived set of circumstances including the fact that the wife would have to be a second wife (actually an anticipated second wife) of Isaiah's, since Isaiah already has a son, and therefore his wife was not a virgin. Or, perhaps Isaiah's wife was “virgin” in the sense that she was pure and undefiled by the world.

This son would also have to have a second name—Immanuel. Some scholars see this as a reference to the birth of Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, who will become a righteous king of Judah.

Perhaps the prophecy refers to a child of a specifically designated woman. The Hebrew article rendered “a” virgin in verse 14 is actually more correctly translated “the” virgin. But who might this woman be?

Perhaps no specific child was implied. Possibly a number of children named Immanuel were intended. Could it be that because of the rapid dissipation of the Syro-Ephraimite threat, women who were then pregnant would, in gratitude, name their children “God is with us,” or “Immanuel.”

Now let us turn to those evidences which suggest that the Immanuel Prophecy is in fact a Messianic prophecy that foretells the birth of our Lord.

1. In New Testament times, Matthew referred to Isaiah’s prophecy in trying to convince the Jews of Matthew’s day that Jesus was in fact born in a miraculous way and was in fact the Messiah. Referring to Mary, Matthew wrote: “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matthew 1:21-23). Some of the critical Bible scholars suggest that Matthew was overzealous and misguided in doing so and shouldn’t have used this Isaiah passage. They point out that Matthew would have used for his Old Testament source the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament writings which used the word “virgin” rather than the earlier Hebrew manuscripts which might have simply implied “young woman.” However, Elder Hugh B. Brown considered Matthew’s quoting of Isaiah 7:14 an evidence that Isaiah was prophesying of the Savior’s birth (*CR*, October 1960, 93). Elder Mark E. Petersen agreed (*CR*, October 1965, 60). Actually many general authorities in this dispensation have expressed their belief that the Immanuel Prophecy applies to the Savior’s birth.

2. Other Old Testament and Book of Mormon prophets have also testified of the birth of the Savior (see Jacob 4:4, Luke 24:27, 44), and so it should not be surprising for Isaiah to do so. For example, Nephi had a vision of a beautiful virgin, exceedingly fair, who was carried away in the Spirit and who returned bearing the Son of God in her arms (1 Nephi 11:13-21). King Benjamin prophesied specifically about Jesus’s birth (Mosiah 3:8). Alma prophesied that a virgin in the land of Jerusalem was to be the mother of the Son of God (Alma 7:10).

3. Verse 13 implies that the sign was intended for the house of David or Judah (“Hear ye now, O house of David”). God had promised David that “thy kingdom shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16). The “King of Kings” was to come through Judah and David’s lineage (Genesis 49:10). The Immanuel Prophecy, then, might be

regarded simply as a reminder of this promise to Judah and David and a declaration of how the Lord would bring about its fulfillment in spite of a wicked king or a wicked generation.

15 Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil and to choose the good.

verse 15 This is the second segment of the Immanuel Prophecy. The child Immanuel will eat “butter” or curds and “honey”—in other words the food of poverty, the fare of the common man. Curds were prepared by pressing the churning fresh milk in a goatskin. The symbolic meaning here is that he will experience the hardships, temptations, and vicissitudes of mortality and thus learn first hand the differences between good and evil. Remember that only Jesus Christ learned perfectly the differences between good and evil and thus lived a sinless life.

16 For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

verse 16 This is the third segment. Before the child Immanuel is old enough to know right from wrong, the land of the two kings that are threatening Judah will be laid waste. If we assume that the Immanuel Prophecy applies only to the birth and childhood of Jesus, then it is difficult to explain this verse. The verse seems to indicate that the birth of the child Immanuel was a sign to the Judah of Isaiah’s day, and before the child is old enough to know the difference between good and evil, the current threat from the Kingdoms of Israel and Syria will have passed. Those who contend that Isaiah intended that his own wife might be the contemporaneous fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy find support in Isaiah 8:3-4 (2 Nephi 18:3-4). Isaiah’s son Maher-shal-hash-baz was still under the age of eight when both Syria and Israel fell to Assyria.

In a rather imaginative, if somewhat contrived, explanation of how this verse might still apply only to Jesus’s birth, Brother Monte S. Nyman in his book *Great Are the Words of Isaiah* wrote:

Most of the critics have assumed that the child spoken of in verse 16 is the same child spoken of in verses 14 and 15. Could not the child in verse 16 be just any child? A child is accountable at age eight in the eyes of the Lord (see D&C 68:25). In his first eight years he is to learn to distinguish between good and evil. Therefore, Isaiah could be prophesying that the kings of Syria and Ephraim [Israel] are both going to be forsaken of their kings in less than eight years (58).

Pekah, king of Samaria, was killed about three years after Ahaz became king. Rezin, the king of Syria, was killed by the Assyrians in response to Ahaz’s plea for help. Thus, this third segment of the Immanuel Prophecy was fulfilled within three years of the time it was delivered.

The question of the proper application of the Immanuel Prophecy is still an open one, and each student must decide for himself. What did Isaiah understand, and what did the Lord intend in inspiring Isaiah to write this prophecy? It seems likely that Isaiah intended at least in part that the sign would be given to Ahaz and the Judah of the eighth century BC. Whether or not Isaiah understood or intended another application is unknown. Could it be that Isaiah understood that the sign would apply to the people of his day, and yet the Lord would properly have us interpret Isaiah's writings as a prophecy of his own miraculous birth? Perhaps so.

17 The Lord shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah, the king of Assyria.

verse 17 After prophesying to Ahaz that trusting in the Lord would result in deliverance from Syria and Israel, Isaiah then prophesies of the dangers of inviting Assyria to come to Judah's aid. Isaiah knew that Ahaz was inclined toward requesting Assyria's help in the conflict, and he issues a stern warning against such action.

In this verse, which is constructed somewhat awkwardly, Isaiah warns Ahaz that if he does enlist Assyria's help, he will bring upon Judah a situation even worse than that which occurred at the time of the rebellion of the ten tribes under the leadership of Jeroboam in 931 BC., and the problems will be caused by Assyria. The Lord will use the king of Assyria and his armies to punish King Ahaz, his family ("upon thy father's house"), and his kingdom ("upon thy people").

18 And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.

verse 18 "in that day" This is a phrase used by Isaiah which often seems to pertain to our day (see also verses 20, 21, 23), though certainly it also has application to Isaiah's day.

"the Lord shall hiss for the fly . . . and for the bee" The Lord shall whistle for, or call for a tormentor. The fly was, and still is, notorious in Egypt, and the honeybee was apparently notorious in Assyria—possibly a type of killer bee? It has been suggested that the reference to the fly might be symbolic of the swarming nature of invading Egyptian armies. The nation of Egypt was seeking resurgence during Isaiah's time.

It seems clear that the Assyrian armies, and their stinging nature, are here referred to as "bees." Bee-keeping was common in Assyria. The Lord shall signal or prompt the Assyrian armies to come down on Judah. The Lord's whistling to the bees is a symbol built on an actual ancient practice, for Cyrillus of Alexandria (ca. AD 400) wrote about beekeepers who whistled to bees to get them to return to their hives (Watts, *John D. W. Isaiah 1-33*, [Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1985], 107).

Some have tried to suggest that the flies represent the armies of Egypt. This seems unlikely, however, since the invasion by the latter never really occurred.

19 And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all bushes.

verse 19 Just as the bee and the fly are able to penetrate every area of the valleys, rocks, thorns, and bushes, so too would the Assyrian soldiers penetrate every area of the kingdom of Judah. No part of the land will be free of enemy occupation.

20 In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet; and it shall also consume the beard.

verse 20 After Isaiah prophesied to Ahaz, Ahaz summarily rejected Isaiah's words. Ahaz then went straight to the temple, stripped off all its precious ornaments, and sent them to the king of Assyria as a bribe to induce him to immediately attack Syria and Israel before they attacked Judah.

“shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired” A hired foreign mercenary will destroy the people. Isaiah continued prophesying: The “hired gun” (or in this case the “hired razor”), Assyria, will one day turn on him who hired it. Verse 20 is more smoothly translated: “In that day the Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the river [Euphrates]—the king of Assyria—to shave your head and the hair of your legs, and to take off your beards also” (NIV). The shaving of the head, feet, and face symbolizes the complete conquest of the people and the land.

The Assyrians cut off all the hair from their captives for three reasons: humiliation, sanitation (especially while traveling under crude conditions to Assyria), and separation. If any slaves escaped while being moved from their home land, they could not blend in with other peoples since their hairless state would betray them. Thus they could be quickly recaptured.

It is interesting to note that Isaiah occasionally, as in this verse, uses the metaphor of sea and river to denote an evil power. This may have originated in ancient Near Eastern mythology wherein the terms sea and river denote the evil powers which the god Baal must overcome before he assumes the throne of El, the father god. A few other passages in Isaiah associate the arch tyrant with sea or river (see also 2 Nephi 15:30; 18:7).

21 And it shall come to pass in that day, a man shall nourish a young cow and two sheep;

22 And it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk they shall give he shall eat butter; for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land.

verses 21-22 People will retain only a fraction of their original herds and flocks, yet the population will be so decimated that even this limited livestock will provide ample milk and curds. Verse 22 is more clearly rendered: “And because of the abundance of the milk they give, he will have curds to eat. All who remain in the land will eat curds and honey” (NIV).

23 And it shall come to pass in that day, every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, which shall be for briers and thorns.

verse 23 The abundance of honey in the land doubtless results from the large land areas that are left uncultivated and turn to wild flowers, weeds, and other blossom-producing plants. The once valuable and carefully cultivated lands (planted with a thousand vines) will turn to briers and thorns. “Silverlings” are small pieces of silver. The expression “at a thousand silverlings” means worth a thousand silver shekels—very valuable.

24 With arrows and with bows shall men come thither, because all the land shall become briers and thorns.

verse 24 The land will be overrun with “briers and thorns” (a metaphor for desolation), and only hunters will use the land.

25 And all hills that shall be digged with the mattock, there shall not come thither the fear of briers and thorns; but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and the treading of lesser cattle.

verse 25 A modern translation is clearer: “As for all the hills once cultivated by the hoe [mattock], you will no longer go there for fear of the briers and thorns; they will become places where cattle are turned loose and where sheep run” (NIV).

2 Nephi Chapter 18

This chapter is a translation of the same materials found in Isaiah chapter 8 of the King James Version of the Bible.

In this chapter Isaiah presents three symbols of Jesus Christ. They are water (verse 6), a temple (verse 14), and light (verses 17-22). See the verse commentary for a further elucidation of these symbolisms.

The prophecies in this chapter, unlike many of Isaiah's other prophecies in previously quoted chapters, seem to apply largely to the time of Isaiah. They are still of value to us as we may observe how the Lord deals with his people when they are disobedient.

1 Moreover, the word of the Lord said unto me: Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man's pen, concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

verse 1 A "great roll" is either a scroll, roll, or tablet, perhaps a wooden writing tablet with a wax writing surface. The Lord said to Isaiah, "Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen: Maher-shalal-hash-baz which means "Quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil." Spoil is riches taken in war, booty. This large scroll was intended for public display and was to serve as a prophecy and a warning.

Keep in mind the setting of this incident: King Ahaz, against Isaiah's advice, had just appealed to Assyria for help against the combined armies of Samaria and Syria. Isaiah had warned him not to form an alliance with Assyria, but rather to trust only in the Lord. Additionally, the northern Kingdom of Israel had sunk to an advanced state of disobedience and apostasy. This message, then, recorded on a scroll was a prophecy of the dire consequences of disobeying the Lord's counsel. Once written on a large parchment, this message was to be carried to the people to warn that an Assyrian attack was imminent. It is an inspired message of judgment and condemnation.

The name on this large scroll was to serve as a sign of the great quickness ("quick" and "swift") with which Assyria would plunder Israel. The message was doubtless delivered to the people both in Judah and Israel, as Isaiah was the Lord's mouthpiece for both groups. The warning was intended for both nations.

2 And I took unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.

verse 2 Isaiah called in two reliable witnesses to witness the recording of the prophecy. Two witnesses were required by the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). Uriah was a well-known figure who worked as a priest in the Jerusalem temple (2 Kings 16:10-16). Little is known of Zechariah other than that he was the son of

Jeberechiah and was considered to be a faithful witness. He may have been the same Zechariah who was King Ahaz's father-in-law (2 Kings 18:2).

3 And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived and bare a son. Then said the Lord to me: Call his name, Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

verse 3 The "prophetess" is Isaiah's wife. It has been suggested that she was referred to as the "prophetess" because she was the bearer of the Lord's word, incarnate in her son. That is, the name of her son became a great prophecy (Motyer, J. Alec, *Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, [Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1993], 90). Or, the title may suggest that she, like her husband, enjoyed the spiritual gift of prophecy. The same title is given to Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14).

4 For behold, the child shall not have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, before the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria.

verse 3-4 Isaiah gave his second son this inspired message as his name. Again, the interpretation of this name is "Quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil." See the commentary for verse 1 for an explanation of this peculiar name. Isaiah then prophesied that even before his son was old enough to know how to say, "My father" or "my mother," (within two or three years) both Syria and the Northern kingdom of Israel would be carried off by Assyria. This prophecy began to be fulfilled in 734-732 BC when Tiglath-Pileser III, king of Assyria, captured both lands and plundered their riches. Syria never recovered. Samaria did recover but was conquered again between 732 and 722 BC.

5 The Lord spake also unto me again, saying:

verse 6 In the following verse the symbol of water is used by Isaiah to represent Jesus. Jesus is as essential to our spiritual salvation as water is to our physical salvation. Without water we will die physically, and without Jesus we will die spiritually. In scripture the image of waters is often symbolic of Jesus. He is the "fountain of all righteousness" (Ether 12:28; 8:26; 1 Nephi 2:9). He cleanses the righteous who enter the waters of baptism. He also invites us to drink from the waters of salvation, which forever quench the thirst of those who partake.

6 Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son;

verses 5-6 "waters of Shiloah that go softly" Shiloah was a conduit that was part of the elaborate water system of Jerusalem. It is not certain where it was. Here it is a metaphor of peace and serenity representing trust in the Lord. The water came out

of the perennial Gihon spring in the Kidron Valley east of the city wall. King Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, will soon build a tunnel to bring the water inside the city wall. This cool gentle flow supplied more than enough water for the city of Jerusalem.

The “waters of Shiloah” represent the tender reliable care the Lord provides to his chosen people through the gentle promptings of the Holy Ghost. The Israelites, including those of the northern kingdom, had rejected the word of the Lord given them through Isaiah and had instead embraced the apostate leadership of Pekah, the son of Remaliah and Rezin the king of Syria.

7 Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria and all his glory; and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks.

verse 7 “the waters of the river” The river spoken of here is the great Euphrates that flowed through Assyria. In contrast to verse 6 wherein the “waters of Shiloah” represent the Savior and his gentle ministrations, the waters of the Euphrates are dangerous and destructive. The Euphrates was a great river that commonly flooded out of control. The waters of Shiloah bring life to those who drink them. The Euphrates brings death to those who are swept up in its flood. The waters of the Euphrates represent the king of Assyria. Inasmuch as the inhabitants of Israel had rejected Jesus, the waters of Shiloah, the Lord set upon them the king of Assyria, the strong and mighty waters of the river that would overflow its banks and cover the entire land with its destruction.

8 And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.

verse 8 The completion of the fulfillment of this prophecy began between 732 and 722 BC when Shalmaneser or perhaps his son Sargon II conquered Syria and the northern kingdom.

An interesting note is that Ahaz’s son Hezekiah, a righteous king of Judah, later revolted against Assyria by refusing to send tribute. Assyria retaliated in 701 B.C. and destroyed many of the cities of Judah. Although Assyria was thwarted from crushing Judah’s head, it did besiege Jerusalem “even to the neck.” Jerusalem, therefore, was miraculously preserved at that time (Isaiah 36-37).

“stretching out of his wings” Now we see a change of metaphor. The Assyrian, like a huge bird of prey, overshadows the whole land, ready to pounce.

“O Immanuel” Isaiah concludes his warning to Israel by warning in turn those nations which rise against Judah. He says, referring to the nation of Judah, “God is with us!”

verse 9-10 Isaiah continues his warning to those nations anticipating the overthrow of Judah: His meaning is: If you dare do battle with Judah, it will mean your own eventual overthrow. This warning may have been directed to the alliance between Syria and the northern kingdom.

9 Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear all ye of far countries; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces.

verse 9 An alternate translation is: Form alliances (“associate yourselves”) to do battle with Judah, and you shall be shattered. Listen, all you distant lands. Arm yourselves and prepare for battle (“gird yourselves”), and you shall be shattered. Arm yourselves and prepare for battle, and be shattered.

“gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces” The twice-repeated phrase is probably the result of a scribal error, since this repetition is not found in the Isaiah Scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Donald W. Parry, Jay A. Parry, Tina M. Peterson, *Understanding Isaiah*, [Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, Utah], 85).

10 Take counsel together, and it shall come to naught; speak the word, and it shall not stand; for God is with us.

verse 10 “Naught” means nothing. Plot your strategy, and it will be thwarted. Propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us.

Note that he again concludes verse 10 with the same warning with which he concluded verse 8: “for God is with us!” He may have reference to the sign prophesied in verses 14 and 15.

11 For the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying:

verse 11 The Lord sternly and powerfully (“with a strong hand”) warned Isaiah not to fear the people or cater to them by believing what they believe and by teaching what they want to hear.

12 Say ye not, A confederacy, to all to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid.

verse 12 Do not agree with the people when they are wrong. For example, in the present political situation, don’t over emphasize the threat posed by the conspiracy or confederacy which Israel and Syria have formed against Judah, and thus don’t speak for an alliance with Assyria just because that is the popular idea. Do not fear what they fear. Rather, trust in the Lord.

verses 13-14 In the following two verses, the Savior is represented by the symbol of a building, a temple. He is our cornerstone, our sure foundation.

13 Sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

verse 13 “Sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself” The literal translation from the Hebrew reads, “make him a temple, the Lord of Hosts,” meaning let the Lord be your temple, your place of holiness. The same idea is contained in the following verse in the phrase “And he shall be for a sanctuary.” Peter and Nephi used similar language: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts” (1 Peter 3:15) and “they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob” (2 Nephi 27:34).

“let him be your fear” Be reverent and humble before God. Fear only him. To fear the Lord is to honor, revere, trust, and obey him. Only he is to be regarded as holy. Only he is to be feared or revered. The noun “dread” means the object of fear mixed with reverence or awe.

14 And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

15 And many among them shall stumble and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.

verse 14-15 To be snared is to be entangled; to be brought into unexpected evil, perplexity, or danger.

“both the houses of Israel” This phrase refers to both of the kingdoms of the house of Israel—Israel and Judah. To both of these the Lord will be a sanctuary, a temple, a place of refuge and protection. But he and his teachings will also be a “stone of stumbling,” “a rock of offense” that causes unbelieving Israelites to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. For the people of Jerusalem he will be a “gin”—a trap or a snare.

16 Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.

verse 16 The Lord commands Isaiah to record, tie up with a strip of leather or a cord, and seal the manuscript containing his testimony with wax (“bind up” and “seal”) as a symbol that the prophecies and testimonies are complete. Thus, they may stand (with the testimonies of the other prophets—the combination forming “the law”) as a permanent witness against the people.

A divine sequence is illustrated here. The Lord’s people must first receive the law by covenant. Then they warn the world’s inhabitants of God’s coming judgments. After they have testified to and warned the nations, they will figuratively “bind,” “tie up,”

or “shut up” their testimonies and “affix a seal” to the law of God. Finally the judgments of God will come (see D&C 88:84; 109:38, 46; 133:72) (*TPJS*, 92).

verses 17-22 These verses contain the subtle imagery of light and darkness. As we walk through mortality, we pass through shadow and darkness. We must come to yearn for and search for and recognize the light which is symbolic of the Savior (see also 2 Nephi 19:2).

17 And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.

verse 17 To “wait upon the Lord” is to hope for and anticipate expected blessings. The phrase implies a significant element of patience and long suffering. Isaiah will wait patiently for the Lord’s will to be revealed and for his promises to be fulfilled even when the Lord chooses to remain silent (“hideth his face”) for the time being because of Israel’s intransigence.

“I will look for him” The literal translation reads, “I will hope for him” (Jacob 4:4).

18 Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of Hosts, which dwelleth in Mount Zion.

verse 18 Isaiah identifies his own symbolic name and that of his two sons as special signs given to the people by the Lord. *Isaiah* means “Jehovah is salvation.” The names of his two sons, *Shear-jashub* and *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* mean, respectively, “the remnant shall return” and “quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil.” For a discussion of the significance of the name Shear-jashub, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 16:3, 13. For a discussion of the meaning of the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 18:1.

“Mount Zion” In almost a mythical sense, the Lord was said by the ancient Hebrews to dwell on Mount Zion. “Mount Zion” probably refers to the top of Mount Moriah in Jerusalem where the ancient temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel, and Herod were built.

19 And when they shall say unto you: Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep and mutter—should not a people seek unto their God for the living to hear from the dead?

verse 19 “them that have familiar spirits” These are sorcerers or mediums who commune with the dead by witchcraft.

“wizards that peep and mutter” These are also sorcerers or mediums.

20 To the law and to the testimony; and if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

verse 19-20 A clearer translation: You have been advised to consult with mediums and spiritualists. Wouldn't it be better to consult with God? How else might the living expect to hear from the dead? The diviner who does not speak according "to the law" [the discourses of Moses, the scriptures] and "to the testimony" [the scriptural witnesses of the prophets] is not of God.

verses 21-22 Again, referring to the diviner or false prophet, Isaiah observes: Displaced and hungry, they will pass through (roam) the land. When they become famished they will become enraged and look upward and curse God. Then they will look earthward and see only distress, gloom, and darkness.

21 And they shall pass through it hardly bestead and hungry; and it shall come to pass that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward.

verse 21 "hardly bestead" Hard pressed, distressed, perplexed, beset by troubles or enemies, in a plight.

"they shall fret themselves" They shall worry.

22 And they shall look unto the earth and behold trouble, and darkness, dimness of anguish, and shall be driven to darkness.

It would seem that Nephi's inclusion of this prophecy, which pertains largely to the times of the prophet Isaiah, is for us today a call to faith. There can be no salvation in foreign alliances, rather our hope must rest in the assurance that our Savior stands at our side as we remain true to the principles of his gospel.

2 Nephi Chapter 19

In chapters 19 and 20, the historical setting still involves the Assyrian conflict of 736 to 701 BC. For a review of these events, see the supplementary article, *The Historical Setting of the Book of Isaiah*. By the time chapter 19 begins, Ahaz has ignored Isaiah's warning not to form an alliance with Assyria, and the confederation between Judah and Assyria is an accomplished fact. In these chapters Isaiah warns specifically of the impending captivity of the northern ten tribes, and he prophesies also of a later Assyrian attack upon the southern kingdom. This latter siege did occur under the leadership of the Assyrian Sennacherib.

The Immanuel prophecy is further elaborated in chapter 19 as Isaiah prophesies of a "new light" and a new leader for Israel. Again, the old question of what time period Isaiah had in mind is raised. Was he foretelling a new leader to appear in his own time—perhaps young King Hezekiah—or was he prophesying of the Savior's birth some 700 years hence. If Isaiah thought his prophesying applied to his own time, it seems probable that the giver of the revelation had in mind a dual meaning, as any Immanuel of his own day was surely only a type and a foreshadowing of the deliverer to come in the meridian of time.

Chapter 19 is a translation of the same materials that are contained in Isaiah chapter 9 of the King James Version of the Bible. It may be outlined as follows: Verses 1-7 are a continuation of the messianic prophecy in chapter 18. Verses 8-21 consist of a prophecy of judgment against the northern kingdom of Israel. This judgment was, of course, fulfilled by the Assyrian conquest and exile between 732 and 722 BC.

1 Nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali, and afterwards did more grievously afflict by the way of the Red Sea beyond Jordan in Galilee of the nations.

verse 1 "Nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali" The word "nevertheless" links this verse with the prophecies in chapter 18. In this phrase Isaiah refers to two separate time periods in Israel's history: a former darker period and a later time of relative light.

The former time is likely the gloomy period of Isaiah's own life ("in her vexation," during her great trouble or period of distress) when the Assyrians were afflicting (albeit relatively "lightly") the Israelites particularly the northern kingdom of Israel and especially those living in two lands located to the west and southwest of the Sea of Galilee, Zebulun and Naphtali (see the illustration, *Territories of the Tribes*). It is in

these lands where Jesus will spend most of his mortal ministry. These lands were occupied by the first major tribes to be later crushed and deported to Assyria.

The latter time period (when “the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation”) probably refers to the time of Christ’s mortal ministry which was a time of blessings and light. Matthew noted that during his time Jesus dwelt in Capernaum, a city that was located “in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim,” as a fulfillment of this prophecy (Matthew 4:13-16).

The New International Version of the Bible renders this phrase: “There will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.”

There are other possibilities for the identity of the former dark period and the later time of light. These include: (1) The darkness is Assyria and the light is King Hezekiah who was victorious over Assyria. (2) The darkness may represent Israel’s wickedness and apostasy, and the light symbolizes the dramatic religious reform that took place after Ahaz’s death under the leadership of both Hezekiah and Isaiah. (3) The dark, again, is wickedness and apostasy, and the light is the ministry of Jesus Christ (see Matthew 4:12-16). (4) Even a latter-day setting may be applicable. The darkness is the time of great destruction before the Savior’s second coming. The light is the Millennium when Christ shall reign personally upon the earth.

As the following verses unfold, note how all five interpretations might apply.

“Nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation” Here Isaiah refers to Israel and says that in the later time period there will be no gloom for “her” (Israel) to compare to that which afflicted her in the former time. While in the former time (Isaiah’s day) Israel was afflicted by Assyria, Isaiah promises that in the latter time period Israel will know no such gloom.

“and afterwards did more grievously afflict by the way of the Red Sea beyond Jordan in Galilee of the nations” This phrase suggests that at some unspecified later time, God will “more grievously afflict” Israel. This is confusing since the first phrase of the verse promises a gloomy former time and a less gloomy later time. The Hebrew verb which is here translated “more grievously afflict” is *kaved* which literally means “make heavy.” Translators differ as to the meaning of this verb in the context of this verse. It would seem that a more plausible translation is one that is used in more modern translations of the Bible. These contain the idea that the Lord will “make glorious” (Revised Standard Version) or “exalt” (Avraham Gileadi) Israel in the later time period. These modern translations are more consistent with the next verse and also more compatible with the gospel writer’s interpretation of the verse (Matthew 4:12-16).

In the later time period, where is this “brighter day” supposed to begin? The King James Version of Isaiah 9:1 indicates that it will occur “by way of the sea, beyond Jordan in Galilee of the nations.” This might be more clearly rendered “on the sea route by the Jordan in the Galilee.” Matthew felt that this phrase referred to Capernaum, the

town on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:13-16). In these verses, Matthew presents the fulfillment of the prophecy found in Isaiah 9:1-2. Matthew felt that the cause of the happier time was Jesus Christ's moving to Capernaum to begin his ministry (Matthew 4:13-16).

The inclusion on the brass plates version of the adjective "Red" in this verse—"by way of the Red Sea" is confusing. Perhaps Isaiah had in mind a broader land area.

2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

verse 2 Keep in mind that Isaiah never specifically spells out the times of the former (when "the people . . . walked in darkness" and when "they . . . dwell in the land of the shadow of death") and later (when "the people . . . have seen a great light" and when "upon them hath the light shined") time periods. In your consideration of the next few verses, keep in mind the specific possibilities for these periods discussed in the commentary for verse 1.

Here Isaiah further describes the contrast between these two time periods. In the former time the people "walked in darkness" and "[dwelt] in the land of the shadow of death." The land of the shadow of death is a land peopled by those who do not know Jesus Christ and his gospel; therefore, they walk in darkness. These phrases describe a people in a condition of apostasy and captivity. In the later period they "have seen a great light" (they have heard of Christ), and "upon them hath the light shined." Whether the context is spiritual or political or personal or social is not specified (cf. John 1:5).

If the later time period was indeed to be in Isaiah's future, which seems likely, note that in this verse Isaiah refers to it as if it had already happened ("have seen a great light" and "upon them hath the light shined"). This is common verb usage among Hebrew prophets I have often referred to—the "prophetic perfect" verb tense.

3 Thou hast multiplied the nation, and increased the joy—they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

verse 3 Isaiah is still referring to the later time period spoken of in verses 1 and 2 when the people will experience great joy and great light. A proper interpretation of this verse and the verses that follow depends to some extent upon which specific time and place Isaiah had in mind for this future blessed period. Again, the possibilities are discussed in the commentary for verse 1 in this chapter. If he is referring to Hezekiah, then this verse describes the Israelites' joy at their deliverance. If he is describing a righteous people fighting against wickedness, then the verse describes their joy as they find success. If Isaiah is prophesying of Jesus Christ, then this verse describes his many followers rejoicing over the spiritual blessings he will provide.

“Thou hast multiplied the nation” This phrase seems to be connected to the Abrahamic covenant, wherein the righteous were promised a great multiplication of their posterity (Abraham 3:14; cf. Isaiah 26:15; Nehemiah 9:23).

Isaiah’s analogy illustrating the extent of the people’s joy in this later time period might cause you to raise an eyebrow. They will be as happy as people are at harvest time or as happy as men are when they are dividing the spoils of battle—the territory or goods taken from a defeated foe. Since this later time period is apparently a time of righteous rejoicing, perhaps Isaiah should have reconsidered this latter analogy.

verses 4-7 These verses explain three reasons why the people’s joy shall be increased in this later time period. The first (verse 4) is that the Lord has relieved Israel of its yoke of oppression. The second (verse 5) is that the tools of war shall be destroyed or burned and war will be no more. The third (verses 6-7) is that a child will be born who will establish his righteous government and establish peace among the nations.

4 For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor.

verse 4 The “his’s” in this verse refer to Israel. A “yoke,” of course, is a device to enable one to carry a heavy burden. These burdens might also be carried across one’s shoulders with a “staff.” To brake the yoke or the staff is to relieve Israel of “his” problems. The “staff of his shoulder” refers to a taskmaster’s staff used to smite slaves.” It is a symbol of oppression. The “rod of his oppressor” is bondage.

Depending, again, on Isaiah’s intent, this verse describes the defeat of the Assyrians, the defeat of wickedness, or the victories which Jesus’s ministry will bring. Perhaps most aptly it describes the destruction of the wicked in the latter days that the commencement of the Savior’s earthly reign during the Millennium.

5 For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.

verse 5 The Revised Standard Version of the Bible renders the verse: “For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood [or stained with blood] will be burned as fuel for the fire.”

Boots, garments, weapons, chariots, and other items used during a holy war were not to become part of the booty or spoil of the victors. Such property was under a ban and had to be burned with fire (Joshua 7:23-26; 11:6, 9; Psalm 46:9; Ezekiel 39:9-10). The specific application of this verse may be something like: The tools of the nations’ armies will burn when the Messiah comes to rule. Symbolically and prophetically, the tools of war may refer to all unclean and corruptible things that will be burned with fire at Jesus’s glorious second coming (3 Nephi 25:1; D&C 64:23-24).

6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

verse 6 “For” This is a transitional word that means *because*. It connects the preceding verses to the idea that follows. The joy of the nation has increased, the yoke of the people has been lifted, and oppression and warfare have been removed because Jesus has become the king and now reigns.

“unto us” Unto the house of Israel.

The phrase “unto us a child is born” is actually more accurately translated from the Hebrew “a child has been born to us.” Here is yet another use of the prophetic perfect verb tense.

Clearly the verse refers to a messianic figure, a deliverer. As has been discussed earlier, some scholars believe that the leader being promised in this verse was Hezekiah. Indeed, Hezekiah was a righteous king and helped to bring Judah to a higher spiritual plane. He also brought some measure of peace to the land. It seems almost certain, however, that if Isaiah was writing of Hezekiah, then he viewed him as a “type” of the future Messiah—a symbol of Jesus Christ.

This verse describes some of the titles and roles of the deliverer. While some might apply to Hezekiah, they seem much more appropriately applicable to the Savior.

The titles “child” and “son” refer to his divine parentage. Not only was he the “only begotten” that is, the only man born into mortality as the product of a mortal mother (Mary) and an immortal father—God the Father, but he is also the “Firstborn” that is, the first intelligence in the premortal world to be clothed in a body of spirit by the process of divine procreation.

“the government shall be upon his shoulder” This phrase refers to the vesting right of a king who, during his coronation, has the robe of authority placed upon his shoulders.

“Wonderful, Counselor” Even though a comma is placed between these two titles, the Hebrew reading apparently dictates that these two names be used together as “Wonderful Counselor” without the comma. “Wonderful” therefore is an adjective modifying “Counselor” and not a separate title on its own. A counselor is an advocate, one who argues cases in court. Jesus is our advocate with the Father (John 17:3; 3 Nephi 19:19-29).

“Mighty God” “Mighty” suggests warrior and refers to his role in overcoming the nations and all forms of oppression.

“Everlasting Father” We know that Jesus Christ did apply the titles “Son” and “Father” to himself. He specifically said to the brother of Jared: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son” (Ether 3:14).

On June 30, 1916 the First Presidency published “The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve” (see Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 465-73). In this exposition they acknowledge that Christ is not our literal parent, but that in scripture he is referred to as our “Father” for three of reasons. These include:

1. He is our Father since he is the Creator. “That Jesus Christ, whom we also know as Jehovah, was the executive of the Father, Elohim, in the work of creation is set forth in the book *Jesus the Christ*, chapter 4. Jesus Christ, being the Creator, is consistently called the Father of heaven and earth in the sense explained above; and since His creations are of eternal quality. He is very properly called the Eternal Father of heaven and earth” (Ibid).

2. Jesus is the “Father” of those who abide in his gospel and thereby become heirs of eternal life. In a revelation given through Joseph the Prophet to Emma Smith the Lord Jesus addressed the Emma as “my daughter,” and said: “for verily I say unto you, all those who receive my gospel are sons and daughters in my kingdom” (D&C 25:1). In many instances the Lord has addressed men as his sons (D&C 9:1; 34:3; 121:7).

3. Jesus is the “Father” by divine investiture of authority. In all His dealings with the human family Jesus represents the Father and possesses the Father’s full power and authority. To the Jews he said: “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30; see also 14:10; 17:11, 22). Also he said, “I am come in my Father’s name” (John 5:43; see also 10:25). The same truth was declared by Christ himself to the Nephites (see 3 Nephi 11:27; compare 9:15; 19:23; 28:10), and has been reaffirmed by revelation in our present dispensation (D&C 50:43). This is true of Jesus and the Father in premortal life as well as during and after the Savior’s mortal sojourn. In other words, God the Father and his firstborn spirit Son, whether acting as the premortal Jehovah or later as the resurrected Lord, were so unified in mind and will that what one thought, said, and did, the other one thought, said, and did—exactly.

It wasn’t simply exalted status, superior knowledge, or intense power and influence that made Jesus God in our premortal existence. If that were so, then Lucifer’s claim to that very position (Moses 4:1-2; Abraham 3:27-28) would have had some validity, for he possessed a lofty and exalted position among the Father’s spirit children (D&C 76:25). Another ingredient was requisite for Godhood. One had to be endowed and invested—indeed, ordained—with the power and authority to speak and act as God the Father. To speak and act in the place of God the Father was not an honor that could be arrogated unto oneself, as the story of Satan’s attempts shows us.

President Joseph Fielding Smith taught the following:

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. 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 (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:27).

We may add yet a fourth reason for referring to Jesus Christ as the Father. In his role of Jehovah, God of the Old Testament, he became known as the God or Father of Heaven.

“Prince of Peace” Christ is part of God’s royal family. He is a prince who shares the throne with the Father. He eliminates war and contention and reigns over a peaceful kingdom.

7 Of the increase of government and peace there is no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.

verse 7 Here Isaiah describes the duration of the reign of the deliverer of Israel. He will reign eternally.

“Of the increase of government and peace there is no end” This new sovereign government and the peace which accompanies it shall have no end.

“upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth, even forever” On the throne and over David’s kingdom (the house of Israel), his rule—that of the deliverer—will be organized with a terrestrial (during the Millennium) and later a celestial order (“to order it”) and established by virtue of justice and righteousness forever.

“The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.” This phrase, also found in 2 Kings 19:31 and in Isaiah 37:32, is a promise that the Lord will use his strength to fulfill his word.

8 The Lord sent his word unto Jacob and it hath lighted upon Israel.

verse 8 Isaiah’s attention is now turned to the rebellious northern kingdom with its dominant tribe of Ephraim and its capital in Samaria. It also has application to the covenant people of our day.

“The Lord sent his word unto Jacob and it hath lighted upon Israel.” The Lord sent his warnings to “Jacob” (the house of Israel), particularly to “Israel” (the northern Kingdom of Israel). The Lord has begun to send his judgments against the northern kingdom, and those judgments will eventually punish the entire kingdom of Israel if they fail to repent.

The initial part of the Assyrian invasion has already occurred with the deportation of major portions of the northernmost Israelite tribes, Zebulun and Naphtali (again, see

the illustration, *Territories of the Tribes*). The kingdom of Israel has had a taste of the Lord's judgment but apparently has not learned or profited from it.

In the next several verses, the Lord issues four specific warnings. He warns against pride (verses 9-12); against the wickedness of the leaders (verses 13-17); against selfishness and the lack of love and kindness (verses 18-21); and against neglecting the poor and needy—social injustice (2 Nephi 20:1-4). Each of these specific warnings is part of a single prophecy but is divided structurally with an identical poetic refrain at the end of each section: "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still." This prophecy has a dual fulfillment: first, when the ancient kingdom of Israel was destroyed, and second, when the world will be destroyed at the time of the second coming of Christ.

9 And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of heart:

verse 9 The terms "Ephraim" and "Samaria" are used by Isaiah to refer to Israel's Northern Kingdom. The dominant tribe is Ephraim, and the capital city is Samaria.

"stoutness of heart" Pride or haughtiness. The opposite is "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (3 Nephi 9:20).

10 The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars.

verses 9-10 "Hewn stones" are stones shaped with tools. "Sycamores" are fig trees. The people are bragging.

One might expect those of the northern kingdom ("Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria") to learn important lessons from the destruction occurring around them. These lessons might include humility, appropriate fear, and a desire to repent. Instead, these northern Israelites betray pride and arrogance of heart by boasting that they will rebuild a civilization more glorious and luxurious than the one that is beginning to be destroyed.

11 Therefore the Lord shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies together;

verse 11 Keep in mind that at this time, Rezin was the king of Syria residing in Damascus. Isaiah outlines the consequences of Israel's pride. First, Rezin's enemy, Assyria, would overthrow Syria. Assyria would then unite the conquered Syrians with the conquered Philistines. The Philistines were enemies of Israel who lived in the south of Palestine near the Mediterranean coast. At this time in history, the Philistines

had been subdued by Assyria. Then these united enemies of Israel will turn against Israel.

The antecedent of “him” and “his” in this verse is not clear. It is likely Israel.

12 The Syrians before and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

verse 12 Together the Syrians, Philistines, and Assyrians will sweep into the kingdom of Israel and swallow it up with one gulp. The Syrians are located “before” (in the northeast), and the Philistines are “behind” (in the west).

“they shall devour Israel with open mouth” This phrase is symbolic of the attack of a lion. The prophets often compare warring nations to lions that mangle and destroy. Israel, in this phrase refers not to the entire house of Israel, but to the northern Kingdom of Israel.

“For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.” See the commentary for 2 Nephi 15:25. Likely the idea is intended that while the Lord’s judgment and punishment still hang over the people, his hand is always stretched forth to help them and receive them if they accept him.

13 For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts.

verse 13 Isaiah explains why the Lord allowed the northern kingdom to be overrun: The people did not turn to the Lord, nor did they seek him.

“him that smiteth them” This refers, of course, to the Lord. To “turn” is to repent.

14 Therefore will the Lord cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush in one day.

verse 14 “Head” represents the elders and old men of the community, and “tail” symbolizes false prophets (see the following verse). The “branch” is a palm branch, located high up on the tree, representing society’s leaders. “Rush” is a stiff, grass-like plant and represents the common people. Again in this phrase, Israel refers not to the entire house of Israel, but rather to the northern Kingdom of Israel.

“in one day” Quickly.

15 The ancient, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail.

verse 15 The Lord will cause the northern kingdom’s leaders to be carried away captive.

16 For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed.

verse 16 The northern kingdom's leaders are leading them astray, and both the leaders and those who are being led astray shall suffer the consequences.

17 Therefore the Lord shall have no joy in their young men, neither shall have mercy on their fatherless and widows; for every one of them is a hypocrite and an evildoer, and every mouth speaketh folly. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

verse 17 Virtually all in the northern kingdom are apostate and have incurred the Lord's wrath, even those whom the Lord ordinarily favors—the youth, the orphans, and the widows. Nearly all of them are hypocrites and evil doers and speak “folly” or foolishness.

“For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still” Again, the same two-fold promise found in 2 Nephi 15:25 and 2 Nephi 19:12 is given. For its interpretation see the commentary for 2 Nephi 19:12.

18 For wickedness burneth as the fire; it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forests, and they shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke.

verse 18 All of this wickedness in the northern kingdom will be consumed by the fire and the sword of the Assyrians. The destruction will sweep through the entire land including the forests with their thickets, briars, and thorns. Isaiah compares the wicked to undesirable plants such as briars, thorns, and thickets.

“They shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke” is better translated: “They shall all roll upward in a column of smoke” (Revised Standard Version).

The burning of the wicked here is a type and shadow of the burning that will occur at the Lord's second coming.

19 Through the wrath of the Lord of Hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire; no man shall spare his brother.

verse 19 The fire and smoke of the impending destruction will darken the land and the Israelites will be consumed in the fire.

“no man shall spare his brother” Even in the midst of this all-consuming destruction, the people will evidence their self centeredness by turning upon one another rather than looking out for one another.

20 And he shall snatch on the right hand and be hungry; and he shall eat on the left hand and they shall not be satisfied; they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm—

verse 20 In the chaos of destruction there will be a great shortage of food, and the people will go hungry and will “snatch” and steal from one another whatever they can. Yet circumstances are so difficult that even then they will remain hungry even possibly to the point of cannibalism.

21 Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh; they together shall be against Judah. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

verse 21 Since the northern ten tribes had broken away from Judah in 931 BC, in the north the tribe of Joseph had been the dominant and leading tribe. The expression “Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh” implies that during the coming crisis the tribe of Joseph will be internally divided. Manasseh will fight against Ephraim, and Ephraim will contend against Manasseh. Only their common hatred of Judah will unite them in making war on the southern kingdom.

“For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.” Yet again, Isaiah repeats the two-fold promise found in 2 Nephi 15:25, 2 Nephi 19:12, and 2 Nephi 19:17. For an interpretation, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 19:12.

2 Nephi Chapter 20

This chapter is a translation of the same materials found in Isaiah chapter 10 in the King James Version of the Bible. It may be outlined as follows: Verses 1-11: Because of the sins of Israel, the Lord permits the Assyrian army, the Lord's rod, to war against the apostate Israelites. Verses 12-19: Because of its pride and overzealousness, Assyria will then be destroyed by her enemies. The fire that will destroy Assyria foreshadows the fire that will destroy the wicked at the second coming. Verses 20-27: A remnant of Israel will return to their lands of promise and "unto the mighty God." Verses 28-32: The march of the great Assyrian army southward towards Jerusalem. As the army traveled it sacked and destroyed all towns and villages in its path. Verses 33-34: Jehovah, as the great forester, uses his mighty iron ax to chop down Assyria's armies as they approach Zion.

verses 1-2 Isaiah continues his warnings and exhortations of the northern kingdom. Particularly he focuses on those leaders who proclaim laws and regulations that oppress the poor and needy.

1 Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed;

verse 1 This verse is more clearly translated: "Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers who issue oppressive decrees."

"Woe" is severe distress and anguish resulting from God's judgments.

One of the major themes found in Isaiah's writings is the concept that the covenant people have social and moral obligations. Particularly did he stress the responsibility of society to care for the needs of its less fortunate members, especially the widows and orphans. He condemned the rich who oppressed the poor.

"unrighteous decrees" These are unjust laws which serve the rich and powerful while preying upon the weak, such as the fatherless and the widows.

"write grievousness" To write oppressive laws.

2 To turn away the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless!

verse 2 "Judgment" here means justice.

"To take away right from the poor" means to rob the poor of their rights.

These unrighteous leaders who create unjust laws (verse 1) prey upon the socially deprived, including the needy, the poor, the widows, and the fatherless.

3 And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory?

verse 3 The Lord changes the pronoun from “they” used in verses 1-2 to “ye” referring to the wicked leaders of Samaria. Because of the wickedness of Samaria’s leaders, the Lord, through Isaiah, warns them that in the coming onslaught, they will be left bereft of divine help.

“**The day of visitation**” and “**the desolation which shall come from far**” refer to the day of punishment or the coming onslaught against the kingdom of Israel by Assyria. Second meanings for “the day of visitation” and “the desolation which shall come from far” might be the Lord’s second coming and the desolation or destruction that will precede that second coming.

“**to whom will ye flee for help?**” This is a rhetorical question, showing that during the day of visitation the wicked will have no one to turn to for help, for they will have rejected God.

“**and where will ye leave your glory**” This phrase may be restated, “and where will you hide your wealth?” At the day of judgment, one’s riches will be meaningless and will not assist in saving one’s soul.

4 Without me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

verse 4 “**bow down under the prisoners**” In the desperation and fear produced by the coming onslaught, some Israelites, having been left bereft of divine help, will try to escape by hiding among their fellow Israelite prisoners, and they will even hide among the slain.

“**For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.**” Again, the oft-repeated, two-fold promise. See its interpretation in the commentary for 2 Nephi 19:12.

5 O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is their indignation.

verse 5 The Lord is speaking in verses 5-7. A less confusing translation is, “Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury!” (Revised Standard Version). “O Assyrian” refers to the king of Assyria as well as to his nation. Here the Lord reveals that he has allowed Assyria to become a powerful nation, a “rod” and “staff” that will smite and chasten, so that he might utilize that nation to mete out his judgments upon various deserving nations, especially apostate Israel. But Assyria, her leaders, and her armies will soon be destroyed according to God’s plan.

The latter-day application is that Assyria represents the wicked nations of the last days that will worship idols and false gods and goddesses, war against Israel, and eventually be consumed by the Lord's glory and majesty during the second coming.

6 I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.

verse 6 The emphasis here is that the Lord is doing the sending. He is allowing Assyria's army to have success as they come against the northern kingdom of Israel to whom the Lord refers as "a hypocritical nation" (because they will not keep their covenants) and "the people of my wrath" (they are to be punished because of their hypocrisy). The "spoil" is the money, land, and other valuable possessions which the victorious Assyrians will take from their victims—their "prey." The Assyrians will stomp or walk upon them ("tread them") in the filth or refuse of the streets ("the mire"). The "spoil" and "prey" also allude to the prophetic name of Isaiah's son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, which name means Quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil. This suggests that Isaiah's earlier prophecy as communicated in the name of his son finds at least partial fulfillment in Assyria's capturing and plundering of Israel.

verses 7-19 Here Isaiah, in eloquent poetic style, castigates the Assyrian king for failing to realize that only through the Lord's behest has Assyria been allowed to come to power. Because he has attributed his power to his own virtues, Assyria's army will themselves feel the hand of the Lord in punishment.

7 Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but in his heart it is to destroy and cut off nations not a few.

verse 7 "Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so" However, the Assyrian king does not understand, in his heart and mind, the real perspective of this event as stated in verse 6. He does not comprehend whence his power comes.

"in his heart it is to destroy and cut off nations not a few" He intends to go on destroying several other nations, even the world, for his own purposes, not the Lord's. He means to gain glory and riches for himself.

8 For he saith: Are not my princes altogether kings?

verse 8 In verses 8 and 9, the Assyrian king is the speaker. The Assyrian king asks, "Are not my commanders all 'kings' and deserving of their own conquered lands which they can rule over"? His implication is also, "Am I not the king of kings"?

9 Is not Calno as Carchemish? Is not Hamath as Arpad? Is not Samaria as Damascus?

verse 9 The Assyrian king does not distinguish among his various conquests—he sees no divine purposes. They are all only conquests. Calno, Carchemish, Hamath, and Arpad are Mesopotamian, Syrian, and Israelite cities already captured by Assyria. Is not Samaria, the land of the ten tribes of Israel, just another of my conquests like Damascus in Syria?

10 As my hand hath founded the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria;

11 Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and to her idols?

verses 10-11 Now the Lord is speaking. He says, in effect, “I have extended my power even to pagan kingdoms (“kingdoms of the idols” with their “graven images,”—artistic representations of animate creatures such as paintings or statues which serve as idols or objects of worship) whose worship of idols even exceeds that of the apostate Israelites. I have empowered even them so that my purposes might be carried out. As I have allowed Samaria to be destroyed to purge it of its wickedness and apostasy, so will I do one day to Jerusalem.”

“My hand hath founded” might be interpreted, “my power has reached or been extended to.”

“**whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria**” The Lord, in order to accomplish his purposes, has even extended his power to pagan countries which worship more idols than do the Israelites. The Lord here condemns Israel for her apostasy—“her idols.”

12 Wherefore it shall come to pass that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and upon Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks.

verse 12 After the Lord has allowed Assyria to punish the Israelites including Jerusalem (“Mount Zion” refers to the temple of Jerusalem and the mountain upon which it stood), he will then deal with the king of Assyria who claimed victory due to his own strength and did not rightfully give credit to the Lord. The phrase “stout heart” here means “proud; resolute; obstinate” (Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language).

As was implied in the preceding verse, the Lord states again that Jerusalem will actually be attacked by Assyria as was Samaria. This prophesied invasion took place in 701 BC when the Assyrian commander Sennacherib besieged Judah and Jerusalem. He captured or destroyed many settlements in Judah. Before Jerusalem could be

taken, however, the Lord sent a terrible epidemic illness through the Assyrian army camp killing many and causing them to have to beat a hasty retreat.

The Lord will punish the Assyrian king for “the fruit of the stout heart”—his evil works and arrogant boasting—and “the glory of his high looks”—his haughty pride—both of which are demonstrated in verses 13 and 14.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, partial fulfillment of this promise of punishment came when an “angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians,” destroying 185,000 people while they were besieging Jerusalem in 701 BC (2 Kings 19:35).

13 For he saith: By the strength of my hand and by my wisdom I have done these things; for I am prudent; and I have moved the borders of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man;

verse 13 The king of Assyria said: “I have been able to conquer because of my own strength.”

“for I am prudent” “I am wise and have good judgment.”

“I have moved the borders of the people” “I have done away with the borders between nations. I have joined their lands with my own kingdom.”

“like a valiant man” Assyria’s king boasts that he has succeeded in robbing them of their properties, goods, and treasures “like the courageous man that I am.”

14 And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people; and as one gathereth eggs that are left have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped.

verse 14 The Assyrian king continues saying, “As I raided the ‘hen house,’ no one dared lift a finger to stop me.” He boastfully claims he had gathered the riches of peoples he conquered as one gathers eggs from an abandoned nest.

15 Shall the ax boast itself against him that heweth therewith? Shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself as if it were no wood!

verse 15 Shall the axe vaunt itself over him who swings it? Shall the saw place itself above him who cuts with it? Just as these questions are silly, it would be just as absurd if the rod should manipulate him who wields it or if the staff should lift itself as though it were not an inanimate object. In other words, the king of Assyria functioned as mere rod and staff in the hand of the Lord to smite the unrighteous deserving, yet he sought to aggrandize himself and to assume the role of world leader on his own supposed merits.

16 Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, send among his fat ones, leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire.

verse 16 The specific punishments to be meted out by the Lord to the Assyrian king are spelled out: The Lord will send among his “fat ones” (those with abundance) leanness (poverty and deprivation). He will “send a wasting sickness among his stout warriors” (Revised Standard Version). Perhaps Isaiah is prophesying here of the specific malady which befell the Assyrian army when they laid siege to Jerusalem in 701 BC. See the commentary for verse 12 above.

“under his [the Assyrian king’s] glory he [the Lord] shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire” The haughty pride of the Assyrian king will be burned up and destroyed.

17 And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame, and shall burn and shall devour his thorns and his briers in one day;

verse 17 This verse symbolically states that the God of Israel will burn or destroy Assyria. The Lord is “the light of Israel” and Israel’s “Holy One.”

The first two phrases of the first line of this verse state the same idea and are an example of synonymous parallelism wherein the second phrase restates the idea expressed in the first phrase. The idea is that the God of Israel will do the burning, the destroying.

The antecedent of the pronoun “his” in the first line is “Israel.” Thus, the reference is to Israel’s Holy One, or to the God of Israel.

“shall devour his thorns and his briers” In this second line, the antecedent of the pronoun “his” is Assyria. In a figurative single day the Lord will destroy Assyria. “Thorns” and “briers” are metaphor for the wicked. The “thorns” and “briers” in this verse and the “forest” and “fruitful field” in the following verse when combined with one another seem to signify the whole of Assyria—complete annihilation—of both “soul and body.”

18 And shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body; and they shall be as when a standard-bearer fainteth.

verse 18 The “forest” represents the people, in this case the people of Assyria, and the “field” symbolizes the world. The destruction of the forest and the field signifies the totality of destruction, as does their destruction “both soul and body.”

“they shall be as when a standard-bearer fainteth” In battle the “standard-bearer” was the man who carried the flag which served as a focal point and rallying cry to keep the warriors organized. Without the standard-bearer and his standard, the fighting men were likely to be reduced to a state of ineffective chaos.

19 And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them.

verse 19 After the destruction of Assyria, the “trees” of her “forest,” which figuratively represents the number of surviving Assyrians, will be so few that even a child could “write them”—list them or count them. Some time later Assyria was destroyed so completely by Babylon and Persia that Assyrians ceased to be a distinct people.

20 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them, but shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

verse 20 Here Isaiah again prophesies that scattered Israel will one day return to the Lord and their promised land. The theme of a “remnant” returning is a recurrent theme in Isaiah’s writings. A “remnant” of Israel implies those that are remaining—those that are still inclined to seek out the Lord after the physical and spiritual scattering (apostasy) which will befall the house of Israel.

Isaiah’s “remnant” may be divided into two groups. First, there is the “historical remnant.” These are perhaps the scattered Israelites of ancient Palestine who remained in Assyria or Babylon after the sieges and destructions between 732 and 722 BC and that in 587 BC. Some eventually returned to their lands and to their temple. Isaiah also promises the return of a future righteous remnant. We may refer to this latter group as the “eschatological remnant.” Eschatology (pronounced es-kat-ology) is the study of “last things.” Thus, this remnant will return to the Lord and to Zion in a latter-day setting following the great wars of destruction that will occur before the Lord’s second coming.

“it shall come to pass in that day” What “day” is being referred to here? As discussed in the introduction to 1 Nephi chapter 20, there are only two major gatherings of Israel known to us which followed Isaiah’s day. The first was in 538 B.C. when the Israelites were released from captivity in Babylon by Cyrus the Persian. The only other gathering is now occurring in this final dispensation as missionaries of the Savior’s Kingdom on earth spread the gospel, and those who are converted gather to Zion.

“such as are escaped of the house of Jacob” These are members of the house of Israel who will “survive” the desolation and ruin of the physical and spiritual scatterings of Israel. These are the righteous “remnant” who are inclined to return again to the Lord. You might also want to review the various “scatterings” of Israel discussed in the introduction to 1 Nephi chapter 20. These scatterings will occur between 732 and 722 BC when the northern kingdom of Israel will be captured by Assyria; in 587 BC when the southern kingdom of Judah will be crushed by Babylon; and in AD 70 when the Romans will destroy Jerusalem.

“stay upon him that smote them” “stay upon the Lord” To “stay upon” is to remain faithful to. The righteous remnant of Israelites will not be “converted” to the Assyrian culture and its heathen ways, rather they will remain faithful to the Lord.

21 The remnant shall return, yea, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God.

verse 21 “The remnant shall return” This phrase recalls Isaiah’s prophecy which he made in naming his son, Shear-jashub, whose name literally means “the remnant shall return.” The word “return” also means “repent.”

Exactly which remnant and precisely when they shall return and repent is not specified in this verse. While certainly a few Israelites taken captive into Assyria between 732 and 722 BC did escape and make their way back to their own land, there was no major gathering of the northern kingdom of Israel once they were taken captive. Isaiah was likely prophesying of a future “remnant” such as those Jews who returned from captivity in Babylon in 538 B.C. after the defeat of Babylon by Cyrus the Persian or even of the “eschatological remnant” spoken of in the commentary for the preceding verse who will gather to Zion in this final dispensation.

22 For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return; the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness.

verse 22 Insert the word “only” after “yet” for clarity. Though those born into the house of Israel are as numerous as the sands of the sea, only a relatively small number of them shall return to the Lord.

“the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness” “Consumption” implies massive destruction or annihilation of humanity (see also Isaiah 28:22 and Daniel 9:27). This devastation is decreed by the Lord due to apostasy, but eventually righteousness and restoration shall occur. The prophet Joseph Smith wrote: “The saints have not too much time to save and redeem their dead, and gather together their living relatives, that they may be saved also, before the earth will be smitten, and the consumption decreed falls upon the world” (*TPJS*, 330).

23 For the Lord God of Hosts shall make a consumption, even determined in all the land.

verse 23 For the Lord will carry out the complete destruction decreed upon the whole land. Again this applies to Assyria and later to Jerusalem (in both 587 B.C. and AD 70) and even later to all the earth in the last day.

24 Therefore, thus saith the Lord God of Hosts: O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian; he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt.

verse 24 O people of Zion don’t be afraid of the Assyrians even when they smite you with the rod and lift up their staff against you as did the Egyptians. Isaiah promises Israel that the Lord will eventually relieve them of Assyrian oppression. The concept of

Zion is always attached to a promised land, temple worship, and a covenant people who possess pure hearts.

“after the manner of Egypt” While Egypt often verbally threatened the area of Palestine, it never mounted a serious attack.

Assyria and Egypt were two of Israel’s chief enemies in biblical times. They are also symbolic of the worldly powers that will fight against Zion in the last days. Isaiah tells those who dwell in Zion to trust God and be not afraid of the Assyrian, for his power will be temporary and limited. Eventually God will destroy the Assyrian and save the remnant of Israel.

25 For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction.

verse 25 Israel was scattered because of her transgressions against God. But in due time—“yet a very little while”—the Lord’s anger at the Israelites will cease and his wrath will be directed toward the destruction of Assyria.

26 And the Lord of Hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb; and as his rod was upon the sea so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt.

verse 26 “the Lord of Hosts shall stir up a scourge for him” To “stir up a scourge for him” is to lash him with a whip. After Assyria serves the Lord’s purposes by smiting Israel, he will lash the Assyrians with a whip, meaning he will punish them for their pride and wickedness. The Lord will wield against the Assyrians a scourge as when he smote the Midianites at the rock of Oreb.

“according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb” See Judges chapters 6-8 for a description of this event. The ancient Israelites were plagued at harvest time by “camel raids” by the Midianites who came from across the Jordan River to seize the hard-earned farm products of the Israelites, particularly those in the area just west of the Jordan and in the Jezreel Valley. The coming of these raiders was like a plague of locusts. There seemed to be little the Israelites could do to protect themselves against these invasions, so they fled with their produce into caves and mountain hideouts. In this desperate setting, the Lord called into service the Israelite Gideon. With the help of a mere three hundred men, hand picked by the Lord, Gideon led a surprise attack against the Midianite camp at the change of the guard—perhaps 10 p.m. Apparently the Midianites were provoked into self slaughter by the confusion produced by the unexpected attack. Gideon then pursued the surviving Midianites, caught them, and slew two Midianite princes “upon the rock Oreb.” By this means did Gideon rid the Israelites permanently of the Midianite camel raids.

“as his rod was upon the sea so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt” This refers to the event described in Exodus 14:26-27 when the Egyptians

were thwarted in their pursuing of the Israelites by the previously divided Red Sea's closing over them. Moses had used his rod to divide the Red Sea.

27 And it shall come to pass in that day that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing.

verse 27 “His burden” and “his yoke” refer to the Assyrian oppression of Israel. “Thy shoulder” refers to the shoulder of Israel.

“because of the anointing” This phrase may be a Messianic prophecy of sorts. Jesus Christ is the “Anointed One” meaning that he is the one anointed of the Father to be his personal representative in all things pertaining to this earth. Because of this anointing, the ultimate yokes of damnation, physical death, and spiritual death will be lifted from the shoulder of mankind. Thus the deliverance of Israel from the Assyrians is a type or symbol of deliverance through Jesus Christ, the Anointed One.

verses 28-32 These verses prophesy of the progression of the Assyrian army toward Jerusalem. Many scholars believe that this prophecy was fulfilled when King Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701 BC. This section may also refer to a future campaign against Israel when some of the world's nations war against her. It is quite possible that this prophecy might be fulfilled in the last days.

28 He is come to Aiath, he is passed to Migron; at Michmash he hath laid up his carriages.

verse 28 Assyria's army passes through and likely conquers a series of towns on its way to Jerusalem.

“laid up his carriages” The army stores its equipment and supplies at Michmash, perhaps so that it will not be burdened as it approaches Jerusalem.

29 They are gone over the passage; they have taken up their lodging at Geba; Ramath is afraid; Gibeah of Saul is fled.

verse 29 **“gone over the passage”** This phrase means crossed over the pass—an unnamed mountain pass on its way to Jerusalem.

“they have taken up their lodging at Geba” The Assyrian army temporarily halts their advancements to rest at Geba.

“Ramath” Note that this town is called “Ramah” in the parallel verse in Isaiah 10:29. Did Joseph Smith err in dictating a “t” in the name of this town? It is of some interest that in a couple of later translations of this verse the name is rendered “Ramata” (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan version) and “Rameta” (Christian Syriac Peshitta version). Neither of these versions would have been available to Joseph Smith (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, Deseret Book Company and FARMS, 77).

“Gibeah” was the place of Saul’s birth and his residence while he was king.

30 Lift up the voice, O daughter of Gallim; cause it to be heard unto Laish, O poor Anathoth.

31 Madmenah is removed; the inhabitants of Gebim gather themselves to flee.

verses 30-31 Other Israelite towns are occupied and routed. It was common for the prophets to refer to Near Eastern cities as “daughter of . . .” In verse 31 the phrase “is removed” means is in flight.

32 As yet shall he remain at Nob that day; he shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.

verses 32 The Assyrian army is described as approaching so close to Jerusalem that they will be able to shake their fists at the city (threaten the city) and thus make a mockery of the temple, ancient Israel’s chief religious symbol. The city of Nob is thought by Biblical scholars to have possibly been located on Mount Scopus, just a mile north and east of the city of Jerusalem.

As mentioned previously, it has been suggested that this description of the invasion of Jerusalem may have dual meaning—that is it may refer to both the historical event of Assyria’s attack upon Jerusalem and also to an eschatological (latter-day) attack on Jerusalem by forces from the north just prior to the Lord’s second coming. The argument for Isaiah’s having in mind a future event here is strengthened by the fact that 2 Nephi 21, the chapter which follows, is definitely a prophecy to be fulfilled in the latter days.

verses 33-34 In these verses, Isaiah will symbolically compare the nation of Assyria to a mighty tree, particularly the trees (cedars) of Lebanon, and avers that the Lord will cut them down to preserve Jerusalem.

33 Behold, the Lord, the Lord of Hosts shall lop the bough with terror; and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down; and the haughty shall be humbled.

verse 33 The “Lord of Hosts” enters as a forester with an axe to prevent Assyria from destroying all his children.

“lop the bough with terror” The Lord will prune the boughs, or chop down the tree, with terrifying power. This includes Assyria’s proud and haughty people. Haughty means proud and disdainful; having a high opinion of one’s self with some contempt for others; lofty and arrogant; supercilious; imperious.

34 And he shall cut down the thickets of the forests with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one.

verse 34 The Lord shall cut down the “forests” with iron (an axe), and Lebanon and its majestic trees (Assyria’s leaders) will fall. Lebanon is a place noted anciently for its spectacular forests of cedar trees, which are often used as a type for pride (cf. 2 Nephi 12:13).

“**a mighty one**” This refers to Jehovah.

2 Nephi Chapter 21

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 21:6-9 Conditions during the Millennium. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

On the night of September 21, 1823, the prophet Moroni visited the seventeen year old boy Joseph Smith, Jr. in his log cabin family home in Manchester, New York. Among the several items Moroni taught Joseph was, “. . . he quoted the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, saying it was about to be fulfilled” (JS-H 1:40). Isaiah 11 is a translation of the same materials from which this chapter was translated.

This chapter begins with Isaiah’s prophesying of new trees or leaders who will emerge out of the house of Israel to bless the earth.

Before beginning this chapter, let’s briefly clarify a couple of background items. First, Jesse was the father of the ancient King David. He was of the tribe of Judah and resided in Bethlehem. He was thus the ancestor of all of the kings of Judah and also of Jesus Christ. If someone descends from Jesse, then they, at least in part, have Jewish origins.

Next, there is the tree analogy used by Isaiah. Picture in your mind’s eye a stout tree with a solid root structure under the ground. Protruding from the ground is a trunk, stump, or “stem.” Branches, shoots, or “rods” are growing out of that trunk. When the tree is used as an analogy to illustrate genealogical succession, the sequence is root to trunk to branches, or root to stem to rod.

The roots of Isaiah’s tree represent the descendants of Jesse. Jesse himself is the ancestor of the roots, and therefore, in our analogy, we may consider him the seed of the tree from which the roots sprang. The trunk or “stem” of the tree, which is referred to as the stem of Jesse, represents one particular descendant of Jesse. In modern revelation, we are told that this is Jesus Christ: “Who is the Stem of Jesse spoken of in the 1st , 2d, 3d, 4th, and 5th verses of the 11th chapter of Isaiah? Verily thus saith the Lord: It is Christ” (D&C 113:1-2).

Chapter 21 prophesies of one or perhaps two latter-day descendants of Jesse who are also descendants of Jesus Christ. They are represented in the tree analogy as branches, “rods,” or shoots of the trunk. The trunk, again, is the stem of Jesse. There is one confusing aspect of Isaiah’s tree analogy. In addition to the terms “branch” and “rod” which refer to these two latter-day descendants of Jesse, he also uses the term “root of Jesse.” According to the tree analogy, one might think that a “root” is an ancestor and not a descendant. Here, however, the opposite is true. These two “roots” of Jesse are, in fact, descendants and not ancestors. Don’t be confused by this use of

the word *root*. In the Old Testament, “root” is often used to mean offspring and not ancestor. Therefore in this chapter we need not always assume the conventional succession of root to trunk to branch, and “root of Jesse” does not mean Jesus’s ancestor but rather his descendant.

Isaiah, at one point refers to the fact that one of these branches will grow out of the roots of Jesse. Here the roots of Jesse are in fact the descendants of Jesse, and these two latter-day servants will be at least in part descendants of the tribe of Judah.

Now, let us speculate for a moment regarding the identity of this latter-day descendant of Jesus Christ—this branch of the stem of Jesse—or perhaps there are two latter-day descendants of the Savior. This descendant, or these two descendants, are mentioned in verses 1 and 10 of 2 Nephi 21.

The first is mentioned in verse 1 and is referred to by Isaiah as a “rod” or “branch.” We are taught in modern revelation that this individual is “a servant in the hands of Christ, who is partly a descendant of Jesse [of Jewish descent] as well as of Ephraim, or of the house of Joseph, on whom there is laid much power” (D&C 113:3-4). Some have speculated that this “branch” might be Joseph Smith, Jr. Others have suggested an alternate identity.

Several Old Testament verses mention a latter-day “branch” or leader who will stand witness of the Lord’s final victory in the last days (see, for example, Zechariah 3:8-9; Jeremiah 23:3-8; and Jeremiah 33:15). Some of these Old Testament references even give this latter-day prophet a name—David (Ezekiel 37:21-28 and Hosea 3:4-5). Therefore, this servant referred to in 2 Nephi 21:1 (and in Isaiah 11:1) may be Joseph Smith, Jr., or perhaps a great leader of Israelite descent named David who will live in the last days and who will be an instrument in the Lord’s hand to help fulfill his divine plan before the Millennium. Church leaders in this final dispensation have even referred to this latter-day David. For example, Joseph Smith said, “The throne and kingdom of David is to be taken from him and given to another by the name of David in the last days, raised up out of his lineage” (*HC*, 6:253). Orson Hyde, in his dedicatory prayer on the Mount of Olives, said, “Raise up Jerusalem . . . and constitute her people a distinct nation and government, with David thy servant, even a descendant from the loins of ancient David to be their king” (*HC*, 4:457).

The second mention of a branch descending from the stem of Jesse is in verse 10. Here he is referred to as the “root of Jesse.” Again, in modern revelation we are taught that he is “a descendant of Jesse, as well as of Joseph, unto whom rightly belongs the priesthood, and the keys of the kingdom, for an ensign, and for the gathering of my people in the last days” (D&C 113:5-6). It is generally held that this servant is Joseph Smith, Jr., or any one or all of those who have held the office of prophet/president of the latter-day Church of Jesus Christ. As we marshal evidence to support this suggestion, keep in mind the characteristics of this servant outlined in D&C 113:5-6 quoted above. They are: He is a descendant of Jesse and Joseph. He is a

rightful heir to the priesthood and a holder of the keys to the kingdom. His work will become an ensign to the nations, and he will have a role in the gathering of Israel in the last days. Review the Book of Mormon prophecy regarding a descendant of the ancient Joseph who would also be named Joseph and who would do a great work of salvation among the Israelites to bring them to the knowledge of God's covenants in the last days (2 Nephi 3:6-11, 14-15). Certainly this Joseph of 2 Nephi 3 is Joseph Smith, Jr. His patriarchal blessing identifies him as a descendant of Ephraim, the son of ancient Joseph. There is less evidence that Joseph was a descendant of Jesse, but there were occasions in early church history when some of the brethren, including Joseph Smith, claimed that they shared lineage with Jesus Christ (see *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 185; *JD*, 4:248; *Journal of President Rudger Clawson*, 374-75; *Ivins Journal*, 21). We know from modern day revelation that Joseph received the priesthood and was given the keys of that priesthood including the keys of the gathering of Israel (D&C 110). Certainly the Church today is an ensign to the world.

It is interesting to note that in Jewish tradition there are two "saviors" or "messiahs." These are "Messiah ben David" (a messiah descended from David) and "Messiah ben Joseph" (a messiah descended from Joseph).

1 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

verse 1 The "stem of Jesse" is Jesus Christ.

Here is prophecy concerning a great latter-day servant or leader whose identity is speculated upon in the introductory remarks for this chapter. It is either Joseph Smith, Jr. or a latter day leader named David.

This verse is an example of synonymous parallelism, a Hebrew poetic device used frequently by Isaiah (see the supplemental article *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*). The same thing is said twice but with different wording:

- (a) And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse,
- (b) And a branch shall grow out of his roots.

Thus we see that "rod" and "branch" are synonyms. A "rod" is a new growth or shoot of a plant. Also we learn that according to Isaiah's tree analogy, the branch (or rod) may grow out of its trunk (or stem) or it may also grow directly out of its roots. Thus, both the "rod out of the stem of Jesse" and the "branch [which] shall grow out of his [Jesse's] roots refer to a latter-day descendant of Jesus Christ.

verses 2-5 These verses describe some important characteristics of the great latter-day servant introduced in verse 1. This leader is likely Joseph Smith, Jr. But if he turns out to be the latter-day David, he might not even be a member of the latter-day Church of Jesus Christ. Indeed, he might not even be a Christian!

2 And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;

3 And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears.

verses 2-3 His gift of discernment among other gifts will come through the influence of the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost.

“fear of the Lord” This might well be translated, “reverence for the Lord.” The Spirit shall teach him easily this reverence for the Lord.

verse 3 This servant shall judge or “reprove” (correct) others by what the Spirit teaches him, not by what he sees and hears with his physical senses.

4 But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

verse 4 He shall judge fairly the poor and the lowly.

An alternate translation of “righteousness” is “equity.”

“and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth” With fairness he will arbitrate for the lowly of the earth.

“with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked” The eloquence and power of this latter-day servant will be something to behold.

5 And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

verse 5 A “girdle” is the innermost piece of clothing.

Righteousness and faithfulness shall be characteristic of him—as a girdle or band about his “loins” and “reins.” “Loins” anciently referred to the genital parts which were regarded as the seat of strength or procreative power. His “reins” refers to his waist.

verses 6-9 These verses mark a sudden change in the subject. These are the classic and oft-quoted verses which describe the millennial period of peace between wild and domestic animals and between people and potentially dangerous animals. Satan will be bound, righteousness will prevail, and knowledge of the gospel will fill the earth.

6 The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and fating together; and a little child shall lead them.

verse 6 This verse mentions six animals. Three are wild carnivores (wolf, leopard, lion) that ordinarily would feed on the three tame animals (lamb, kid, calf).

“the calf and the young lion and fatling together” The term “fatling” may refer to any young animal (calf, kid, lamb, or pig) which is being fattened before being slaughtered. In commenting upon the use of the word “fatling” here, Parry, Parry, and Peterson, in their book *Understanding Isaiah*, wrote: “The King James Version translation of *fatling* is probably incorrect. The Jerusalem Bible suggests ‘calf and lion cub feed together,’ replacing *fatling* with the verb *feed*” (119). One problem with their suggestion is that the word *fatling* is also found here in the Book of Mormon.

“a little child shall lead them” Little children will not only feel safe and secure among the ordinarily ferocious beasts but will have control over them and lead them.

7 And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

verse 7 “the lion shall eat straw like the ox” There will be no shedding of blood during the Millennium by man or beasts. Carnivores will become herbivores. During the Millennium, “the enmity of man, and the enmity of beasts, yea, the enmity of all flesh, shall cease from before my face” (D&C 101:26).

8 And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’s den.

verse 8 The label “asp” may refer to any of a number of poisonous snakes. A “cockatrice” in biblical writings is an unidentified deadly serpent, also probably a poisonous snake.

9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

verse 9 In all of the Lord’s kingdom, nothing hurtful or destructive will occur. Enmity will be removed from the earth, and peace, love, and kindness will rule. The term “holy mountain” may refer to the entire earth in its temple-like condition. The earth shall be filled with devotion to the Lord just as water fills the great seas.

“the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord” Nephi cited this verse and explained that “all things shall be made known unto the children of men,” including “things of all nations,” “secret” things, “work[s] of darkness,” and things that have been revealed (2 Nephi 30:15-18).

10 And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious.

verse 10 Here is introduced the second of the two latter-day servants discussed in the introductory remarks for this chapter. He is at least in part a “root” or descendant

of Jesse and the tribe of Judah. He is generally understood to be the prophet Joseph Smith, Jr.

“[he] shall stand for an ensign of the people” In the ancient Near East, the ensign or banner was a royal symbol which had the function of rallying an army of supporters. In this instance, this “root” of Jesse shall serve as the Lord’s ensign and rally people to the Lord’s cause.

“to it shall the Gentiles seek” Perhaps a better translation of this phrase is, “he shall be sought by all nations.” The implication is that this servant’s task is to summon a nation of righteous Israelites from all the nations of the world where they live in captivity and dispersion. This servant is the Lord’s right hand (see verse 11) who serves as the Lord’s agent for gathering his people.

“his rest shall be glorious” This is the first mention in the Book of Mormon of the *rest* of the Lord. What is his *rest*? Ultimately, to enter into the rest of the Lord refers to reaching the end of our probationary state when the test of mortality is over and the struggles of life are done. For some, this would occur at death. For others, the probationary state continues through both phases of our probation—both our mortal life and our time in the spirit world prior to our resurrection (*HC*, 1:252). These will enter into the rest of the Lord at their resurrection. The ultimate and absolute rest is to dwell or rest with the Lord for eternity (*Alma* 57:36; 60:13). It is to first pass from this mortal existence into paradise where you may find “rest” or freedom from the afflictions of mortality. Subsequently you will inherit a fulness of celestial glory and live eternally in his presence. This rest is the same as having one’s calling and election made sure. It is celestial, “glorious,” and “the fulness of his glory” (*D&C* 84:24).

One may argue that a person may also achieve a relative rest from the rigors of mortal probation while he is still here in mortality. There may be two types of this relative rest:

1. Those who fully accept the gospel and abide in its truths may be granted by the Spirit of the Lord a growing and blessed state of peace and security during this life. It is freedom from the confusion and fear that is engendered by false and apostate religious doctrines. It is a comfortable assurance that you have found the truth. It is the blessed knowledge and confidence that you are considered worthy of exaltation. This knowledge, or rest, can only come by personal revelation from the Spirit of God. This rest is closely related to, or even identical to, the gift of hope.

2. There is perhaps a second type of this relative rest. It is the personal privilege of being received into the personal presence of the Lord while one is still mortal. This is really the privilege of being sealed up to eternal life by the Second Comforter, the Savior himself in person. Concerning the higher priesthood, the Lord taught: “And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God. Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof, and the

authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live. Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God; But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory” (D&C 84:19-24). Moses desired to make available to Israel the highest privilege of the priesthood—the privilege of seeing the face of God, of coming directly into the divine presence. However, because of Israel’s disobedience, the Lord said, “I have sworn in my wrath, that they shall not enter into my presence, into my rest, in the days of their pilgrimage” (JST-Exodus 34:2).

Are we actually going to rest in heaven? While this verse may not refer to the rest which is freedom from labor, let’s hope there will also be some of that type of rest as well!

11 And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.

verse 11 “in that day” This refers to our day, or the last days.

“the remnant of his people which shall be left” After the scattering of the house of Israel, only a “remnant”—a few—will be left who are inclined to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ and gather with the saints.

12 And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

verses 11-12 These two verses are parallel in their meaning and further define the role of the latter-day servant in gathering Israel and serving as an ensign to the world. Actually these verses refer to the second gathering of Israel. The first took place when the Lord led his people out of bondage in Egypt, or perhaps following the Babylonian captivity. The second gathering is now in progress as Israel gathers to the gospel and to the stakes of Zion. Appropriately, Moses, who led the first gathering from Egypt, was entrusted with the keys of the gathering of Israel which he restored to the prophet Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple in 1836 (D&C 110:11). During this second gathering, as opposed to the first, the remnants will return from all directions. This fact is depicted or symbolized by the several different countries mentioned which surrounded ancient Israel. Assyria is modern Iraq; Egypt and Pathros are Egypt; Cush (or Nubia) is Ethiopia; Elam is Iran; Shinar is Iraq; Hamath is Syria. This list of countries

metaphorically represents the entire world, the “four corners of the earth.” God will gather the covenant people from all the nations of the earth to his covenant lands.

The “islands of the sea” is the symbolic designation for widely scattered Israel.

Since we know that these two verses are parallel in meaning, we can see that the Lord’s “hand” and his “ensign” are synonymous. They both personify the Lord’s latter-day servant.

Again in verse 12, “Israel” refers not to the entire house of Israel, but to the northern Kingdom of Israel.

13 The envy of Ephraim also shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.

verse 13 During the gathering, all envy and enmity between Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) will end.

“The envy of Ephraim also shall depart” The jealousy or enmity which Ephraim has for Judah shall cease to exist.

“the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off” The harassments or persecutions that Judah has leveled against Ephraim shall stop.

The final two phrases in this verse have the same meanings as do these first two phrases in keeping with the AB, AB form of parallelism.

To “vex” is to irritate or bother greatly.

14 But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines towards the west; they shall spoil them of the east together; they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them.

verse 14 Once reunited, this combined Israel will work together as a unit and prevail over their earlier enemies. These include the Philistines to the west, in the area which is now called the Gaza Strip. and also those enemies on the east which include Edom, Moab, and Ammon (today’s Jordan).

“they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines” The pronoun “they” refers to Israel—probably Ephraim and Judah together—as they overcome their ancient enemies Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Ammon. This description of Israel’s victory over their ancient enemies is a type of latter-day Israel’s overcoming the world. Edom, or Idumea, is a type of the world (D&C 1:36).

The combined forces of Ephraim and Judah shall “pounce on [or attack] the back of Philistia” (New Jewish Version).

“they shall spoil them of the east together” Together the combined forces of Ephraim and Judah shall plunder their enemies to the east.

“they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab” Edom and Moab will become subject to them. Also the “children of Ammon shall obey [become subject to] them.”

15 And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind he shall shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry shod.

verse 15 The Lord will dry up the “tongue of the Egyptian sea.” Various suggestions have been proffered for the specific identity of the “tongue of the Egyptian sea.” It is not certain whether it is land or water. These suggestions include the western most “tongue” of the Red Sea (including the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba) and the delta of the Nile which protrudes as a “tongue” from the northern coast of Egypt into the Mediterranean Sea. The most attractive possibility, however, is the large inland sea created each spring as the Nile overflows its banks and floods a large area of the lower Nile valley. This sea forms a “tongue” of the Mediterranean Sea which protrudes far inland. This “tongue of the Egyptian sea” has indeed been dried up or “destroyed” by the building of the Aswan Dam with its consequent controlled Nile River drainage.

The Lord will “shake [raise] his hand over the river” (usually interpreted to be the Euphrates River) using the might of a great wind and divert it into seven small streams so that men might walk across it “dry shod,” that is, without getting their shoes wet. Three elements in this passage—“mighty wind,” “hand,” and “go over dry shod”—recall the Israelites’ miraculous crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21-22) and the Jordan River (Joshua 3:7-17). The same powers that guided the ancient Israelites out of Egypt will guide modern Israel out of Egypt and Assyria (both representing the world) to their gathering places.

The implication of this verse is that the Lord’s power will insure that no force or obstacle will stop the latter-day gathering of Israel. He will prepare the way that the righteous remnant of Israel will be allowed to gather.

16 And there shall be a highway for the remnant of his people which shall be left, from Assyria, like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

verse 16 Also the Lord will prepare a highway for the remnant of Israel coming from Assyria (the land on the other side of the Euphrates River). This “highway” will resemble the one prepared for Israel when it left the land of Egypt. This highway might be, in fact, literally a road, but the concept of “highway” might also refer figuratively to a mode of transportation such as airline travel or train travel. Obviously the Lord did not create a literal road for ancient Israel when they left Egypt, but he did prepare the way for them as they traveled to Palestine. He will do the same for gathering Israelites in the latter days.

2 Nephi Chapter 22

Chapter 22 is a translation of the same materials found in Isaiah chapter 12. This chapter probably most appropriately applies to the latter-day period just prior to the Millennium. It consists of two brief psalms or songs of worship that gathered Israel will sing to the Lord in the future.

As the chapter begins, Isaiah is speaking to gathered Israel. He admonishes them to give thanks and praise to the Lord for providing the blessings of the Millennium and the opportunity for exaltation. He suggests to them a song they might sing. We recall a modern-day revelation that promises, "The song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads" (D&C 25:12).

It seems evident in this chapter that Isaiah knew of the Millennium and yearned for the Lord's blessings granted in that glorious period. He expresses the gratitude each of us should feel as the Lord's prophesied works come to pass among men.

The first psalm is a "thanks psalm," one which gives thanks to the Lord for his blessings. It consists of verses 1 and 2 (and perhaps verse 3). The second psalm consists of verses 4 through 6 and is a "praise psalm" which primarily gives praise to the Lord.

1 And in that day thou shalt say: O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.

verse 1 "And in that day thou shalt say" The time period being referred to has just been discussed in the introductory comments for this chapter. Isaiah is speaking to gathered Israel just prior to the Millennium.

"O Lord, I will praise thee" The speaker (or singer) is now gathered Israel.

"thou wast angry with me" Because of mine iniquity and apostasy over the centuries thou sawest fit to scatter me (the house of Israel) to the four corners of the world.

"thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedest me" Thou hast forgiven my sins and thou hast allowed me to be restored to a knowledge of the true gospel and gathered to my lands of inheritance.

2 Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also has become my salvation.

verse 2 The song continues. In this verse the speaker or singer is still gathered Israel.

"God is my salvation" It is God, Jehovah, even Jesus Christ who has given me the opportunity for exaltation.

“the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song” The Lord is the source of my strength and the object of my adoration.

The divine name is usually translated as simply *Lord* in the KJV. Here, of course, it is translated as “Lord Jehovah.” This is the first time the title Jehovah is found in the Book of Mormon. The word *Jehovah* is the anglicized word for the Hebrew personal name for God which is the four letters (tetragrammaton) JHWH, which is pronounced Yahweh. JHWH is derived from the Hebrew word *hyh* which means “to be” or “to exist.” Thus Jehovah may be translated as something like “the existing one” or “the one who exists” or “I am.”

In this context, it is interesting that when Jehovah spoke to Moses at the burning bush, Moses asked, in effect, “What is thy name.” “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exodus 3:13-14). The Hebrew expression, ‘ehyeh ‘asher ‘ehyeh, rendered “I AM THAT I AM” in the King James translation, is a penetrating statement, and one which has received much attention over the centuries. The word ‘ehyeh is a conjugation of the verb *hyh*—“to be.” There are many possible meanings or explanations for the phrase “I AM THAT I AM.” Some have suggested that it represents a causative form of the verb. In short, the Lord’s words would mean “I cause to exist,” or “I cause to be.”

Jehovah is a word that is written out in full only four times in the King James Version (Exodus 6:3; Psalm 83:18; Isaiah 12:2; 26:4). It would seem that the true principle and commandment to avoid taking the name of the Lord in vain (Exodus 20:7) was adulterated by many over the centuries, until, by the time of the Savior in the meridian of time, the Jews had come to believe it blasphemous to even speak the personal name of the Lord. Thus, Jesus was attacked and almost stoned because he declared his divine sonship in these words: “Before Abraham was, I AM,” or, stated another way, “Before Abraham, was I, Jehovah.” The King James translators, presumably desiring to hallow the sacred name, substituted “LORD” (with capital letters) for YHWH, in all but the four cases mentioned above.

“he also has become my salvation” Here is a repeat of the same thought stated in the first phrase of this verse. The Lord is the means of my deliverance, triumph, or exaltation.

3 Therefore, with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.

verse 3 The speaker here is not entirely clear. It seems likely that Isaiah is addressing and prophesying to gathered Israel.

“water out of the wells of salvation” The “waters of salvation” might be better translated “springs of salvation,” which depicts living, flowing water. The “waters of salvation” or “springs of salvation” represent Jesus Christ. To “draw water out of the wells of salvation” is to partake of those things necessary for eternal life and receive

exaltation in the celestial kingdom and therefore drink eternally from the wells of salvation.

4 And in that day shall ye say: Praise the Lord, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted.

verse 4 Isaiah continues as the speaker, and he is addressing gathered Israel.

“And in that day” The time frame still seems to be the latter days, just prior to the Millennium. Isaiah now suggests another song which gathered Israel will sing.

“call upon his name” Proclaim his name.

“declare his doings among the people” Make known his deeds among the people, especially those doings that bring salvation to mankind.

“make mention that his name is exalted” Declare that his name is exalted.

5 Sing unto the Lord; for he hath done excellent things; this is known in all the earth.

verse 5 “Sing unto the Lord” Sing in praise of the Lord.

“he hath done excellent things” He has performed glorious wonders, most notably he wrought the infinite atonement.

“this is known in all the earth” The New Jewish Version of the book of Isaiah renders this, “Let this be made known in all the world!”

6 Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.

verse 6 The terms “cry out,” “shout,” “inhabitant,” and “thee” are feminine forms in the Hebrew and depict Christ’s bride, Zion, who is ready to be received by the Holy One of Israel. Zion is depicted as the bride elsewhere (Isaiah 54:1-6; Revelation 21:2, 9; and D&C 109:73-74), and Jehovah is also portrayed elsewhere as the husband (Isaiah 54:5).

“thou inhabitant of Zion” One living in the millennial day.

“in the midst of thee” Christ, the Holy One of Israel, will personally reign over the saints during the Millennium.

2 Nephi Chapter 23

Chapters 23 and 24 of 2 Nephi are a translation of the same materials found in Isaiah chapters 13 and 14. These chapters contain Isaiah's inspired warnings to Babylon. Actually Assyria and not Babylon was the dominant nation in the Fertile Crescent during Isaiah's lifetime. But even during the so-called Assyrian period, Babylon still represented the best of culture, learning, and literature. It was also the center of apostate pagan religion. Babylonian culture and its pagan ideologies spread throughout the Middle East. Accordingly in these two chapters Isaiah often uses Babylon and her king as symbols of the world and its wickedness (cf. D&C 1:16). Thus, you should keep in mind that the term "Babylon" has both literal and figurative meanings. It refers to a specific ancient kingdom and to a spiritual condition. Sometimes it is difficult to know whether Isaiah is referring to physical or spiritual (figurative) Babylon.

In addition to warnings to Babylon, chapter 24 also contains some warnings to Assyria and Philistia. Philistia, or the land of the Philistines, is the southern Mediterranean coastal area of Palestine.

The whole of chapter 23 and the first 23 verses of chapter 24 have been termed thematically "the fall of Babylon." It should be noted that the prophesied destruction of Babylon in chapters 23 and 24 is a type of the destruction which will come upon the wicked just prior to the Lord's second coming. Isaiah likely had both the historical meanings and the latter-day implications in mind as he wrote these chapters. He writes of the Davidic king ultimately destroying the Assyrian and Babylonian kings. This is strong evidence for Isaiah's latter-day intent and application since historically, no Davidic king ever defeated a king of Assyria or a king of Babylon. On the contrary, successive Assyrian and Babylonian kings defeated Israel and exiled her people. In a latter-day context, however, the great king Jesus Christ will prevail over spiritual Babylon.

These two chapters may be outlined as follows: introduction (23:1); the Lord summons his forces (23:2-5); the anger and power of the Lord are leveled against spiritual Babylon (23:6-13); physical consequences will befall the land of Babylon and its inhabitants (23:14-22); the Lord will be merciful to Israel (24:1-3); a taunt song against the king of Babylon (24:4-21); the destruction of physical Babylon (24:22-23). To complete the outline of these two chapters, verses 24 through 27 of chapter 24 contain the prophecy of the fall of Assyria, and verses 28 through 32 of chapter 24 tell of the fall of Philistia.

1 The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see.

verse 1 A “burden” is a prophecy of doom or judgment against a people. The “burden of Babylon” is actually Isaiah’s inspired oracle or divine declaration of judgment or doom against Babylon. When a prophet like Isaiah delivers such a message, indeed it can become a “burden” for the people since additional knowledge and responsibility is placed upon them.

Again, keep in mind the probable dual meaning here. Historically, in Isaiah’s day (689 BC), Babylon was attacked and destroyed by Assyria under Sennacherib (Babylon was rebuilt shortly thereafter). In the latter days, spiritual Babylon will be attacked and destroyed by the righteous members of the Lord’s kingdom on the earth.

“which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see” This phrase explains the means by which Isaiah received this message of warning or “burden.” He saw it in vision of the future.

verses 2-5 Here the Lord is the speaker. He summons his forces from the ends of the earth in preparation for a “holy war.” Who are his forces? Historically it was the army of the king of Assyria that destroyed Babylon. Thus, from that historical standpoint, it is Assyria’s army and later the army of Persia (539 B.C.) that are being rallied here. From a broader, latter-day perspective, it is the army of believers, members of the kingdom of God on the earth who are being summoned.

2 Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles.

verse 2 **“Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain”** Raise the battle flag on top of the hill. A *banner* may also be termed an *ensign*. In this dispensation members of God’s army will figuratively lift up an ensign, the gospel banner, upon the high mountain. The “high mountain” symbolizes the temple.

“exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles” Shout to the soldiers and raise your arm as the signal for them to attack the gates of the proud city Babylon. In this dispensation we might interpret this phrase as having an almost opposite meaning: Lift up a voice of warning to the enemy, wave the hand and beckon them to enter the gates or entrances of Zion and to the temple.

Here the word *exalt* means to raise, as the voice.

3 I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones, for mine anger is not upon them that rejoice in my highness.

verse 3 **“I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones”** In ancient Israel the soldiers prepared for the holy war by participating in holy rituals connected with the temple (Deuteronomy 23:10-15). Thus, the Lord says, “I have called out my righteous and strong warriors.” Here is perhaps further evidence that a latter-day time frame is also intended. Would the Assyrian or Persian armies, for

example, be referred to by the Lord as “my sanctified ones”? In this dispensation he calls out his saints, those who are temple worthy who are made holy by Christ’s power. These will battle against evil using his weapons. His “mighty ones” are heroes and men of valor.

“mine anger is not upon them that rejoice in my highness” “Highness” refers to the Lord’s exaltation. I am not angry with those who take pride in me, those who accept my sovereignty.

4 The noise of the multitude in the mountains like as of a great people, a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together, the Lord of Hosts mustereth the hosts of the battle.

verse 4 The multitudes gathered to do battle, either in Isaiah’s day or in this last dispensation, are noisy. Elsewhere Isaiah likens the noise of a great multitude of people to the “noise of the seas” and “the rushing of mighty waters” (Isaiah 17:12).

In his day he gathered them to do battle with Babylon. In the latter days they are gathered with the intent of defeating evil and building Zion.

“in the mountains like as of a great people” This seems to have reference to the gathering of the saints in the Rocky Mountains. On August 6, 1842, Joseph Smith prophesied that some of the saints would “live to go and assist in making settlements and build cities and see the saints become a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains” (*TPJS*, 255).

5 They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, yea, the Lord, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land.

verse 5 Those who join the Lord’s army will be gathered from all the nations of the earth.

“the weapons of his indignation” These represent the Lord’s powers. Compare this to Jeremiah 50:25: “The Lord hath opened his armory, and hath brought forth the weapons of his indignation.”

In his anger, the Lord is coming to destroy the whole country or the sum total of all evil on the earth.

verses 6-13 Again, the ancient city of Babylon, with all its pomp, arrogance, and worldliness, is symbolic of the world in the last days. These verses describe the effects of the Lord’s anger and power when they are directed against spiritual Babylon in the latter days.

In verses 6-10, Isaiah is the speaker.

6 Howl ye, for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.

verse 6 “Howl ye” This expression is used repeatedly by Isaiah (16:7; 23:1, 6, 14; 65:14). It implies that the wicked (those who belong to Babylon) are like dogs and wolves who howl while under duress.

“the day of the Lord” The “day of the Lord” is a day in which the Lord metes out rewards or punishments. Here, this expression refers to our day, or the last days. More specifically “the great and dreadful day of the Lord” refers to the Savior’s coming in glory. For the righteous it is a “great” day. For the wicked, the times have been “dreadful.”

“it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty” Christ will destroy the wicked in preparation for his second coming.

7 Therefore shall all hands be faint, every man’s heart shall melt;

verse 7 The residents of spiritual Babylon will be immobilized by their fear. Their arms will hang down limp, likely in fear or despondency.

8 And they shall be afraid; pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames.

verse 8 The people of Babylon in the day of the Lord shall all be terrified and overcome with “pangs and sorrows”—physical and emotional pain. Apparently there is a particularly noxious type of fear that will beset the wicked at a time of their impending destruction (read the graphic example of this fear in Revelation 6:15-17).

“they shall be amazed one at another” The New International Version reading is more descriptive: “They will look aghast at each other” because of the terrible happenings.

“their faces shall be as flames” Their faces will flush with guilt and shame. This expression may also refer to the fact that prior to the Lord’s second coming the wicked will burn with fire.

When this verse is compared with the parallel at Isaiah 13:8 in the King James Version, it becomes apparent that the Book of Mormon text is different in that the latter does not have the following clause: “they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth.” This difference between the Book of Mormon and the Bible could be accounted for by asserting either that the clause was added to the Bible account or deleted from the Book of Mormon account. Since the words “they shall be” begin the missing part as well as the immediately following clause, it may indicate that someone’s eye skipped from one set of words to the other and thus account for their absence in the Book of Mormon. These words may have been lost when the printer’s manuscript was made from the original manuscript, though the original is unavailable to substantiate the situation one way or another. The omission of this phrase in the Book of Mormon interferes with the fine balance of the characteristic poetic parallelism that is present

when the phrase is added back. This suggests that indeed an error was made when the Book of Mormon was being produced.

9 Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.

verse 9 Again, the “day of the Lord” refers to that day in which he metes out rewards and punishments. Here it refers to the latter days and the Lord’s second coming. That day is a cruel day for those who are not prepared. The Lord is capable of “wrath” and “anger.” This is the day of the Lord’s vengeance against those who reject him whether they be in ancient Babylon or in latter day “Babylon.” The land will be made a wilderness, and every sinner will be destroyed. The Lord will destroy all corruptible things at his glorious coming, including the wicked.

The agents of the eventual fall of ancient Babylon were invaders from Persia, who in 539 B.C. conquered Babylon and supplanted its international dominance with their own. Babylon never again rose to power and eventually simply disappeared as a city.

10 For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

verse 10 A cosmic upheaval will accompany the day of the Lord’s vengeance and the heavenly lights will be darkened. Every star and constellation will all cease to shine. The sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will give forth no light. This verse possibly refers to some of the so-called “signs of the coming of the son of man” prophesied to occur in the latter days (D&C 45:39-42). The prophet Amos prophesied that for the wicked “the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light” (Amos 5:8).

11 And I will punish the world for evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay down the haughtiness of the terrible.

verse 11 The Lord again becomes the speaker. The “world” is synonymous for evil. I will punish all of the wicked for their sins. I will humble everyone who is proud and punish everyone who is arrogant and cruel. Those remaining will obviously be the righteous and humble.

The “terrible” are those who cause fear. The phrase “will lay down the haughtiness of the terrible” is better translated, “will put an end to the pride and ruthlessness of the tyrants and oppressors.”

12 I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.

verse 12 “Precious” in this context means rare. Those mortals who survive will be scarcer than gold. Ophir is a region of unknown location, in biblical times known for its production of fine gold. Your author can find no non-biblical or other biblical reference to “the golden wedge of Ophir,” thus the expression may not refer to a specific precious object. Rather the “golden wedge of Ophir” may simply be a general reference to the gold of Ophir.

Another idea called to mind here is that those who remain on the earth, those who survive the furnace of affliction will be purified like gold. They will no longer possess dross (sin).

“even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir” This awkward phrase might be better written: “a man will even be more precious than the golden wedge of Ophir.”

13 Therefore, I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of Hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.

verse 13 I will make the heavens tremble and the earth shall be shaken out of its place on that day when I, the Lord, show my anger. This imagery suggests earthquakes and cosmic disasters causing panic among the people who will scatter like a chased roe (deer) or fleeing gazelle and like sheep who have no shepherd.

The prophecy that the heavens will shake and the earth moved out of her place has, subsequent to Isaiah, been repeated by many prophets and placed in the context of Christ’s second coming (Joel 3:16; D&C 43:18; 45:48; 49:23; 84:118; Moses 7:6). Both Haggai (Haggai 2:6-8, 21-23) and Paul (Hebrews 12:26- 29) explained this prophecy.

verses 14-22 These verses graphically describe the physical consequences that will befall the land and its inhabitants.

14 And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up; and they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land.

verse 14 As mentioned, the imagery here implies that wicked people during the judgments of the last days will be like hunted and frightened deer. They will flee for their lives and they will be like sheep without a shepherd, implying that those who have not accepted Jesus as their shepherd may not receive his protection.

“they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land” During the Lord’s latter day judgments the wicked will flee to their own lands and homes in Babylon (meaning the world) looking for safety. The righteous will flee from Babylon and its carnal preoccupations to Zion and its temples.

15 Every one that is proud shall be thrust through; yea, and every one that is joined to the wicked shall fall by the sword.

verse 15 The arrogant inhabitants of the city will be stabbed to death (“thrust through”). This idea is repeated twice in a parallel fashion. The “sword” here represents war and its instruments. In the last days the wicked will destroy themselves during the many wars and battles of which the prophets have prophesied.

16 Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled and their wives ravished.

verse 16 The wicked shall experience great devastation. While they look on helplessly, their babies will be “dashed to pieces,” that is, thrown against something hard and battered to death, their homes will be looted, and their wives will be seized and raped.

17 Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver and gold, nor shall they delight in it.

verse 17 “I will stir up the Medes against them” Historically, the Medes were a people who came from Media, located in northwest Persia or Iran. Media became part of the Persian Empire when the Medes were conquered in the middle of the sixth century BC by Cyrus the Great of Persia. Under Cyrus, the Persians and Medes easily conquered Babylon in 538 BC. Some twenty years later the walls of Babylon were demolished, following which the city never again became the capital of an independent people. Two centuries later, after the Greeks, under Alexander the Great, conquered the Persians, Babylon rapidly declined in commercial and cultural importance as Seleucia became the major city in the area. By the time of Christ, only a few astronomers and mathematicians continued to live in the ancient, sparsely populated city. After they left, Babylon remained a deserted tell (mound), which sand and brush gradually covered until it became a hill used only by wild animals and as grazing land for nomadic flocks (*Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, 1:335).

“which shall not regard silver and gold, nor shall they delight in it” The Medes will not go into battle to obtain plunder (silver and gold); instead, their motivation is to kill, and gain power and control.

Perhaps the Medes or Persians are symbolic of latter day nations who have wicked designs upon one another.

18 Their bows shall also dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eyes shall not spare children.

verse 18 Again, the archer’s bow and arrow symbolize war and its various instruments. With their bows and arrows the Medes will slaughter the young men. One meaning of the word *dash* in Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines is “To break; to destroy.” The merciless soldiers will also slay children (“the fruit of the womb”).

“their eyes shall not spare children” Another phrase emphasizing the fact that no one will be spared during the wars. Even small children are killed so that future generations will not arise in rebellion to avenge their parents’ deaths.

19 And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

verse 19 Isaiah seems again to be the speaker in this verse, and the Lord resumes as the first person in the following verse and throughout the remainder of the chapter.

Babylon, with its riches, glorious gardens, magnificent temples, fortified walls, and high towers, was legendary in the ancient world. It was the most glorious of all the world’s kingdoms. Again, Babylon is symbolic of the world in the latter days.

“the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency” The Chaldeans of the first millennium BC were a Semitic people. They were a founding people of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, whose marvelous capital, Babylon, was a monument to their accomplishments. Chaldea is often used as a synonym for Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was a Chaldean. It was under Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC) that Babylon reached its zenith of power, pomp, and splendor, but his empire fell only a generation after his death” (*New Layman’s Bible Commentary*, 781).

“shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah” Sodom and Gomorrah are regarded as prototype examples of God’s divine judgment on all those who are evil (Jude 1:7). These cities became a heap of ruins (Genesis 18-19) as will ancient Babylon and latter-day “Babylon.”

Bible scholars have suggest that Sodom may have been leveled by a great explosion and fire caused by the ignition, perhaps by a stroke of lightning, of the naturally occurring petroleum products including gases in the area.

20 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.

verse 20 Isaiah’s prophecy in this verse certainly came to pass. Babylon did become an uninhabited wasteland.

“from generation to generation” This expression implies a very long time.

“Arabian” refers to nomadic wanderers of the region. Apparently Babylon was to be so devastated that even these hardy people would not choose to camp there.

To “make their fold” is to enclose and tend sheep during the night.

21 But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there.

verse 21 Wild animals of the desert will come to infest the site. The “houses” or buildings of Babylon will overflow with “doleful creatures.” Doleful means *sad*. Isaiah identifies creatures of the night that are ritually impure and are not domesticated. Such creatures will inhabit desolate Babylon, even taking over the abandoned houses.

“owls shall dwell there” Isaiah uses the images of bitterns and owls to characterize desolate places.

“Satyrs shall dance there” Satyrs are goat-like creatures in Greek mythology. The Hebrew word actually means “he-goats.”

John the Revelator wrote that “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird” (Revelation 18:2).

22 And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces; and her time is near to come, and her day shall not be prolonged. For I will destroy her speedily; yea, for I will be merciful unto my people, but the wicked shall perish.

verse 22 “And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses” Apparently “wild beasts of the islands” are hyenas. Hyenas will cry in the abandoned palaces of destroyed Babylon.

“and dragons in their pleasant palaces” The Hebrew word for *dragon* means “wild dogs” or “Jackals.” Jackals or wild dogs will cry or howl in Babylon’s palaces. The fact that palaces will be inhabited by creatures indicates that even wealthy, upper-class groups will not be exempt from God’s destructions and judgments.

“her time is near to come, and her day shall not be prolonged” Babylon’s time, or end, is near! Babylon (the worldly) will possess worldly honor for only a moment and will then be quickly destroyed.

I, the Lord, will destroy her speedily sparing only the righteous.

2 Nephi Chapter 24

1 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.

verse 1 “Jacob” refers to members of the twelve tribes or house of Israel. In one setting, after Babylonian captivity, he will allow them to return to their own land. The Lord will yet again have mercy on the people of Israel, and he will choose them anew (“choose Israel”) as his elect and allow them to be redeemed and gathered to their covenant or promised lands (“set them in their own land”).

In the latter days they will finally be gathered to their promised lands yet again. “Strangers” (or better translated “foreigners”)—actually non-Israelites—will come and live among them. These non-Israelites will flee to Zion for safety. They will be preached to and converted (“joined with them”). They will also “cleave to”—be adopted into—the house of Israel.

2 And the people shall take them and bring them to their place; yea, from far unto the ends of the earth; and they shall return to their lands of promise. And the house of Israel shall possess them, and the land of the Lord shall be for servants and handmaids; and they shall take them captives unto whom they were captives; and they shall rule over their oppressors.

verse 2 “And the people shall take them and bring them to their place” The restoration of Jacob to their lands of promise will be assisted by other peoples. Perhaps this refers to Persians who supported the return of Judah in ancient times or, alternatively, to latter-day Gentile missionaries of modern times. The latter-day Gentile missionaries (“the people”) will help the scattered people of Israel gather to their promised lands. These missionaries will also gather the Gentiles from the ends of the earth. These will repent, join the Church, and be adopted into the house of Israel. The promised lands of the Israelites are America and the Holy Land. Each of these two promised lands is “the place for the city of Zion” (D&C 57:2), a place for the temple of the Lord (D&C 124:38), and a place of refuge against the forces of the world. Symbolically, these lands are a type and shadow of heaven, which is “a far better land of promise” (Alma 37:45). The Israelites and Gentiles will be gathered from a wide diversity of nations (“from far unto the ends of the earth”).

“the house of Israel shall possess them” Once these Israelites and Gentiles are gathered, they will fully belong to the covenant house of Israel.

The promised land belongs to the Lord, hence it is “the land of the Lord.” The Israelites gathered to the promised lands are in part the humble common people

(“servants” and “handmaids”). These common people will become eternal rulers in God’s kingdom, ruling over those in their former lands who oppressed them.

3 And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall give thee rest, from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve.

verse 3 “in that day” This expression also may have dualistic meaning, referring either to the ancient times or to the latter days. The Lord will provide the people of Israel with relief from the hardships of bondage. Temporal rest from fear and hard bondage came to the house of Israel anciently under the leadership of King David and King Solomon, both of whom were types and shadows of the King of kings, Jesus Christ, who will give the house of Israel eternal rest. The expression “hard bondage” recalls the time the Israelites spent in Egypt as slaves of the Egyptian taskmasters or when scattered Israel lived subject to oppressive governments.

verses 1-3 Historically these verses were fulfilled when Cyrus the Great of Persia captured Babylon and issued an edict allowing all captive peoples in Babylon to return to their place of origin. The first group of Jews returned to Judah in about 538 B.C. and began to rebuild their homeland. Another great exodus of Jews from Babylon began in 520 BC. Eventually the Jews were able to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, the city itself, and the temple. Later on, the Jews began to enjoy autonomy and prosperity. They began to flourish and even began to proselyte other people in the area and to grow in numbers. Indeed, the population of the Jews grew into the millions by the time of Christ. While Babylon became desolate, Judea flourished.

verses 4-21 Isaiah prophesies that the Israelites, once back in their homeland, will recite a taunt-song about the “king of Babylon.”

In verses 4-11 the object of the taunt song is the king of Babylon. If Isaiah had in mind an ancient historical setting, then the object of the song is indeed the historical character, the king of Babylon. If Isaiah, on the other hand, intended a latter day setting for these verses, then the king of Babylon is symbolic of Satan. In verses 12-20 the song is clearly directed at Satan himself. Likely these verses have two applications: Lucifer’s fall from heaven during the premortal existence, and the time when Lucifer will be cast down to hell (outer darkness) after the Millennium.

4 And it shall come to pass in that day, that thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say: How hath the oppressor ceased, the golden city ceased!

verse 4 “it shall come to pass in that day” The meaning of the time reference “in that day” depends on the intended subject of this prophecy. If ancient Babylon’s king is intended, then it might refer to the time of Israel’s return to Palestine in about 538 BC.

If Satan and a latter-day context is intended, then the latter-day reference is likely. Perhaps both meanings were intended by Isaiah.

“thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon” A *proverb* is a song or saying. In this case it is a song of derision against the king of Babylon. “Thou shalt sing this taunt-song, or satirical song, about the king of Babylon.”

The taunt song shall say, “How the cruel king of Babylon has fallen, and how the tyranny has ceased.” The “golden city” is the proud city of Babylon. Again, the king of ancient Babylon is a type for Satan in all dispensations.

5 The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, the scepters of the rulers.

verse 5 The Lord has terminated the power of these evil rulers, either the king of Babylon or Satan. The “staff” and “scepters” are the symbols of the rulers’ power.

6 He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth.

verse 6 A “continual stroke” implies constant and repeated blows. He who angrily oppressed the people and never stopped persecuting the nations he had conquered is brought down. This angry and wicked oppressor is either the king of Babylonia or Satan.

“none hindereth” No one restrains the bringing down of the Babylonian king. No one helps him or comes to his aid.

7 The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet; they break forth into singing.

verse 7 Babylon is destroyed; Satan is thrust down to hell. Now, at last, the whole earth enjoys rest and peace, and its people break forth into songs of joy. Enoch asked the Lord, “When shall the earth rest?” (Moses 7:58), to which the Lord responded, “for the space of a thousand years the earth shall rest” (Moses 7:64), referring to the Millennium, when Satan is bound and powerless.

8 Yea, the fir-trees rejoice at thee, and also the cedars of Lebanon, saying: Since thou art laid down no feller is come up against us.

verse 8 This imagery illustrates how those who once were persecuted by the king of Babylon will rejoice when he has become powerless. Fir trees, cypress, and Lebanon cedars may have been chosen for the imagery because Babylon harvested ancient forests of these species to support their extravagant building practices. The cypress trees and the cedars of Lebanon rejoice over the fallen king—the king of Babylon or Satan, saying: Since you are “laid down” in death, there is no one to cut us down. This verse recalls other scriptures in which God’s creations (the trees, forest, mountains, earth, and heavens) “break forth into singing” when the Lord redeems Jacob (Isaiah 44:23), comforts his people, and has mercy of the afflicted.

A “feller,” of course, is a woodsman or tree cutter and represents the king of Babylon or Satan.

9 Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming; it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations.

verse 9 *Hell* is the translation of the Hebrew *Sheol* meaning the underworld or the place of the dead. Sheol is translated as “grave” in verse 11. “Hell from beneath”—hell below is preparing to welcome the king of Babylon or Satan.

“it stirreth up the dead for thee” The New International Version reading here is instructive. It says that hell “rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you—all those who were leaders in the world, they are caused to rise from their thrones.” These will marvel that the mighty king of Babylon or Satan has been cut down and become like them.

10 All they shall speak and say unto thee: Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us?

verse 10 All these dead kings in hell call out to the king of Babylon or Satan saying, “Now even you are as powerless as we are! You have become weak just like us!” During mortality the king of Babylon, of course, ruled with glory and power and possessed great wealth and importance.

11 Thy pomp is brought down to the grave; the noise of thy viols is not heard; the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee.

verse 11 Now your glory and vanity are lost once you are placed in the grave. The “noise” or sound of your “viols”—the fiddles or violin-like instruments that previously honored thee, are no longer heard.

“the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee” Literally, “Your bed is maggots and your blanket is worms.” This describes a fallen and disgusting condition.

12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! Art thou cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations!

verse 12 Lucifer, bright morning star, “you have fallen from heaven. You are thrown to the ground (actually cast out of heaven and into the earth), you who did previously conquer nations.” Lucifer was once a mighty individual, a truly eminent person in the premortal existence, before the Father cast him to earth with his angels. Referring to Satan, we read in modern revelation: “And was called Perdition [the lost one], for the heavens wept over him—he was Lucifer [the light bearer or “shining one”], a son of the morning” (D&C 76:26).

Isaiah indicates here that the object of this taunt song is no longer just the ancient historical king of Babylonia. Especially “honored” by the song now is Satan himself.

“which did weaken the nations” Satan’s work among the nations has brought dishonor, corruption, perversion, anarchy, immorality, exploitation, war, greed, and a myriad of other evils to every nation and people since the beginning: “And the children of men were numerous upon all the face of the land. And in those days Satan had great dominion among men, and raged in their hearts; and from thenceforth came wars and bloodshed; and a man’s hand was against his own brother, in administering death” (Moses 6:15).

13 For thou hast said in thy heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north;

verse 13 You have said resolutely, “I will climb up to heaven and place my throne above the stars of God. I will sit like a king on that mountain in the north where the gods assemble.”

To exalt here is to “raise with pride; to make undue pretensions to power, rank, or estimation” (*Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*).

“thou hast said in thy heart” Satan was and is a self-centered individual who secretly makes his own plans without seeking God’s guidance.

“I will ascend into heaven” Even though Lucifer enjoyed a position of prominence in the premortal world, he was not content with his status, as it was below that of the Father. He said to the Father, “Give my thine honor” (D&C 29:36-37).

“I will exalt my throne above the stars of God” The inordinately ambitious Lucifer errs here in at least two regards. First, he believes that he is able to exalt or deify himself. Yet, the scriptures inform us that no one can become exalted without Jesus Christ and his atonement. Secondly, Lucifer speaks concerning his “throne.” Yet no one can possess a heavenly throne without overcoming the world and receiving God’s permission and blessing. “To him that overcometh will I grant to set with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Revelation 3:21).

The “stars of God” are righteous people who are favored of God. Satan desires a throne higher than these righteous sons of God.

“the mount of the congregation” Alternate translations render this phrase “assembly of the gods” or “the mountain where the gods assemble.” This refers to the general assembly of the exalted where decisions have been made or are being made concerning the creation of the worlds and other eternal events. Lucifer desires to become part of this assembly which would give him equal power and authority with the gods.

“in the sides of the north” This is alternately translated “in the farthest north” and is an allusion to heaven, meaning a place far away from the habitations of humanity.

14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High.

verse 14 I will ascend above the clouds—to heaven—and be like unto God. Ironically Lucifer wanted to ascend to heaven, yet he fell and was “cut down to the ground” (see verse 12).

The term “Most High” suggests a vertical hierarchy. God is higher than all. He is the Most High.

15 Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

verse 15 Instead you will be thrust down into the deepest and darkest parts of hell—actually outer darkness. Satan sought a high position in heaven. Instead God will send him to the place farthest from heaven.

16 They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and shall consider thee, and shall say: Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms?

verse 16 Hell’s inhabitants will be amazed that Lucifer, who shook kingdoms with his evil intentions, has been brought down to the depths. They will “narrowly look upon thee,” that is, stare or squint at you—look at you “closely and with minute scrutiny” (*Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*) and ask, “Is this the man who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble?”

The word “man” here is Isaiah’s reminder that Lucifer is by no means a god.

17 And made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof, and opened not the house of his prisoners?

verse 17 Is this the man who turned the world into a desert and destroyed cities? Is this the man who never allowed his captives to go free?

“and opened not the house of his prisoners” This is perhaps a reference to the fact that Lucifer does not want his spiritual captives, or those bound by sin, to be released.

18 All the kings of the nations, yea, all of them, lie in glory, every one of them in his own house.

verse 18 **“all of them, lie in glory, every one of them in his own house”** The kings who ruled over telestial earth are buried in magnificent tombs decorated with marble. The implication is that Lucifer will not even enjoy this privilege.

19 But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and the remnant of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcass trodden under feet.

verse 19 Here is imagery describing how the king of Babylon, a type of fallen Lucifer, will be treated. This verse conveys the idea that both the king of Babylon and Satan will ultimately receive no respect.

The grave of Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon's king, has never been discovered, and Lucifer will never have a grave or a monument because he never received a body. The implication is that the body has never been buried, but abandoned like garbage. Thus Nebuchadnezzar, and also Satan, share the fate of the dead among the poorest people, like those stabbed in a brawl. Symbolically they are simply dumped into a stone-lined pit and left to the birds and animals.

This verse is a quote of Isaiah 14:19 where the word "raiment" in the book of Isaiah is rendered "remnant" here in this verse. Brother Sidney Sperry feels that the word *raiment* is more appropriate and should have been used. He suggested that the meaning of the verse is: "Clad with the slain, i.e., the corpse of the King of Babylon is surrounded by other dead bodies [in a common grave]" (*Book of Mormon Compendium*, 242).

20 Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land and slain thy people; the seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned.

verse 20 "Renowned" means remembered by future generations. You are guilty of destructive and murderous acts against mankind and nature. Accordingly, you will not be buried like other kings with their large monumental tombs.

"the seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned" None of your evil kind will ever be honored. As mentioned above, Satan never received a body, and thus he cannot ever receive an honorable burial. We might interpret this as meaning that Satan and his sons of Perdition will be cast into outer darkness where there is none of God's glory.

21 Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquities of their fathers, that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities.

verse 21 "Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquities of their fathers" Let the slaughter begin. The children of evildoers will perish because they espoused the sins of their fathers.

"that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities" The righteous will possess the lands of promise and build cities of Zion for the pure in heart. The wicked, however, will not be blessed to inherit such cities of Zion.

verses 22-23 These verses foretell the destruction of physical Babylon.

22 For I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of Hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew, saith the Lord.

verse 22 The Lord says, “I will attack Babylon and bring it to ruin. I will leave no children or other survivors.

The phrase “the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew” implies that all will be destroyed. Absolutely all inhabitants will be destroyed.

23 I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water; and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of Hosts.

verse 23 I will turn Babylon into a marsh haunted by such as the “bittern.” A bittern is a fowl native to Europe. It has long legs and neck, and stalks among reeds and sedge, feeding upon fish. I will sweep Babylon with the “besom,” or broom, of destruction. *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines besom as, “a broom; a brush of twigs for sweeping.”

Isaiah uses the images of bitterns and owls to characterize desolate places.

There are a number of instances in original manuscript of the Book of Mormon where Dr. Royal Skousen feels that Oliver made a mistake in transcribing Joseph Smith’s dictation. If a word or a phrase was unknown to him, he substituted a more common word or phrase (but with varying degrees of success). In each of these cases, the substitution is found in the original manuscript and was later copied into the printer’s manuscript. It was then either corrected by the typesetter or appeared in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. This verse offers such an example. In the original and printer’s manuscripts, this verse read “. . . and I will sweep it with the bosom of destruction.” The word *bosom* was changed to *besom* by the typesetter, and it therefore appeared in the 1830 edition. Dr. Skousen feels that the reading in the present edition is the correct one.

verses 24-27 Isaiah now continues with a short warning to Assyria.

24 The Lord of Hosts hath sworn, saying: Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand—

verse 24 The Lord God has sworn an oath: “What I have intended (“purposed”) will happen. What I have determined to do will be done.” And what is it the Lord has determined to do?

25 That I will bring the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot; then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders.

verse 25 I will destroy the Assyrians in my land of Israel and trample them on my mountains. I will free my people from “his yoke” (Assyria’s vassalage) and from the burdens Israel has had to bear at Assyria’s hand. This defeat of Assyria likely occurred in 701 BC during the reign of King Hezekiah. The Assyrians under Sennacherib had laid siege to Jerusalem. Assyria seemed about to crush Jerusalem when a peculiar catastrophe suddenly struck the Assyrian army. Some accounts have it that 185,000 of the Assyrian soldiers died though this may have been a greatly exaggerated legend. At any rate Sennacherib departed quickly back to Nineveh (capital city of Assyria), never to return. For a more complete historical description of this event see the supplemental article, *Historical Setting for the Book of Isaiah*.

Symbolically or figuratively speaking the yoke of Assyria (which represents the world) is removed from covenant Israel as Israel accepts Jesus Christ and forsakes their sins.

26 This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all nations.

verse 26 “This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth” This is my plan for or my promise to the world, and it will surely come to pass.

“and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all nations” The Lord is in control of all nations and has power over all the earth, to punish and to reward.

27 For the Lord of Hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?

verse 27 *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *disannul* as, “To annul; to make void; to deprive of authority or force; to nullify; to abolish.” When the Lord has a plan, who has the ability to cancel or nullify his plans? He has stretched out his arm to punish or protect, and who shall stop him?

verses 28-32 Isaiah concludes with a warning to Philistia. The Philistines occupied the area of Palestine which is on the Mediterranean coast of Judah. The Philistines were often at war with the Israelites.

28 In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden.

verse 28 A “burden” is a prophecy of desolation or destruction on a wicked nation. Thus, this verse states that the following prophecy or warning to Philistia was given by Isaiah in the year that Ahaz died which was about 715 BC. The reader will recall that Ahaz was an unrighteous king of Judah who refused to follow Isaiah’s counsel (see the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 17 and the supplemental article, *Historical Setting for the Book of Isaiah*).

29 Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken; for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent.

verse 29 Before offering an interpretation of this verse, let us review a brief historical note. During the time of Isaiah, Philistia survived attacks by the Assyrian army under two different Assyrian kings, Shalmaneser and Sargon. The latter captured the Philistine city of Ashdod. At the time of the writing of this verse, yet another destruction of Philistia lay in the future. A third Assyrian king, Sennacherib, would later capture several Philistine cities and render them vassals of Assyria.

"Palestina" is Philistia or Palestine which consists of the five kingdoms, Gaza, Ekron, Gath, Ashdod, and Ashkalon.

"Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken" People of Philistia, you have no reason to be glad simply because the rod that beat you is broken. The rod[s] that beat Philistia were the Assyrian kings Shalmaneser and Sargon. Isaiah warns the Philistines that they have no reason to rejoice just because Shalmaneser and Sargon are dead and that Assyria has lost her leader. Another oppressor king will follow.

"for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice" Apparently "the serpent's root" is that place from which it gives birth. A "cockatrice" is a venomous snake. When one snake dies a more poisonous one comes in its place. The metaphor in this verse suggests that Philistia's next oppressor will be somehow related to its first, perhaps a descendant.

"and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent" Isaiah again uses imagery to describe how the poisonous snake (Assyria) will yet produce offspring that will war against the Philistines. The serpent is called *fiery* probably because of its terrible burning venom. It is call *flying* probably because of the speed with which it strikes.

30 And the first-born of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety; and I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant.

verse 30 **"And the first-born of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety"** The Lord will provide for those who are humble and righteous and who suffer (the poor and needy) even among the Philistines. They will join with the Zion people and be protected. The New International Version of the Bible suggests that the first-born of the poor are the "poorest of the poor."

"I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant" "Thy root" is your posterity. In essence Isaiah is saying, "But because of your disobedience, the Lord will send a terrible famine upon you Philistines (in Philistia or Palestine) that will kill all of you." Note how the King James Version has Isaiah speaking for the Lord in both the first person ("I will kill thy root with famine") and the third person ("he shall slay thy remnant").

“he shall slay thy remnant” Even those few who survive the famine (“thy remnant”) shall be destroyed.

31 Howl, O gate; cry, O city; thou, whole Palestina, art dissolved; for there shall come from the north a smoke, and none shall be alone in his appointed times.

verse 31 “Dissolved” means destroyed.

“Howl and cry for help, all you Philistine cities! Be terrified, all of you. A cloud of dust is coming from the north—it is the Assyrian army, and none whom the Lord has designated shall avoid it.

Philistia was repeatedly invaded by Assyrian armies. It was finally Babylon, however, and Nebuchadnezzar who snuffed out any remaining sparks of Philistine independence in 604 BC.

“none shall be alone in his appointed times” The Jerusalem Bible reads “there are no deserters in those attacking Assyrian battalions,” which means that all enlisted men who belong to the Assyrian army are mighty warriors; there are no cowards or stragglers among them.

32 What shall then answer the messengers of the nations? That the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.

verse 32 What then shall we tell the messengers or envoys that come to the promised land inquiring from other nations how they might be saved from Assyria’s destructive forces? We will tell them that the Lord has established Zion, and the meek and obedient shall find safety there. The poor also will find both temporal and spiritual salvation in Zion.

2 Nephi Chapter 25

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 25:23 For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.

2 Nephi 25:26 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.

Chapters 25 through 33 of 2 Nephi may be viewed as Nephi's final testimony or final warnings. He addresses his remarks primarily to three main groups of people: the Jews, the descendants of Lehi, and the Gentiles. Much of these final nine chapters in 2 Nephi contain prophecies including many applicable to the "last" or latter days.

Anciently the Jews were a blessed people, highly favored of the Lord. The tribe of Judah, along with the other tribes of Israel, was provided a choice promised land. Theirs was the calling to rule over Israel, and they did so in the form of the great kings like David and Solomon. To maintain their "covenant people" status, they had only to keep the commandments of God as taught and written by their prophets. Prior to Lehi's leaving Jerusalem, Israel's prophets taught the law of Moses, but they also foretold the fulfilling of that law one day by the Messiah who would be born through the Jews' own tribal lineage. In 2 Nephi 25, Nephi prophesies of the fate of the Jews—their rejection of the Savior, their scatterings and scourgings, and their eventual repentance.

After quoting thirteen consecutive chapters of Isaiah's writings in 2 Nephi 12-24 (Isaiah 2-14), Nephi begins to prophesy "in plainness." Chapter 25 might be considered a "message to the Jews," an invitation for them to repent and return to the fold.

verses 1-7 In these verses Nephi identifies five important reasons why many of his own people cannot understand the writings of Isaiah (*Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, a FARMS publication, "Nephi's Keys to Understanding Isaiah," Donald W. Parry, 47-65.):

1. They do not understand "the manner of prophesying among the Jews" (verse 1). Exactly what Nephi had in mind here is unclear, but he may have been referring to literary devices such as his use of symbolism, his poetic forms, and his use of unique prophetic phrases. Also he may be referring to the historical, cultural, and theological elements that compose the prophetic style of Isaiah.

2. They were guilty of "works of darkness" and "doings of abominations" which caused them to lose their susceptibility to promptings of the Spirit of God (verse 2).

3. They lacked the “spirit of prophecy” (verse 4). See the commentary for verse 4 for a discussion of the “spirit of prophecy.”

4. They did not know the geography of the “regions round about” the city of Jerusalem (verse 6). There are, for example some forty geographic locations mentioned in the Isaiah materials in the Book of Mormon. Often Isaiah attaches a symbolic meaning to the place-name. For example, Sodom represents all wicked cities of the last days that will suffer the judgments of God. Assyrian nations represents warring nations of the last days which will fight against Israel. Jerusalem is symbolic of a holy or sacred city, a city of the Lord. The expression “ships of Tarshish” symbolizes the materialism and worldliness during the last days.

5. They did not live in the days in which the prophecies were fulfilled, the last days (verse 7). Some of the prophecies of Isaiah are now being fulfilled providing evidence that we live in the last days. These include the invitation for Israel to repent and cleanse themselves (Isaiah 1:16-20); the building of temples (Isaiah 2:1-5); the lifting of the ensign to the nations for Israel’s gathering (Isaiah 5:26-30; 11:11-16; 10:20-27; 14:1-3; 49:8-26; 55:12-13); the building of the army of Israel (Isaiah 13:1-5, compare D&C 105:26,31); the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (JST Isaiah 29:11-14); the welcoming of the Gentiles to the covenant (Isaiah 56:1-8); and the restoration of Zion (Isaiah 33:17-24; 35:5-10; 54:1-3).

1 Now I, Nephi, do speak somewhat concerning the words which I have written, which have been spoken by the mouth of Isaiah. For behold, Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many of my people to understand; for they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews.

verse 1 Speaking of his own people, Nephi says, “for they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews.” Nephi never completely explains what he means by this statement, so we are left to speculate (see also above). Perhaps the phrase “the manner of prophesying among the Jews” refers to the style in which the Israelite prophets preserved the Lord’s word. Isaiah’s words, for example, were written in a sophisticated literary form with abundant use of carefully crafted poetic styles and images. Understanding his writings requires an education in Jewish history, literature, cultural manners, and customs. In addition, one must have the “spirit of prophecy” spoken of in verse 4. Perhaps the writings of the Israelite prophets like Isaiah were not intended for all to understand.

The prophecies of Nephi and other Book of Mormon prophets, on the other hand, are written in “plainness” so that those who read them “may learn” (verse 4) more effectively.

“among the Jews” It might be useful to review the various meanings of the word “Jew.” In its purest sense, it refers only to the descendants of the tribe of Judah. In Nephi’s day the meaning had been expanded somewhat to include all those who

lived in the southern kingdom of Judah regardless of their tribal origins. In this latter context, Nephi referred to himself and his descendants as “Jews” (2 Nephi 30:4). The term “Jew” has also been used to refer to all descendants of the house of Israel. This latter usage has been termed a “mistake” (see Bible Dictionary in 1979 LDS edition of Bible) though the usage is common today and even anciently (see 1 Nephi 5:6, 12). This latter usage probably has evolved from the Judahites’ preeminence and dominance in governmental matters within the house of Israel.

2 For I, Nephi, have not taught them many things concerning the manner of the Jews; for their works were works of darkness, and their doings were doings of abominations.

verse 2 The Promised Land culture of Nephi and his people was intended to begin afresh with a clean slate except for the vital brass plates. Thus they would be free of the contaminating apostate influences of the Old World Jewish religious culture which was tainted with “works of darkness and . . . doings of abominations.” This fresh start, however, did produce the disadvantage of depriving Nephi’s people of the background vital to enable them to understand the somewhat esoteric writings of Israel’s prophets.

Speaking of the Hebrew poetic writing styles, the reader may notice the example of synonymous parallelism contained in this verse (see the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*):

their works were works of darkness
their doings were doings of abominations

3 Wherefore, I write unto my people, unto all those that shall receive hereafter these things which I write, that they may know the judgments of God, that they come upon all nations, according to the word which he hath spoken.

verse 3 In previous chapters, Nephi has quoted from Isaiah’s writings, and he acknowledges that many of his people will not understand these passages of Isaiah’s. Nephi intends that his own writings which follow be read and understood plainly by all those of his own culture and their descendants and by all who will read the Book of Mormon in the future.

“that they may know the judgments of God” Throughout Isaiah’s writings, Isaiah calls covenant Israel and all nations to repent of their sins and to come to the Lord. Nephi includes many of these passages in his writings as a warning to his own people and to future readers, including the Jews, the Lamanites, the Gentiles, and others of the house of Israel.

4 Wherefore, hearken, O my people, which are of the house of Israel, and give ear unto my words; for because the words of Isaiah are not plain unto you,

nevertheless they are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy. But I give unto you a prophecy, according to the spirit which is in me; wherefore I shall prophesy according to the plainness which hath been with me from the time that I came out from Jerusalem with my father; for behold, my soul delighteth in plainness unto my people, that they may learn.

verse 4 This verse is felt to contain one of the great interpretive keys or secrets to understanding the book of Isaiah, indeed all scripture. Can you pick it out?

In order to understand the scripture an individual must be “filled” with the “spirit of prophecy.” And what is the spirit of prophecy? It is a susceptibility to the promptings of that same Spirit that has enabled the prophets to prophesy—the Holy Ghost. The angel speaking in Revelation 19:10 clearly states that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Which is it then? Is the “spirit of prophecy” a state of receptivity to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, or is it the testimony of Jesus which comes only through the ministrations, the repeated promptings, of the Holy Ghost? It seems that it is not possible to separate the two—a receptivity to the Holy Ghost and the testimony of Jesus. They are intimately and inextricably related. One cannot possess a testimony of Jesus without being susceptible to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Such a testimony can only come through revelation, and revelation is received by mortals only through the ministrations of the Holy Spirit of God. Conversely, one cannot truly be filled with the Holy Ghost and not possess a testimony of Jesus. Indeed, the central purpose and function of the Holy Ghost is to testify of Christ! The student of the scriptures must keep in mind this vital and intimate relationship between a testimony of Jesus and susceptibility to the promptings of the Spirit!

Armed with the testimony of Jesus and the requisite relationship with the Spirit, we are prepared to read and understand the writings of Isaiah and indeed all the scriptures. We can truly come to understand the scriptures in no other way.

Lest we be guilty of being simplistic, it is important to realize that some book-learning and mental exercise is also important in understanding Isaiah’s writings. Since today most of us are not schooled in ancient Israelite culture, language, customs, and geography, it is necessary for us to have some help in these issues as we read and try to understand Isaiah (see verse 5 and its commentary).

“I give unto you a prophecy” This prophecy of Nephi comprises the remainder of Nephi’s writings in chapters 25 through 33 of 2 Nephi. A prophet, of course, cannot transmit information from God to man lest he be in tune with the Spirit. By the Spirit Nephi has come to truly understand the plans and purposes of God as he has studied the scriptures. This clear understanding enabled him to write and teach clearly and understandably—“in plainness.”

5 Yea, and my soul delighteth in the words of Isaiah, for I came out from Jerusalem, and mine eyes hath beheld the things of the Jews, and I know that the

Jews do understand the things of the prophets, and there is none other people that understand the things which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them, save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews.

verse 5 The previous verse provided us the first great key to understanding the scriptures. Now in this verse is found the second vital key. In order to be able to properly interpret scripture, a person must study and learn the sometimes peculiar way in which the prophets wrote. He must know something about the history and culture and language of the prophet and the people to whom he is writing. No one can understand the Jewish prophetic writings, for example, lest “they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews.” To put it in the vernacular, there is no “free lunch” in scripture study and understanding. Hard work and study are required. The Spirit seems more likely to assist those who show real effort and diligence in studying the scriptures. As contrasted with the first great key to scripture interpretation in verse 4, the “spirit of prophecy,” this second great key has been referred to as the “letter of prophecy” (Avraham Gileadi, *The Book of Isaiah, a New Translation with Interpretive Keys from the Book of Mormon*, 3-7). Often, assistance from other sources is also necessary and helpful to a true understanding of the scriptures.

6 But behold, I, Nephi, have not taught my children after the manner of the Jews; but behold, I, of myself, have dwelt at Jerusalem, wherefore I know concerning the regions round about; and I have made mention unto my children concerning the judgments of God, which hath come to pass among the Jews, unto my children, according to all that which Isaiah hath spoken, and I do not write them.

verse 6 Here Nephi says: Because I am educated in the culture and language of the Jews (“I, of myself, have dwelt at Jerusalem”), I am able to understand those prophecies of Isaiah and others which are applicable to my people (“I know concerning the regions round about . . . [of] . . . the judgments of God which hath come to pass among the Jews, unto my children”). I have told my people about the existence of these prophecies (“I have made mention unto my children concerning the judgments of God”), but as yet I have not written down my interpretations (“I do not write them”) nor have I taught my interpretations to my people (“I, Nephi, have not taught my children after the manner of the Jews”).

7 But behold, I proceed with mine own prophecy, according to my plainness; in the which I know that no man can err; nevertheless, in the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled men shall know of a surety, at the times when they shall come to pass.

verse 7 Again, the prophet Nephi refers to the clear interpretation and explanation of Isaiah’s prophecies which he is about to write. We will read this “plain” explanation in the remainder of this chapter and in 2 Nephi chapters 26-33. Those who

read these chapters should be able to understand these prophecies clearly (“I know that no man can err”). Yet some will refuse to believe them until the prophecies are actually fulfilled and they are simply unable to deny them (see also the following verse).

8 Wherefore, they are of worth unto the children of men, and he that supposeth that they are not, unto them will I speak particularly, and confine the words unto mine own people; for I know that they shall be of great worth unto them in the last days; for in that day shall they understand them; wherefore, for their good have I written them.

verse 8 Take care to keep the pronouns—the “they”s and “them”s—straight in this verse Nephi is speaking of the prophecies of Isaiah and counseling those living in the latter days, particularly descendants of the Book of Mormon people, to pay heed to those prophecies.

9 And as one generation hath been destroyed among the Jews because of iniquity, even so have they been destroyed from generation to generation according to their iniquities; and never hath any of them been destroyed save it were foretold them by the prophets of the Lord.

verse 9 “And as one generation hath been destroyed among the Jews” This phrase likely has reference to the Babylonian captivity and destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC.

“even so have they been destroyed from generation to generation” You might wonder which historical events had occurred to Jerusalem or the Jews prior to Nephi’s writing this material which might correspond to this statement. Nephi, here, is writing somewhere around 550 BC. At that time, Jerusalem had been sacked by Babylon some four decades previously, but at the time of Nephi’s writing Judah was still being held captive in Babylon. They weren’t freed from captivity until about 538 BC. They could hardly have been “destroyed from generation to generation.” Since the Babylonian captivity, they haven’t been available for anyone to destroy them in their homeland. The likely explanation is that Nephi is prophesying in what is termed the “prophetic present” or the so-called “prophetic perfect” verb tense. That is, he is prophesying about events to occur in the future, yet he is using a verb form which suggests that they had already occurred.

The final concept in this verse, of course, calls to mind the oft quoted verse in Amos: “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

10 Wherefore, it hath been told them concerning the destruction which should come upon them, immediately after my father left Jerusalem; nevertheless, they

hardened their hearts; and according to my prophecy they have been destroyed, save it be those which are carried away captive into Babylon.

verse 10 The inhabitants of Judah had been warned of their imminent destruction by Lehi and by other prophets. This destruction was prophesied to occur shortly (“immediately”) after Lehi and his traveling company left Jerusalem. The destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon is recorded in the Bible in 2 Kings 25 and took place about 586 BC.

“according to my prophecy” Since the word “prophecy” usually concerns itself with future events, Nephi’s use of the word here is unusual. Jerusalem had already been destroyed by Babylon. “Prophecy” here means “discerning matters of the Spirit.” The “spirit of prophecy” includes the “spirit of revelation”—it is the susceptibility to receive revealed information from the Holy Ghost.

verses 11-12 Here Nephi refers to the Jews’ being taken captive in Babylon, and then he prophesies of their future.

11 And now this I speak because of the spirit which is in me. And notwithstanding they have been carried away they shall return again, and possess the land of Jerusalem; wherefore, they shall be restored again to the land of their inheritance.

verse 11 Nephi prophesies that those Jews taken captive in Babylon will one day return to the land of Jerusalem. He further prophesies (verse 15) that once back in Jerusalem, they will reject their Savior and eventually be “scattered by other nations.”

12 But, behold, they shall have wars, and rumors of wars; and when the day cometh that the Only Begotten of the Father, yea, even the Father of heaven and of earth, shall manifest himself unto them in the flesh, behold, they will reject him, because of their iniquities, and the hardness of their hearts, and the stiffness of their necks.

verse 12 “wars, and rumors of wars” Between the Jews’ return to Jerusalem in 538 BC and the Savior’s mortal advent, there was indeed considerable strife in Judah. For example, in 334 BC the young king of Macedon in Greece, Alexander the Great, conquered Palestine and introduced a hundred and fifty years of Greek rule to the area. The Greeks continually tried to choke out the Jewish religion and replace it with their own pagan form of worship. In 165 BC the Jews, led by Judas Maccabeus or Judas Hasmoneus, rose up against this oppressive Greek rule. This was the so called Maccabean revolt and turned out to be a prolonged bitter civil war between the Jews and the ruling Greeks. The latter were finally driven out of Palestine in 143 BC, resulting in the Hasmonean dynasty. After nearly a century of Hasmonean or Maccabean rule, the descendants of the original Maccabees become incompetent and

corrupt, and eventually the Jews rose up against them. In one battle some fifty thousand Jews died, and on another occasion about eight hundred Pharisees were crucified in Jerusalem, and their wives and children were killed before them as they hung on crosses. In 63 BC the Roman general Pompey marched on Jerusalem. As he stormed the temple, some twelve thousand Jews died. In 40 BC the Parthians or Persians invaded Palestine and deposed the ruling Roman puppet leaders. Three years later Rome retook control of the area.

“they will reject him, because of their iniquities” Sin renders man unqualified to possess the discerning power of the Spirit, and that man is inclined to reject eternal truths. Yet this rejection is often not without some evidence of ambivalence. When a truly vital truth, such as the divinity of Jesus, is rejected, the result is invariably bitterness, “hardness” of the heart, and “stiffness” of the neck. It is almost as if the individual who rejects the Savior senses that he might have made a fatal error and seeks for justification in trying to destroy that which he has rejected. See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

13 Behold, they will crucify him; and after he is laid in a sepulchre for the space of three days he shall rise from the dead, with healing in his wings; and all those who shall believe on his name shall be saved in the kingdom of God. Wherefore, my soul delighteth to prophesy concerning him, for I have seen his day, and my heart doth magnify his holy name.

verse 13 “they will crucify him” Note here that even the specific manner of Jesus’s death was foreseen by prophets. They taught that he would die on a cross.

“with healing in his wings” This expression is also found in Malachi 4:2 where its contextual meaning is clear. After describing the latter-day cleansing of the earth where the wicked will “burn as stubble” just prior to the Lord’s second coming, Malachi describes Christ’s coming “with healing in his wings.” Christ’s coming will have salutary or healing effects on the death, misery, and destruction that will result from the cataclysmic cleansing of the earth. In the context of verse 13, it may be also assumed that Christ’s resurrection will have vital healing effects. He will solve the problems of physical and spiritual death and thus “heal” mankind of these afflictions.

“Wherefore, my soul delighteth to prophesy concerning him, for I have seen his day, and my heart doth magnify his holy name” This phraseology of Nephi’s bears a striking resemblance to the “Magnificat,” or song of praise, recited by Mary on meeting her cousin Elisabeth (see Luke 1:46-55). To magnify is to praise.

“I have seen his day,” of course, refers to the day of Christ’s mortal ministry which Nephi has seen in vision (1 Nephi 11:26-28).

verses 14-17 See the commentary for 1 Nephi 19:14 and 2 Nephi 9:2. These verses discuss why the Lord scatters a people.

14 And behold it shall come to pass that after the Messiah hath risen from the dead, and hath manifested himself unto his people, unto as many as will believe on his name, behold, Jerusalem shall be destroyed again; for wo unto them that fight against God and the people of his church.

verse 14 “hath manifested himself unto his people” This seems to refer to those relatively few to whom Jesus appeared between his resurrection and ascension.

“**Jerusalem shall be destroyed again**” Nephi has already been shown in vision the great destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon in 587 BC (2 Nephi 1:4). The final great destruction of Jerusalem came in AD 70 when Roman legions, led by Titus, besieged and ransacked the city and leveled the temple.

15 Wherefore, the Jews shall be scattered among all nations; yea, and also Babylon shall be destroyed; wherefore, the Jews shall be scattered by other nations.

verse 15 After prophesying of the great final scattering of the Jews, Nephi makes it clear who will do the scattering and why Babylon will not participate. Babylon will fall to Cyrus and the Persians in 539 B.C. Therefore Babylon, which was instrumental in the great “scattering” of the Jews in 587 BC, will not participate in the great final scattering of Jews following Judah’s destruction by Rome in AD 70.

16 And after they have been scattered, and the Lord God hath scourged them by other nations for the space of many generations, yea, even down from generation to generation until they shall be persuaded to believe in Christ, the Son of God, and the atonement, which is infinite for all mankind—and when that day shall come that they shall believe in Christ, and worship the Father in his name, with pure hearts and clean hands, and look not forward any more for another Messiah, then, at that time, the day will come that it must needs be expedient that they should believe these things.

verse 16 Note how clearly this verse differentiates between God the Father and God the Son. Some have suggested that the Book of Mormon is trinitarian in nature—that it teaches of only one God. We do understand this misconception. See “Trinity Doctrine and the Book of Mormon” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 4, chapter 4, *The Trinity Doctrine*.

When is the day when the Jews as a body will be persuaded to believe in Christ? The scriptures suggest it will not occur until after the Lord’s second coming (see D&C 45:43-53; Zechariah 13:6). After the Jews’ conversion they will be gathered by the Lord to their promised land and establish themselves there in righteousness.

“**and look not forward any more for another Messiah**” Through apostasy, the concept of the Messiah was perverted among the Jews. The truth is that the Messiah

was to be none other than the great God who would condescend to come to earth and redeem mankind from the fall of Adam. This true concept was found recorded on the brass plates and was taught among the Nephites. However, by the time of Christ's mortal ministry, most Jews were looking more for a political redemption by a great Davidic king who would deliver them from their Roman oppressors. Today most Jews have more of a metaphorical view of the Messiah. They no longer look for a literal Messiah, but rather anticipate the coming of a great messianic age.

“it must needs be expedient that they should believe these things” The Jews will one day accept the Book of Mormon which was written at least in part for the “convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ.”

17 And the Lord will set his hand again the second time to restore his people from their lost and fallen state. Wherefore, he will proceed to do a marvelous work and a wonder among the children of men.

verse 17 This verse refers to the final gathering of Israel after the restoration of the gospel in the latter days.

“And the Lord will set his hand again the second time to restore his people from their lost and fallen state.” In a general sense, Christ has tried many times to gather Israel together (Matthew 23:37). In a more specific sense, one might point to two major attempted gatherings. The first was at the time of the Savior's mortal ministry when he brought the gospel to the earth. During that period the keys of gathering were delivered to Peter, James, and John by Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17). The second gathering is now in progress as Israel gathers to the gospel and to the stakes of Zion. In preparation for this gathering, Moses again returned the keys to the earth (D&C 110).

“to restore his people from their lost and fallen state” The “gathering” referred to here is the spiritual gathering and not just the temporal gathering. People must be gathered spiritually (converted to the gospel of Christ) before they are gathered temporally (allowed entrance into their promised land). To make possible this final gathering, the Lord will do a “marvelous work and a wonder among the children of men.” That is, he will restore the gospel, including the necessary priesthood and keys. He will provide the Book of Mormon and other modern scripture.

18 Wherefore, he shall bring forth his words unto them, which words shall judge them at the last day, for they shall be given them for the purpose of convincing them of the true Messiah, who was rejected by them; and unto the convincing of them that they need not look forward any more for a Messiah to come, for there should not any come, save it should be a false Messiah which should deceive the people; for there is save one Messiah spoken of by the prophets, and that Messiah is he who should be rejected of the Jews.

verse 18 “he shall bring forth his words unto them” The scriptures both ancient and modern will be made available to the Jews.

“false Messiah” Throughout Jewish history there have been some specific personalities which have caused speculation and raised hopes of the Messiah’s advent.

19 For according to the words of the prophets, the Messiah cometh in six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem; and according to the words of the prophets, and also the word of the angel of God, his name shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

verse 19 “according to the words of the prophets, the Messiah cometh in six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem” See the commentary for 1 Nephi 10:4.

“his name shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God” It is interesting to note that other prophets also had revealed to them the name of the Savior including Adam (Moses 6:51-52), Enoch (Moses 7:50), Noah (Moses 8:24), and the brother of Jared (Ether 3:14). *Jesus* is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua or Jeshua and means God is help or Savior. The title *Christ* is of Greek origin and means the anointed one. The Hebrew equivalent of this title is Messiah. See also the commentary for 3 Nephi 9:15.

20 And now, my brethren, I have spoken plainly that ye cannot err. And as the Lord God liveth that brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt, and gave unto Moses power that he should heal the nations after they had been bitten by the poisonous serpents, if they would cast their eyes unto the serpent which he did raise up before them, and also gave him power that he should smite the rock and the water should come forth; yea, behold I say unto you, that as these things are true, and as the Lord God liveth, there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved.

verse 20 In order to fully understand the significance of this verse, turn to Numbers 21:4-9 and read the strange little story contained in those verses. Briefly, because of the sins of the Israelites in the wilderness, the Lord sent among them poisonous serpents which bit many, and, as a result, many died. Moses petitioned the Lord for a way to save his people from these serpents. In response, the Lord commanded Moses to make a serpent of brass and place it on a pole. Whosoever was bitten by a poisonous serpent could be saved from death by looking upon the pole.

Without help from more modern revelation like the Book of Mormon, it is difficult to know what to make of this story. There are only two verses in the New Testament that help in the interpretation of this anecdote. One is in John 3:14: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.” The other is a more oblique reference found in 1 Corinthians 10:9.

Verse 20 and other verses in the Book of Mormon help us to fully recognize the profound significance of the story of Moses and the poisonous serpents. See also Helaman 8:13-16 and 1 Nephi 17:41 and Alma 33:19. Moses was a “type” of Jesus Christ. A “type” is “a person, thing, or event that represents or symbolizes another, especially another that it is thought will appear later; symbol; token; sign” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language*, 2nd college edition). Notice in the story how Moses was an advocate for the people just as Jesus is an advocate for the people before the Father. The serpent placed upon the pole is also a type of Christ. Its being placed upon a pole typifies the hanging of the Savior upon a cross. Moses was, in effect, lifting Christ up for all Israel to see. He was teaching them Jesus Christ. All those that look upon or accept Christ and his gospel shall be saved or exalted. Those who fail to do so will not. It is profoundly true that throughout the Old Testament we find types of Jesus Christ.

It is interesting to note that throughout the history of the world, many cultures have used the serpent as a symbol of either Deity or the devil. The symbol used by physicians today of the snake coiled about a pole likely had its origin in this story in the book of Numbers. It is humbling for your author to realize that in my profession our symbol of healing is the symbol of the Great Healer, Jesus Christ.

The accounts of Moses’s smiting a rock to produce water for the Israelites may be reviewed in Exodus 17:6 and Numbers 20:11.

“as the Lord God liveth, there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ . . . whereby man can be saved” Here is one of the great passages of scripture worth memorizing and repeating often! Nephi here swears with an oath (“as the Lord God liveth”) that his statement is true.

21 Wherefore, for this cause hath the Lord God promised unto me that these things which I write shall be kept and preserved, and handed down unto my seed, from generation to generation, that the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph, that his seed should never perish as long as the earth should stand.

verse 21 “for this cause” Continuing the thought in the final sentence of the previous verse, the Book of Mormon record will be preserved to come forth in the latter day to bear witness of Jesus Christ.

“that the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph” The Lord promised ancient Joseph in Egypt that his seed should not become extinct as long as the earth should last (2 Nephi 3:16). This promise was prophesied of, years before its occurrence, by the prophet Ether (Ether 13:7).

22 Wherefore, these things shall go from generation to generation as long as the earth shall stand; and they shall go according to the will and pleasure of God;

and the nations who shall possess them shall be judged of them according to the words which are written.

verse 22 “these things” This phrase, as seen from the previous verse, refers to the writings of Nephi, indeed to the entire Book of Mormon. This scriptural record will be preserved “as long as the earth shall stand.” How long is this? Certainly at least to the end of the Millennium. Thus the Book of Mormon will continue to be a precious and valuable scriptural source throughout the Millennium. Might we still be making use of the Book of Mormon even after the earth has become celestialized and serves as the abode for those blessed souls living in the presence of God?

23 For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.

verse 23 “For we labor diligently to write” It was not easy inscribing on metal plates. It was hard work, and it required diligent labor! But the purpose of the work, as outlined in the rest of the verse, makes it all worth while.

“reconciled to God” This phrase has a very specific meaning. A synonym is “justified.” It means to be forgiven of all sin and ready for exaltation. Please review the concept of justification in the introductory commentary for Alma 5. For a more detailed discussion of justification, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

“for we know that it is by grace that we are saved” What is grace? The word grace is most specific in its meaning. It is the love which God has for us. But, particularly, it is that aspect of his love which inclines him to extend to us blessings we do not fully deserve. Are we really saved by grace? Or is it by our good works?

“after all we can do” The answer is that we are saved (exalted) by the combination of our good works and the Savior’s grace. For a discussion of these important concepts, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 4, chapter 11, *Grace and Works*.

24 And, notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled.

verse 24 “notwithstanding we believe in Christ” As explained in the previous verse, even though a Nephite or any other man were to live the law of Moses and even believe in Christ, it is still not possible for him to be saved without the grace of God—that incomparable love which Christ has for us which impels him to extend the blessings of the atonement to a man even though that man has not actually earned that honor through his performance in living the commandments according to the law of justice.

The meaning of this verse, then, is: “Notwithstanding” or even though a man believes in Christ, he must still “keep the law of Moses” that is, do good works and

make a sincere and persistent effort to keep the commandments. He must also look forward “with steadfastness unto Christ” to the time when the Savior’s atonement is applied to him and he is “reconciled to God”—brought into position to enter God’s presence. In this manner we say that through Christ’s atonement, “the law [of Moses] shall be fulfilled.”

25 For, for this end was the law given; wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith; yet we keep the law because of the commandments.

verse 25 The “law” (of Moses) was a necessary school master. It was given to Israel (1) because of their inability to abide the terms of the everlasting gospel, and (2) to teach them of the need for a Redeemer. However, the law may be termed “dead” unto the Nephites because they understood that living it could never result in eternal life. Nephi teaches the concept of the deadness of the law to remind us that salvation is through Christ, not through obedience to the law of Moses. Only Christ’s atonement when coupled with obedience to the commandments can give man the opportunity for exaltation. Man is thus “made alive [eternally alive] in Christ.”

The phrase “alive in Christ” characterizes the life of a person blessed by the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ. Being reborn to a “life which is in Christ” (2 Nephi 25:27), he has been reawakened to things of righteousness. Figuratively, he is eating the “bread of life” (John 6) and drinking the “living water” Christ offers (John 4). These benefits, of course, are available to any individual through faith and obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.

26 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.

verse 26 The appropriate position of Christ in our lives and in our hearts is at the very center. We need to become consumed with trying to learn of him and emulate him and obey him. We must teach our children to do the same. Only with Christ’s consent can a man be forgiven of his sins and be exalted.

27 Wherefore, we speak concerning the law that our children may know the deadness of the law; and they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was given. And after the law is fulfilled in Christ, that they need not harden their hearts against him when the law ought to be done away.

verse 27 This verse reviews the concepts we have discussed in the previous verses.

“we speak concerning the law that our children may know the deadness of the law” The “law” here is the law of Moses. The law of Moses is “dead” in that a man cannot be saved or exalted through the law of Moses without the application of Christ’s atoning blood. See *The Law of Moses in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 16.

“that life which is in Christ” Eternal life in his presence.

“and know for what end the law was given” There can be no doubt that the law of Moses was a preparatory gospel. More specifically, the very purpose of the law of Moses was the typifying and prophesying of the Savior.

“they need not harden their hearts against him when the law ought to be done away” Here is a profound warning most appropriately directed to the Jews of the last two millennia. Unfortunately the warning has gone largely unheeded by them. See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

28 And now behold, my people, ye are a stiffnecked people; wherefore, I have spoken plainly unto you, that ye cannot misunderstand. And the words which I have spoken shall stand as a testimony against you; for they are sufficient to teach any man the right way; for the right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not; for by denying him ye also deny the prophets and the law.

verse 28 “by denying him ye also deny the prophets and the law” There is a great irony in the Jews’ rejection of Jesus Christ. First, Jesus was the very being who gave the law to Moses anciently (3 Nephi 15:5). To the Pharisees Jesus said: “Ye keep not the law. If ye had kept the law, ye would have received me, for I am he who gave the law” (JST, Matthew 9:19). Secondly, the law, if properly understood, pointed directly to Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus further said: “Why teach ye the law, and deny that which is written; and condemn him whom the Father hath sent to fulfill the law, that ye might all be redeemed?” (JST, Luke 16:20).

29 And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ, and deny him not; and Christ is the Holy One of Israel; wherefore ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul; and if ye do this ye shall in nowise be cast out.

verse 29 “the right way is to believe in Christ” In the Book of Mormon, the terms *belief* and *believe* most often refer to acceptance, trust, and confidence in God, his son Jesus Christ, and in the gospel (e.g., Mosiah 4:9-10; Alma 33:22; 3 Nephi 12:9; Mormon 7:9). To believe or hold a belief is a mental process. When we believe in something that is eternally true and then act upon it, our belief begins to turn to faith—actually the revealed form of faith. See the complete discussion of the types of faith in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapters 9, 10, and 11: *Revealed Faith, Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*, and *Other Notes on Faith*.

This verse spells out clearly the proper relationship we should have with Jesus. Is it possible to be too casual in our relationship with him? The scriptures are clear that in a genealogical sense he is our elder brother. He is, as are we, a spirit child of our Father in Heaven. We are also told that he loves us more than we can know, and that he is merciful and willing and anxious to forgive us our faults. Given just this information, one might make the mistake of coming to regard him as just our friend, our buddy, our pal. He is so much more. He is our God, our ideal, our exemplar. His is the only name under heaven by which any of us can be saved or exalted. Our charge in mortality is to pattern our lives after his life. We must seek to know, through scripture study and through prayer how he handled a myriad of life's experiences which we will also encounter in mortality. What were his attitudes, his feelings, his motivations, his perspectives? What did he say? What did he do? What did he think? We must then seek to do the same. We must become consumed with trying to emulate him. He must come to own us, to dominate us, to possess us, to have his way with us. We must struggle to be like him. In this manner we truly worship him.

30 And, inasmuch as it shall be expedient, ye must keep the performances and ordinances of God until the law shall be fulfilled which was given unto Moses.

verse 30 It is clear that obedience to the laws and ordinances we are given will ever be an essential principle of gospel living (see also Mosiah 13:30). This is deliberate faith. It is the conscientious and deliberate obedience even when it goes against the grain of our "natural self." One may philosophize and theorize and debate and discuss to one's heart's content. Plain obedience will never be supplanted as an essential tenet of the gospel.

2 Nephi Chapter 26

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 26:22 Speaking of Satan and his secret combinations, Nephi wrote: He leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever.

2 Nephi 26:24 He 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.

This chapter is Nephi's message to Lehi's descendants and to the Gentiles.

In verse 6 of this chapter and then beginning in verse 15, Nephi will begin to quote again from the writings of Isaiah. These writings are found in chapter 29 of the book of Isaiah in our King James Version. Nephi's utilization of the material in Isaiah 29 will continue through 2 Nephi 27.

Nephi's version of Isaiah 29 contains much more material than Isaiah's. The verses in Isaiah 29 that are quoted in chapters 26 and 27 of 2 Nephi include Isaiah 29:3-24, a total of twenty-two verses. Nephi's quotation of this material is found in 2 Nephi 26:6 and from 2 Nephi 26:15 through 2 Nephi 27:35, a total of fifty-five verses. Obviously Nephi's account of Isaiah 29 contains information that is not found in the Bible's version. Why is this so? There are perhaps two possible explanations: (1) It might be that Isaiah's record was originally much larger, but the loss of "plain and precious parts" of the scriptural record shortened it to its present biblical version. Perhaps the version of this material of Isaiah to which Nephi had access, namely that written on the plates of brass, was more complete. This might account for Nephi's longer version. (2) It could be that Nephi's version is much longer simply because Nephi added many verses of his own commentary.

In these prophetic writings Isaiah and Nephi speak of judgments and destructions to be leveled against the wicked of the house of Israel. It seems clear that Isaiah intended that these judgments will be brought against the Jews in Jerusalem. In Isaiah 29:1-2, Isaiah directs his warnings to "Ariel, the city where David dwelt." *Ariel* means the hearth of God or the temple. It is another name for Jerusalem. This is a clear warning to those in Jerusalem. On the other hand, Nephi states in 2 Nephi 26 and 27 that these warnings and judgments of the Lord apply to his own descendants in the New World and not to the Jews in the Old World alone (see 2 Nephi 26:14-16). The ancient fulfillment of these biblical prophecies in Isaiah 29 would have occurred in 587 BC when Babylon attacked Jerusalem and in AD 70 when Rome destroyed the city. As he has in previously quoted materials, Isaiah likely intended here a dual fulfillment or dual application of his prophecies—both in ancient days and in these last days. Nephi's

version of these prophecies makes it especially clear that a latter-day time frame also applies (see 2 Nephi 26:14).

In 2 Nephi 26 only three verses can be said to be reasonably direct quotations of verses from Isaiah 29. These are 2 Nephi 26:15-16, 18 which correspond to Isaiah 29:3-5. Even in these few verses, Nephi's version contains more information than is found in Isaiah's biblical account.

1 And after Christ shall have risen from the dead he shall show himself unto you, my children, and my beloved brethren; and the words which he shall speak unto you shall be the law which ye shall do.

verse 1 As Nephi prophesies of the future of Lehi's descendants, one of the most important prophecies is that of the resurrected Christ's visit to the Nephites. That prophecy is found in this verse.

"my children, and my beloved brethren" Nephi is prophesying to the Nephites who will be alive some 580 years hence, at the time of Christ's appearance in the western hemisphere.

"the law which ye shall do" The Savior, when he appears in person, will give the Nephites a new law which will replace the Mosaic law. When he appears to the Nephites, he will announce the fulfillment of the law of Moses and identified himself as the law (3 Nephi 15:9).

2 For behold, I say unto you that I have beheld that many generations shall pass away, and there shall be great wars and contentions among my people.

verse 2 After looking ahead to the appearance of Jesus to the Nephites, Nephi then backs up in time and comments upon the time that would intervene between his own day and the time of the Savior's coming. He sees a period of much war and contention.

verses 3-7 Nephi saw in vision the future of his people, and he saw the wickedness, wars, and destructions that would occur among them. He prophesied that the Nephites would be informed of the birth and death of Jesus by prophets of God and by a series of signs. Yet, some of the Nephites would persist in their wickedness and disbelief. Some of the signs, such as earthquakes and other natural calamities would cause the destruction of the more wicked among them. Then Jesus in his glory would appear personally to the "more righteous" part of the people who remained.

Here is another important "type" or symbol of things to come found in Old Testament period scriptures—in this case in the Book of Mormon. The destruction of the wicked at the time of Jesus's crucifixion and the two hundred year "golden era" of the Nephites that followed is a clear type of the ultimate latter-day cleansing of the earth which will precede the Savior's second coming and the Millennium which will follow.

3 And after the Messiah shall come there shall be signs given unto my people of his birth, and also of his death and resurrection; and great and terrible shall that day be unto the wicked, for they shall perish; and they perish because they cast out the prophets, and the saints, and stone them, and slay them; wherefore the cry of the blood of the saints shall ascend up to God from the ground against them.

verse 3 “after the Messiah shall come there shall be signs given unto my people of his birth” These signs will be described in 3 Nephi 1. Actually the signs will begin *before*, not “after,” Christ’s birth (see 3 Nephi 1:13).

“and also [signs] of his death and resurrection” These are described in 3 Nephi 8.

“they cast out the prophets ... and stone them, and slay them” See Helaman 13:24-29. At the time of Christ’s crucifixion, the wicked among the Nephites will be destroyed by the dramatic natural disasters that will occur in the New World at that time. These wicked Nephites were those who had rejected the counsel of the prophets. Prophets are often inspired to expose the evil designs Satan has upon humankind. In his anger, Satan would have us destroy or “stone” the prophets. President Spencer W. Kimball taught that we mentally stone the living prophets by disregarding their counsel (“To His Servants the Prophets,” *Instructor* [August 1960] 95:257). When we rationalize and argue that the prophets and other General Authorities are not really in touch with how things really are, we are actually aligning ourselves with Satan. We are doing his bidding.

“the cry of the blood of the saints shall ascend up to God from the ground against them” When a murderer sheds blood, and the murder has not yet been avenged—the murderer has not yet been punished—the blood of the murder victim “cries from the ground.” Under the law of Moses “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (Genesis 9:6). The unpunished murderer “defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it” (Numbers 35:30-34). If a murderer could not be found, the elders of the city where the murder occurred were to offer sacrifice and testify that they had neither shed the blood nor seen who did it. Then they were to plead, “Be merciful, O Lord . . . and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel’s charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them” (Deuteronomy 21:1-9).

4 Wherefore, all those who are proud, and that do wickedly, the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, for they shall be as stubble.

verse 4 Note the similarity between this verse and Malachi 4:1. Is Nephi quoting from the prophet Malachi? This of course would be impossible since Malachi lived and prophesied some one hundred and fifty years after the prophet Nephi. Malachi’s

prophecies were not contained on the brass plates. Did Malachi quote from the prophet Nephi? No, that would not be possible. The Book of Mormon plates were not available to Old World prophets. What is the explanation for the similarities of these verses? See the discussion of this issue in the commentary for 1 Nephi 22:15. Both Malachi and Nephi were probably quoting the prophet Zenos! Isn't Nephi mis-applying this prophecy of Zenos? Zenos was likely prophesying of the destruction of the wicked to occur just prior to the Savior's second coming in the latter days (see 1 Nephi 22:15). Yet here Nephi is applying this same prophecy to the devastation of the wicked that will occur in the western hemisphere at the time of Christ's crucifixion. Is this a legitimate use of scripture? It is indeed! Nephi is making use of one of his own principles of scripture interpretation—that of “likening” the scriptures. When Nephi “likens” the prophecies of Isaiah, he applies them to events that Isaiah may not have had in mind but this application is altogether appropriate (see 1 Nephi 19:23-24; 2 Nephi 11:2, 8).

5 And they that kill the prophets, and the saints, the depths of the earth shall swallow them up, saith the Lord of Hosts; and mountains shall cover them, and whirlwinds shall carry them away, and buildings shall fall upon them and crush them to pieces and grind them to powder.

6 And they shall be visited with thunderings, and lightnings, and earthquakes, and all manner of destructions, for the fire of the anger of the Lord shall be kindled against them, and they shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall consume them, saith the Lord of Hosts.

verses 5-6 Here Nephi graphically and somewhat figuratively portrays the fate of the wicked Nephites at the time of Christ's crucifixion.

“the fire of the anger of the Lord” Nephi implies that the “lightnings” and the other calamities mentioned were to be actually caused by the Lord himself. Another explanation for the upheaval of the elements at the time of the Savior's crucifixion is that the elements themselves—each and every one of which contain intelligences with agency—were in such agony and anguish over the Savior's suffering that they rose up on their own.

“they shall be as stubble” Stubble left after a harvest is dry and explosively flammable. Hence when the Lord destroys the wicked it will be like fire's burning stubble—fast and furious.

“the day that cometh” This will be at the time of Jesus's crucifixion.

7 O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people! For I, Nephi, have seen it, and it well nigh consumeth me before the presence of the Lord; but I must cry unto my God: Thy ways are just.

verse 7 After viewing this destruction of his unrighteous descendants, Nephi laments their loss. His comments indicate that he saw in vision these calamities and realized they were sent by God.

8 But behold, the righteous that hearken unto the words of the prophets, and destroy them not, but look forward unto Christ with steadfastness for the signs which are given, notwithstanding all persecution—behold, they are they which shall not perish.

verse 8 “look forward unto Christ with steadfastness” The word steadfastness here is rich in meaning. It suggests the quiet confidence of the righteous.

Here Nephi indicates that his obedient descendants will not be destroyed. This verse and those that precede it introduce an interesting spiritual law which pertains to this mortal earth. It is that the behavior of human beings can affect and influence the “natural” phenomena. Apparently God at times uses these “natural” occurrences to punish or reward his children. See also 1 Nephi 19:10-12. Also in 3 Nephi 9-10 the voice of the Lord proclaims that it is he himself who has sent the destructions in response to the wickedness of the people.

9 But the Son of righteousness shall appear unto them; and he shall heal them, and they shall have peace with him, until three generations shall have passed away, and many of the fourth generation shall have passed away in righteousness.

verse 9 “Son of righteousness” This phrase is found in Malachi 4:2, though it is rendered there “Sun of righteousness.” Presumably, again, both Nephi and Malachi are quoting the prophet Zenos though we have no record of Zenos’s using this phrase. Also this is another instance of Nephi’s “likening” the scriptures. This prophecy of Zenos’s was intended to apply to the Savior’s second coming. Here Nephi is applying it to the coming of Jesus to the Nephites.

“until three generations shall have passed away, and many of the fourth generation shall have passed away” This has reference to the several-year period of the golden age of the Nephites or the so-called mini-millennium following Jesus Christ’s visit to the Nephites. This lasted from AD 34 to about AD 200.

10 And when these things have passed away a speedy destruction cometh unto my people; for, notwithstanding the pains of my soul, I have seen it; wherefore, I know that it shall come to pass; and they sell themselves for naught; for, for the reward of their pride and their foolishness they shall reap destruction; for because they yield unto the devil and choose works of darkness rather than light, therefore they must go down to hell.

verse 10 **“a speedy destruction cometh unto my people”** Nephi foresees the great destruction of his people near the hill Cumorah in about AD 385 (Mormon 6).

“they sell themselves for naught” What is “naught”? The word “naught” actually, of course, means nothing. But here the word implies pride, power, materialism, wealth, fame, and title. In short, it is worldliness which is of zero value in an eternal context.

“for the reward of their pride and their foolishness they shall reap destruction” For a discussion of pride and how it leads to spiritual destruction, see “Pride” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self.”*

“they must go down to hell” Where will such people ultimately find themselves? Mostly in one of the two lesser degrees of glory, but not before they spend time in spirit prison which is often referred to in scriptures as “hell.”

11 For the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with man. And when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction, and this grieveth my soul.

verse 11 **“For the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with man.”** It is impossible to comprehend spiritual and eternal matters without the influence of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost will attend only those who are making an effort toward righteousness.

“when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction” When the Spirit is withdrawn from man, his course is invariably rapidly downhill, away from eternal things and toward carnal concerns. The withdrawal of the Spirit is the spiritual death-knell, not only of an individual, but also of any civilized society.

verses 12-13 These two verses state clearly the central purpose of the entire Book of Mormon record: “the convincing of the Jews . . . [and] Gentiles . . . that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God; and he manifesteth himself . . . unto every nation.” The wording in these two verses is so similar to that used by Moroni in writing the title page for the Book of Mormon, that some have speculated that Moroni was probably influenced by these verses as he chose his wording for the title page.

12 And as I spake concerning the convincing of the Jews, that Jesus is the very Christ, it must needs be that the Gentiles be convinced also that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God;

verse 12 Nephi speaks here of the necessity of the Jews and Gentiles being convinced that the man Jesus, the very person whom he had seen in vision (1 Nephi 11), is (1) “the very Christ” and (2) “the Eternal God.”

Just exactly what concepts is Nephi stressing here? What does Nephi intend to teach when he says that Jesus is “the very Christ”? It should be pointed out that the word “Christ” seems to have originated from the Greek word “Christos.” Nephi would have never uttered this word since the Greek language did not reach the area of Palestine until after the conquering of the known world by Alexander the Great in about 334 BC which was long after Nephi left Judah. If Nephi did not say or write the word “Christos,” then what concept did he write that caused Joseph Smith to translate it as “the very Christ”? The words “Christ” and “Messiah” both have the same meaning. They mean the anointed one. Throughout Hebrew history, the Hebrew kings were anointed as they acceded to their office. Thus the kings were referred to as “the Lord’s anointed.” There was a strong Hebrew tradition that one day a “Prince of Peace,” a descendant of David, would come to power and govern all Israel. He will rescue Israel from all her oppressors and will govern in peace, justice, and righteousness, and his reign will have no end. This is the anointed one for whom Israel keeps watch. Nephi understood clearly that Jesus would be that long-awaited Messiah or Christ. Nephi also understood that Jesus would not be just another Hebrew king. He is the special anointed one for whom Israel waits, “the very Christ”—the King of kings.

Apparently it is also essential that the Jews and Gentiles come to understand that Jesus is “the Eternal God”—Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—none other than he who gave the law to Moses on Sinai.

13 And that he manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him, by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, working mighty miracles, signs, and wonders, among the children of men according to their faith.

verse 13 All who strive earnestly to believe in him and do his will, regardless of their race or station, are entitled to a witness from the Holy Ghost that he is in fact (1) the Christ and (2) the Eternal God. Once an element of faith is established among a people, he will further witness his divinity by “working mighty miracles, signs, and wonders” among them. And when are these great wonders to occur? See the next verse.

14 But behold, I prophesy unto you concerning the last days; concerning the days when the Lord God shall bring these things forth unto the children of men.

verse 14 “I prophesy unto you concerning the last days” Nephi is about to quote prophecies from Isaiah’s writings recorded in the King James Version of the Bible as chapter 29.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the setting of these verses in the book of Isaiah suggests that Isaiah was primarily prophesying about the Jews and Jerusalem (see Isaiah 29:1-2). Perhaps Isaiah also had in mind a latter-day application

of these verses. Nephi makes it clear in verse 14 that he will apply these prophecies to the latter days and to the descendants of Book of Mormon peoples.

verses 15-16 These verses are Nephi's version of Isaiah 29:3-4. In these King James Version biblical verses Isaiah seems to be describing how the Lord will come against the Jews in Jerusalem until the Jews are brought to a humble state where their fallen nation will speak "out of the ground" and "low out of the dust." This speaking to the world from "low out of the dust" might be interpreted figuratively to mean that she (Israel) will deliver her message from the depths of her humiliation. A more literal interpretation might also be intended. Israel's words speaking "out of the ground" might mean that her scriptural records will be preserved in the earth for a time before coming forth to the world. If Isaiah intended that his prophecy apply to the Jews in the Old World, then one might postulate that these records speaking "out of the ground" might be the Dead Sea Scrolls or other scriptural records that are now buried in the ground and will yet come forth in the Old World. On the other hand, in the New World, the Book of Mormon fits such an interpretation and seems to be the meaning which that intended in this verse.

The reader may wish to review the supplemental article, *Biblical Prophecies of the Book of Mormon*.

15 After my seed and the seed of my brethren shall have dwindled in unbelief, and shall have been smitten by the Gentiles; yea, after the Lord God shall have camped against them round about, and shall have laid siege against them with a mount, and raised forts against them; and after they shall have been brought down low in the dust, even that they are not, yet the words of the righteous shall be written, and the prayers of the faithful shall be heard, and all those who have dwindled in unbelief shall not be forgotten.

verse 15 In this verse, Nephi makes it clear very early that he is interpreting the verse as having direct application not to the Jews in Jerusalem but rather to "[his] seed and the seed of [his] brethren [who] shall have dwindled in unbelief." He describes their being "smitten by the Gentiles." The historical fulfillment of this prophecy will occur in the latter days when any remnants of Book of Mormon peoples are driven from their lands by either Spanish conquerors or the settlers of North America (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 13:14).

"camped against them round about, and shall have laid siege against them with a mount, and raised forts against them" These phrases reflect the ancient techniques of besieging a city. It means, "I will encamp against you and surround you. I will besiege you with towers, and I will raise siege works against you." Because the descendants of Nephi and his brethren will have dwindled in unbelief, the Lord will send other nations to afflict them.

“after they shall have been brought down low in the dust, even that they are not” After these unbelieving Israelites have been humbled and even almost annihilated.

“yet the words of the righteous shall be written” Here is a plausible reference to the Book of Mormon recorded by righteous New World prophets.

The Lord will not abandon those of Nephi’s descendants who will dwindle in unbelief. The prayers of the few faithful among them will not go unheard and unheeded.

16 For those who shall be destroyed shall speak unto them out of the ground, and their speech shall be low out of the dust, and their voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit; for the Lord God will give unto him power, that he may whisper concerning them, even as it were out of the ground; and their speech shall whisper out of the dust.

verse 16 “for those who shall be destroyed shall speak unto them” Some among the descendants of the Book of Mormon people who have been destroyed, namely the Book of Mormon prophets, will speak to “them”—the latter-day survivors of the Book of Mormon people through the pages of the Book of Mormon.

“out of the ground” “speech shall be low out of the dust” “their voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit” “their speech shall whisper out of the dust” All of these phrases plausibly have reference to the Book of Mormon and its plates’ coming forth from the ground or being unearthed by Joseph Smith and speaking to the latter-day descendants of Book of Mormon people in a manner that will ring true to them. The expression “familiar spirit” suggests the idea of a departed spirit, a “ghost,” with whom it is possible for mortals to communicate. It also suggests the idea that the message of the spirit is “familiar” or rings true. The expression “familiar spirit” is found a few times in the Old Testament, including Isaiah 29:4. The expression is an English translation of the Hebrew word *owb* that refers to either a spiritual medium or necromancer who communicates with the dead or to a ghost or spirit who speaks through a necromancer. The latter definition applies in this verse.

“for the Lord will give unto him power that he may whisper concerning them” Now the topic turns from the book of Mormon prophets to a specific man who will come or speak to the descendants of the Book of Mormon people. Who is this man—who is “him”? Also to what does “them” have reference? It would seem that “him” refers to either the prophet Mormon or the prophet Joseph Smith. The antecedent of “them” is “those who shall be destroyed”—the Book of Mormon peoples.

17 For thus saith the Lord God: They shall write the things which shall be done among them, and they shall be written and sealed up in a book, and those who have dwindled in unbelief shall not have them, for they seek to destroy the things of God.

verse 17 This verse presents another pronoun obstacle course. See if you can pick out the meanings of the pronouns in the verse. “They [the Book of Mormon prophets] shall write the things which shall be done among them [the Book of Mormon people], and they [the things which shall be done among the Book of Mormon people] shall be written and sealed up in a book, and those who have dwindled in unbelief [in the latter days] shall not have them [the things written in the Book of Mormon], for they [the people in the latter days who have dwindled in unbelief] seek to destroy the things of God.”

In summary then, the Book of Mormon will not be brought “out of the ground” until after Nephi’s seed and the seed of his brethren the Lamanites have “dwindled in unbelief” and have been “smitten by the Gentiles” who will come among them.

18 Wherefore, as those who have been destroyed have been destroyed speedily; and the multitude of their terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away—yea, thus saith the Lord God: It shall be at an instant, suddenly—

verse 18 “as those who have been destroyed” These are the descendants of Lehi who will suffer “speedily” the prophesied judgments of God and be destroyed for their disbelief. See the commentary for verse 10.

“the multitude of their terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away” The multitude of the foes of Lehi’s descendants shall be numerous, like dust or wheat chaff that blows by in the wind.

“It shall be in an instant suddenly” The Lord’s judgments come suddenly and unexpectedly.

19 And it shall come to pass, that those who have dwindled in unbelief shall be smitten by the hand of the Gentiles.

verse 19 Here is the same idea discussed in verse 15 above. It is also found in 1 Nephi 13:14.

20 And the Gentiles are lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and have stumbled, because of the greatness of their stumbling block, that they have built up many churches; nevertheless, they put down the power and miracles of God, and preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning, that they may get gain and grind upon the face of the poor.

verse 20 Now Nephi turns his attention to those “Gentiles” who will one day smite his unbelieving descendants. These are likely the non-native settlers of the Western Hemisphere, especially the early European settlers of the United States of America and Central America. Nephi issues them also a stern warning.

The Gentiles will suffer, not only from too much pride, but they will have their own “stumbling block.” What is this stumbling block of the Gentiles? The record of the

Nephites (the Book of Mormon) will have been “sealed up,” literally in the ground for safekeeping (see verses 16 and 17). Here it will remain untouched and unaltered by human hands. This is, of course, in contrast to the Bible which has come down to us only after being altered by the hands of men. In this context, it is likely that the “stumbling block” of the Gentiles is the lack of knowledge and spiritual understanding that results from removal of “many plain and precious parts” from the Bible. Nephi uses similar wording in 1 Nephi 13:28-35 when he says that alterations and deletions have been made in the Bible: “Because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do *stumble*” (italics added).

“preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning”

This colorful expression is found in no other place in the scriptures. Apparently some in the latter-day apostate gentile churches will be less concerned with eternal truths than their own personal aggrandizement.

“grind upon the face of the poor” Again, here is another colorful expression which is unique in the scriptures to this verse alone. Its meaning is clear. Some of those in the apostate latter-day churches will place themselves and their own material successes ahead of the interests of the poor.

In the next several verses Nephi describes the conditions among the Gentiles in the latter days. Obviously it is a time of spiritual destitution.

21 And there are many churches built up which cause envyings, and strifes, and malice.

verse 21 Here are more problems to be found in the apostate latter-day churches among the Gentiles.

22 And there are also secret combinations, even as in times of old, according to the combinations of the devil, for he is the founder of all these things; yea, the founder of murder, and works of darkness; yea, and he leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever.

verse 22 “secret combinations” It is clear that from the time of our very earliest ancestors (Moses 5:18-51) Satan has “inspired” men to join together in secret works of evil. These secret combinations will play an important role in the downfall of the Book of Mormon people, and they certainly may be found upon the earth today.

“flaxen cord” The idea of flaxen cord seems to be that the devil might convince and beguile some men so that he might initially influence them only gentle and subtle manipulation—lead them about with a flimsy, thin (“flaxen”) cord. After a while, however, he has them bound firmly with strong cords, and they are lost.

Nephi’s use of the flaxen cord analogy recalls the binding of Samson and suggests that Nephi was familiar with that story and that some version of it may have been preserved on the brass plates.

The reader will recall that Samson, relying on his unusual strength, allowed the men of Judah to bind him and deliver him to the Philistines: “. . . and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands” (Judges 15:14). When a flaxen cord is burned, the ash retains the cord’s outward form but crumbles at the touch, making burned flax a suitable image for fragility. Later, Samson playfully allowed Delilah to bind him with green withes (willows) and with new ropes and to weave his hair into a web. In each case he escaped easily, mocking the Philistines, until at last he was betrayed by his overconfidence, deprived of his strength, and bound with unbreakable fetters.

It is also significant that, of the prophets in the Book of Mormon, only Nephi, who was familiar with the Old World, mentions *flax*. Flax seems to have been unavailable in the New World, where cotton and hemp were used instead.

23 For behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you that the Lord God worketh not in darkness.

verse 23 Clandestineness, secrecy, and mystery are hallmarks of Satan’s influence.

24 He 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.

verse 24 “He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world” “He,” of course, is Jehovah. It would seem that his very purpose for being is the exaltation of all mankind (Moses 1:39)—bringing his people home to his Father. Bringing all of us to our celestial homes is his passion, his obsession, his full-time work.

“he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him” This phrase refers to a profound and important eternal principle. The Savior’s atonement provided him with a powerful ability to motivate men—that is, to draw men unto him. Following the Savior’s resurrection he taught, “For this cause have I been lifted up; therefore . . . I will draw all men unto me” (3 Nephi 27:15; see also James 4:10). Because of his atoning sacrifice the Savior exerts a form of spiritual gravity that draws and entices all men unto him. This compelling force is always extended. It reaches out, penetrates every open heart, and helps to fire the desire to repent.

But how does the atonement motivate, invite, and draw all men unto the Savior? What causes this gravitational pull—this spiritual tug? The reason is based on a fascinating principle called “righteous suffering.” There is a certain compelling power that flows from righteous suffering—not indiscriminate suffering, not needless suffering, but righteous, voluntary suffering for another. Such suffering for another is the highest and purest form of motivation we can offer to those we love. Contemplate for a

moment: How does one change the attitude or the course of conduct of a loved one whose every step seems bent on self-destruction? If example fails to influence, words of kindness go unheeded, and the powers of logic are dismissed as chaff before the wind, then where does one turn? Jag Pravesh Chader suggested an alternative approach: “When [they—kindness and logic] fail to produce any salutary effect, voluntarily [one] invites suffering in his own body to open the eyes of the person who is determined to see no light” (E. Stanley Jones, *Mahatma Gandhi*, 110).

Fasting has often been employed for just such a purpose. Abstinence does much more than make us hungry. It does more than refine our spirits. It has within it a certain inherent motivational power that can change and soften the hearts of others, particularly when they know we are fasting for them. Therein lies a force that can penetrate the granite walls of pride, replenish the barren reservoirs of humility, and engender increased affection and gratitude for him who so suffers.

A missionary evangelist, E. Stanley Jones, once asked Mahatma Gandhi as he sat on a cot in an open courtyard of Yeravda jail: “Isn’t your fasting a species of coercion?” “Yes,” he said very slowly, “the same kind of coercion which Jesus exercises upon you from the cross.” As Jones reflected upon that sobering rejoinder, he said: “I was silent. It was so obviously true that I am silent again every time I think of it. He was profoundly right. The years have clarified it. And I now see it for what it is: a very morally potent and redemptive power if used rightly. But it has to be used rightly” (*Mahatma Gandhi*, 110).

Not all suffering motivates for good. There is the suffering of the prison inmate, yet the prison houses continue to overflow. There is the recurring hurt and suffering of war, yet the world resounds with war and conflict. There is the suffering of those who contract contagious diseases from immoral conduct, but thousands continue to follow suit. And then there is the suffering of those pure and noble souls who are able to suffer beyond themselves, whose suffering has more than a purifying power for self. It also brings a redemptive power to others.

Mohandas Gandhi seized upon righteous suffering as a powerful motivational tool for good. Each of his fasts possessed a certain motivational power, but none had more far-reaching effects than the fasts at Calcutta and Delhi. Calcutta was a battleground of hate. Gandhi, a Hindu, stayed at a Muslim home in the heart of the riot district. Some Hindus were incensed at Gandhi’s conciliatory conduct towards the enemy. An attempt on his life failed. Various consortiums of hot-headed Hindu youth were sent to Gandhi to convince him of the error of his ways. Each time the youth would return and repeat, “The Mahatma is right.” The war continued. Finally, Gandhi announced a fast to the death unless the foes altered their course. It would be peace for them or death for him. After three days of fasting, the suffering of one revered by an entire nation proved too much for the people to bear. The softening and persuasive powers of his suffering melted “hearts of stone.” Weapons, from knives to guns, were

laid at his feet. Almost overnight the healing occurred. Lord Mountbatten, one of the military leaders present observed, “What 50,000 well-equipped soldiers could not do, the Mahatma has done. He has brought peace” (*Ibid.*, 116-17). And so he had.

Delhi was his next challenge. The tension was screw-tight. Gandhi proposed eight points on which Hindus and Muslims must reach accord, or again he would fast to the death. All eight points favored the Muslims. The risk was staggering, but his goal was honorable: to unify a divided nation. After six days the pact of peace was signed. E. Stanley Jones, present just before the fast, wrote: “This was no cheap signing of an ordinary peace pact. There was a moral quality here that made it different. His blood and their tears cemented the pact.” He also noted, “His method and his aim were right. . . . He shook that nation to its depths—shook it morally” (*Ibid.*, 117-18). Through the power of righteous suffering a diminutive, seventy-nine-year-old man, waning in life, literally saved a nation by bringing it to its spiritual senses.

Suffering in behalf of another seems to have its major impact for good when at least four elements are present. First, the sufferer is pure and worthy. Second, the cause for which he suffers is just. Third, the recipient knows and loves the sufferer. And fourth, the recipient appreciates the cause for which the suffering occurs. When these four elements simultaneously exist, the chemistry for human behavioral change is explosive.

Just before the Church was organized the Lord gave some instructive counsel to Joseph and Oliver. He forgave them for their shortcomings and encouraged them to be faithful and keep the commandments. In so doing, he gave them a key to spirituality: “Look unto me in every thought. . . . Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet” (D&C 6:36-37). The Savior knew that an honest contemplation of the atonement turns our thoughts and actions heavenward. That is why we place such great emphasis on remembering the Savior and his atonement. It is a central component of the sacramental prayers (see D&C 20:77, 79). To “remember” the Savior’s sacrifice is a repeated theme of the scriptures (2 Nephi 10:20; Mosiah 4:11, 30).

“he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation” There is nothing esoteric about the gospel of Christ. It is not intended for any elect or exclusive group. No one is excluded. It is intended for all. All are warned, and all may benefit and be exalted.

25 Behold, doth he cry unto any, saying: Depart from me? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but he saith: Come unto me all ye ends of the earth, buy milk and honey, without money and without price.

verse 25 Here Nephi borrows phraseology from Isaiah (Isaiah 55:1) to state the idea the Christ is the “living water” and the “bread of life,” and he invites all to come unto him to obtain eternal gifts that may be acquired without money.

26 Behold, hath he commanded any that they should depart out of the synagogues, or out of the houses of worship? Behold, I say unto you, Nay.

verse 26 When Joseph Smith came to this passage, he needed to use a word which meant a place of assembly or meetinghouse. He therefore chose the Greek word “synagogue” which means exactly that. As mentioned previously, Greek was not a language spoken commonly in the area of Jerusalem in 600 BC. Please see a discussion of other Greek words found in the Book of Mormon in the commentary for Jacob 7:27.

Until relatively recently, the common wisdom about the concept of the synagogue is that it did not exist until after the Babylonian captivity. Thus, Lehi and his traveling group would have had to leave Jerusalem and the Old World without being acquainted of the concept of the synagogue or place of gathering for religious purposes. However, Lee I. Levine, a leading scholar on the history of the synagogue, has suggested that synagogues did exist before the Babylonian captivity in the form of chambers in the city gates (“The Nature and Origin of the Palestinian Synagogue Reconsidered,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 [1996]: 425-48). These early synagogues have been excavated at such important Old Testament sites as Beersheba, Gezer, Lachish, and Megiddo. Each of these has at least one chamber (which is nearly square) lined with stone benches around the interior walls, a single doorway, niches likely used for storing special ritual items, perhaps even sacred scrolls. If Levine is correct, then, before the Babylonian captivity, a town’s or city’s social activities centered around the city gate, and it seems reasonable that these social activities included Sabbath worship in a chamber of the gate that resembled later synagogues and functioned similarly.

Nephi’s straightforward use of a term that meant religious meeting place in this verse implies that he was personally familiar with some form of a place of worship in his original homeland.

27 Hath he commanded any that they should not partake of his salvation? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but he hath given it free for all men; and he hath commanded his people that they should persuade all men to repentance.

verse 27 “he hath given it free for all men” Salvation or exaltation is not “free,” that is, it is not earned without effort, but everyone, without paying, has the opportunity to decide to partake of (commit to) the gospel of Christ which “persuade[s] all men to repentance.” Thus, all are given “for free” the opportunity to start down that road to their sanctification and eventual exaltation.

28 Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden.

verse 28 “all men are privileged the one like unto the other” While God is “no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34) and loves all his children unconditionally and equally, he does ultimately favor the righteous with blessings (1 Nephi 17:35). Jehovah taught Samuel: “The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). The real issue with God is righteousness, not race.

An English teacher today would prefer the final phrase in this verse to be “none is forbidden.”

29 He commandeth that there shall be no priestcrafts; for, behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion.

verse 29 This verse contains a very succinct definition of “priestcraft.” Priestcraft is roundly condemned by the Lord. See also the commentary for 2 Nephi 10:5. Are there any practicing priestcraft today? Would any of the television evangelists qualify?

30 Behold, the Lord hath forbidden this thing; wherefore, the Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love. And except they should have charity they were nothing. Wherefore, if they should have charity they would not suffer the laborer in Zion to perish.

verse 30 “this thing” Priestcraft.

Here is the specific antidote for priestcraft. It is charity or the “pure love of Christ.” He who serves with charity has no thought for personal gain. McConkie and Millet, in their book *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, eloquently stated: “Charity is the anthem of Zion, priestcraft the psalm of Babylon” (310).

“if they should have charity they would not suffer the laborer in Zion to perish” “They” refers to those who preach to or lead in the kingdom of God. This might also be stated, “If they would have charity their primary concern would be for those over whom they preside.” For a discussion of charity, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapters 6, 7, and 8: *Charity as Empathy, Charity as a Revealed Sense of Others*, and *Applications of the Principles of Charity*.

31 But the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money they shall perish.

verse 31 The “laborer in Zion” is the leader of the kingdom of God. Here is a profound principle worth pondering. He who seeks after that which is eternal, shall have eternal life. He who labors for that which is perishable shall perish.

32 And again, the Lord God hath commanded that men should not murder; that they should not lie; that they should not steal; that they should not take the name of the Lord their God in vain; that they should not envy; that they should not have malice; that they should not contend one with another; that they should not commit whoredoms; and that they should do none of these things; for whoso doeth them shall perish.

verse 32 Those who practice priestcraft are motivated by things of the world. They will also indulge in these specific sins of the world. It is notable that Nephi refers to six of the ten commandments as he counsels the latter-day readers of the Book of Mormon. The word “whoredoms” is apparently synonymous, in the Book of Mormon text, with adultery.

33 For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; 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.

verse 33 Again, today’s English teacher would prefer: “For none of these iniquities comes of the Lord.”

“he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men” None of us will miss our opportunity for exaltation for failure to heed a gospel principle of which we are not aware. We will all have ample opportunity to hear and understand the vital saving principles.

“he remembereth the heathen” All peoples and nations will have an opportunity to hear the gospel (D&C 133:37).

2 Nephi Chapter 27

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 27 Isaiah 29

2 Nephi 27-30 Nephi prophesies of latter-day apostasy, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the restoration of the gospel.

This chapter explains the role of the Book of Mormon in the latter days.

Before studying this chapter, please review the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 26. Basically chapter 27 is Nephi's quoting of the Isaiah materials found in the King James Version in Isaiah 29:6-24. As mentioned in the commentary for 2 Nephi 26, however, there are differences between Isaiah's and Nephi's versions of these materials. Nephi's version contains some information not contained in the Bible's book of Isaiah. For example, there are no materials in Isaiah 29 which correspond to 2 Nephi 27:1, 6-14 and 20-23. The possible reasons for these apparent additions by Nephi are discussed in that commentary above. Also Nephi's intended application of these prophecies is clearly the latter days, while Isaiah likely had in mind, at least in part, a historical application to ancient Judah.

1 But, behold, in the last days, or in the days of the Gentiles—yea, behold all the nations of the Gentiles and also the Jews, both those who shall come upon this land and those who shall be upon other lands, yea, even upon all the lands of the earth, behold, they will be drunken with iniquity and all manner of abominations

verse 1 “the days of the Gentiles” In all of the scriptures, this exact expression is found only in this verse. However, this same time period is referred to elsewhere in scripture as the “times of the Gentiles” (D&C 45:25, 30). This period, obviously occurring in the “last days,” will be that period when the fulness of the gospel will be found in the hands of the great Gentile nation. Through the efforts of “gentile” missionaries, the gospel will be disseminated to those of the house of Israel wherever they may be found throughout the world. As the remainder of this verse states, the “days of the Gentiles” will also be a time of universal apostasy and much wickedness “even upon all the lands of the earth.” A gentile nation is any nation that does not have the Lord Jesus Christ as its king. In the “days of the Gentiles” there will be many Gentile nations on the earth where will be found great wickedness. The “great Gentile nation” is, specifically, the United States of America.

“drunken with iniquity and all manner of abominations” A metaphor for the senselessness and recklessness of those who are wicked.

2 And when that day shall come they shall be visited of the Lord of Hosts, with thunder and with earthquake, and with a great noise, and with storm, and with tempest, and with the flame of devouring fire.

verse 2 “they shall be visited of the Lord of Hosts” In the days or times of the Gentiles, after the missionaries from the great Gentile nation have borne their testimonies to the world, then will come the testimony of the Lord which he will bear to the world, or “visit” upon the world, using the forces of nature. “Tempest” is simply another word for storm.

These are the “signs of the times” spoken of in latter-day scripture (D&C 45:25-38) by which the spiritually perceptive individual will know that the hour of the Lord’s second coming is nigh. These will include “wars and rumors of wars, and the whole earth shall be in commotion, and men’s hearts shall fail them.” The “love of men shall wax cold, and iniquity shall abound.” There will be “an overflowing scourge; for a desolating sickness shall cover the land.” There will also be “earthquakes . . . in divers places, and many desolations; yet men will harden their hearts against me, and they will take up the sword, one against another, and they will kill one another.” These signs will mark the beginning of the great cleansing of the earth during which there will be great destruction of the wicked people and their wicked ways. This great destruction, while it may be considered a “sign of the times,” it is given a more specific label. It is one of the “signs of the coming of the Son of Man” (D&C 45:39-50). If the reader would like to review a more complete discussion of these signs, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapters 24, 25, and 26: *Signs of the Lord’s Second Coming—Introduction*, *Signs of the Lord’s Second Coming—Those that Warn*, and *Signs of the Lord’s Second Coming—Those that Punish and Cleanse*.

3 And all the nations that fight against Zion, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night vision; yea, it shall be unto them, even as unto a hungry man which dreameth, and behold he eateth but he awaketh and his soul is empty; or like unto a thirsty man which dreameth, and behold he drinketh but he awaketh and behold he is faint, and his soul hath appetite; yea, even so shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against Mount Zion.

verse 3 “as a dream of a night vision” In this latter day, the wicked who fight against Zion and expect to gain power over her, will be denied their expected victory, and they will be as empty and frustrated as a sleeper who dreams of food and drink but awakens faint from hunger and thirst.

“Mount Zion” The expression “Mount Zion” may properly be used to refer to the gathering places of the saints in the latter days.

4 For behold, all ye that doeth iniquity, stay yourselves and wonder, for ye shall cry out, and cry; yea, ye shall be drunken but not with wine, ye shall stagger but not with strong drink.

verse 4 Here Nephi addresses the wicked of the latter-days who are drunk with their own sins. Those who “imbibe” the world’s materialism, immorality, and idolatry tend to become intoxicated and addicted to that way of life and to that way of thinking. Like the drunkard they are in a spiritual stupor (“stay yourselves and wonder”). The expression “cry out, and cry” is alternatively translated, “blind yourself, and be blind” (*The Interpreter’s Bible*) implying that the drunkard suffers from impaired vision. Finally, like the drunkard, the wicked cannot walk a straight line. They stagger because they walk in darkness and apostasy and have lost their spiritual faculties.

5 For behold, the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep. For behold, ye have closed your eyes, and ye have rejected the prophets; and your rulers, and the seers hath he covered because of your iniquity.

verse 5 “the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep” “ye have closed your eyes” Ye have acquired spiritual blindness. These latter-day wicked have spiritually fallen asleep and have not responded to the Lord’s attempts to communicate with them. In conditions of universal unresponsiveness, the Lord may temporarily withdraw his Spirit and cease his attempts to communicate. Thus he may “[pour] out upon you the spirit of deep sleep” or “cover” his “seers” and “rulers,” that is deny access to prophets and seers.

verses 6-14 These verses in 2 Nephi 27 are additions to Isaiah 29 in that there are no materials in Isaiah 29 which correspond to them.

6 And it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall bring forth unto you the words of a book, and they shall be the words of them which have slumbered.

verse 6 Marking the end of the great period of apostasy will be the restoration and the coming forth in the latter days of the Book of Mormon. It will contain the messages or “words” of the Book of Mormon prophets who have “slumbered” in their graves for centuries.

7 And behold the book shall be sealed; and in the book shall be a revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof.

verse 7 “the book shall be sealed” The “book” refers to the Book of Mormon plates rather than to the Book of Mormon itself. It is likely that this prophecy refers to the portion of the plates of Mormon that Joseph Smith described as being sealed when he took possession of them. These are the plates of Mormon. This sealed portion contained the visions of the brother of Jared including his vision of things “from the

beginning of the world to the ending thereof.” For a more complete discussion of this sealed portion of the plates of Mormon, see the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

8 Wherefore, because of the things which are sealed up, the things which are sealed shall not be delivered in the day of the wickedness and abominations of the people. Wherefore the book shall be kept from them.

verse 8 “because of the things which are sealed up” Apparently this sealed portion of the plates contains spiritual truths we are not yet ready to receive.

“the things which are sealed shall not be delivered in the day of the wickedness and abominations of the people” Bruce R. McConkie said, “It seems apparent, under all the circumstances, that the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon will not come forth until after the Lord Jesus comes” (*The Millennial Messiah*, 114).

“the book shall be kept from them” Here “the book” refers to the entire set of plates from which Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon (the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi). Because of the unbelief of the people, they will not be privileged to view these plates, but rather will be expected to content themselves with studying Joseph Smith’s translation of them.

9 But the book shall be delivered unto a man, and he shall deliver the words of the book, which are the words of those who have slumbered in the dust, and he shall deliver these words unto another;

verse 9 “the book shall be delivered unto a man” The “book,” or the entire set of Book of Mormon plates, shall be delivered to Joseph Smith, Jr.

As mentioned previously, “those who have slumbered in the dust” are the Book of Mormon prophets who had been dead for centuries by the time the Book of Mormon was translated.

“he shall deliver the words of the book . . . unto another” Who is this individual unto whom Joseph Smith will deliver the words of the book? It is likely Martin Harris. We are familiar with the story of how Martin Harris took the sample of the writing on the plates to Professor Charles Anthon in New York (see JS-H 1:63-65). Perhaps this is the event to which Nephi is referring.

10 But the words which are sealed he shall not deliver, neither shall he deliver the book. For the book shall be sealed by the power of God, and the revelation which was sealed shall be kept in the book until the own due time of the Lord, that they may come forth; for behold, they reveal all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof.

verse 10 “the words which are sealed he shall not deliver” Joseph did not translate, or even open, any of the sealed portion of the plates.

“neither shall he deliver the book” Joseph did not allow the plates themselves to pass to another.

“until the own due time of the Lord” As discussed in the commentary for verse 8, it is suggested that we will not have access to the translation of the sealed portion of the plates until after the Lord’s second coming.

“they reveal all things” See the commentary for verse 7. The sealed portion of the plates contain a grand panoramic vision of the Brother of Jared in which he was allowed to view the earth from its beginning to its end.

11 And the day cometh that the words of the book which were sealed shall be read upon the house tops; and they shall be read by the power of Christ; and all things shall be revealed unto the children of men which ever have been among the children of men, and which ever will be even unto the end of the earth.

verse 11 “the day cometh” The “day” referred to here is the Millennium. Apparently the Millennium will be a time of great revealed knowledge. “In that day when the Lord shall come, he shall reveal all things. Things which have passed, and hidden things which no man knew, things of the earth, by which it was made, and the purpose and the end thereof. Things most precious, things that are above, and things that are beneath, things that are in the earth, and upon the earth, and in heaven” (D&C 101:32-34). Can you imagine anything more exciting than having access to this abundant revealed knowledge!

12 Wherefore, at that day when the book shall be delivered unto the man of whom I have spoken, the book shall be hid from the eyes of the world, that the eyes of none shall behold it save it be that three witnesses shall behold it, by the power of God, besides him to whom the book shall be delivered; and they shall testify to the truth of the book and the things therein.

verse 12 “the book shall be hid from the eyes of the world” Again, the word “book” refers to the plates and not to the translated Book of Mormon.

“save it be that three witnesses shall behold it, by the power of God” It seems likely that this verse (along with verse 22) was a trigger for the experience of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon. These witnesses were, of course, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer. It is interesting that section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which concerns itself with the three special witnesses of the Book of Mormon, was received in June of 1829, about the time when the final translation of the Book of Mormon was being completed. Keep in mind that the final books to be translated were those contained on the small plates of Nephi including 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Jarom, and Omni (see the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*). Thus it seems likely that about the time this verse was translated, Joseph sought and received D&C 17. There are also other verses in

the Book of Mormon that refer to special witnesses including 2 Nephi 11:3 and Ether 5:2-4.

13 And there is none other which shall view it, save it be a few according to the will of God, to bear testimony of his word unto the children of men; for the Lord God hath said that the words of the faithful should speak as if it were from the dead.

verse 13 “save it be a few” These are the eight witnesses—Hiram Page, Joseph Smith, Sr., Hyrum Smith, Samuel H. Smith, Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer, Jr., and John Whitmer.

“the faithful should speak as if it were from the dead” The Book of Mormon prophets will speak to the world through the medium of the Book of Mormon as if it were “from the dead” or “from the dust” (2 Nephi 3:19).

14 Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to bring forth the words of the book; and in the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth him good will he establish his word; and wo be unto him that rejecteth the word of God!

verse 14 The expression “words of the book” may be taken to mean the messages and concepts taught in the Book of Mormon.

verse 15-19 These verses correspond to verses 11 and 12 in Isaiah 29. You will note that Nephi’s version in 2 Nephi 27:15-19 is expanded over that in Isaiah 29:11-12.

15 But behold, it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall say unto him to whom he shall deliver the book: Take these words which are not sealed and deliver them to another, that he may show them unto the learned, saying: Read this, I pray thee. And the learned shall say: Bring hither the book, and I will read them.

verse 15 “him to whom he shall deliver the book” This is Joseph Smith, Jr.

“another” This is Martin Harris.

The “learned” is Charles Anthon, a professor of classical studies at Columbia College.

“Bring hither the book, and I will read them.” We are familiar with the story of Martin Harris’s visit to Professor Charles Anthon in New York bearing a copy of some of the characters from the plates along with their translation. It seems likely that Martin was motivated to make this trip to satisfy his nagging doubts about the plates. Yet we see that Martin’s trip was a fulfillment of ancient prophecy. After Professor Anthon had given Martin a certificate certifying the authenticity of the copied characters which Martin had shown him, the following occurred: “I took the certificate and put it into my pocket,

and was just leaving the house, when Mr. Anthon called me back, and asked me how the young man found out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an angel of God had revealed it unto him. He then said to me, 'Let me see that certificate.' I accordingly took it out of my pocket and gave it to him, when he took it and tore it to pieces, saying that there was no such thing now as ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them. He replied, 'I cannot read a sealed book'" (JS-H 1:61-65).

16 And now, because of the glory of the world and to get gain will they say this, and not for the glory of God.

verse 16 This verse refers to the final sentence in the previous verse, and explains Professor Anthon's motivation in offering to translate the gold plates. It certainly was not to further God's purposes, and it probably was not based entirely on scientific curiosity. Rather, apparently he saw an opportunity to get rich by marketing his "translation" of the gold plates.

In 1834, Professor Anthon denied that he told Martin Harris that the Book of Mormon characters resembled Egyptian. Not only did Martin Harris report that he did confirm their authenticity, but he returned home, told his friends about the experience, and later mortgaged his property to finance the publication of the Book of Mormon. Whatever happened during Martin Harris's visit to Dr. Anthon, Harris obviously came away very reassured. There is another piece of evidence indicating that Martin Harris and not Charles Anthon was telling the truth about their visit. In 1831 W. W. Phelps, in a letter, wrote that Anthon had translated the Book of Mormon characters and declared them to be "the ancient shorthand Egyptian." Brother Phelps could have only heard this phrase from Martin Harris, and it was not within Harris's background to make up a phrase like that. He must have heard it from Dr. Anthon himself. At the time this phrase was known to scholars, including Dr. Anthon. The world had been taught the secrets of translating ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics by the brilliant Frenchman, Jean Francois Champollion. He had broken the code by using the Rosetta Stone which contained a text repeated three times in Egyptian hieroglyphics, in Demotic or common Egyptian, and in Greek. Champollion's work had been published in 1822, and it had been reviewed in June 1827 in the *American Quarterly Review*, which referred to hieratic Egyptian script as "short-hand" Egyptian (Number 2 [June 1827]: 450). Anthon was familiar with this review. He owned a copy and he cited it in his *Classical Dictionary*. Anthon would have read this review only months before Harris's visit. Thus it is probable that W. W. Phelps heard this peculiar phrase from Harris, who in turn got it from Anthon, the only person involved who was likely to have known it. Anthon probably mentioned shorthand Egyptian because he was struck by certain obvious similarities in the transcript to hieratic or demotic Egyptian. We can only conclude that

Harris told the truth about what Anthon said during their meeting. Anthon's motive for later denying his confirmation to Martin Harris was likely to protect his prestigious standing among his peers. It was a professional liability for Anthon to have been linked with the Mormons and with Joseph Smith (*Re-exploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, 73-75).

“will they say this” Apparently Charles Anthon was not the only one who offered to translate the plates for their own selfish purposes.

17 And the man shall say: I cannot bring the book, for it is sealed.

verse 17 “The man,” of course, is Martin Harris.

“for it is sealed” This apparently refers to the sealed portion of the plates of Mormon (see the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*).

18 Then shall the learned say: I cannot read it.

19 Wherefore it shall come to pass, that the Lord God will deliver again the book and the words thereof to him that is not learned; and the man that is not learned shall say: I am not learned.

verse 19 “him that is not learned” This phrase and this verse have reference to Joseph Smith, Jr.

20 Then shall the Lord God say unto him: The learned shall not read them, for they have rejected them, and I am able to do mine own work; wherefore thou shalt read the words which I shall give unto thee.

verse 20 “I am able to do mine own work” This important theme, which will be reiterated in verses 21, 23, and 26, is that the Lord will bring forth his word and bring about his purposes by faith and miracles and not by the worldly wisdom and sophistication of learned men. It is clear that the Lord did not want the Book of Mormon to come forth through the erudition of the world. It is generally by faith and miracles rather than worldly means that the Lord accomplishes his purposes (D&C 1:24; 1 Corinthians 1:27).

verses 21-23 Material corresponding directly to these verses are not found in Isaiah 29 but are an addition to Isaiah's writings made by Nephi.

21 Touch not the things which are sealed, for I will bring them forth in mine own due time; for I will show unto the children of men that I am able to do mine own work.

verse 21 This verse and the following verse contain the Lord's instructions to Joseph Smith, Jr. We have already speculated that the Lord's “own due time” will be following his second coming.

“I am able to do mine own work.” See the commentary for verse 20.

22 Wherefore, when thou hast read the words which I have commanded thee, and obtained the witnesses which I have promised unto thee, then shalt thou seal up the book again, and hide it up unto me, that I may preserve the words which thou hast not read, until I shall see fit in mine own wisdom to reveal all things unto the children of men.

verse 22 As mentioned, in this verse the Lord is instructing Joseph Smith.

“then shalt thou seal up the book again” Joseph Smith will return the plates to Moroni.

“the words which thou hast not read” This is a reference to those things contained on the sealed portion of the plates.

“until I shall see fit in mine own wisdom to reveal all things unto the children of men” It seems likely that a diligent study of the scriptures available to us today is essential to our being able to fully appreciate and anticipate with relish the eventual revelation of “all things unto the children of men.”

23 For behold, I am God; and I am a God of miracles; and I will show unto the world that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and I work not among the children of men save it be according to their faith.

verse 23 Here is a reiteration of the important theme discussed in the commentary for verse 20. The Lord will work among the children of men according to their faith and not according to their intellectualism and erudition. Some might misconstrue this concept and conclude that intellectual pursuits are evil. They are not. The ideal balance seems to be to develop your mental capabilities to their utmost and be diligent in acquiring knowledge, but then remain humble and teachable. The consummate scholar knows well his limitations and realizes how relatively little man is given to know. Indeed it is only after admitting his lack of understanding that he is able to acquire fresh knowledge and make new discoveries.

verses 24-35 The remaining verses in chapter 27 correspond directly to Isaiah 29:13-24.

24 And again it shall come to pass that the Lord shall say unto him that shall read the words that shall be delivered him:

25 Forasmuch as this people draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men—

verses 24-25 “him that shall read the words that shall be delivered him” Who is this individual? The clue is found in verse 22. It is Joseph Smith, Jr. To what

specific interaction between Joseph Smith and the Lord are these verses referring? This is a prophecy of Joseph Smith's first vision!

verse 25 What a chilling indictment of the latter-day Christian churches! The Lord says, in essence, "They give me lip service only but they feel no heart-felt devotion. Their actions show that they do not love me." In other words, the Lord says, "They are hypocrites."

"their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men" "Fear" is regard or reverence. Their worship of me is a mere repetitive litany written by men.

26 Therefore, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, yea, a marvelous work and a wonder, for the wisdom of their wise and learned shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent shall be hid.

verse 26 "I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, yea, a marvelous work and a wonder" Here is the well-known prophecy of the latter-day restoration of the gospel, including the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

"wisdom of their wise and learned shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent shall be hid" Refers to the false teachings that will be exposed by the marvelous work and a wonder. The worldly wisdom of the apostate churches pales when compared to revealed knowledge. To "perish" is to die out. "Prudent" means wise.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has listed eleven elements to be included in the restoration: [1] gospel knowledge, [2] opening of the heavens (visions, revelations, ministering of angels), [3] priesthood and keys, [4] coming of Elias, [5] gift of the Holy Ghost, [6] gifts of the Spirit, [7] true church with its divinely inspired organization, [8] apostles, prophets, and other church officers, [9] gathering of Israel, [10] establishment of Zion, and [11] temple ordinances (*Mormon Doctrine*, 635).

27 And wo unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord! And their works are in the dark; and they say: Who seeth us, and who knoweth us? And they also say: Surely, your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay. But behold, I will show unto them, saith the Lord of Hosts, that I know all their works. For shall the work say of him that made it, he made me not? Or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, he had no understanding?

verse 27 "And wo unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord!" The Hebrew word that is here translated as "counsel" might well have been *sod*. This Hebrew word has a double meaning and might well be translated as secrets. See also 2 Nephi 28:9. Thus those who "seek deep to hide their counsel" are those who try desperately to hide their secret and wicked acts and thoughts from the Lord, an

undertaking which is, of course, impossible. Yet they are foolish enough to think they are successfully hiding, and they ask, “Who sees us, and who knows us”?

“Surely, your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter’s clay.” Unrighteous individuals are inclined to regard some commandments as an unwarranted intrusion into their natural inclinations—“turning of things upside down.” In this verse these individuals are compared to clay and the Lord to a potter. A potter can do anything he wants with his clay. These unrighteous individuals may accuse the Lord, their Creator, “You may have formed us [as a potter forms clay], but you don’t really understand our true nature.” This metaphor makes clear the foolishness of mortals who presume to be wise or more knowledgeable than their Creator (cf. D&C 10:5-34).

The Lord answers, “I know all [your] works”—your real motivations, and especially your real potentials, your true nature. In distorting and hiding the truth, you call black white and white black. Shall the potter be regarded as less wise than his clay?

28 But behold, saith the Lord of Hosts: I will show unto the children of men that it is yet a very little while and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field; and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest.

verse 28 Lebanon is a small country just north of Palestine and west of Syria on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The vegetation and animal life in Lebanon today apparently is not as abundant as it was anciently. In early times it was famous for its wine (Hosea 14:7), its cedars (1 Kings 5:14), its cypresses (1 Kings 5:8), and its wild animals (2 Kings 14:9). The fragrance of its trees is alluded to in Hosea 14:7. Today its trees are mostly gone, its animals are scarce, and its foliage is scanty.

In the latter days (see the following verse), Lebanon will be restored, literally or figuratively, to its former condition. It shall be “esteemed” or regarded as a forest.

A figurative or metaphorical interpretation of this verse is most plausible. The verse is a metaphor which suggests a change of values and perceptions among humankind. As a result of the marvelous work and a wonder, the forests of Lebanon (a type for the pride and worldliness of people; 2 Nephi 2:12-13; 19:9-10) will be replaced by fruitful fields (a type for productive covenant people of the Lord; e.g., Isaiah 27:6; 37:31; cf. 2 Nephi 15:1-7). At that day these fruitful fields will be valued and esteemed just as much as the forests once were (cf. Isaiah 32:15).

29 And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness.

verse 29 In the latter days the spiritually blind and deaf will be helped to see and hear by the Book of Mormon.

30 And the meek also shall increase, and their joy shall be in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

verse 30 The “meek” and the “poor” are likely those who are unencumbered by things of the world. They are humble before God. These shall rejoice in the restoration of the gospel.

31 For assuredly as the Lord liveth they shall see that the terrible one is brought to naught, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off;

verse 31 “the terrible one is brought to naught” As a result of the marvelous work and a wonder, Satan and those who follow him in rejecting and fighting against the Lord and his covenants will be silenced and destroyed.

Others who will be destroyed include:

“the scorner” The scorner is one who rejects the Lord and his truth with derision and contempt.

“all that watch for iniquity” These are those who are ever alert to opportunities to do evil.

32 And they that make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of naught.

verses 32 Others who will be destroyed include:

“they that make a man an offender for a word” Here the Lord condemns those who would look for reasons to accuse and blame others through a distorted and critical weighing of others’ words.

“lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate” Lay an unfair trap for him who seeks to find justice or carry out justice. The area near the gate of a city was used anciently to conduct judgment and other types of business (cf. Deuteronomy 21:19; Ruth 4).

“turn aside the just for a thing of naught” With specious arguments deny justice to the innocent. They reject truth and justice for some vain and temporal reward (cf. 2 Nephi 28:16; 29:3).

33 Therefore, thus saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale.

verse 33 “who redeemed Abraham” In what way did the Lord redeem Abraham? It is difficult to know exactly what is meant by this phrase. The word *redeem* might be defined as to rescue, to buy back, to set free by paying a ransom, or to deliver from sin and its consequences. During his life Abraham was often “rescued” by the Lord. For example, the Lord directed Abraham and Lot and their families from Haran to Canaan (Genesis 12:1), and later, because of famine, to Egypt (Genesis 12:10). While in Egypt both Abraham and his wife needed rescuing from the pharaoh (Genesis 12:17-

20). The Lord intervened in the matter of Abimelech's interest in Abraham's wife Sarah (Genesis 20), and, of course, the Lord intervened in the matter of Sarah's barrenness (Genesis 21). Perhaps the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham and his posterity of a promised land and numerous posterity was, in a sense, a redemption of Abraham's posterity (Genesis 17). Perhaps Nephi is here announcing Abraham's ultimate redemption from sin and his exaltation (see Alma 5:24; 7:25; D&C 132:29).

“thus saith the Lord . . . concerning the house of Jacob: Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale” To “wax” is to grow or become. When a face “wax[es] pale,” it becomes white due to shame and embarrassment. The Lord through the prophets Isaiah and Nephi is announcing the latter-day restoration of the gospel. In that day the children of Israel will no longer hang down their heads in sorrow and shame and wander about scattered in the world devoid of their own identity.

34 But when he seeth his children, the work of my hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel.

verse 34 “the work of my hands” The Lord is speaking. This phrase seems to refer to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. The first line of this verse is awkwardly worded. The Lord seems to be saying: “When Israel sees the restored gospel in the midst of his people—his children . . .”

Again, to “fear” God is to esteem, regard, or reverence him.

35 They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.

verses 34-35 When Jacob (the house of Israel) in the latter days discovers in his midst the restored gospel, he will rejoice and worship the Lord. Then shall those who formerly erred, or made mistakes, in spirit come to understanding, and those who murmured shall accept instruction.

2 Nephi Chapter 28

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 28:3-4 Nephi's prophecy of latter-day secular churches which are built up and not unto the Lord. When one shall say to the other, behold I, I am the Lord's, and the other shall say I, I am the Lord's.

2 Nephi 28:7-9 Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

2 Nephi 28:20-22 For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good. 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 28:29-30 Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough! For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have.

In chapters 28 through 30 Nephi prophesies of the latter days—that day when the Church will be restored and the Book of Mormon will be revealed to the world. Specifically he describes the religious landscape into which the restoration of the gospel will take place including the apostate conditions of the Christian world in that day. These chapters became the favorites of early church members in the early nineteenth century since they describe with uncanny accuracy the religious state of affairs that existed at the time the Church was restored. These chapters explained for those early saints the religious world around them and served to confirm for them the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. A delightful discussion of the details of the early saints' perceptions of these chapters has been written by Grant Underwood ("Insights From the Early Years: 2 Nephi 28-30," *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure*, 323-339). A sampling of the details of this article will be included in the verse commentary of these three chapters.

1 And now, behold, my brethren, I have spoken unto you, according as the Spirit hath constrained me; wherefore, I know that they must surely come to pass.

verse 1 "behold, my brethren" Nephi's audience is primarily those who live in this final dispensation. He particularly addresses his descendants (see the following verse where he refers to "our seed").

“as the Spirit hath constrained me” The word *constrained* means compelled or urged to action.

“I know that they must surely come to pass” Those events revealed to me by the Spirit will come to pass.

2 And the things which shall be written out of the book shall be of great worth unto the children of men, and especially unto our seed, which is a remnant of the house of Israel.

verse 2 This verse has reference to the Book of Mormon and clearly identifies the time frame of this chapter to be the latter days when the Book of Mormon will be introduced to the world.

“the things which shall be written out of the book” This phrase might better have been rendered “the things which shall be written in the book.”

“our seed” This, of course, refers to the descendants of Lehi, Ishmael, and Zoram.

3 For it shall come to pass in that day that the churches which are built up, and not unto the Lord, when the one shall say unto the other: Behold, I, I am the Lord's; and the others shall say: I, I am the Lord's; and thus shall every one say that hath built up churches, and not unto the Lord—

verse 3 Here is a major feature of the apostate condition of the world in the last days. Among the churches of men—those “built up, and not unto the Lord”—there will be a competitive and contentious vying for recognition and for members.

This verse and the next describe the situation that Joseph Smith, Jr., encountered in the surrounds of his home as he was growing up and wondering which church he should join.

Some time in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of country. Indeed, the whole district of country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division amongst the people, some crying, “Lo, here!” and others, “Lo, there!” Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist.

For notwithstanding the great love which the converts to these different faiths expressed at the time of their conversion, and the great zeal manifested by the respective clergy, who were active in getting up and promoting this extraordinary scene of religious feeling, in order to have everybody converted, as they were pleased to call it, let them join what sect they pleased; yet when the converts began to file off, some to one part and some to another, it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the

priests and the converts were more pretended than real; for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued—priest contending against priest, and convert against convert; so that all their good feelings one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a strife of words and a contest about opinions (JS-H 1:5-6).

4 And they shall contend one with another; and their priests shall contend one with another, and they shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance.

verse 4 “teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance” In these false churches intellectualism and the scholarship of men will replace the promptings and gifts of the Spirit as the means for determining theological truths (D&C 50:17-22).

5 And they deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel; and they say unto the people: Harken unto us, and hear ye our precept; for behold there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, and he hath given his power unto men;

6 Behold, hearken ye unto my precept; if they shall say there is a miracle wrought by the hand of the Lord, believe it not; for this day he is not a God of miracles; he hath done his work.

verses 5-6 Nephi identifies some false precepts that will be taught at the time of the restoration. These false ideas tend to instill in their adherents the notion that a restoration of the gospel is wholly unnecessary.

“they deny the power of God” The concept of priesthood is irrelevant. There is no need for a restoration of the priesthood.

“there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work” As Joseph Smith shared his account of the first vision with the Protestant preachers of his day, they responded “with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them” (JS-H 1:21). There will be no more miracles wrought by the power of God, for “he hath given his power unto men.” We already have a Bible and any further revelation or scripture is unnecessary, anticlimactic, and redundant.

7 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.

verse 7 This verse illustrates the insidious humanistic and hedonistic philosophies. These hold that individuals should be free to gratify their own carnal desires, to set their own moral standards, to live for the pleasure of the moment, and to do all of this without guilt. In order to sin without guilt, of course, one must lower his

moral standard to correspond with his behavior. This is exactly opposite the true gospel principle which is that to remove guilt one must repent and lift his behavior to correspond to the Lord's standard. Among those who espouse these hedonistic philosophies of men, there exists a significant and poignant irony: These philosophies can never result in true happiness. The principle that "wickedness never was happiness" is absolutely true and there will never be an exception (see the discussion of this principle in the commentary for Alma 41:10).

8 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.

verse 8 Both justice and mercy are valid concepts. It is vital, however, that there be maintained an appropriate relationship between justice and mercy. The false doctrine described in this verse distorts this relationship by inappropriately expanding the role of mercy and diminishing the importance of justice. In scripture this is referred to as allowing "mercy to rob justice." For other examples of the erroneous philosophy wherein mercy is allowed to rob justice, see Alma 30:17 in which Korihor taught: "Whatsoever a man does is no crime." Also in Alma 1:4, Nehor testified that "all mankind should be saved at the last day," and that "in the end all men should have eternal life." When the appropriate relationship exists between justice and mercy, then mercy will not rob justice but rather will appease justice, providing, of course, the sinner repents. Anyone who would be inclined to let mercy rob justice in their lives ought to heed well Alma's final warning to his son Corianton: "O my son, I desire that ye should deny the justice of God no more. Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point because of your sins, by denying the justice of God; but do you let the justice of God, and his mercy, and his long-suffering have full sway in your heart; and let it bring you down to the dust in humility" (Alma 42:30).

"take the advantage of one because of his words" This phrase refers to an individual who would lie in wait hoping to ensnare someone because of his words. Another way of expressing this sinful tendency is found in 2 Nephi 27:32: This sinner is one who waits eagerly to make another an "offender for a word." Those who are charitable tend to overlook the mistakes of others concentrating instead on the good he finds in people.

"God will beat us with a few stripes" Stripes are strokes made with a lash, whip, rod, strap, or scourge; affliction; punishment; sufferings.

9 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.

verse 9 “there shall be many which shall teach after this manner” In Book of Mormon times there were, indeed, many including Sherem (Jacob 7:1-20), Nehor (Alma 1:2-15), and Korihor (Alma 30:6-60). Nephi prophesies that there will be many in the last days.

In what way are these doctrines “vain”? Vain implies over concern about self—personal vanity. In obeying these erroneous doctrines, a man is self-centered. He who lies or watches for a way to ensnare or dig a pit for his neighbor is only looking to elevate himself at the expense of another. The “live-for-today” philosophy embodies the “me-first” attitude which is common today. The world would teach that we prosper only according to our own genius, and we prosper only according to our own strengths and abilities. It is us against the world. If our neighbor prospers, then he does so at our expense. This apostate philosophy may be termed the scarcity mentality or the law of the jungle.

“shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord” This phrase has already been discussed in the commentary for 2 Nephi 27:27. To reiterate: The Hebrew word that is here translated as “counsel” might well have been *sod*. This Hebrew word has a double meaning and might well be translated as secrets. Thus those who “seek deep to hide their counsel” are those who try desperately to hide their secret and wicked acts and thoughts from the Lord, an undertaking which is, of course, impossible. The Lord, of course, perceives perfectly the hearts of men.

10 And the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them.

verse 10 As mentioned in the commentary for verse 3, false doctrines are a major characteristic of the apostate latter day world. The previous verse identifies another important characteristic—false teachers. They are the very antithesis of the humble and righteous teachers who preceded them. Their apostate teachings mock those that have gone before. Thus, “the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them.”

11 Yea, they have all gone out of the way; they have become corrupted.

verse 11 “The way” may be said to be the way of truth. In this and subsequent verses, we are taught the characteristics of false teachers—those characteristics by which they can be recognized.

12 Because of pride, and because of false teachers, and false doctrine, their churches have become corrupted, and their churches are lifted up; because of pride they are puffed up.

13 They rob the poor because of their fine sanctuaries; they rob the poor because of their fine clothing; and they persecute the meek and the poor in heart, because in their pride they are puffed up.

verses 12-13 In the previous verses, we have been discussing the sin of pride. Perhaps pride may be succinctly defined as the seeking primarily for things of the world rather than things of the Spirit. This seeking is most often competitive and disregards the rights and feelings of others. Review Moroni's memorable warning to the people of the latter day delivered near the end of the Book of Mormon.

Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing.

And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea, even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts.

For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.

Behold, the sword of vengeance hangeth over you; and the time soon cometh that he avengeth the blood of the saints upon you, for he will not suffer their cries any longer (Mormon 8:35-37, 41).

For a further discussion of the concept of pride, see "Pride" in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The "Natural Self" and "Spiritual Self."*

It is said that priestcraft seeks to hide its spiritual poverty behind worldly wealth. See the definition and discussion of priestcraft in the commentary for 2 Nephi 10:5. Those involved in priestcraft would rather build costly buildings and wear lavish vestments than feed the poor.

14 They wear stiff necks and high heads; yea, and because of pride, and wickedness, and abominations, and whoredoms, they have all gone astray save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men.

verse 14 "They wear stiff necks and high heads" The false teachers, those practitioners of priestcraft in the latter days, will be stubborn and spiritually unteachable (have "stiff necks") and smug and proud, even disdainful of those of lesser position ("have high heads").

"a few who are the humble followers of Christ" Let us hope that Nephi saw, in this instance, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We must also acknowledge others of this latter-day dispensation who are outside of the Church, yet who strive earnestly and successfully to emulate the Savior.

“nevertheless they are led” Here the pronoun “they” seems to have reference to those “few who are humble followers of Christ.” These might, on occasion, have ecclesiastical leaders who lead them in such a way as to cause them to err. “Behold, I the Lord have looked upon you, and have seen abominations in the church that profess my name. . . . Wherefore, let every man beware lest he do that which is not in truth and righteousness before me” (D&C 50:4, 9).

15 O the wise, and the learned, and the rich, that are puffed up in the pride of their hearts, and all those who preach false doctrines, and all those who commit whoredoms, and pervert the right way of the Lord, wo, wo, wo be unto them, saith the Lord God Almighty, for they shall be thrust down to hell!

verse 15 “Whoredoms” are sexual sins, especially adultery.

A warning reiterated. Nephi’s concept of “hell” seems to correspond to what we would call the spirit prison today.

16 Wo unto them that turn aside the just for a thing of naught and revile against that which is good, and say that it is of no worth! For the day shall come that the Lord God will speedily visit the inhabitants of the earth; and in that day that they are fully ripe in iniquity they shall perish.

verse 16 It seems to be man’s nature that those who reject truth particularly if they have previously accepted that truth, do so with some considerable ambivalence. It is this ambivalence that compels many sinners to “revile against that which is good” and to actively reject the righteous and pronounce them to be of little value—“turn aside the just for a thing of naught.” The restored Church’s bitterest opponents may be often found among those who were erstwhile members of the Church but later became disaffected often due to an inability to live up to the church’s standards. People of this group behave as though they carry a continual burden of guilt that can only be relieved by actively persecuting the Church.

“for the day shall come that . . . they shall perish” Apparently we can expect the gap between the righteous and the wicked to widen as the Savior’s advent nears. The righteous will stand apart from those obviously “ripe in iniquity.” The latter group will “perish”—they will suffer spiritual death. They will be permanently separated from God.

17 But behold, if the inhabitants of the earth shall repent of their wickedness and abominations they shall not be destroyed, saith the Lord of Hosts.

18 But behold, that great and abominable church, the whore of all the earth, must tumble to the earth, and great must be the fall thereof.

verse 18 “that great and abominable church” This phrase has reference to that entity described in 1 Nephi 14. Bruce R. McConkie has described it as: “It is the

world; it is all the carnality and evil to which fallen man is heir, it is every unholy and wicked practice; it is every false religion, every supposed system of salvation which does not actually save and exalt man in the highest heaven of the celestial world. It is every church except the true church, whether parading under a Christian or a pagan banner" (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 340). It is especially anyone who makes war against the saints.

verses 19-21 There are several ways in which a man may be led away captive by Satan. Satan customizes his approach to each individual. Some may be provoked to anger or violence. Some might be more effectively led away by gentle appeasement or pacification. Others may be encouraged toward indolence or indifference. Still others may be satiated with abundant worldly possessions or influence and become driven to protect them and even to accumulate more.

19 For the kingdom of the devil must shake, and they which belong to it must needs be stirred up unto repentance, or the devil will grasp them with his everlasting chains, and they be stirred up to anger, and perish;

verse 19 The "kingdom of the devil" is the spirit prison. The word "shake" implies rouse themselves to action, in this case repentance. If the inhabitants of the spirit prison are not "stirred up unto repentance," they will spend eternity with Satan as sons of Perdition.

20 For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good.

verse 20 "at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men" It is sobering to contemplate Satan's desperate rage—anger and resentment—which impels him to try to stir up the same anger and resentment in the hearts of men, and encourage men to direct it against that which is good.

21 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.

verse 21 "carnal security" As long as the war between things of the world and things of the Spirit is being actively fought in a man's heart and mind, that man glimpses, from time to time, his eternal identity and does not lose touch with his eternal spiritual self. He will persist in remaining, at least to some extent, uncomfortable with his worldly concessions. If, however, he falls far enough along the worldly path, he may lose this discomfort. He will become comfortable with his worldly self. He will achieve a state of "carnal security."

“All is well in Zion” At least some of the devil's various tactics here are intended for members of the Church (see also verse 24). The sobering implication here is that often all is not well in Zion.

The word “carefully” in this verse is chilling. It implies that Satan's efforts at seduction of men are made thoroughly, painstakingly, and conscientiously.

22 And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none—and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance.

verse 22 “there is no hell” C.S. Lewis wrote, “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. . . . [The devils] themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight” (*The Screwtape Letters*, 13).

“others he flattereth away” To flatter is to coax; to attempt to win by praise or enticements. It also has the meaning of false praise for the purpose of gaining favor and influence. Flattery is one of Satan's most effective tools. He will say to the sinner, “You're fine. You're doing well. You have no need to worry. All your thoughts and actions are natural and fully justified.” President Joseph F. Smith identified flattery as one of the three great temptations facing the Latter-day Saints (*Gospel Doctrine*, 312-13). In the Book of Mormon the different forms of flattery are used almost always in a negative sense (the exception is Alma 17:31 where the word *flattereth* is used to mean persuaded or encouraged).

23 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, from whence they must go into the place prepared for them, even a lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment.

verse 23 Joseph Smith taught that man's three arch enemies in mortality are death (physical death), hell, and the devil, and that salvation consists in overcoming these three (*HC*, 5:387-88, 403; *Times and Seasons*, August 15, 1844). Do we believe in universal salvation? No. All are saved but the sons of perdition (*JD*, 2:238; *D&C* 76:39, 41-44).

“lake of fire and brimstone” This expression, of course, does not describe the literal fate of anyone. Rather, it is a figurative or symbolic expression that is discussed more fully in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:16.

24 Therefore, wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion!

25 Wo be unto him that crieth: All is well!

verses 24-25 We are reminded simply that there is no place for passivity in living the gospel. We must remain uncomfortable and proactive in our strivings to be obedient. The phrase “all is well in Zion” obviously indicates an attitude of spiritual complacency. For those with this attitude, Satan has a fertile opportunity to lead them “carefully down to hell” (2 Nephi 28:21).

26 Yea, wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost!

27 Yea, wo be unto him that saith: We have received, and we need no more!

28 And in fine, wo unto all those who tremble, and are angry because of the truth of God! For behold, he that is built upon the rock receiveth it with gladness; and he that is built upon a sandy foundation trembleth lest he shall fall.

verses 28 “And in fine” In summary.

“wo unto all those who . . . are angry because of the truth of God” In another place Nephi said, “No man will be angry at the words which I have written save he shall be of the spirit of the devil” (2 Nephi 33:5). Put simply, some people react to the truth with anger. This is clearly due to the absence of the Spirit of God and the presence of the spirit of Satan acting on a susceptible individual.

The analogy of building on a rock or sand is used by the Savior himself in 3 Nephi 14:24-27 (see also D&C 6:34; 11:24; 50:44; and 90:5). The “rock” would seem to represent the Savior himself or the principles of his gospel. The sand simply represents the absence of these.

29 Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough!

verses 27-29 These verses are usually thought to be intended for people outside the Church who believe that the Bible is sufficient scripture, and that no further revelation is needed or even appropriate. Could these verses also apply to people within the Church? An example of how this prophecy might apply to the saints was experienced in June of 1978 when the Revelation on Priesthood was announced to the Church. Most everyone in the Church received the news with grateful hearts and with thanksgiving. A small number did not accept it, and some apostate groups have broken off from the Church as a result of that revelation. This subject is so important that it will dominate the entire next chapter—2 Nephi 29.

30 For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them

that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have.

verse 30 “thus saith the Lord God” Here begins a sermon by Jesus Christ quoted by the prophet Nephi. It will extend through the entire next chapter.

“line upon line, precept upon precept” The important concept described in this verse outlines the conditions upon which the Lord reveals knowledge to man. It includes more than the idea of revealing knowledge a little at a time. Also implicit in this concept is the idea that in order to receive additional knowledge, one must prove oneself a faithful steward over the knowledge already received. If not, then even that which has been already received will be taken away.

31 Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm, or shall hearken unto the precepts of men, save their precepts shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost.

verse 31 Here we are reminded of that essential theme whose importance pervades all of mortality. It is the struggle between influences of the Spirit and those of the world. In this context the meaning of the colorful phrase “maketh flesh his arm” is clear. It means to regard things of the world and men as the source of one’s power.

32 Wo be unto the Gentiles, saith the Lord God of Hosts! For notwithstanding I shall lengthen out mine arm unto them from day to day, they will deny me; nevertheless, I will be merciful unto them, saith the Lord God, if they will repent and come unto me; for mine arm is lengthened out all the day long, saith the Lord God of Hosts.

verse 32 In this verse and the verse which follows, the Lord makes it clear that the benefits of the restored gospel in the latter days will be extended to the Gentiles (“I shall lengthen out mine arm to them”) as well as to the house of Israel.

“for mine arm is lengthened out all the day long” During this mortal trial the Savior remains ever willing and anxious to receive any of his children into his fold.

2 Nephi Chapter 29

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 29:6-8 Thou fool that shall say, a Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible.

2 Nephi 29:13 The Jews, Nephites, and lost tribes shall have each other's words.

This chapter describes Satan's latter-day attack on the Book of Mormon.

By the time we arrive at this point in the scripture, Nephi has already prophesied that the whole world in the last days will be engulfed in apostasy. There are, abounding in the world, wickedness, priestcraft, pride, false teachings, and worldly wisdom in place of revelation. These apostate characteristics have infiltrated the world's churches and every institution of human endeavor. In this setting, the Book of Mormon comes forth by miraculous means and through an unsophisticated prophet to provide guidance to those who have faith. It is especially valuable because it has been hidden in the earth for centuries, and it still contains its original purity and plainness.

1 But behold, there shall be many—at that day when I shall proceed to do a marvelous work among them, that I may remember my covenants which I have made unto the children of men, that I may set my hand again the second time to recover my people, which are of the house of Israel;

verse 1 The construction of this verse is unusual in that most of it consists of a very long parenthetical expression which begins following “there shall be many”—and extends through verse 2 into verse 3. It ends following “my words shall hiss forth”—in verse 3. Without this long parenthetical expression, the first sentence of this chapter would read something like, “But behold, there shall be many Gentiles [who] shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible.”

“marvelous work” This expression originated with the prophet Isaiah and is found in Isaiah 29:13-14. It has reference to the restored gospel in the latter days.

“my covenants which I have made unto the children of men” This phrase refers to the Abrahamic covenant the details of which can be reviewed in the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:8.

“that I may set my hand again the second time to recover my people” This same expression is used a few times in the book of Second Nephi. See also 2 Nephi 6:14, 2 Nephi 21:11, and 2 Nephi 25:17. If the Lord is going to set his hand a “second” time to gather Israel, then when was the first time the Lord “set his hand to recover his people”? It might be argued that this latter-day gathering is the third or fourth gathering. At the time of Moses, the Lord set his hand the first time to lead his people out of captivity in Egypt to their land of inheritance in Palestine. Another significant gathering

took place following the Babylonian captivity. Some have suggested that the time of Christ's mortal ministry constituted a "gathering." After all, the keys of gathering were given by Moses to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration at that time (Matthew 17:1-9). Certainly this was an attempted gathering when the Lord "set his hand" to gather Israel. It turned out to be, however, a gathering that did not fully succeed. In any case this great "second" or final gathering is now in progress as Israel gathers to the gospel and to the stakes of Zion.

Perhaps the Lord refers here to his mortal ministry as the "first time" he set his hand to recover his people.

2 And also, that I may remember the promises which I have made unto thee, Nephi, and also unto thy father, that I would remember your seed; and that the words of your seed should proceed forth out of my mouth unto your seed; and my words shall hiss forth unto the ends of the earth, for a standard unto my people, which are of the house of Israel;

verse 2 "the promises which I have made unto thee, Nephi, and also unto thy father" The Lord extends the Abrahamic covenant to the posterity of the Book of Mormon people. See the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:1-2, 8. The Lord also promises that the seed of Lehi and Nephi will be preserved even to the last days and have an opportunity to hear the words of the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 3:23).

"the words of your seed" This is the Book of Mormon which will, in the terminology of Isaiah, "hiss forth unto the ends of the earth, for a standard unto my people, which are of the house of Israel." One of the definitions of *hiss* in *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, "To whiz, as an arrow or other thing in rapid flight." That is, the Book of Mormon will serve as a signal, a standard, a flag, or a rallying point for those elect of the house of Israel who will gather in that day.

3 And because my words shall hiss forth—many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible.

verse 3 Here the term "Gentile" is likely best interpreted as any non-Jew who is a candidate to be gathered back to the fold or church of God. This would include the citizens of the great Gentile nation of the latter days, the United States of America, though many of those citizens are blood descendants of the house of Israel.

The meaning of this verse is clear. Certainly every modern-day missionary has encountered this objection to our Church's non-biblical standard works. Heber C. Kimball, after returning from a missionary excursion, wrote, "We delivered our testimony to many [ministers] who with one consent said 'we have enough and need no more revelation;' thus fulfilling a prediction of the Book of Mormon" (*Times and Seasons* [16 August 1841] 2:507-11).

Another more subtle but similar danger lurks for those of us in the Church who feel that our knowledge of our standard works is adequate or sufficient. We can never risk the scriptural apathy that invariably follows if a church member stops studying the scriptures. His rationalization might sound something like: “A Book of Mormon! A Book of Mormon! I’ve already read the Book of Mormon, and I don’t need to any learn more about it.”

Not only do we have the Bible and the Book of Mormon and the other standard works of the Church, but we as a people look forward to additional sacred scripture which will eventually be restored to the earth (D&C 93:18; D&C 107:57, Ether 4:7).

4 But thus saith the Lord God: O fools, they shall have a Bible; and it shall proceed forth from the Jews, mine ancient covenant people. And what thank they the Jews for the Bible which they receive from them? Yea, what do the Gentiles mean? Do they remember the travails, and the labors, and the pains of the Jews, and their diligence unto me, in bringing forth salvation unto the Gentiles?

verse 4 Here is the Lord’s warning to the “Gentiles” of the last days—the “day of the Gentile.” See the commentary for the previous verse for reflections on the identity of the “Gentiles.”

“O fools, they shall have a Bible” The Lord refers to the people of the latter day.

“And what thank they the Jews for the Bible which they receive from them?” Just how grateful are the Gentiles for the Bible they received from the Jews?

“Yea, what do the Gentiles mean?” What are the perceptions of the Gentiles relative to the Bible and its origins? Do they acknowledge the diligence of those righteous Jews, the Jewish prophets, through whose efforts and sacrifice we have a Bible today?

5 O ye Gentiles, have ye remembered the Jews, mine ancient covenant people? Nay; but ye have cursed them, and have hated them, and have not sought to recover them. But behold, I will return all these things upon your own heads; for I the Lord have not forgotten my people.

verse 5 Here is a sobering reminder of the persecutions the Jews have received at the hands of the “Gentiles” since the final scattering of the Jews by the Romans in AD 70. Also contained in this verse are instructions as to how we ought to regard the Jews today. While we may have come to regard them, as a culture, to be refractory to the gospel message until the Lord’s second coming, we must love them and never cease our efforts to win them over to the fulness of the gospel—to “recover them.”

It is touching to reflect on the Lord’s persistent dedication and patience which he evidences for his wayward children—especially his “chosen,” those who were especially valiant in the premortal world.

6 Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible. Have ye obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews?

verse 6 The Lord is still condemning those latter-day “Gentiles” who claim to accept the Bible yet maintain prejudices against the Jews, the very people that gave us the Bible. He is also condemning those who feel that the Bible alone is sufficient scripture to settle all questions of religion. Revelation has not ceased. The Bible is not the final word of God. Miracles, spiritual gifts, and revelation are always available to the true followers of Christ.

7 Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?

verse 7 Do you not know that all people of the earth are my children and are entitled to hear my words? The implication seems to be that the record of the Jews, the Bible, contains revelation intended primarily for the people of the Old World. Is it not logical to expect a corresponding record to be provided for people of the New World?

“isles of the sea” Again, this term refers simply to scattered Israel, wherever they may be found upon the earth.

8 Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word? Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another? Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also.

verse 8 **“murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word?”** Are you really resisting the concept that revelations in addition to the Bible should come forth?

“the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you” In the justice of God, no person is expected to accept a truth unless it has been properly established. One condition for this proper establishment is that the truth satisfies the law of witnesses. This law simply stated is: “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (1 Corinthians 13:1; see also Matthew 18:16; D&C 6:28,30; 128:3). Examples today of the application of this law might include the testimony of Christ in the Bible and the Book of Mormon; the three and eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon plates; the witness, in the meridian of time, of both Jesus Christ and John the Baptist—both sealed by their blood; the martyrdom of both Hyrum and Joseph Smith; the

invariable presence of another individual with Joseph Smith when priesthood keys were restored; and the sending out of missionaries two by two.

It is obvious that the central thrust of this verse is that the Bible and the Book of Mormon function together to satisfy the law of witnesses.

“when the two nations shall run together” What are the “two nations”? And when will they “run together”? It is likely that the two nations are the Old World (Judah) and the New World (Joseph or Ephraim). Their respective scriptural records (the Bible and the Book of Mormon) shall function together in the last days.

9 And I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and that I speak forth my words according to mine own pleasure. And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another; for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever.

verse 9 “that I may prove unto many” It should be obvious that even when a truth is established according to the law of witnesses and is thus “proven,” it may well not be proven in a tangible worldly or scientific sense. The only individual to whom the Lord is able to “prove” anything is he who is responsive to the Spirit.

“end of man” This verse is a statement on the constancy and eternal nature of God. The meaning of the phrase “end of man” is unclear. It could refer to the time when each and every one of the spirit children of God—those who belong to our round of creation—has been dispatched to this mortal earth to one of the other worlds in this round of the Father’s creation. Whatever the meaning of this phrase, the meaning of the verse is clear: God is eternal (Moses 1:38), and he will never cease to provide us with his word.

10 Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written.

verse 10 A firmly held heresy in the sectarian religious world is that the Bible contains all of God’s word and that there is no true scripture outside of the Bible. This is the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. Furthermore they would pronounce a malediction upon anyone who would contend otherwise, often quoting Revelation 22:18: “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book” (even most orthodox Christians today admit the apostle John had in mind only his own book when he wrote this verse—see also Deuteronomy 4:2). Here in verse 10 this incorrect doctrine is decried by the Lord himself. For a more complete discussion of the heresy of *sola scriptura*, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 4, chapters 7, 8, and 9: *Scriptural Canon—Should It Be Open or Closed?*, *Continuing Revelation and Modern Scripture*, and *The Question of Scriptural Inerrancy*.

As long as we are “Bible bashing” with the sectarian world, why not bring up a verse written by the very same author who wrote the verse in Revelation 22: “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25). It is clear that the Bible does not contain all of God’s word, and there is much more which he has “caused . . . to be written.”

11 For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written.

verse 11 “For I command all men . . . that they shall write the words which I speak unto them” If one people to whom the Lord has spoken has been commanded to record at least some of which the Lord has said, isn’t it logical to suppose that others to whom the Lord has spoken will also be asked to write it down? In the final verses in this chapter, we will identify three major scriptural records that have come forth or will eventually come forth. This particular verse leaves open the possibility that several other records may have been written and may yet come forth.

Again, the phrase “all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south” and the phrase “islands of the sea” refer to scattered Israel wherever they may be found.

“for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world” It may be true that a man who has not heard the law or had a chance to understand it will be judged lightly until he had that chance (D&C 82:3; Luke 12:48). However, this phrase makes clear that the old saw, “Ignorance of the law is no excuse,” is ultimately applicable. Certain books will be used both as a standard and as a witness in the final judgment. Each man has an obligation to search the scriptures to learn the law.

In speaking of some of the books out of which the world will be judged, President Spencer W. Kimball offered the following insight: “The Book of Life (see Revelation 20:12) will show the earthly activities of all of us, and the book of the angels will give the entire story of every man and what he did in the light and in the shadows, in the open and in the corners, all that is said in the secret places and from the housetops, all that was thought and expressed, whether good or bad. There will be no escape. The honest judge will give full value to all for their good works and will not overlook the other” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*. Edited by Edward L. Kimball, [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft], 1982, 46).

12 For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the

other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it.

verse 12 There are to be at least three major scriptural testimonies of Christ that will eventually come forth. These are the written records of “the Jews” (the Bible), “the Nephites” (the Book of Mormon), and “the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away”—obviously the ten lost tribes. The verse then tantalizes us by suggesting the eventual coming forth of yet a fourth record, that of “all nations of the earth.” Isn’t it exciting to consider and speculate regarding these other records?

The possibility of a separate record of scripture coming forth from the “lost” ten tribes of Israel is problematic. We have discussed previously that many of these Israelites, those descended from the ten tribes, have been thoroughly scattered throughout other nations of the world and do not exist in a discrete and separate body. Do they? Is there a separate body of the scattered ten tribes that live together somewhere?

As one reads the scriptural descriptions of the dramatic return of the ten tribes in the latter days, one cannot help but wonder if these passages of scripture are describing a discrete and sizable group of Israelites who will return *en masse* rather than a piece-meal gathering in of widely scattered Israelites from among the peoples of the earth. The Bible suggests, for example, that their return will be so spectacular that it will make the crossing of the Red Sea pale by comparison. Jeremiah says the Lord will lead the seed of Israel “out of the north country” and then comments: “It shall no more be said, the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands whither he had driven them” (Jeremiah 16:14-15).

In latter-day scripture we read: “And they who are in the north countries shall come in remembrance before the Lord; and their prophets shall hear his voice, and shall no longer stay themselves” (D&C 133:26).

Here we learn that wherever the ten tribes are, they have prophets among them who will lead them in their gathering. The record then continues: “And an highway shall be cast up in the midst of the great deep” (D&C 133:27). Isaiah suggests that this miraculous highway may be the result of the drying up of the great deep similar to the way the Lord parted the waters for Moses and allowed the Israelites to walk over on dry land. He says: “Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?” (Isaiah 51:10).

Apparently the returning Israelites will fill up the Western Hemisphere. Joseph Smith said one of the principal reasons the wicked will be cleansed from the earth is to make room “from the lost tribes of Israel from the north country” (*TPJS*, 1973 edition, 17). Modern revelation indicates that the massive immigration pouring across the Lord’s mighty highway will saturate all of the arable land and require the settling of both

deserts and barren regions. To solve this problem the Lord says: “And in the barren deserts there shall come forth pools of living water; and the parched ground shall no longer be a thirsty land” (D&C 133:28).

The Lord says these returning multitudes will bring with them vast treasures of precious things which will be turned over to the priesthood in the New Jerusalem, no doubt for the embellishment of the temple and beautifying of the great new capital city: “And they shall bring forth their rich treasures unto the children of Ephraim, my servants” (D&C 133:30).

In Deuteronomy 31:4 Moses addresses scattered Israel and implies that a part of scattered Israel may even be located somewhere outside of this earth: “If any of thine be driven out unto the *outmost parts of heaven*, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee” (italics added). A possible extra-terrestrial location of this group is also suggested by Jesus’s proclamation: “He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:31, italics added). Perhaps Jesus’s phrase “from one end of heaven to the other” corresponds to Moses’s “out unto the outmost parts of heaven.”

Prophets have suggested that the ten tribes will be gathered in from “the north countries.” One verse of scripture suggests that “north countries” refers to a place beyond the four corners of the earth: “. . . being gathered in from the four corners of the earth, *and from the north countries*” (Ether 13:11, italics added). Brigham Young said: “The ten tribes of Israel are on a portion of the earth—a portion separate from the main land” (Brigham Young, quoted by Matthais F. Cowley in his book, *Wilford Woodruff*, 448). All who read the scriptures are familiar of the concept of God’s technique of removing large bodies of people from the earth to some place especially prepared for them. The classic example is the City of Enoch: “And Enoch . . . built a city that was called the City of Holiness, even Zion . . . and lo, Zion in process of time was taken up into heaven” (Moses 7:19-21). The City of Enoch was taken up and perhaps even that portion of earth on which the city was located.

Brother Cleon Skousen has also drawn upon the apocryphal Old Testament book of Esdras for some other suggestions regarding the lost ten tribes. Before listing those suggestions, perhaps it would be appropriate to mention a few things about “the apocrypha.”

In Joseph Smith’s King James Bible, which he was using to create his inspired revision, there were fourteen books between the Old Testament and the New Testament known as the Old Testament Apocrypha. Most latter-day saints are not familiar with the apocryphal Old Testament books because they were eliminated from the King James Bible and all protestant Bibles in the early 1800s. They are still present in some Catholic Bibles, though there is some skepticism over their authenticity among

the leadership of the Catholic Church. Today, if one is interested, these books are available and may be easily found and purchased.

When Joseph finished his inspired revision of the Old Testament, he inquired of the Lord on March 9, 1833, as to whether or not he should translate or revise these apocryphal books. The Lord in D&C 91 gave him, in essence, the following answer which is the position of the Church on the Apocrypha: (1) These books contain many things which are true, and they are mostly translated correctly. (2) There are also many things contained therein that are not true but are the false traditions of men. (3) There is no need to revise the Apocrypha. (4) Any member of the Church may read the Apocrypha, but he should make certain he has the Spirit with him to help him discern what is true from what is not.

We have come to apply this counsel more widely than to just the Apocrypha. For example, is it all right for a church member to read the Dead Sea Scrolls and accept as true those things which are witnessed as such by the Spirit? Yes, indeed! There are literally hundreds of pieces of ancient literature which have been discovered that are as old as the Old Testament books in our Bible. We do not accept them as canonized scripture, but certainly acknowledge that they may contain some significant truths.

Now, back to Brother Cleon Skousen and The book of Esdras. This book indicates that the ten tribes, after they had been taken captive into Assyria, eventually decided to migrate north to a land which had never before been inhabited:

Those are the ten tribes, which were carried away prisoners out of their own land at the time of Osea, the king, whom Salmanasar, the king of Assyria, led away captive, and he carried them over the waters [Euphrates and Tigris Rivers] and so came they into another land. But they took this counsel among themselves that they would leave the multitudes of the heathen, and go forth into a further country, where never mankind dwelt.

Anglo-Saxon tradition suggests that this people originally lived in large numbers around the Black Sea until the first century BC. Then they migrated en masse to the north about 65 BC. As a result of this migration they eventually settled in Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Holland, England, and France.

According to Esdras at some point in time the ten tribes divided into two groups. It would appear that the more spiritual elements were quickened sufficiently to be transferred to a location, perhaps the "outmost parts of heaven" referred to by Moses who promised they would also be gathered back in the due time of the Lord. The fragments of the ten tribes who were not taken became dispersed among the nations of the earth. These also must be eventually gathered out from among the nations (*A Glimpse into the Future*, Chapter 1, *The Great Last Gathering*).

13 And it shall come to pass that the Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews; and the Nephites and the

Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel; and the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews.

verse 13 These three records are to be shared with the other groups. These three records are, by the way, another example of the law of witnesses (see the commentary for verse 8).

“the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews”

The expression “lost tribes” is found in only two verses of scripture, here and in 3 Nephi 17:4. We learn in 1 Nephi 22 that the term “lost” reflects the perspective of the Israelites in the Holy land. Thus, the lost tribes are those who are “lost from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 22:4). The lost tribes are Israelites whose identity is not known to the world and in some cases not even to themselves. Some scriptures describe their scattered exile as being in “the north,” using metaphorical language from the perspective of the rest of Israel, who last saw them being taken away in that direction (Jeremiah 16:15; Zechariah 2:6; D&C 110:11; 133:26).

The “words of the lost tribes of Israel” will apparently be brought forth when the body of the ten lost tribes return en masse to join the rest of gathering Israel. The records of the Nephites and of the Jews obviously do not consist of only one book each. Rather each is a collection of many books. Perhaps the record of the lost tribes will be the same.

An alternate suggestion has been made regarding the identity of the record of the lost tribes of Israel. Since Ephraim was the predominant tribe among the ten lost tribes, and since the latter day Church has frequently been referred to as consisting of the “children of Ephraim,” perhaps the Doctrine and Covenants should be regarded as a witness for Jesus Christ among latter-day Ephraim which may some day be combined with the other records of the lost tribes when they come forth.

14 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.

verse 14 It is obvious that the latter-day gathering and restoration of Israel will also include a gathering, into one, of the three major scriptural testimonies of Christ. This combined scriptural record will “show unto them that fight against my word . . . that I am God, and that I covenanted with Abraham that I would remember his seed forever.”

2 Nephi Chapter 30

This chapter deals mainly with prophecies of the latter-day restoration or gathering of Israel both in the New World and in the Old World. This will occur in preparation for the onset of the Millennium which is also described here.

1 And now behold, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you; for I, Nephi, would not suffer that ye should suppose that ye are more righteous than the Gentiles shall be. For behold, except ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall all likewise perish; and because of the words which have been spoken ye need not suppose that the Gentiles are utterly destroyed.

verse 1 “And now behold, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you” Nephi now addresses himself to the descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples, to those blood descendants of Lehi, Ishmael, and Zoram.

Here Nephi uses the term “Gentile” to refer again to all non-Jews including those outside the house of Israel and those citizens of the great Gentile nation of the latter days many of whom are of the blood lineage of the house of Israel. In the next verse, Nephi’s own descendants are included in the category of “Jews” because they came out from the land of Judah, even though we know that they are of the blood lineage of the tribe of Joseph through both Ephraim (Ishmael) and Manasseh (Lehi).

2 For behold, I say unto you that as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off; for the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel.

verse 2 Are the Gentiles, those actually without the house of Israel, going to be included in the gathering of Israel to occur in this final dispensation? They are indeed. As many of these Gentiles as repent and accept the gospel of Jesus Christ will gather with Abraham’s descendants and indeed will be inducted “by adoption” into the House of Israel. As stated below (verse 8), the work of gathering will take place “among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, to bring about the restoration of his people upon the earth.” John the Baptist understood this principle of “adoption” and taught it to the Jews of his day. He said to them, “God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (JST Matthew 3:36). The “stones” were obviously the Gentiles (see also the commentary for 1 Nephi 14:1-2).

“as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off” Nephi probably intends “the Jews” here to mean the descendants of his own people. This statement also applies to all Israelites by blood lineage. Those who do not measure up to their

spiritual privileges will not receive the blessings that might have been theirs as sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

3 And now, I would prophesy somewhat more concerning the Jews and the Gentiles. For after the book of which I have spoken shall come forth, and be written unto the Gentiles, and sealed up again unto the Lord, there shall be many which shall believe the words which are written; and they shall carry them forth unto the remnant of our seed.

verse 3 In this verse Nephi seems to continue to use the definitions of “Jews” and “Gentiles” that are most frequently applicable in the Book of Mormon, that is the “Jews” are all those who came out of the land of Judah including the Book of Mormon people. The Gentiles are everyone else, especially those citizens of the great Gentile nation of the latter days.

“after the book of which I have spoken shall come forth” After the Book of Mormon plates shall be delivered to Joseph Smith.

“and be written unto the Gentiles” And be translated for the use of the “Gentiles” in the great Gentile nation.

“and sealed up again unto the Lord” And be delivered back to the Lord.

Among these “Gentiles” which, as we have discussed previously, are actually mostly descendants of the tribe of Joseph and his son Ephraim, there will be many who believe the message of the Book of Mormon. Some of these will become missionaries and carry forth the Book of Mormon to the descendants of the Book of Mormon people.

4 And then shall the remnant of our seed know concerning us, how that we came out from Jerusalem, and that they are descendants of the Jews.

verse 4 “they are descendants of the Jews” The remnant or seed of the Book of Mormon peoples, wherever they may be today, will gain a knowledge of their spiritual heritage through the Book of Mormon. The Nephite and Lamanite peoples were all descended from the tribe of Joseph. In what sense then are they “descendants of the Jews”? Throughout the Book of Mormon, it is taught that Jewish nationals—those who originated in the kingdom of Judah—are Jews. In this sense, Nephites and Lamanites are Jews, though they are genealogically descended from the tribe of Joseph. In addition, the actual tribal representation among Book of Mormon peoples will be expanded in future pages of the Book of Mormon when Mosiah leads a contingent of Nephite peoples north to the land of Zarahemla. There his people encounter and unite with the people of Zarahemla, a people partly descended from the tribe of Judah and perhaps other Israelite tribes (Omni 1:13-19).

It is obviously incorrect to declare that all American Indians or modern-day “Lamanites” are descendants of Joseph through Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael (see the supplemental article *Book of Mormon Myths*). Those native American

Indians who have descended from Book of Mormon peoples, which likely represents only a small part of the Indian peoples, most probably have the blood of many of the tribes of Israel. Reference to them as a “remnant of Jacob” is a satisfactory label though not perfectly accurate.

It is interesting to note that in early church history, perhaps largely due to 2 Nephi 30, it was anticipated that a mass conversion of the American Indians to the gospel of Jesus Christ was imminent. W.W. Phelps wrote to Oliver Cowdery: “The Indians are the people of the Lord, and the hour is nigh when they will come flocking into the kingdom of God, like doves to their windows; yea, as the book of Mormon foretells—they will soon become a white and delightsome people. And how much is the joy of our hearts enlarged, when it is known the ‘poor Indians’ are to be raised from their low estate, and miserable condition by the everlasting gospel; even the fulness of the gospel contained in the Book of Mormon, and other books of God?” (*Messenger and Advocate* [October 1835] 2:193-95).

The early saints also anticipated a physical gathering for the American Indians just as they did for the Jews. This was to occur in Zion which, from revelations given to Joseph Smith, was to be in western Missouri. The United States government policy of relocating the Indians just west of Missouri was considered an act of God. It was anticipated that the Indian’s would have a significant role in establishing and building Zion. How disappointing has been the spiritual progress of the American Indians!

5 And the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers.

6 And then shall they rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a pure and a delightsome people.

verse 6 “their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes” This phrase suggests that the freeing up of the apostate descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples from their false beliefs and ignorance will be a process over a period of time and not a single event.

“they shall be a pure and a delightsome people” The earliest editions of the Book of Mormon contained the word “white” rather than “pure.” The word “pure” first appeared in the 1840 edition. Perhaps Joseph Smith made this emendation to avoid the misinterpretation that skin color would actually change. Or, perhaps this prophecy does indicate that when those who bear the mark of the curse accept the gospel, the mark is eventually removed from them. See the discussion of the “curse” and the “mark of the curse” in the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:21-23. This prophecy found application prior to the latter days. Perhaps the first group to qualify for this prophecy were those

Lamanites converted by the sons of Mosiah during their fourteen-year mission. These were the “Anti-Nephi-Lehies” (see the commentary for Alma 23:6). With their conversion the cause of the curse was done away. Therefore, there was no continuing reason for the “mark,” the dark skin, to persist. It is likely that the dark skin was removed from them making them the first Lamanites to become physically white as well as spiritually “pure and . . . delightsome.” The mark would also be removed from others (3 Nephi 2:14-16).

verses 7-17 In these verses Nephi refers to the gathering of Israel, in particular the gathering of the tribe of Judah. We know that the gathering of the Jews will not take place in earnest until the Lord’s second coming. Thus, much of what is said in these verses refers to the millennial gathering of the scattered tribes of Israel. While the latter-day gathering of Israel began with the restoration of the gospel through the prophet Joseph Smith, this gathering will continue to the time of the second coming of Christ and reach its zenith during his millennial reign.

7 And it shall come to pass that the Jews which are scattered also shall begin to believe in Christ; and they shall begin to gather in upon the face of the land; and as many as shall believe in Christ shall also become a delightsome people.

verse 7 “the Jews which are scattered also shall begin to believe in Christ” It is probably fair to say that few of the world’s cultures have so thoroughly fettered themselves with false doctrines and false traditions than the Jews. In the last days some relatively few Jews will begin to accept Christ. This movement, the so-called “Messianic Jews,” or “Jews for Jesus,” is seen today in the United States and in Israel and in other countries. It seems clear from modern prophecy, however, that no major conversion of the Jews will occur until the Savior’s second coming when he will set his foot on the Mount of Olives, and the mount will split in two. At that time the Jews will look upon the Lord and ask, “What are these wounds in thine hands and in thy feet? Then shall they know that I am the Lord; for I will say unto them: These wounds are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends. I am he who was lifted up. I am Jesus that was crucified. I am the Son of God. And then shall they weep because of their iniquities; then shall they lament because they persecuted their king” (D&C 45:51-53).

This verse indicates that in the eyes of the Lord the converted Jews will be more “delightsome” than they are at present.

“they shall begin to gather in upon the face of the land” Certainly we have no trouble today in seeing the beginning of the fulfillment of this part of the prophecy. Under the influence of the Zionist movement the Jews are rapidly gathering to Israel. As one might expect, in the early days of the Church, the interest in the Zionist

movement was high since members looked forward to Christ's second coming and the onset of the Millennium—perhaps even in their own lifetime.

While verse 7 might lead one to believe that the mass conversion of the Jews will precede their physical gathering, historical events have shown that the opposite is true. Again, the real gathering of the Jews to Jesus Christ and his Church will not occur until the millennium.

verses 8-18 Nephi closes his prophecy by quoting from the prophet Isaiah concerning the Millennium. In the scheme of things, Nephi does omit one final phase of this earth's existence—that great final battle during which the devil and his legions shall be loosed following the Millennium, and Michael will lead the righteous (D&C 88:111-115).

8 And it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall commence his work among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, to bring about the restoration of his people upon the earth.

verse 8 **“the Lord God shall commence his work”** “His work” is the missionary effort of the latter-day Church of Jesus Christ—the gathering of Israel. Do we have a problem with the timetable suggested here for the events in verses 7 and 8? Taken in sequence, these verses suggest that there will be a major conversion of the Jews prior to or coincident with the establishment of the latter-day missionary program. At the time of the writing of this commentary, not many of the Jews have been “gathered” or converted to the gospel, yet the missionary effort had its beginnings more than a century ago. Certainly the Lord's missionary work has commenced prior to any major conversion of the Jews, and their mass conversion still lies ahead as suggested in the commentary for the previous verse. Apparently the work of gathering will be continued during the Millennium when the work will be greatly expedited in speed and efficiency compared to that which is done prior to the Savior's second coming. So much so that all that is done prior to the Millennium will seem like only a beginning.

verses 9-10 These verses describe the great destruction and cleansing of the earth just prior to the Millennium.

9 And with righteousness shall the Lord God judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth. And he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth; and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

verse 9 Here Nephi quotes from Isaiah—see Isaiah 11:4 and 2 Nephi 21:4.

The Lord shall judge fairly the poor and the lowly. An alternate translation of “righteousness” here is “equity.”

“and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth” With fairness he will arbitrate for the lowly of the earth. These “meek” individuals will obviously be favored of the Lord. He obviously shows no favoritism to those of worldly wealth or position (D&C 35:15; 88:17-18). The wicked, on the other hand, who in this context are those who place things of the world ahead of things of the Spirit, will obviously draw the Lord’s wrath.

10 For the time speedily cometh that the Lord God shall cause a great division among the people, and the wicked will he destroy; and he will spare his people, yea, even if it so be that he must destroy the wicked by fire.

verse 10 “the Lord God shall cause a great division among the people”

This great division will occur in the last days in preparation for the earth’s being changed from a telestial to a terrestrial environment. The telestial-bound individuals will be destroyed while the others will be allowed to remain to see the beginning of the Millennium.

verses 11-15 These verses are quotations from Isaiah—see Isaiah 11:5-9 and 2 Nephi 21:5-9. They describe the conditions that will exist during the Millennium.

11 And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

verse 11 Here the clear reference is “the Lord God” in the previous verse. Righteousness and faithfulness shall be characteristic of him—as a girdle or band about his “loins” and “reins.” “Loins” anciently referred to the genital parts which were regarded as the seat of strength or procreative power. “His reins” might be rendered “sinews” and also refers to his strength and power.

verses 12-15 These are the classic and oft quoted verses that describe the millennial period of peace between wild and domestic animals and between people and potentially dangerous animals. Satan will be bound, righteousness will prevail, and knowledge of the gospel will fill the earth. For commentary on these verses, see the commentary for 3 Nephi 21:6-9.

12 And then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb; and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling, together; and a little child shall lead them.

13 And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

14 And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’s den.

15 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

verses 16-18 These verses also continue to describe conditions that will exist during the Millennium.

16 Wherefore, the things of all nations shall be made known; yea, all things shall be made known unto the children of men.

17 There is nothing which is secret save it shall be revealed; there is no work of darkness save it shall be made manifest in the light; and there is nothing which is sealed upon the earth save it shall be loosed.

verses 16-17 The Lord will later reveal to Joseph Smith the following: “The rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow; for their iniquities shall be spoken upon the housetops, and their secret acts shall be revealed” (D&C 1:3).

“there is nothing which is sealed upon the earth save it shall be loosed” The Millennium will be a period of complete disclosure, exposure, and unveiling. All secrets, both wholesome and sordid, will be revealed. Dissembling will not be allowed.

18 Wherefore, all things which have been revealed unto the children of men shall at that day be revealed; and Satan shall have power over the hearts of the children of men no more, for a long time. And now, my beloved brethren, I make an end of my sayings.

verse 18 “all things which have been revealed unto the children of men shall at that day be revealed” There is a fundamental principle of learning that pertains here. The only individuals who will fully appreciate the day when all scripture will be made available to them are those who have been diligent with the scripture we have available to us today!

2 Nephi Chapter 31

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 31 Nephi's discourse on Baptism

2 Nephi 31:3 My soul delighteth in plainness.

2 Nephi 31:4-7 If the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfil all righteousness, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!

2 Nephi 31:13 Follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent .

2 Nephi 31:17-21 After ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold I say unto you nay, for ye have not come this far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end.

Chapters 31 and 32 of 2 Nephi are particularly known for their discussion of the concept of the “doctrine of Christ” (Jacob 7:2, 6; 2 Nephi 31:2, 21; 32:6). But, what exactly is the doctrine of Christ? It would seem that the doctrine of Christ is simply another name for the gospel of Christ or the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are taught repeatedly in latter-day scripture that the Book of Mormon contains the “fulness of the gospel of Christ” (D&C 20:9; 27:5; 42:12). Yet we have observed there are some specific teachings missing from the Book of Mormon such as information regarding the details of the spirit world, the three degrees of glory, celestial marriage, and the temple endowment. Does the Book of Mormon, then, really contain the doctrine of Christ or the gospel of Christ in its fulness? Let us explore this question.

To begin our discussion, let us consider the question, What does *gospel* mean? What is the *gospel*?” The term *gospel* comes from the Old English *godspell* which is derived from *god* (meaning “God” or “good”) and *spel* (meaning “story”). Gospel, then, literally means “God story,” “good story,” “good news,” or “glad tidings.” The LDS Bible Dictionary defines the gospel: “The good news [gospel] is that Jesus Christ has made a perfect atonement for mankind that will redeem all mankind from the grave and reward each individual according to his/her works” (682). The gospel of Jesus Christ, then, is

the atonement of Christ, the “good news” that our sins may be forgiven by virtue of the Lord’s atonement, and that we may return to our celestial home. Without his atonement, we are lost. In one sense, then, the Book of Mormon does contain the fulness of the gospel. The doctrine of Christ contained in the Book of Mormon is sufficient to bring us home to him. The Book of Mormon is a rich source of divine teaching regarding the Lord’s atonement.

But are the Book of Mormon’s teachings of the atonement alone really sufficient? We actually want more than to come home to him. We want to be exalted in his presence. We want to inherit the blessings of the highest kingdom in the celestial heaven. If we are to earn our exaltation, wouldn’t it be helpful if we knew more details (more than we can read in the Book of Mormon) about the spirit world, the three degrees of glory, the ordinances of the temple, including celestial marriage? Elder Bruce R. McConkie expanded the definition of the gospel to include more about the principles and specific applications of the Savior’s atonement. He defined the gospel as: “the atonement. But the gospel is also all of the laws, principles, doctrines, rites, ordinances, acts, powers authorities, and keys needed to save and exalt fallen man in the highest heaven hereafter” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 134). By another definition, then, the doctrine or gospel of Christ in its fulness includes all that is necessary for our exaltation and some of this is not contained in the Book of Mormon.,

It would seem, then, that the ideal combination of teachings would include the Book of Mormon’s teachings on the doctrine of Christ (the simpler version of requirements for celestial salvation) plus the materials specific in other modern-day scriptures that lay out the requirements for exaltation.

In our discussion of chapters 31 and 32, we will concentrate on the basics of the doctrine of Christ—those principles that allow us to understand and take advantage of the Savior’s atonement in our lives (see also 3 Nephi 11-15 and 3 Nephi 27:13-21). By these teachings, we may come to Christ and become one of his sons and daughters. This doctrine is the “only way . . . under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 31:21). It is the only doctrine with the power to save.

Though any attempt to itemize the tenets of the doctrine of Christ must necessarily include elements of individual subjectivity and bias, it would probably be reasonable and helpful to do so. I will provide you, the reader, a seven-step formula. This is certainly not a formula in the sense of a check list meant to be mechanically followed one time through in sequence. It is a formula whose steps must be all kept simultaneously in mind and worked on continuously. An enriched understanding of these features of the doctrine of Christ can result from a study of the background materials I will mention as we go along:

1. Faith, including faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For a more thorough discussion of this principle see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 9, *Revealed Faith*; chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*; and chapter 11, *Other*

Notes on Faith. We all possess the initial subtle motivation to obey the commandment to be baptized and to obey all other commandments because of those things we have felt, heard, or read—sometimes through the testimonies of others. As we begin to obey, there is always a necessary element of deliberate effort. When we do succeed in obeying, this deliberate element is *deliberate* faith. We must simply obey because it's the right thing to do. We must obey even when we are often and compellingly resisted by our natural selves. With successful obedience, we are blessed with an incremental acquisition of sequential gifts of the Spirit. These are increments of the attributes of Christ. The accumulated total of these gifts of the Spirit we have acquired through our obedience are the sum of our *revealed* faith. Among the other blessings of revealed faith is the ability to obey more easily. The Lord is able to bless us with gifts of the Spirit—with revealed faith—only because of his atoning sacrifice and death. This is so because his blessings—his spiritual gifts to us—are inevitably grander than the efforts or “works” we have expended. According strictly to the principle of justice, it is not fair that he award us so generously for our relatively paltry efforts. Hence, it is only through his atoning sacrifice and death that he is allowed to so bless us.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is a specific and vital kind of faith. As we earnestly and deliberately strive to obey and emulate him (exercise our deliberate faith), we are blessed with a personal knowledge of him and a personal relationship with him. We are also blessed with a love for him and profound gratitude for his atoning sacrifice on our behalf. We are affirmed by the revealed knowledge that he loves us, and we are inclined to openly avow our love for him and our desire to follow his example—to obey him and strive to be like him.

2. Repentance. For a more thorough discussion of this principle, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 4, *Repentance*. Repentance is the vital step-wise process of changing from someone who fails to obey the Lord's commands to one who is obedient. When an individual begins to obey after a history of failure to do so, we refer to his obedience as *repentance*.

Repentance also includes the reparation or recompense we must make for the injury we might have inflicted on others due to our previously sinful behaviors (thoughts, words, actions).

3. The ordinance of baptism. The principle of baptism is a far richer concept than the reader may initially suppose. For a more thorough discussion of this principle, please see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18, *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*. See also volume 2, chapter 5, *The Holy Ghost*.

Baptism of water. In the ordinance of baptism of water, we affirm our intention and willingness to identify ourselves with his people and enter into a covenant to take upon ourselves his holy name (2 Nephi 31:13) and obey him. We evidence our sincere desire to return to God's presence, desiring it above all else, “with full purpose of heart . . . with real intent” (2 Nephi 31:13). We also communicate our desire to actively and

enthusiastically seek out the mind of God in order that we might conform to his will. We agree to join with his people here on earth and serve them in their striving to keep the commandments and progress spiritually.

Baptism of the Spirit. This is the receiving of the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands by someone with proper authority (2 Nephi 31:12). This essential gift bestows the power of personal revelation, or at least enhances one's ability to receive personal revelation, without which there can be no spiritual progress. It also enables and authorizes an individual to participate in the third part of the ordinance of baptism, the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. Thus, the individual is more apt to grow spiritually at a greater rate because of the baptism of the Spirit.

Baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. This third component of the ordinance of baptism embodies the principle of reconciliation and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost. Again, we are motivated to repent of sins and obey the Lord's commands by our faith in the Lord Jesus, especially at first by our deliberate faith. The "baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost" is the very process or "ordinance" by which man progresses spiritually here on earth. It is the process by which the blessings of the Lord's atonement are extended to any individual.

This is how it works: As a man strives to obey the Lord's commands, the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit of Promise, observes his efforts. When his actions and motivations are judged adequate and appropriate, the Spirit grants the blessings of the Lord's atonement and forgives him of his sins (he is justified). *Justification* is the removal of the penalty for sin imposed by the law of justice. The Holy Ghost then changes his very heart by (1) purging from his soul—burning out of his soul as if by fire—the specific imperfections of which he is repenting and (2) granting him an increment of the divine attribute he is striving to obey. These latter two processes together comprise the phenomenon of *sanctification*. For a more thorough discussion of the principles of justification and sanctification, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*. This is an ongoing process that continues over a lifetime. Through the influence of the Spirit of God, the iniquity, carnality, sensuality, and every other evil thing may be "burned out" of the repentant soul as if it were by fire. The person who has been thus cleansed becomes a "new creature" of the Holy Ghost. When the Holy Ghost blesses someone in this manner, it is said that he is "applying the atoning blood of Christ" or that he has "cleansed their garments by the atoning blood of Christ."

Can a mortal really ever be perfect? An individual who is born of the Spirit or totally converted is indeed referred to in the scriptures as being "perfect" (JST Genesis 17:1; Matthew 5:48; 19:21; Colossians 4:12; 1 Peter 5:10). He may not be just like Christ—perfect in an absolute sense—and is certainly not immune from committing sin. Yet, his spiritual progress has earned him the right to be considered "justified before

God” and “perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32-33). Such an individual eventually comes to abhor sin and cleave unto righteousness (see Alma 13:12).

The process of “baptism” centers on the ordinance of the sacrament. When we partake of the sacrament, we recommit ourselves to the Lord’s commandments. Rather than doing so in general terms, it seems more effective to commit ourselves to a specific goal for the coming week. We should prayerfully search our soul and ferret out a specific and small area where we need to improve. Then we should commit to do better in that specific area. If we live up to our commitment, the Spirit will honor us. We will be blessed to receive justification (forgiveness) and sanctification (purging of a part of our natural self and a granting of an increment of a gift of the Spirit). We thus take a small step toward becoming like Christ. Once we have taken a small step, then we are ready for another, and another, and another. This process continues throughout our lives. Being involved in the process is vital. It implies the attitude of humility and willingness to strive and improve to become more like the Savior.

4. Enduring to the end (2 Nephi 31:20). See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 7, *Spiritual Growth—Gifts of the Spirit* and chapter 8, *The Blessings of Spiritual Growth*. It seems clear that spiritual progress must be an ongoing process. It is an active process and not a passive one. There seems to be no such thing as a plateau in an individual’s spiritual maturity. When progress slows to a stop, then backsliding will inevitably begin to occur. The key to continued progression, and thus to “enduring to the end” is to maintain one’s relationship with and receptivity to the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost. Without such a relationship it seems impossible to maintain that vital eternal perspective and attitude. When the spiritual or eternal perspective is lost, then only the world and worldliness remains, and all spiritual progress ceases. We must never cease to deliberately strive to progress and improve ourselves. Only in this way does our responsiveness to the promptings of the Spirit remain fresh and alive. The principle of “no pain, no gain” certainly applies in the area of spiritual progress as much as any other. An element of personal grit and will power is essential.

Some may think of enduring to the end in terms of “hanging on by one’s fingernails” or “putting up with” or “sticking it out.” Such terms miss the spirit of real enduring. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught: “Patient endurance is to be distinguished from merely being ‘acted upon.’ Endurance is more than pacing up and down within the cell of our circumstance; it is not only acceptance of the things allotted to us (Alma 29:3, 6). . . . True enduring represents not merely the passage of time, but the passage of the soul” (*CR*, April 1990, 43). Endurance means an ongoing proactive effort that results in continuous growth.

As one’s progress continues, then his continued obedience is almost assured. Scripturally, an individual who is ever-striving is said to stand “steadfastly” and “always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of [his] sins;

and [he] shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created [him], or in the knowledge of that which is just and true” (Mosiah 4:11-12).

There are several scriptural references to the principle of enduring to the end. An individual who is successfully enduring to the end is willing to “stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life” (Mosiah 18:9). To endure to the end is to be “steadfast and immovable”—the scriptural phrase for spiritual maturity (Mosiah 5:15).

5. Receiving the promise of eternal life. See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*. Joseph Smith wrote: “When the Lord has thoroughly proved [a man], and finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and his election made sure” (*TPJS*, section three, 1838–39, 150). He may be sealed up to eternal life.

6. Resurrection. See “Resurrection” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 7, *Salvation*. Both the doctrine of resurrection and the doctrine of the final judgment (see the following item) were regarded by the prophet Joseph Smith as being among the first principles of the gospel (*TPJS*, 149, 365).

7. Final judgment. See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 9, *The Judgments*. An ancillary principle, closely related to resurrection and judgment is eternal life which is life forever in the presence of God. And intimately related to eternal life is eternal spiritual growth or progression in the direction of becoming like God.

Another major Book of Mormon passage that contains a summary of the gospel or doctrine of Christ is 3 Nephi 27:13-21.

Throughout the Book of Mormon, the many statements regarding the gospel (the doctrine of Christ) contain variations in terminology and are often elliptical (characterized by economy of expression), leaving out one or more of the seven points in any one articulation. However, for an audience familiar with the basic pattern, the allusion to that pattern is perfectly clear. These elliptical references often take the form of *merismus*, a classical rhetorical device in which the division of an important topic or statement into component parts allows for its full invocation by explicit listing of selected parts only. In the Hebrew Bible *merismus* occurs as concise or condensed expressions that, by mentioning the first and last or more prominent elements of a series, invoke the entire list (A. M. Honeyman, “*Merismus in Biblical Hebrew*,” *Journal of Biblical Hebrew* 71 [1952]:14). In other words, once a pattern is established in the form of A, B, C, D, E, F, G (such as the elements of the gospel or doctrine of Christ), the mere mention of two or more of these items, such as A and F, is used to represent the entire series. Understood as a formula composed of a list of ordered items, the gospel lends itself well to this rhetorical device. For example, a typical Book of Mormon *merismus* states that believing in Jesus and enduring to the end is life eternal (see 2 Nephi 33:4). While repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost are not explicitly mentioned, they

are implied by the use of merismus. A conservative count of gospel-related merisms in the Book of Mormon gives at least 130 meristic statements of the gospel or doctrine of Christ (Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets,” *BYU Studies* 31/3 [1991]:31-50).

1 And now I, Nephi, make an end of my prophesying unto you, my beloved brethren. And I cannot write but a few things, which I know must surely come to pass; neither can I write but a few of the words of my brother Jacob.

verse 1 “my beloved brethren” Nephi has been addressing his fellow Nephites in the land of Nephi.

2 Wherefore, the things which I have written sufficeth me, save it be a few words which I must speak concerning the doctrine of Christ; wherefore, I shall speak unto you plainly, according to the plainness of my prophesying.

verses 1-2 As Nephi begins to wind up his writing, he leaves us with the impression that he can only write a few more things. Thus we can assume that he will give us only those things which he considered to be of vital importance. Obviously the concepts of the “doctrine of Christ” as discussed in this chapter are among those vital concepts. There is one true “doctrine of Christ” or gospel, to which all who desire a fulness of salvation must ultimately subscribe.

“a few of the words of my brother Jacob” Nephi has quoted “but a few words” of Jacob’s teachings in 2 Nephi 6-10—Jacob’s two-day lecture to his fellow Nephites.

3 For my soul delighteth in plainness; for after this manner doth the Lord God work among the children of men. For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding.

verse 3 “For my soul delighteth in plainness” See the commentary for 1 Nephi 13:29.

“For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding.” This is an important principle of revelation. When the Lord speaks to a man, he wants that man to understand plainly. Hence, he must condescend to the man’s intellect and speak to him on a level that will allow the man to understand. Obviously the Lord’s prophets are not always sophisticated by the world’s intellectual standards, and revelation must be given to each “in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding” (D&C 1:24; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:27).

4 Wherefore, I would that ye should remember that I have spoken unto you concerning that prophet which the Lord showed unto me, that should baptize the Lamb of God, which should take away the sins of the world.

verse 4 John the Baptist's ministry was obviously of such importance that Nephi and other prophets were accorded visions of it (see 1 Nephi 11:27; Isaiah 40:3-4; and Malachi 3:1).

5 And now, if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfil all righteousness, O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!

verse 5 “to fulfil all righteousness” This oft misunderstood phrase is of profound importance. What does it really mean? The phrase implies that Jesus had to be baptized in order to be considered completely righteous. But, wasn't he absolutely righteous already? Was he not already spotlessly free from sin? Can one improve on that? The “usual” or “conventional” explanation for Jesus's having to be baptized is that baptism is a commandment, and Jesus was complying with that commandment in spite of his “not really needing to be baptized.” He was simply setting a good example for us.

Actually, there was nothing arbitrary in Jesus's desire for baptism. He was not simply seeking baptism as an outward and unnecessary sign of his obedience. He was not seeking merely to set a good example. The ordinance of baptism was, for him, just as essential as it is for you and me. It is vital to remember that righteousness is not simply the absence of sin or wickedness. It is not simply the avoidance of sins of commission. It is also the active seeking of the mind and will of God and the anxious and willing conformity to that will once it is procured. It is the process of introspection and discerning those ways in which our character and behavior fall short of the Lord's example. It is the spiritual growth granted us by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost when we make sufficient effort to amend our behavior and attitudes—when we repent. When John the Baptist expressed reluctance to baptize Jesus, the Savior responded, “Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). It is clear that neither the Baptist nor Christ could have been considered completely righteous had not the baptism occurred. Though the Son had committed no sin, the Father obviously expected him to make additional progress while here in mortality toward acquiring the mind and character of the Father. This progress would occur line upon line, precept upon precept in the same process of sanctification in which we are commanded to participate. Baptism, with its three separate parts, is an integral part of spiritual progress. Spiritual growth here on earth—even that of Jesus during his mortal ministry—is enhanced and accelerated by the ordinance of baptism. Indeed, we may say that baptism is the ordinance by which we are blessed to grow spiritually.

So, righteousness includes the proactive seeking after spiritual growth. In contrast, at the time of Christ's mortal ministry “righteousness” was understood to mean

merely conforming to the obligations and covenants that God had spelled out in the Mosaic law. A “righteous man,” under Mosaic law, showed unswerving and exacting faithfulness in keeping his religious obligations—in not violating the complex and challenging rules and regulations spelled out in the Mosaic law.

Today we also must avoid those sins of commission, that is breaking the laws of the gospel. But in addition, we must actively strive to become more like the Savior, to acquire those attributes which he possesses. If we do not, then we are guilty of sins of omission. We fail to make those sufficient strides in our spiritual progress that the Lord expects of us. The mortal Christ was the perfect embodiment of righteousness. We must earn our exaltation in exactly the same way Jesus obtained his. As baptism was required of Christ that he might be an heir of salvation, so it is required of all who seek that blessing. Jesus was baptized because baptism is required for entrance into the kingdom of God and also that he might qualify himself to fully participate in the process of spiritual growth (again, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18, *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*). Through the ordinances of baptism of water, baptism of the Spirit, and baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost his painful mortal experiences including his agony in Gethsemane and on the cross yielded maximal spiritual growth even for him.

Did Christ really “fulfill *all* righteousness” by being baptized (emphasis added), or were there other ordinances or covenants with which he complied? Was it necessary, for example, for Jesus to have hands laid upon his head and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost or the priesthood? Did he comply with the temple ordinances of the day? Of course he willingly sought the privilege of obeying and conforming himself to all of these saving ordinances.

“how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!” Note how the importance of this question is underscored by its ending with an exclamation point rather than a question mark. It seems likely that Nephi’s intent here is not really to ask a question. Rather he is making a vitally important statement.

verses 6-8 Notice the verb tenses in these verses (“the Lamb of God *did fulfil* all righteousness;” “he *was* holy;” “after he *was baptized* with water the Holy Ghost *descended* upon him in the form of a dove”). Nephi uses the past tense to describe events yet in the future. This is a common form of verb usage among Hebrew prophets and is often referred to as the “prophetic perfect” tense.

6 And now, I would ask of you, my beloved brethren, wherein the Lamb of God did fulfil all righteousness in being baptized by water?

7 Know ye not that he was holy? But notwithstanding he being holy, he showeth unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before

the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments.

verse 7 “**he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments**” The Book of Mormon teaches that Christ is separate and distinct from the Father and that the Son is subservient to his Father. See also 3 Nephi 11:11; 11:32; 26:2. Also, during Christ’s personal ministry among the Nephites he demonstrated his separateness from the Father and his deference to him as he prayed to the Father on their behalf (see 3 Nephi 17:15-18; 19:19-34).

8 Wherefore, after he was baptized with water the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove.

verse 8 “**in the form of a dove**” This phrase leads to an incorrect impression. Joseph Smith taught that the Holy Ghost does not change himself to the form of a dove. Rather the dove appeared after Jesus’s baptism as a sign that the Holy Ghost was present. Joseph explained: “The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come [accompanied by] the sign of the dove” (*TPJS*, 275-76).

9 And again, it showeth unto the children of men the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter, he having set the example before them.

verse 9 “It” refers to the Spirit of God; “he” refers to the Savior. “Having set” is yet another example of the prophetic perfect verb tense.

“**the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate**” Is a *straight* path the same as a *strait* one? Certainly not! A straight path is one without deviation. A strait path is one that is strict, narrow, and rigorous. In these verses, Nephi is emphasizing the strictness of the path; that is, all who would be exalted must comply judiciously with the ordinances of the gospel. Nephi is also emphasizing the narrowness of the gate. The gate consists of repentance and baptism. For a discussion of why the word straitness (rather than straightness) is appropriate here, see the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

verses 10-15 An interesting feature of these verses is that Nephi quotes alternatively both the Father and the Son leading to the conclusion that he probably had previously had an audience with both of them. A similar experience was had by Enoch (see Moses 7:50, 53, 59).

10 And he said unto the children of men: Follow thou me. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, can we follow Jesus save we shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father?

11 And the Father said: Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son.

verse 11 The principle of repentance is a vital tenet of the doctrine of Christ, and it is mentioned four times in 2 Nephi 31 (see also verses 13, 14, 17). In this chapter Nephi does not define repentance, however. What exactly is repentance? We know that it is essential for each of us to repent to allow the atoning influence of Jesus Christ to intervene on our behalf and cleanse us of our sins. We know that those who repent enjoy a newness of life and an increase in light, while those who refuse to repent lose light (see D&C 93:39). But what is the essence of repentance? See the commentary above on repentance. Again, it is change. The change wrought during repentance must be very real and must take place in our hearts, in our minds, and in our actions or behavior. The changes of repentance must lead us in the direction of eventually living the whole law, obeying the law more conscientiously.

Is there any difference between the terms *obedience* and *repentance*? Are the two synonymous? We use the word repentance when we wish to emphasize what? The word repentance implies change. The individual who has not been obeying but then begins to obey has repented. As also mentioned above, the process of true repentance also includes making amends or recompense for the effects of previous sins.

12 And also, the voice of the Son came unto me, saying: He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me; wherefore, follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do.

verse 12 “**He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost**” This verse refers to the gift of the Holy Ghost. Did the Nephites have the Melchizedek priesthood which provides the authority to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost? They did. See the commentary for verse 18 below.

13 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.

verse 13 “with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent” Here is an important principle of the “doctrine of Christ.” It seems clear that to qualify to receive communication from the Holy Ghost and thus from the Lord, a man must be free of hypocrisy. What is hypocrisy? If a man represents himself, or at least implies by his words or his actions that he has attributes he does not possess, he is a hypocrite. It would seem that if a man is free of hypocrisy, then we would say of him, He possesses “real intent” (Moroni 10:4); he has “nothing wavering” (James 1:6); a “sincere or honest heart (D&C 8:1).”

Parenthetically, we must be cautious not to judge a man as being a hypocrite. If a man’s outward actions and speech seem to represent him as being more righteous than he really is, then perhaps his outward actions simply represent his deliberate efforts to grow spiritually. Perchance he is “experimenting upon the words” of Christ in an attempt to acquire genuine gifts of the Spirit.

“then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” In order to have a chance at exaltation, it is necessary to experience the complete or total ordinance of baptism. This complete ordinance consists of three parts. They are: the baptism of water, the baptism of the Spirit (receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost), and the “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost.” See a summary of these three parts above.

Notice that in the phrase “and *then* cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” (emphasis added) the baptism of fire follows genuine repentance and baptism by water. It also follows the ordinance of bestowal of the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is thus the third part of the ordinance of baptism.

“then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel” After the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost have completed their work, an individual can “speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.” This phrase may have reference, at least in part, to the phenomenon of “speaking in tongues” or the “gift of tongues.”

We know that speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues are two of the gifts of the Spirit, two evidences of the true Church and signs that the Lord is working with his people. But what are those gifts? What does it mean to speak in tongues? An example of speaking in tongues is found in the second chapter of Acts in the New Testament. On the day of Pentecost—some fifty days after Passover and a day that was traditionally observed as the occasion when Moses had received the law from God on Sinai—the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the disciples in a manner they had never known before. Luke records in verses 1 through 6: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” Both the Hebrew word *ruakh* and the Greek word *pneuma* may be translated as “wind, breath, or spirit.” The “rushing mighty wind” that was felt by the early saints thus symbolized a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit. “And there

appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.” That is, the people witnessed “tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them” (New International Version) or “flames like tongues of fire distributed among them” (Revised English Bible). “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.”

This monumental event in the history of the Christian Church made it possible for the gospel to be preached by simple men to people of other tongues. So speaking a foreign but known tongue is a manifestation of the gift of tongues. We have numerous examples of this phenomenon in the history of the Church, times when either the speakers or the listeners were actuated by the Spirit of the Lord, when a foreign language was spoken or understood, and thus when communication and edification followed. This happens regularly with our full-time missionaries. By hard work and consistent effort and practice—and, most importantly, through a rich endowment of the Holy Ghost—elders and sisters are enabled to acquire language skills in a miraculously short period of time. They recognize and understand and feel things that would normally require many years to master. It is an everyday occurrence that staggers the learned and the wise of the world.

A second manifestation of tongues is when persons speak the pure Adamic language. We are told in modern revelation that our first parents were taught by God to read and write in a language that was “pure and undefiled” (Moses 6:6). The Adamic language continued among the children of men until the time of the Tower of Babel, at which time the speech of the people (except for the Jaredites, who took this sacred tongue with them to America) was confounded (Genesis 11:1-9; Ether 1:33-37; Smith, *Way to Perfection*, 67-69). The Adamic tongue was a powerful language that communicated not only words and ideas but also the power of God. “And so great was the faith of Enoch that he led the people of God, and their enemies came to battle against them; and he spake the word of the Lord, and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled, even according to his command; and the rivers of water were turned out of their course; and the roar of the lions was heard out of the wilderness; and all nations feared greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the power of the language which God had given him” (Moses 7:13). Moroni seems in awe of the power of this language, as contained in the writings of the brother of Jared: “And thou hast made us [the Nephites] that we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands. Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared, for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them” (Ether 12:24).

At the time of the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, and on many other occasions, Latter-day Saint men and women have enjoyed the gift of tongues. Because most of us, like Ammon, often “cannot say the smallest part which [we] feel” (Alma 26:16), speaking in the language of God, by virtue of a spiritual outpouring, seems to allow people to speak and rejoice and exult in the things of righteousness, to express their praise to God from the depth of their souls, and otherwise to give voice to that which is unutterable.

It is presumably this manifestation of the gift of tongues that many outside the true church seek to acquire or imitate. Many Pentecostals hold it as a tenet of their faith that one is not truly born again until he or she speaks in tongues. The prophet Joseph Smith, like Paul, his apostolic colleague, said that the gift of tongues is in some ways the least of the spiritual gifts but the one most sought after (see 1 Corinthians 14:8-32; *TPJS*, 246). Because Satan is so eager to deceive those who seek excessively for the gift of tongues (*Ibid.*, 25, 162, 195), the Prophet declared that anything taught in tongues was not to be received as doctrine (*Ibid.*, 229). “Tongues were given,” he explained, “for the purpose of preaching among those whose language is not understood; as on the day of Pentecost, etc., and it is not necessary for tongues to be taught to the Church particularly, for any man that has the Holy Ghost, can speak of the things of God in his own tongue as well as to speak in another; for faith comes not by signs, but by hearing [and clearly understanding] the word of God” (*Ibid.*, 148-49).

That statement of the prophet Joseph Smith leads us to the third manifestation of tongues and the one to which Nephi referred. “Do ye not remember,” Nephi inquired, “that I said unto you that after ye had received the Holy Ghost ye could speak with the tongue of angels? And now, how could ye speak with the tongue of angels save it were by the Holy Ghost? Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ” (2 Nephi 32:2-3). The message is simple, straightforward, and deeply profound. Men and women who have been born of the Spirit, who are becoming new creatures alive in Christ, enjoy the gift and influence of the Holy Ghost. When they teach or preach, they do so by that same power. The result is that they convey not merely their own will and desires but the mind and will of Christ. Stated more simply, prophets speak with the tongue of angels in the sense that they speak with the power and persuasion of the Holy Spirit. They speak what angels would speak. They deliver what Christ wants delivered. It is as though angels have come and delivered the message, or, more powerfully, as though our blessed Redeemer himself has been present and have spoken to his people.

14 But, behold, my beloved brethren, thus came the voice of the Son unto me, saying: After ye have repented of your sins, and witnessed unto the Father that ye are willing to keep my commandments, by the baptism of water, and have received the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, and can speak with a new

tongue, yea, even with the tongue of angels, and after this should deny me, it would have been better for you that ye had not known me.

verse 14 This verse and others suggest that repentance ought to begin to occur before baptism (see also verse 11 above). Certainly repentance is an ongoing process that continues throughout one's life. Then, what is the level of repentance that must occur prior to baptism? Apparently there is an obligatory initial basic change of heart, turning away from the world and from transgression and toward the Lord. Such an initial fundamental change is to precede baptism. Then after baptism there must be a continual changing until we have overcome all sin and can abide the whole law.

“and after this should deny me, it would have been better for you that ye had not known me” What do you suppose the Lord meant by this most provocative statement? It is similar to a statement by Jesus to his apostles made during his final Passover meal: “Woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24). Taken at its face, this verse seems to say that all those who have received the “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” “and can speak with a new tongue, yea, even with the tongue of angels” have reached a state of spiritual development so lofty that if they should deny Christ, they would be consigned to outer darkness. Certainly the only individuals in the eternities for whom it might have been better had they not known Christ would be the sons of Perdition who will live forever with Satan and his angels. All other people will be blessed by Christ and his gospel to receive a degree of glory. Perhaps we ought to be cautious about taking this verse too literally. In this verse we are exposed to one extreme of the post-mortal possibilities, that is perdition or outer darkness. Certainly, not all of those who have been exposed to the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost, the “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost,” are capable of committing the sin against the Holy Ghost and being consigned to that awful fate.

As we progress toward godhood during this mortal sojourn, we enter into a succession of covenants with the Lord. The first formal covenant is that of baptism. We promise loyalty, dedication, obedience, and in return he promises us much more. With each covenant we make, we accept an obligation to keep that covenant. The consequences of breaking a covenant become ever more serious as we progress. Perhaps it may be said of each covenant that if we were to break it, it would have been better for us in the eternities if we had never made the covenant in the first place.

Another meaning may be implied here. It is true that those who are converted to the gospel then fall away and become more hardened and bitter against the truth than if they had never heard the gospel.

15 And I heard a voice from the Father, saying: Yea, the words of my Beloved are true and faithful. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.

verse 15 “the words of my Beloved are true and faithful” We don’t usually think of words as being “faithful.” People are faithful but not things. The word *faithful* may also be used as meaning “true and [capable of being] trusted” (*Easton’s Bible Dictionary*).

16 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.

verses 15-16 For a discussion of the important concept of enduring to the end, see the commentary for verse 20.

“Son of the living God” The Old Testament contains scores of names and titles of deity, including Shepherd, Savior, Redeemer, Lord, God, Rock, Almighty, Branch, Creator of Israel, Deliverer, Everlasting Father, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, Shield, Jehovah, Lawgiver, Light, Ruler, Stone, Star, Prince of Peace, Servant. Such divine epithets are found in every Old Testament book except Esther. Parenthetically, the word *epithet* has two quite different meanings. The first is “a characterizing word or phrase used in place of the name of a person or thing.” An *epithet* is also “a word or phrase used invectively as a term of abuse or contempt” (*Random House Webster’s College Dictionary*). Obviously, here the former meaning applies. According to Book of Mormon scholar Susan Easton Black, the Book of Mormon contains 101 epithets for Christ (“Names of Christ in the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, July 1978, 60-61). In all, the 101 names or titles of Christ appear 3,925 times in the Book of Mormon’s 6,607 verses. Black’s tabulation shows that, on average, a name or title of Christ appears once every 1.7 verses. The frequent occurrence and variety of deific names and titles in the Book of Mormon distinguish the book from religious works created in the nineteenth century and place it squarely within the tradition of ancient religious texts.

17 Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; for, for this cause have they been shown unto me, that ye might know the gate by which ye should enter. For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.

verse 17 “the things . . . that your Lord and your Redeemer should do” Nephi is writing. He is the speaker in this verse. Is it not presumptuous for Nephi to write that there are things which the Lord “should do”? This verse serves to emphasize that the law applied to the mortal Jesus Christ in much the same way it applies to each of us.

“baptism by water” This expression serves to emphasize that there is more than one kind of baptism—more than one part of the ordinance of baptism.

“For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.”

Note here that a man’s sins are not remitted or “washed away” by baptism. Rather they are remitted or burned out of his soul by the Spirit of God in response to that man’s striving to repent. The reader is referred to the discussion of the three parts of the ordinance of baptism mentioned above.

18 And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son; and ye have received the Holy Ghost, which witnesses of the Father and the Son, unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye entered in by the way ye should receive.

verse 18 “strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life” We have stressed previously that “strait” does not mean “straight.” Strait means narrow, exacting, and difficult. While some may object to the use of the word strait here, and in the following verse, rather than straight, there is significant justification for its use as discussed in the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

“ye have received the Holy Ghost” “It is clear that the Nephites held the higher priesthood which we now call the Melchizedek priesthood. This provided them the authority to confer the Holy Ghost following a proper baptism” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 volumes, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957-66, 1:123). A sure testimony of the Father and of the Son can only come by revelation from God through the Holy Ghost.

“unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made” This phrase refers back to the promise made by the Savior in verse 12: Those that repent and enter in through the gate of baptism will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

verses 17-18 After you have studied the commentary on the concept of “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” in verse 13 and in the chapter, *Baptism, the Ordinance by Which We Grow Spiritually*, you might be thinking that there can be no other more advanced principle of salvation to master. Think again! These materials explain that repentance and baptism and the remission of our sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost are only the beginning of a process. Obedience to these principles merely takes us through the “gate” and sets us on the “strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life.” In subsequent verses, Nephi will tell us what else we must do.

19 And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.

verse 19 Here Nephi tells us more about the “strait and narrow path.” The credit for getting us through the gate and onto the strait and narrow path belongs to Christ, not us. Once on the path, this verse implies, we must demonstrate our own independence and obedience.

“for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him” You might, as you survey the summary of the tenets of the “doctrine of Christ” in the introductory comments for this chapter, wonder if the principle of faith has been slighted. Actually the necessity of faith is found in several of the tenets of the doctrine of Christ. Manifesting a sincere heart-felt desire to return to God’s presence is a manifestation of faith (deliberate and revealed faith). We evidence our faith as we seek understanding, as we repent, and as we accept baptism.

“relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” This phrase implies that man lacks sufficient merit of his own to entitle him to return to the presence of the Lord. He must depend completely upon the grace of God. He is a beggar at the throne of grace (Mosiah 4:20). For a review of the concepts of the law of justice and grace, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement*.

20 Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

verse 20 “ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ” To be steadfast is to be firm of mind or purpose; fixed in principle. We must demonstrate that our change of heart is permanent, that our commitment to obey is stronger than the enticements of the world and the devil, and we must do this day after day, year after year, through thick and thin, through good times and bad.

“having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men” This phrase refers to two important gifts of the Spirit, hope and charity.

“having a perfect brightness of hope” “Brightness” connotes vividness and precision. Hope is not only the longing for righteousness and the yearning to return to the presence of God (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 365). It is also a gradually growing assurance—received over time as an incremental gift of the Spirit—that one is going to receive celestial glory. The hungering to return to our celestial home is the product of the change of heart which results from the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. This desire for heaven is eventually added upon or affirmed by the Holy Spirit who bestows the gift of hope—again, that quiet assurance that one is indeed on the return path to the celestial home (see the discussion of the gift of hope in “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* and in “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter

11, *Other Notes on Faith*. Still further discussion of this topic is found in “The Rest of the Lord—the Gift of Hope” in volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*).

Like all other gifts of the Spirit, the gift of hope is given incrementally, line upon line, until eventually we may reach a “perfect brightness of hope” when we are quietly and humbly assured in our heart that we have earned the ultimate eternal reward.

“a love of God and of all men” Charity, or the pure love of Christ, may be defined as the longing for the exaltation of another individual as intensely as you long for the blessing of exaltation for yourself. As we seek to serve others and are purged of our imperfections by the Holy Ghost, this charity naturally follows (see a discussion of Charity in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 6, *Charity as Empathy*, and chapter 7, *Charity as a Revealed Sense of Others*).

“feasting upon the word of Christ” While we are on the strait and narrow path, what shall we do? The words of Christ hold the secret. Where do we find the words of Christ? They are contained in the scriptures, in the words and writings of inspired servants of the Lord, and in personal revelation to which each of us is entitled (2 Nephi 32:5). The words of Christ can only be truly understood through the ministrations and promptings of the Holy Ghost. And what does it mean to “feast”? The word speaks for itself.

“endure to the end” Endure to the end of what? In context it is clear that we must endure to the end of the path that leads to eternal life. And how long is this path? We do not reach the end of it until we are able to abide the whole law. “For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory” (D&C 88:22). But is it not true that most everyone leaves this mortal life with some deficiencies? Many depart early, before they have had much opportunity to strive along the path to spiritual progress. Are those things we have left undone in mortality taken care of by some sudden dispensing of virtue in the next life? That is unlikely. Most of us will still have some distance to travel, even after death, to reach the end of the path that leads to eternal life. I suspect that it will not be required of us to be able to abide the whole law in order to be judged worthy to enter Paradise. The key will likely be making significant progress along the road toward perfection—which progress is judged sufficient by the Lord.

“thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” Joseph Smith enriched the concepts in verse 20 as follows:

After a person has faith in Christ, repents of his sins, and is baptized for the remission of his sins and receives the Holy Ghost, (by the laying on of hands), which is the first Comforter, then let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and living by every word of God, and the Lord will soon say unto him, Son, thou shalt be exalted. When the Lord has thoroughly proved him and finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and his election made sure, then it will be his privilege to receive the other

Comforter, which the Lord hath promised the saints” (*TPJS*, 150; see also D&C 98:11-15; 101:1-4; and 136:31).

The sublime denouement of our sojourn on the path of life is having one’s calling and election made sure, which means that a righteous man may be ultimately crowned with the knowledge “that he is sealed up unto eternal life” (D&C 131:5). Apparently this message is sometimes communicated by the “Second Comforter” who is Jesus Christ himself. For a discussion of the concept of having one’s calling and election made sure, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7. See also the reference in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine* mentioned above.

Joseph Smith taught further:

Now what is this other Comforter? It is no more nor less than the Lord Jesus Christ himself; and this is the sum and substance of the whole matter; that when any man obtains this last Comforter, he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him, or appear unto him from time to time, and even he will manifest the Father unto him, and they will take up their abode with him, and the visions of the heavens will be opened unto him, and the Lord will teach him face to face, and he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God; and this is the state and place the ancient saints arrived at when they had such glorious visions—Isaiah, Ezekiel, John upon the Isle of Patmos, St. Paul in the three heavens, and all the saints who held communion with the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn” (*TPJS*, 150-51).

Joseph here teaches that when an individual receives the Second Comforter, he may be blessed with the ministrations of both the Father and the Son. It was mentioned above in the commentary for verses 10-15 that Nephi seems to have been taught face to face by both the Father and the Son. We may logically conclude that Nephi had his calling and election made sure. In this dispensation the saints have been encouraged to seek for this great blessing.

Brother Larry E. Dahl has written a word of caution:

The doctrine is true; the promise is sure. Perhaps, however, a word of caution needs to be added. There is the danger of focusing so intently on the final summit that we do not pay sufficient attention to more immediate, and for the moment, more important matters. Like the Jews of old, we could look “beyond the mark,” thus impairing our spiritual vision, and stumble from the strait and narrow path (Jacob 4:14). A great lesson can be learned from the experience of Alma, recorded in Mosiah 26. The Lord covenanted that Alma would have eternal life even though Alma was not directly seeking that blessing. There is no indication in the record that he was even thinking about it. As the chief high priest (president) of the Church, Alma was deeply concerned about many of the rising generation who did not believe. Their hearts were hardened, they wouldn’t pray, and they wouldn’t be baptized. He pleaded with the Lord for guidance as to “what he should do concerning this matter, for he feared that he should do wrong in the sight of God” (verse 13). He “poured out his whole soul to God”

(verse 14). And the voice of the Lord came to him in response to his pleading. But before telling Alma how to deal with his problem, the Lord blessed him for his faith and devotion, and said, “Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life” (verse 20). Truly, “he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39) (“The Doctrine of Christ” in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, 373-74).

21 And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen.

verse 21 “this is the doctrine of Christ” For a discussion of the concept of the “doctrine of Christ,” see the introductory comments for this chapter.

“the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God”

There are some statements about the godhead in the Book of Mormon that might initially seem confusing. As here, these statements refer to the separate members of the godhead being “one God” or “one Eternal God” (see also Mosiah 15:5; Alma 11:44; Mormon 7:7). It would seem that the nature of the relationship of the three members of the godhead to one another leads to these statements. The three are so closely aligned and allied that they function as a single unit. Their powers, their influences, their intentions, their goals, their responses are indistinguishable and identical. The three, indeed, function as one God. There may be additional reasons why the three are one God that we are not yet given to understand. Note their oneness is emphasized by the singular verb is—“which is one God, without end.”

There may also be a historical reason why the Book of Mormon repeatedly teaches that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one God. This reason may have had its beginnings at the death of the righteous King Hezekiah of Judah. He was succeeded by his son, Manasseh who was twelve years old when he began to reign. He ruled Judah for fifty-five years and was certainly one of the most decadent and wicked leaders ever to reign over Judah. He built altars for the pagan God Baal, worshiped the “astral Deities” Mercury, Venus, and Mars, built altars to the pagan Gods in the temple of God, practiced the adulterous fertility rites, shed the innocent blood of many in Judah, and encouraged the practice of infant immolation. He even submitted his own son to the fire as a sacrifice to the gods. During his nightmarish reign, any righteous prophet of God had to go into hiding to avoid being murdered (2 Kings 21:1-16). Manasseh was succeeded by his equally wicked son Amon who was assassinated after only a two-year reign.

Amon was succeeded by his son Josiah who became “good King Josiah,” and was one of the most righteous kings to lead Judah. He reigned some thirty one years

and presided over a major religious reform. He restored the prophets to their proper place of leadership, tore down the pagan altars, and rebuilt the temple and returned the worship therein to its proper form. During the reign of Josiah, an interesting thing happened. The high priest Hilkiah found, in the temple as it was being restored, a manuscript largely containing the writings of Moses called “the book of the law.” When this manuscript was read to King Josiah, he was overwhelmed and frightened to the point of tearing his clothes (2 Kings 22:11). The book contained stern warnings to Israel issued by the Lord, and its teachings became the very basis and theme of the religious reform advocated by Josiah. He called all the elders of Judah together and had the book read to them. He then made a personal covenant to uphold all the teachings and commandments contained in the book, and all of Judah’s elders made the same covenant.

What was this book that so frightened the good King Josiah? It was the book whose name means “second law,” referring to the “second law of Moses.” It is the book Deuteronomy. What year was it found, and what year did the major religious reform of Josiah take place? About 621 BC. Was the Prophet Lehi around in 621 BC? Of course he was. And was he supportive of the religious reforms instituted by Josiah? Not only would he have been supportive, but he would have been actively helping with the reform.

So what has all this to do with the godhead doctrine as contained in the Book of Mormon? Just this: The most prominent theme contained in Deuteronomy is that found in Deuteronomy 6:4, the so called “Shema”—Judah’s creed or confession of faith: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is *one Lord*” (emphasis added). This doctrine was particularly pertinent at the time of Josiah’s reform since his immediate predecessors had immersed Judah in the idolatrous worship of many gods. Under the influence of the newly discovered book of Deuteronomy, Judah was absolutely committed to the doctrine of “one [true] God” in contrast to many false gods. Lehi and his family would certainly have also been completely committed to this doctrine, and they would have taught it as the gospel truth to their descendants.

Incidentally, it is interesting to note one additional main theme of the Book of Deuteronomy, the so called “Deuteronomic reform.” In effect, this was, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land. If ye do not, ye shall be destroyed—literally wiped off the face of the earth.” This may have been the message that so frightened King Josiah and caused him to tear his clothes. Have you ever heard that theme? It is repeated many times in the Book of Mormon. It is the so-called promise—curse of the Book of Mormon.

The literature of the Book of Mormon fits the setting from which it comes.

2 Nephi Chapter 32

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 32:3 Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.

2 Nephi 32:5 For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do.

2 Nephi 32:8-9 And now, my beloved brethren, if ye would hearken unto the Spirit which teacheth a man to pray ye would know that ye must pray; for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray. Ye must pray always, and not faint; that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul.

1 And now, behold, my beloved brethren, I suppose that ye ponder somewhat in your hearts concerning that which ye should do after ye have entered in by the way. But, behold, why do ye ponder these things in your hearts?

verse 1 Nephi is still addressing his “beloved brethren” who are his people (2 Nephi 25:2-3) living with him in the land of Nephi.

“ye ponder somewhat in your hearts concerning that which ye should do after ye have entered in by the way” Nephi intends: “You are wondering what you should do next, after you have passed through the gait that leads to the strait and narrow path.”

“why do ye ponder these things in your hearts” Nephi felt that by now the answer should be obvious to his people. In verses 2 through 6 he will re-emphasize the profound truth that all spiritual knowledge and direction comes through the ministrations of the Holy Ghost. Man cannot negotiate successfully the path of life without direction from the Spirit himself.

2 Do ye not remember that I said unto you that after ye had received the Holy Ghost ye could speak with the tongue of angels? And now, how could ye speak with the tongue of angels save it were by the Holy Ghost?

verse 2 Here Nephi implies that he has observed some inspired teaching being done by his people. He offers this observation as evidence of the Holy Ghost’s presence.

3 Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.

verses 2-3 “Angels . . . speak the words of Christ.” Through the influence of the Holy Ghost, angels, who are nothing more nor less than people who have passed through this mortal phase and are on special assignment, are able to do and say the same things that Christ would do and say under any given circumstances. This blessing of the Holy Ghost applies entirely also to mortal men and women. The power and authority of angels does not exceed in the slightest that of the Lord’s mortal servants.

For further discussion of angels, see the commentary for Alma 29:1.

verse 3 “feast upon the words of Christ” To “feast” upon the words of Christ is to proactively, diligently, and enthusiastically study the scriptures or to vigorously search out the Lord’s servants and hearken unto their words.

4 Wherefore, now after I have spoken these words, if ye cannot understand them it will be because ye ask not, neither do ye knock; wherefore, ye are not brought into the light, but must perish in the dark.

verse 4 “if ye cannot understand them” “Them” refers to the words of which Nephi had just spoken.

“ye are not brought into the light” What does it mean to be “brought into the light”? A careful reading of this verse suggests that we cannot “come,” of our own volition, into the light. Rather we have to be “brought” in by some person or power outside ourselves. This person and power is the Holy Ghost. Even the plainest teachings that man can receive regarding the principle of the “doctrine of Christ,” the words of Christ, cannot, by themselves, make him understand this vital doctrine or “bring him into the light.” The Spirit of the Lord must participate.

An important prerequisite step to being brought into the light is to “knock.” What does it mean to knock? It means to proactively, prayerfully, and with earnest effort seek understanding. In other verses in this chapter this prerequisite step is referred to as: “search knowledge [and] understanding” (verse 7), and “feast upon the words of Christ” (verse 3).

5 For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do.

verse 5 After the baptism of water and the baptism of the Spirit (receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost), we “enter in by the way,” and we set our foot on life’s strait and narrow path where we depend heavily on the Spirit of the Lord to provide us direction.

“it will show unto you all things what ye should do” Here the Holy Ghost is referred to by the impersonal pronoun “it.” This seemingly uncongenial habit has arisen because we often refer to the Holy Ghost by referring to his influence rather than to the man himself.

This particular phrase refers to an important function of the Holy Ghost that we often fail to recognize. As we grow spiritually, each individual does so in his or her own particular and unique way and sequence. One might well ask the question of the Lord, “In my spiritual growth, what specific area should I be working on now or next?” Here in this phrase we learn that one of the important functions of the Holy Ghost is to reveal to us or prompt us concerning the very area or item we should be concentrating on at the moment. Ideally, as we partake weekly of the sacrament, it would be this specific item we would choose as the subject of our covenanting with the Lord for the upcoming period of time.

6 Behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and there will be no more doctrine given until after he shall manifest himself unto you in the flesh. And when he shall manifest himself unto you in the flesh, the things which he shall say unto you shall ye observe to do.

verse 6 “this is the doctrine of Christ” A reasonable summary of the “doctrine of Christ” is found in the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 31. This verse suggests that perhaps this doctrine is incompletely summarized here in 2 Nephi, and that further light will be shed on this doctrine after the Lord’s post-resurrection visit to the Nephites. It is certain that more specific light will be given to the earth when the fulness of the gospel is restored to the earth, but this fact does not invalidate the incomparable value of the principles of the doctrine of Christ discussed herein. Do we have available to us today a complete definition of the doctrine of Christ? The restoration of the gospel in its fulness in this dispensation has brought us a more complete understanding of the Lord’s plan of salvation and the precious ordinances of the temple. Perhaps the understanding afforded us in this final dispensation is more complete than it has ever been in the history of our earth.

7 And now I, Nephi, cannot say more; the Spirit stoppeth mine utterance, and I am left to mourn because of the unbelief, and the wickedness, and the ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men; for they will not search knowledge, nor understand great knowledge, when it is given unto them in plainness, even as plain as word can be.

verse 7 Apparently Nephi could have taught more! He could have provided us with more important doctrines, but the Lord did not allow him. And what was the limiting factor? Why did he not teach more? He was obviously restrained by the Spirit. But why? We can only speculate. Perhaps he was constrained by the fact that those whom he was teaching (1) did not seek diligently for new understanding; (2) did not strive to understand what he had already taught; and (3) did not qualify for the ministration of the Spirit of God to enable them to understand what they had already heard preached in plainness.

The following verse suggests that Nephi's hearers also were not praying diligently and sincerely. What about us today? Are we sufficiently diligent in our study of the scriptures? Have we mastered those truths we have been given, and do we yearn for new knowledge? Are we regularly importuning the Lord to know what we "should do?"

8 And now, my beloved brethren, I perceive that ye ponder still in your hearts; and it grieveth me that I must speak concerning this thing. For if ye would hearken unto the Spirit which teacheth a man to pray ye would know that ye must pray; for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray.

verse 8 "I perceive that ye ponder still in your hearts" Nephi apparently perceives that some of those listening to him are puzzled by his sayings. They lack the spiritual sensitivity to understand.

"it grieveth me that I must speak concerning this thing" Nephi speaks as though the subject of prayer is so basic that he fears offending his hearers by counseling them on the subject.

"the Spirit . . . teacheth a man to pray" The Lord has taught us in the Doctrine and Covenants that if a man is properly influenced by the Holy Ghost, he will receive whatsoever he asks for in prayer (see D&C 46:30). The reason for this bold promise lies in the fact that such a man is taught the things for which he should pray by the Holy Spirit (see D&C 50:30; 3 Nephi 19:24).

"the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray" Prayer may be defined as yearning for spiritual directions and spiritual intervention. What can be more devastating to the devil's cause than this. For his purposes to be fulfilled, the devil only need separate a man from his God.

9 But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul.

verse 9 One definition of the verb "to faint" is to lose one's courage, resolve, hope, or will.

"he will consecrate thy performance unto thee" The prayerful individual who is striving to be obedient will be justified and sanctified by the Spirit under the direction of the Lord. The individual will grow spiritually in response to his righteous "performance." See *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

One truly exciting implication of this verse is that the Spirit is available to us continually if we can only stay in tune.

2 Nephi Chapter 33

Scripture Mastery

2 Nephi 33:3 But I, Nephi, have written what I have written, and I esteem it as of great worth, and especially unto my people. For I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them; and I cry unto my God in faith, and I know that he will hear my cry.

This chapter may be considered to be Nephi's farewell. At the conclusion of a lifetime of faithful service, the great prophet Nephi bade farewell to his people in the land of Nephi and to all who would, in the future, read his words.

If we had available to us Nephi's writings upon the large plates of Nephi, perhaps we might have learned more about Nephi's ministry. From the record we do have, translated from the small plates of Nephi, we have learned little of that ministry. Only in 2 Nephi 5 did we read something of Nephi's actions as leader of his people. There we read that he maintained the records, made weapons for their defense, built a temple, and taught his people to be industrious. Mostly we have read of the Lord's dealings with Nephi's family including the rift that occurred therein. Also we have read a major discourse that Nephi's brother Jacob delivered to the Nephites (2 Nephi 6-10), several chapters of Isaiah's writings (2 Nephi 12-24), Nephi's commentary on those Isaiah materials (2 Nephi 25-26), and Nephi's prophecies of the latter days (2 Nephi 27-30).

1 And now I, Nephi, cannot write all the things which were taught among my people; neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking; for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men.

verse 1 "I, Nephi, cannot write all the things which were taught among my people" Perhaps there are several reasons why Nephi could not write more. At least we can speculate that there was a lack of time. Also, the Lord exercised some constraining influences over him (2 Nephi 32:7). It seems clear that Nephi knew more than he wrote.

"neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking" Nephi indicates that he considered himself able to speak more powerfully than he could write. Apparently he did not feel the same power of the Spirit when he wrote as when he spoke. We must consider Nephi something of an authority on the Spirit of God. After all he spoke with him face to face (1 Nephi 11:11).

"when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the Power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men" We are reminded of a powerful principle of gospel teaching. If an individual is to teach the gospel effectively,

that individual must be worthy of, desirous of, and in possession of the Spirit of the Holy Ghost. The teacher will be aware of the Holy Ghost's presence, as the Holy Ghost will actually bear witness to the teacher of the principles he teaches—as he is teaching! By this means the teacher will know that the Holy Ghost is with him and that the Holy Ghost will attempt to bear witness to the hearer as well. The missionary, for example, who remembers this principle and always seeks for the attending Spirit of the Holy Ghost will provide for his investigator the best possible chance of being ministered to by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost.

2 But behold, there are many that harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit, that it hath no place in them; wherefore, they cast many things away which are written and esteem them as things of naught.

verse 2 In this verse and in the remaining verses in this chapter, Nephi continues to speak of his people. He is addressing his own contemporaries, their posterity, and us in this final dispensation..

“they cast many things away which are written and esteem them as things of naught” One example of those referred to in this verse might be those who will reject the Book of Mormon in this latter-day dispensation. Perhaps the “plainness” of the Book of Mormon’s message is partly responsible for its widespread rejection. It has ever been that truth spoken plainly tends to divide people. Either people will accept and love the truth or they will “harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit” and “cast many things away which are written and esteem them as things of naught.” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

Is it not ironic that some who reject the Book of Mormon today do so in the name of loyalty to the Bible!

3 But I, Nephi, have written what I have written, and I esteem it as of great worth, and especially unto my people. For I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them; and I cry unto my God in faith, and I know that he will hear my cry.

verse 3 To esteem something is to regard it or set a value on it, whether low or high. Can there be any doubt that Nephi prayed earnestly? Nephi truly possessed that gift or character trait referred to as charity or “the pure love of Christ” which will be discussed further in the commentary for verse 7 below.

4 And I know that the Lord God will consecrate my prayers for the gain of my people. And the words which I have written in weakness will be made strong unto them; for it persuadeth them to do good; it maketh known unto them of their fathers; and it speaketh of Jesus, and persuadeth them to believe in him, and to endure to the end, which is life eternal.

verse 4 “the Lord God will consecrate my prayers for the gain of my people” The Lord will accept my prayers and accordingly bless my people.

“the words which I have written in weakness will be made strong unto them” Nephi has previously admitted his “weakness” (see 1 Nephi 19:6). This admission is made in a spirit of true humility and modesty. In verse 1 he mentioned that he perceived that he was not “mighty in writing.” We must conclude that he genuinely regarded his ability to write as somewhat inadequate. This perception notwithstanding, he knew that he was communicating sound principles of truth, and that the Spirit of the Lord would testify of the truth of these principles to the honest reader of his words in the future.

“it persuadeth them to do good; it maketh known unto them of their father; and it speaketh of Jesus, and persuadeth them to believe in him.” What is the antecedent of “it”? That antecedent is found earlier in this same verse and also in verse 3. Can you spot it? “It” is “the words which I have written,” or, in verse 3, “what I have written.” In other words, “it” refers to the writings of Nephi.

“life eternal” This is the same expression as “eternal life” which means far more than living forever. It implies living eternally in the celestial presence of God.

“persuadeth them to believe in him, and to endure to the end, which is life eternal” This phrase is an excellent example of merismus, the Hebrew rhetorical device of invoking the entire gospel, or doctrine of Christ, by mentioning only a few of its parts. See the commentary on merismus in the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 31. Here Nephi mentions only two features of the gospel: “to believe in him” and “to endure to the end.”

5 And it speaketh harshly against sin, according to the plainness of the truth; wherefore, no man will be angry at the words which I have written save he shall be of the spirit of the devil.

verse 5 Here is the “it” again. As in the previous verse, “it” refers to the writings of Nephi. In a broader sense, we might regard “it” as referring to the entire Book of Mormon.

We have mentioned previously the fact that eternal truths, plainly presented, tend to polarize people into two camps. If the people are in tune with the Spirit, they will embrace the truth. If they are not, they will reject the truth as being foolish, naive, unsophisticated, or otherwise nonsensical. This rejection, however, seems always accompanied by a subtle and deep-seated element of ambivalence, disquiet, and discomfiture. “The guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center” (1 Nephi 16:2). The Book of Mormon itself is just such a “plain” truth. It is either the word of God, or it isn’t. It is either true, or it is a lie. There is no gray area.

“he shall be of the spirit of the devil” Perhaps the devil gets too much credit here. People need only be captivated by things of the world rather than eternal things

to render them inclined to reject eternal truths. Mortality itself—combined with our natural-man selves—offers abundant opportunities to become distracted from our eternal destiny. The mortal experience was designed by God for man as a test. Many become lost here in mortality while seeking after material possessions, power, popularity, pleasures, and other things of the world. While it certainly pleases Satan to see us led astray, he probably doesn't have to try very hard since the world itself and our natural-self response to it are sufficient distractions for many.

6 I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell.

verse 6 Here the verb “glory” means that Nephi delights in considering and expressing sacred spiritual truths.

“he hath redeemed my soul from hell” It would seem that Nephi's calling and election had been made sure.

7 I have charity for my people, and great faith in Christ that I shall meet many souls spotless at his judgment-seat.

verse 7 In this verse and the two which follow, Nephi expresses his love for three different groups of people. These include his own people (verse 7), the Jews (verse 8), and the Gentiles (verse 9).

“I have charity for my people” Some students of the Book of Mormon have complained of a subtle problem in their relationship with the prophet Nephi. To some, he seems almost too good to be true. He seems to be so pure and so steady and so noble that some have been a little discouraged in trying to follow his example or to identify with him. It is vital that we disabuse ourselves of this false idea. Certainly he was human with weaknesses, but it is apparent that he was a guileless, humble, remarkable individual who was exactly what he appears to be. It is clear that over his lifetime Nephi had developed a profound love for his fellow man. Charity may be defined as “the highest, noblest, strongest kind of love, not merely affection; but the pure love of Christ. It is never used to denote alms or deeds or benevolence, although it may be a prompting motive” (Bible Dictionary, 632). Perhaps an even more apt definition of charity is this: If a person yearns for the exaltation and temporal welfare of another individual as earnestly as he yearns for his own exaltation and temporal welfare, then he has charity for that individual. It would seem that this Christ-like love is the natural result of a life centered in Christ and his service.

In this verse Nephi expresses his charity for “my people.” These certainly included those who lived with him in the land of Nephi and likely their posterity.

8 I have charity for the Jew—I say Jew, because I mean them from whence I came.

verse 8 “I have charity for the Jew . . . them from whence I came” Was Nephi of Jewish descent? We know that father Lehi and his son Nephi were descendants of Joseph through Manasseh. Thus Nephi was a “Jew” only in that he was a Jewish national—he hailed from the land of Judah. Actually Nephi made reference to this unique definition of a “Jew” in other places in the text. To Nephi, Jews are those descended from the inhabitants of the kingdom of Judah at the time Lehi left Jerusalem, even though those individuals might have descended from ancestors from Israelite tribes other than Judah (see 2 Nephi 25:6,14-15; 30:4).

9 I also have charity for the Gentiles. But behold, for none of these can I hope except they shall be reconciled unto Christ, and enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path which leads to life, and continue in the path until the end of the day of probation.

verse 9 Notice that even though Nephi expresses his charity for the Gentiles, he qualifies his hope for them somewhat. He expresses his misgivings about the chances that the Gentiles will eventually be exalted. But what is a Gentile? Here, a Gentile is any individual who is not a Jewish national. In essence, the label Gentile encompasses all non-Israelites.

It seems likely that Nephi’s reservations about the Gentiles grew out of those things he had been taught through revelation. Regarding the seed of his father or his own seed, Nephi had learned that “they shall be remembered again among the house of Israel; they shall be grafted in, being a natural branch of the olive-tree, in the true olive-tree” (1 Nephi 15:16; see also 2 Nephi 26:15-16; 29:2). Nephi was also familiar with the promises that had been made to the Jews: “It shall come to pass that the Jews which are scattered also shall begin to believe in Christ; and they shall begin to gather in upon the face of the land; and as many as shall believe in Christ shall also become a delightful people” (2 Nephi 30:7). Nephi knew that the prophesied promises made to the Gentiles were less hopeful. For example, Nephi had learned that when the Gentiles would receive the writings in the Book of Mormon, they would respond by saying, “We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible” (2 Nephi 29:3). Nephi had also written: “The Gentiles are lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and have stumbled, because of the greatness of their stumbling block” (2 Nephi 26:20).

Reading his “warnings” to the Gentiles might be a bit confusing since the requirements he outlines for them apply equally to those of the house of Israel. We realize today that the division between “Jew” and “Gentile” is of little spiritual significance, since anyone of gentile heritage who accepts the gospel becomes a member of the house of Israel by “adoption.” Also any descendant of the house of Israel who rejects the gospel loses any “preferential” status which they might have had.

“strait path which leads to life” For a discussion of why the word *strait* (rather than straight) is appropriate here, see the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

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

verse 10 Here Nephi begins his final warning to the world which will continue through verse 15. That the Book of Mormon is a powerful witness for Christ, there can be no doubt. As mentioned previously, Susan Easton Black has pointed out that Christ is mentioned in the Book of Mormon an average of every 1.7 verses. The book’s avowed purpose is to teach that “Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God” (title page of the Book of Mormon).

Nephi’s promise here is an interesting one. The honest seeker after truth, who does not believe in the Book of Mormon (“these words”), is promised that if he will believe sincerely in Christ (and, of course, remain open to the ministrations of the Holy Spirit), he will come to believe in the Book of Mormon since the Book of Mormon contains the words of Christ. The Spirit ever stands ready to testify of Christ’s teachings.

“they teach all men that they should do good” What does it mean to “do good”? It means to become like Christ, to emulate his example, to think as he thinks and do as he does. He is the epitome of good. In this context, see D&C 6:34.

11 And if they are not the words of Christ, judge ye—for Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that they are his words, at the last day; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things, notwithstanding my weakness.

verse 11 Here we have a promise of a great final testimony Christ will bear to the truth of the Book of Mormon. Apparently it will be a testimony for all to hear, born “with power and great glory.” Then all will know that the Book of Mormon contains the words of Christ.

12 And I pray the Father in the name of Christ that many of us, if not all, may be saved in his kingdom at that great and last day.

verse 12 A prophet has the power to condemn those who will not hear, but that is not his desire or his purpose. Rather his purpose is to lift and to save.

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

verse 13 “I speak unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust” The expression “crying from the dust” is used with three different meanings:

1. The prophet-writers of the Book of Mormon use the expression to mean that their individual messages and testimonies will be read and taught long after they had died and their physical bodies returned to the dust or buried in a grave. This meaning seems most applicable here (see also 2 Nephi 3:19-21; 26:16; 27:13; Mormon 9:30; Moroni 10:27; Isaiah 29:4).

2. The phrase is used by Moroni to refer to the pleas of departed saints, which cry out for fulfillment of the Lord’s promises or for vengeance or justice upon the wicked (Mormon 8:21-24; Ether 8:23-25; cf. 2 Nephi 28:10; 3 Nephi 9:11).

3. The concept of truth coming forth from the earth also applies to the Book of Mormon itself, as a record sealed up and hid in the ground but brought forth from the earth by the Lord in modern times (Mormon 8:16, 26; cf. Moses 7:62).

“until that great day shall come” What specific day is being spoken of here? It is that time “at the last day,” at the Lord’s second coming, when all of those who believe in him will be vindicated—when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is the Christ.

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

verse 14 Nephi is speaking. He warns his readers that they will not reach the kingdom of heaven if they will not (1) “respect the words of the Jews” (believe the words of the Jewish prophets contained in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon); (2) believe “also my words” (believe in the Book of Mormon); and (3) accept “the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God” (teachings of Christ as will be recorded in the New Testament).

15 For what I seal on earth, shall be brought against you at the judgment bar; for thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey. Amen.

verse 15 Nephi did write his record with priesthood sealing authority and with the ratification of the Holy Ghost. He knew that he had been commanded to write, and he had obeyed. He was a special witness of the Savior. With full understanding of his role, Nephi had the authority to seal his writings with this final warning and promise.