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## *Learning to Love the Book of Mormon - The Book of Jacob*

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Source: *Learning to Love the Book of Mormon*

Last Updated: August 2013 to February 2014

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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

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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 Book of Jacob The Brother of Nephi

Jacob was the elder of two sons born to Sariah and Lehi in the wilderness (1 Nephi 18:7, 19). He and his younger brother Joseph apparently were born some time during the eight years Lehi's family traveled in the wilderness between Jerusalem and the land Bountiful. It seems likely that Jacob and Joseph were born during the early part of the wilderness journey since they later were said to have a recollection of the hardships suffered in the wilderness (2 Nephi 2:1-2). Thus, when Jacob's family arrived in the promised land he was probably between three and seven years old. At the time Nephi delivered the plates into his hands in 544 BC, he was probably somewhere between fifty and fifty-four years of age.

What do we know about Jacob? We know him only by the material found in the Book of Mormon text. His own writings consist of thirteen pages in 2 Nephi (chapters 6-10) and the eighteen pages of the book of Jacob. There are also some eleven additional references to him by other Book of Mormon prophets (1 Nephi 18:7; 18:19; 2 Nephi 2:1-4; 5:6; 5:26; 11:1; 11:3; 31:1; Enos 1:1-3; Alma 3:6; Words of Mormon 1:3). We read, for example, that his early childhood years were not easy. Because of the unrighteous behavior of his eldest brothers, Laman and Lemuel, he "suffered afflictions and much sorrow" (2 Nephi 2:1). His father Lehi, with prophetic insight, gave us a telling glance of Jacob's eternal character when he said, "thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain" (2 Nephi 2:2). He was undoubtedly named after Jacob, father of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Among the prophets who have lived upon the earth, Jacob may be considered among the greatest. He possessed a combination of gifts that made him so. These included spirituality, intellectual capacity, judgment, and literary ability including the capacity to speak plainly. He is responsible for some of the plainest doctrinal teachings found in the Book of Mormon. Examples include his discussion of the scattering and gathering of Israel (2 Nephi 6:8-15; 9:1-2; 10:1-22; Jacob 5); his explanation of the fall of Adam and the atonement of Christ (2 Nephi 9); and his warnings against the sins of materialism, pride, and unchastity (Jacob 2).

When Nephi was forced to flee from Lehi's family's original settlement in the New World—"the place of the fathers' first inheritance" (Alma 22:28)—Jacob chose to travel with him to the land of Nephi or the "place Nephi" (2 Nephi 5:5-8). A careful reading of 2 Nephi 5:6 suggests that Jacob and his younger brother Joseph were probably not married at this time. We know that Jacob did eventually marry and have a family including a righteous son Enos (Jacob 7:27; Enos 1:1-3).

Once in the land of Nephi, Jacob and his younger brother were ordained to the priesthood and given responsibilities to teach and lead the Nephites in ecclesiastical matters (2 Nephi 5:26). Nephi reported that Jacob was blessed to actually see the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Nephi 11:3).

John S. Tanner in his article, "Literary Reflections on Jacob and His Descendants" (*The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn With Joy*, 259-61) has contrasted the styles of Nephi and Jacob. Nephi is inclined to "delight" or "glory" in plainness (2 Nephi 31:3; 33:6). He does not equivocate, rather he frankly rebukes or forgives his brothers (1 Nephi 7:21). Jacob, by contrast, is more timid, more reluctant to condemn, anxious lest he offend, vulnerable, intimate, humble, and tender. Jacob does not seem to have been hardened by his tribulations in the wilderness. Rather he was refined and rendered more sensitive to the sufferings of others (see, for example, Jacob 2:3, 6, 7, 9). In writing, he employed an intimate and unique vocabulary. Brother Tanner has pointed out that two-thirds of the use of the words "grieve" and "tender" in the Book of Mormon are attributed to Jacob, as are his solitary use of such intimately expressive words as "delicate," "contempt," "lonesome," "sobblings," "dread," and "wound," the latter used only in reference to emotions and not bodily injury.

The book of Jacob consists of three main sections. These are:

1. Jacob 1-3. These chapters contain a long sermon by Jacob in which he warns against the sins of materialism, pride, and immorality. This section concludes with the words: "These plates are called the plates of Jacob, and they were made by the hand of Nephi. And I make an end of speaking these words" (Jacob 3:14).

2. Jacob 4-6. This segment includes the allegory of Zenos. Apparently Jacob intended that these writings would conclude his contribution to the small plates of Nephi. At the conclusion of chapter 6, Jacob delivers his farewell to his people until they meet at the "pleasing bar of God" (Jacob 6:13).

3. Jacob 7. This section was apparently an afterthought written "some years" (verse 1) later than were the first six chapters. It is Jacob's account of Sherem, the antichrist.

### **Chapter Outline of Jacob**

A brief outline of the book of Jacob, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

**Jacob 2** Jacob denounces pride and unchastity and denounces the unauthorized practice of plural marriage.

**Jacob 5** Zenos's Allegory of the Tame and Wild Olive Trees.

**Jacob 7** The antichrist Sherem

**The words of his preaching unto his brethren. He confoundeth a man who seeketh to overthrow the doctrine of Christ. A few words concerning the history of the people of Nephi.**

This headnote, superscription or colophon was not a late addition to the Book of Mormon but was part of The Book of Jacob on the small plates of Nephi.

## Jacob Chapter 1

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### Scripture Mastery

**Jacob 1:8** Wherefore, we would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger, but that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world.

**Jacob 1:19** And we did magnify our office unto the Lord . . . answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence.

Chapter 1 may be outlined as follows: Nephi's instructions regarding the small plates (verses 1-8); the appointment of the beloved Nephi's successor (verses 9-12); the segregation of the people into tribes (verses 13-14); the spiritual deterioration of Jacob's people (verses 15-16); the beginning of Jacob's temple sermon (verses 17-19); Jacob's temple sermon extends through Jacob 3:14.

**verses 1-4** These verses contain the important commandment Nephi gave to his brother Jacob. It was this commandment, that was passed on to each of the authors of the small plates of Nephi, that imbued each of them with a binding obligation to write a "few . . . things" on "these plates," the small plates of Nephi. These "few . . . things" were to be those subjects the writers considered most precious. They were commanded not to emphasize the historical happenings. These authors of the small plates, other than Nephi and Jacob, included Enos, Jarom, Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki.

**1 For behold, it came to pass that fifty and five years had passed away from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem; wherefore, Nephi gave me, Jacob, a commandment concerning the small plates, upon which these things are engraven.**

**verse 1** Before Jacob, his older brother Nephi had been both the spiritual and secular leader of his people, the people of Nephi. Before Nephi's death, he separated the responsibilities of the church and spiritual leadership from those of the secular government. We learn in this verse that Nephi gave to Jacob the small plates of Nephi. Presumably Jacob was also appointed to succeed Nephi as the spiritual leader. Nephi conferred the responsibility of the civil government upon another man who would later become known among the people as "second Nephi" (see verse 11). Some have speculated that this secular leader may have been a son of the prophet Nephi.

**"fifty and five years had passed away from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem"** During the entire Book of Mormon period, the Nephites reckoned their dates by three different events (see 3 Nephi 2:5-8). These were:

1. Lehi's leaving Jerusalem (e.g., Jacob 1:1; Enos 1:25; Mosiah 6:4; 29:46). This year was some time between the first year of the reign of Zedekiah (597 BC) and the final attack on Jerusalem by Babylon (586 BC). The year was most likely 587 BC (see the commentaries for 1 Nephi 7:14 and 1 Nephi 19:4). The Nephites continued to use this system to record more than five hundred years of Nephite history, from 1 Nephi through the book of Mosiah, up to the time that Mosiah instituted the reign of the judges.

2. The commencement of the reign of the judges which was about 91 BC—sometimes alternatively referred to as the year Mosiah died (Mosiah 29:44-46). This practice will begin in Mosiah 29 and will be used for about one hundred years, in the books of Alma and Helaman and in the beginning of 3 Nephi (Mosiah 29:44; Alma 1:1; 3 Nephi 1:1, 26; 2:5-8).

3. The year that the signs of Christ's birth was given (3 Nephi 1:15; 2:7-8). This system will be used from 3 Nephi through the book of Moroni. It was in the 385th year after the birth of Jesus that Mormon led his people in battle at Cumorah (Mormon 6:5), and it was after the 420th year that Moroni closed the Book of Mormon (Moroni 10:1).

**2 And he gave me, Jacob, a commandment that I should write upon these plates a few of the things which I consider to be most precious; that I should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people which are called the people of Nephi.**

**verse 2** Because of this verse, the small plates of Nephi are said to contain only a “light touch” of history.

**“this people . . . the people of Nephi”** This phrase refers to those individuals who followed Nephi from the coastal “land of their fathers’ first inheritance” to the land of Nephi and to their descendants (see 2 Nephi 5).

**3 For he said that the history of his people should be engraven upon his other plates, and that I should preserve these plates and hand them down unto my seed, from generation to generation.**

**verse 3** Make certain that you understand and remember clearly the difference between the small plates of Nephi and the large plates of Nephi. If you need a review, please read again the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

**“his other plates”** These are the so-called large plates of Nephi, those plates that contained more of a historical record of the people. The large plates were, later abridged by the prophet Mormon, and that record came into the hands of the prophet Joseph in the form of a set of plates we now refer to as the plates of Mormon.

**“these plates”** This phrase refers to the small plates of Nephi. These were delivered into the hands of Joseph Smith in exactly the form in which they were recorded. We are now reading the translation of these unabridged plates. The translation of these small plates comprises the first twenty-five percent of the Book of

Mormon—1 Nephi through Omni, including the Words of Mormon—and it contains more of a spiritual, rather than historical, emphasis.

**4 And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these plates, and touch upon them as much as it were possible, for Christ’s sake, and for the sake of our people.**

**verse 4 “the heads of them”** This expression refers to the chief or most precious topics or themes of the “preachings,” revelations,” and “prophesyings” of the authors of the small plates of Nephi (John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 90).

**“for Christ’s sake, and for the sake of our people”** In what sense is this collection of scripture preserved “for Christ’s sake”? Since it is the work of Christ “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39), then Christ’s purposes are furthered by man’s learning the eternal principles found herein.

**5 For because of faith and great anxiety, it truly had been made manifest unto us concerning our people, what things should happen unto them.**

**verse 5** The plural pronouns “us” and “our” in this verse and in the following verses refer to Jacob and his brother Nephi.

**“because of faith and great anxiety”** Because of their great faith and because of the concern Nephi and his brother Jacob had for their people, these two prophets were favored with revelation concerning the fate of their people. Here is another reminder that receiving revelation is not a passive activity. To be effective a prophet must passionately and actively seek the favor and direction of the Lord.

**6 And we also had many revelations, and the spirit of much prophecy; wherefore, we knew of Christ and his kingdom, which should come.**

**verse 6 “the spirit of much prophecy”** The phrase “spirit of prophecy” refers to a susceptibility to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, which susceptibility is earned by righteous obedience to gospel principles. It is not possible to have and maintain a durable testimony of Jesus Christ without ministrations, actually revelations, from the Lord through the Holy Ghost.

**7 Wherefore we labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest, lest by any means he should swear in his wrath they should not enter in, as in the provocation in the days of temptation while the children of Israel were in the wilderness.**

**verse 7 “enter into his rest”** For a discussion of the “rest” of the Lord, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 21:10.

**“the provocation in the days of temptation”** Jacob here refers to the incident described in Numbers 13-14 in which the Lord was provoked to anger by the rebelliousness and spiritual blindness of the Israelites in the wilderness, and he forbade the adult males from entering the promised land. In an analogous way, it is possible that each of us, through disobedience might be forbidden to enter the Lord’s eternal rest (cf. Hebrews 3:8).

The story of the provocation in the days of temptation in the wilderness is well told by the author Pearl S. Buck in her book *The Story Bible, Volume One, the Old Testament*. I will reproduce part of that story here out of my love, born in my youth, for the story:

The cloud over the tabernacle rose up and drifted through the wilderness to a place very close to the southern border of Canaan. Here at Kadesh, as the site was called, the children of Israel stopped to water their cattle and make plans for their final march. While they pitched their tents and settled into camp, Moses sought counsel from the Lord. “Send out men to search the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel,” said the Lord. “Choose one man from every tribe, each one a ruler among his people.” So Moses by the commandment of the Lord chose twelve men, all of them headmen of the various tribes, and instructed them to spy out the land of Canaan to see what lay ahead. Joshua, of the tribe of Ephraim and already Moses’s chief military leader, was to lead the scouting expedition; and Caleb, a valiant young captain of the tribe of Judah, would act as his second-in-command. “Go up into the mountains of the south,” said Moses, “and see what the land is like. Find out what kind of people live there; whether they are weak or strong, or few or many. Make note of the cities that they live in, whether they are tents or strongholds. See if the land itself is good or bad, rich or poor; and whether it has wood or not. Go now, and be of good courage. Bring back some of the fruit of the land so that we all may see.” This was the time for the first ripe grapes, and therefore there should be no difficulty in bringing back some sample of the riches of Canaan. So the twelve spies went on their way. From the heights of Hebron, once so well-known to Abraham, they viewed the valleys below. There, they saw, were small, pleasant villages and great walled cities, and fields that were carpets of fresh young corn.

The spies went down from the mountains and went carefully through the land. The soil was rich and prosperous, and trees grew up the slopes toward the hilltops. Sheep grazed in green, well-watered pastures; people lived in well-fortified towns. And those people looked very strong and vigorous, especially those of the tribe of Anak. Joshua led his scouts through the land for forty days, until they had seen hills, plains, valleys, and the coast, and they knew they had indeed come upon a fertile land. They also knew that it was already occupied by various tribes, each of which no doubt

intended to keep occupying it. They went on, and they came to a gently flowing brook with lush vineyards on either side. From a great vine they cut a branch bearing one huge cluster of grapes, and so marvelous was this cluster that two men had to carry it between them hung upon a staff. The place they called Eshcol, meaning "cluster," because of the grapes they had found. They found ripe pomegranates, too, and figs; and saw all manner of flocks and herds and fruits of the field. Many of the fruits and crops were the same as they had known in Egypt, and there were even some that they had never seen before.

After the forty days they returned to their camp at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Paran, taking with them the huge cluster of grapes, the pomegranates, the figs, and many a tale of the wonders they had seen. They reported at once to Moses and to Aaron, and all the children of Israel crowded around to listen. "We went into the land to which you sent us," Joshua began. "It surely is flowing with milk and honey, and this is the fruit of it." He showed the people what his spies had brought back, and they delighted in the sight. "But the people are strong who live in that land," said another of the spies, "and the cities are walled and very great. And moreover, we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the south, and the Hittites and other strong tribes live in the mountains, and the Canaanites live by the sea. Altogether there are many powerful and warlike people in that land." Nine other spies nodded agreement as he spoke, and added their own words of alarm about the dangers of the land.

Their listeners murmured unhappily. Caleb silenced them and turned to Moses. "It is a good land, well worth having. Let us go up at once and take possession," he said boldly. "We are well able to overcome it." But all the other spies who had been with him, except Joshua, shook their heads in gloom and said: "No, we cannot go against those people. They are much stronger than we. We shall have no chance at all." And the spies gave an evil report to the children of Israel about the lovely land which they had searched. The more they talked, the less they said about its riches and the more they said about its dangers. What they had seen, they exaggerated; and what they had not seen, they imagined. "There are giants in that land!" they said. "All the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature, but especially the sons of Anak who are descended from the giants. Beside them we were no more than grasshoppers; and to them we were no more than grasshoppers that they could easily crush beneath their feet." The children of Israel were terrified, and deeply disappointed. All this way through the wilderness, only to come to a land they dare not enter! There was weeping in the camp that night; and a murmuring against Moses and Aaron. "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt!" they cried out to their leaders. "Or that we had died in the wilderness! Why has the Lord brought us to this land? Are we to fall by the sword of these giants in Canaan, and have our wives and children taken as prisoners? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

The suggestion caught fire and ran through the camp. They said to one another, "Let us choose a captain for ourselves, and let us return to Egypt. Moses shall not lead us any longer, for see where he has brought us." The sounds of their rebellion came to their leaders' ears. Both Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in front of all the people, praying God that the children of Israel should overcome their cowardice. And to the people themselves Moses cried out: "Why can you not obey and trust the God who has helped you so many times before when you have thought that all was lost?" Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes in great dismay. Out of all the twelve spies, they were the only two who tried to reason with the people; for they were brave men, and they had faith in God. "It is a good land, and a fertile one!" they said. "It truly flows with milk and honey. Why do you have doubts when you know that if the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us there and give it to us? It is promised to us! Only you must not rebel against the Lord, not be afraid of the people of this land. We can crush them easily, for they have no defense when the Lord is with us. Fear them not!"

But the Israelites were too afraid to listen to words of reason, and their fear showed itself in anger against Caleb and Joshua. They reached for stones to fling at them, and would have stoned not only the two brave spies but Moses and Aaron as well if a strange and wonderful distraction had not suddenly occurred. The glory of the Lord appeared in the form of a brightly glowing light from the tabernacle, in front of all the children of Israel. And the voice of the Lord came from the brightness. "Moses! How long will these people provoke and disobey me? How long will it be before they believe in me, after all the signs I have shown them? I will send a plague to wipe them out; I will disinherit them. Of you, and you alone, shall I make a great and mighty nation." But Moses pleaded for them, as he had done countless times before. "Do not destroy them, Lord, I beg you; not after having brought them all this way and becoming famed as the Lord who leads by cloud and fire and talks to his people face to face. If you should kill them here, then the nations which have heard of your fame will say that you were not able to bring your people into the land you promised them, and that you therefore destroyed them in the wilderness. You are long-suffering, O Lord, and of great mercy. Pardon, I pray you, the wickedness of the people in accordance with the greatness of your mercy, as you have forgiven them since leaving Egypt even until now." The Lord listened, and relented; but not altogether. "I will pardon them, as you ask," he said. "They shall not be destroyed, nor will I disinherit them. But because all these men, who have seen my glory and my miracles which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, have not listened to my voice and have tempted me now ten times, they shall none of them see the land which I promised to their fathers. Tell them this: 'Not one of you who is twenty years or older, and has murmured against me, shall ever go into that land. Only Joshua and Caleb, who have been faithful to me, shall be allowed to live in Canaan. And the little ones, whom you feared would be made prisoners, shall grow up to inherit the land which you have despised. But as for the rest of you, you shall stay in the

wilderness and wander there until you die. And your children shall wander in the wilderness for forty years, one year for each of the days in which you searched the land, until they are grown and you are gone.”

**8 Wherefore, we would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger, but that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world; wherefore, I, Jacob, take it upon me to fulfil the commandment of my brother Nephi.**

**verse 8 “we would to God”** This phrase implies a fervent wish and might be alternatively translated, “we desire, as God is our witness.”

**“view his death, and suffer his cross”** To “view” Christ’s death is to accept and learn of his atoning sacrifice, and to “suffer his cross” means to determine to righteously endure the temptations and vicissitudes of mortality. It was the Lord’s intent that his atoning sacrifice would “bring all men unto him.” This could only occur if the people would learn about and ponder his atonement. Then in a sense of gratitude, “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” the people would come to Christ.

To “bear the shame of the world” is to endure the inevitable ridicule of worldly people while clinging to eternal principles of truth.

**“to fulfil the commandment of my brother Nephi”** This commandment is found in verses 1 through 4 of this chapter.

**9 Now Nephi began to be old, and he saw that he must soon die; wherefore, he anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people now, according to the reigns of the kings.**

**verse 9 “he anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people”** In Hebrew culture, a man was not elected nor was he simply unceremoniously designated to be king. Rather he was anointed in a ritual that symbolized the outpouring of the Spirit, and in which the king covenanted to lead his people in righteousness (Stephen D. Ricks, “The Coronation of Kings,” a FARMS reprint, July 1989).

**“he anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people now, according to the reigns of the kings”** We will read in the commentary for verses 13 and 14 of this chapter that all of the Book of Mormon peoples at this time in their history could be classified by a few different systems of labeling. This particular phrase seems to define the Nephites as those who were reigned over at the moment (“now”) by Nephi.

One subtle point worth noting is that here in the first chapter of the book of Jacob, especially in Jacob 1:11, Jacob provides us with a description of the “reigns of the kings” over his people. We may thus assume that after Jacob was given the small plates of Nephi, he did not start writing immediately. He had been commanded to write upon these plates only those things that were “most precious.” This commandment required that Jacob wait for a while before writing upon the plates, since it required the

advantage of a backward glance in order to make comparisons and judgments regarding what was most precious and therefore should be written.

**10 The people having loved Nephi exceedingly, he having been a great protector for them, having wielded the sword of Laban in their defence, and having labored in all his days for their welfare—**

**verse 10 “having wielded the sword of Laban in their defence”** We may presume, though we are without a specific account, that Nephi personally participated in battles against the Lamanites. Perhaps we might be able to read an account of these battles if we had access to those 116 pages of manuscript that were lost by Martin Harris. The sword of Laban was more than just another weapon. It apparently became an important symbol to the Nephite nation. It was symbolic of the arm or power of the Lord. It implied a promise that the Lord would strengthen and bless the Nephites as he had their fathers. The significance of this symbol still lingers even today.

Brigham Young related an interesting account of Joseph and Oliver’s returning the Book of Mormon plates to the Hill Cumorah. Brigham attributes this account to Oliver Cowdery. It does not fit with the anatomy of the New York Hill Cumorah, and it is difficult to know whether or not Oliver was reporting a literal experience. “They laid the plates on a table; it was a large table that stood in the room. Under this table there was a pile of plates as much as two feet high, and there were altogether in this room more plates than probably many wagon loads; they were piled up in the corners and along the walls. The first time they went there the sword of Laban hung upon the wall; but when they went again it had been taken down and laid upon the table across the gold plates; it was unsheathed and on it was written these words: ‘This sword will never be sheathed again until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and his Christ’” (JD, 19:38).

The battles referred to in this verse and in verse 14 occurred in the land of Nephi and were likely initiated by the Lamanites who resented and hated the Nephites and desired to destroy their records and traditions. Ultimately the Lamanites will prevail in these battles and force the Nephites to leave the land of Nephi in about 210 BC.

A preferred spelling of “defence” today, at least in the United States, is *defense*.

**11 Wherefore, the people were desirous to retain in remembrance his name. And whoso should reign in his stead were called by the people, second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth, according to the reigns of the kings; and thus they were called by the people, let them be of whatever name they would.**

**verse 11 “let them be of whatever name they would”** Regardless of their given name, once they assumed the office of king they were given the title and called “Nephi.” It is interesting to note that in many ancient cultures including Israel, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, a king received a new name or throne name when he was crowned

king. Perhaps this new name was given to the king as part of his coronation rite (Stephen D. Ricks, “King, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1-6” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 214-15).

## 12 And it came to pass that Nephi died.

**verse 12** Nephi was probably about seventy years old when he delivered the small plates to Jacob (see 1 Nephi 2:16). We cannot be sure how long it was between his delivering the plates and his death.

## 13 Now the people which were not Lamanites were Nephites; nevertheless, they were called Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites.

**verse 13** It should be noted that throughout the Book of Mormon, the people are consistently divided into seven tribes (see also 3 Nephi 7:2; 4 Nephi 1:37-38; Mormon 1:8-9). Prior to his death, the prophet Lehi called his family together and first spoke to several of his sons collectively (2 Nephi 1:1-29). He then divided the family into seven groups and spoke to them individually. First, he spoke to Zoram (2 Nephi 1:30-32); second to Jacob (2 Nephi 2); third to Joseph (2 Nephi 3); fourth to the children of Laman (2 Nephi 4:3-7); fifth to the children of Lemuel (2 Nephi 4:8-9); sixth to the sons of Ishmael (2 Nephi 4:10), and seventh to Nephi and Sam together (2 Nephi 4:11). Thus, Lehi seemed to establish the precedent of these seven groups which will endure as distinct groups throughout the Book of Mormon record. It is interesting and notable that there are no “Samites” in the Book of Mormon. In a way, Lehi was acting here like Jacob of old. Both Jacob and Lehi pronounced their blessings to “all [their] household,” who had gathered around them shortly before they died. The aim was to organize a household of God in a new land of promise. Both organized their posterity into tribal groups in the patriarchal tradition of ancient Israel. This placed Lehi in a patriarchal role, and indeed the Nephites remembered Lehi as “Father Lehi” just as the Israelites speak of Abraham as “Father Abraham.”

The tendency for the people to be joined by strong family ties persists throughout the Book of Mormon. Different forms of government will come and go, but the family structure will persist. For example, in the dark days of political collapse just prior to Christ’s advent, there still remained “much family,” and the tribal structure took the place of the failed government (3 Nephi 7:2-4).

The division of the people into seven groups will remain an important feature of their culture. Alma will eventually establish “seven churches in the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 25:23). It is interesting to note that in Mesoamerican tradition there were “seven caves” or seven lineages from which the inhabitants of Mesoamerica were to have sprung (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, John L. Sorenson,

313). It would be presumptuous, however to imagine a connection between these seven lineages and the Nephite/Lamanite tribes.

For a more thorough review of the various Book of Mormon peoples, see the supplemental article, *Peoples of the Book of Mormon*.

**“Ishmaelites”** These are the descendants of Ishmael. Just as the sons of Ishmael joined with Laman and Lemuel in rebellion (1 Nephi 7:6; 18:9), so their descendants remained united with the Lamanites. They are only occasionally distinguished from the Lamanites (Jacob 1:13-14; Alma 43:13; 47:35; Mormon 1:8-9).

**14 But I, Jacob, shall not hereafter distinguish them by these names, but I shall call them Lamanites that seek to destroy the people of Nephi, and those who are friendly to Nephi I shall call Nephites, or the people of Nephi, according to the reigns of the kings.**

**verse 14** Here Jacob points out that while the labels “Nephite” and “Lamanite” are the names of specific tribes, as pointed out in the commentary for verse 13, these same labels might also be used in a less specific way. In this latter sense all of the Book of Mormon people may be divided into two general groups: (1) the adherents of Nephi and his teachings—the Nephites, and (2) those who seek to destroy these Nephites—the Lamanites.

**“the people of Nephi, according to the reigns of the kings”** One definition of “Nephite” consists in those people who were ruled by and gave allegiance to the “Nephis”—those kings who succeeded the prophet Nephi. Generally throughout the remainder of the Book of Mormon, this same sociopolitical definition of “Nephites” and “Lamanites” will hold true. A people’s label will depend upon their political allegiance and not their ethnic origins.

**15 And now it came to pass that the people of Nephi, under the reign of the second king, began to grow hard in their hearts, and indulge themselves somewhat in wicked practices, such as like unto David of old desiring many wives and concubines, and also Solomon, his son.**

**verse 15 “under the reign of the second king”** This probably refers to Nephi’s successor, the king referred to as second Nephi.

The suggestion has been made by Daniel H. Ludlow that Nephi’s political successor was perhaps Jacob (*A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976, 156). This, however seems unlikely, as in this verse and in verse 9 above, Jacob refers to Nephi’s royal political successor in the third person. We previously mentioned the suggestion that Nephi’s successor may have been one of his sons. We are obviously not given to know just who he was.

**“like unto David of old desiring many wives and concubines, and also Solomon”** We learn from modern revelation that both David and his son Solomon had

many wives and concubines, and that they were justified in doing so, since these marital partners were given them by the Lord (D&C 132:38-39). Yet, as this verse suggests, both David and Solomon were apparently guilty of some measure of abuse of this principle of polygamy. We are all familiar with the story of David's sin of adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, and with his arranging for Uriah's death in battle (2 Samuel 11).

This verse presents the student of the Book of Mormon with an interesting problem. It has been estimated that the Nephites, when they split with Laman and Lemuel perhaps some forty years previously, numbered about twenty-four (eleven adults and thirteen children). This group, as you will recall, included Nephi, Zoram, Sam, Jacob, Joseph, and their families, and also Nephi's "sisters." Using a reasonable figure for birth rates and factoring in deaths, the adult population at the time of Jacob 1 unlikely exceeded thirty-five males and thirty-five females. With such limited numbers as these, the preference of some of the Nephites for "many wives and concubines" would be puzzling and would seem to require a larger female population. Also who were the "concubines"? Concubines were usually women of a lower social order than the prevalent one who were kept and supported by a man in addition to his wives. Dr. John L. Sorenson has suggested that this verse provides some evidence that the Nephites must have combined with some other people on their arrival in the New World, likely some which were indigenous to the area ("When Lehi's party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1 [Fall 1992], 1-34). There are other evidences in the Book of Mormon text that the members of Lehi's party joined with and intermarried with other peoples whom Dr. Sorenson refers to as "others." We will mention them in context.

**16 Yea, and they also began to search much gold and silver, and began to be lifted up somewhat in pride.**

**verse 16 "search much gold and silver"** We will learn in Jacob 2:12 that many of the people began to "search for gold, and for silver." Presumably this means that they began to worship mammon (riches) rather than God.

**17 Wherefore I, Jacob, gave unto them these words as I taught them in the temple, having first obtained mine errand from the Lord.**

**verse 17 "errand from the Lord"** What charming terminology for a calling from the Lord! This is the only instance of the use of this phrase in the entire Book of Mormon. Jacob's "errand" apparently is to rebuke, warn, and teach the Nephites concerning pride and unchastity (Jacob 2-3), an errand given him through revelation (Jacob 2:11).

**18 For I, Jacob, and my brother Joseph had been consecrated priests and teachers of this people, by the hand of Nephi.**

**19 And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day.**

**verse 19 “we did magnify our office unto the Lord”** Jacob and his brother Joseph “magnified” their callings in the priesthood. To magnify is to “make it great” or make it greatly effective, so that no one in *our* (Jacob and Joseph's) stewardship can shift responsibility for their sins from their own choices to *our* negligence. Conversely, failing to magnify our calling is to neglect one's duty, so that blame for the sins of others is due in part to one's own negligence (see Jacob 1:19). To magnify a calling or an office in the Church is to accept pro-actively all of the responsibilities of the calling and to perform the duties of the calling enthusiastically and completely.

Elder Delbert L. Stapley explained that “to magnify is to honor, to exalt and glorify, and cause to be held in greater esteem or respect. It also means to increase the importance of, to enlarge and make greater” (“Honoring the Priesthood,” *Improvement Era* [May 1957] 60:423-25).

This verse implies a rather sobering admonition to missionaries: They must teach an individual the word of God with “all diligence” in order to avoid sharing the responsibility of that individual's sins. Jacob had stated previously, “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” (2 Nephi 9:44). This verse is also consistent with Ezekiel's teachings that a watchman who fails to sound the alarm will be held accountable for the destruction of his people (Ezekiel 3:17-21; 33:1-9). A similar and perhaps even more sobering warning was given to parents by the Lord (D&C 68:25).

## Jacob Chapter 2

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### Scripture Mastery

**Jacob 2** Jacob denounces pride and unchastity and condemns the unauthorized practice of plural marriage.

**Jacob 2:18-19** Before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

**Jacob 2:27-30** (compare D&C 49:16) Jacob's teaching on polygamy: If I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people.

**1 The words which Jacob, the brother of Nephi, spake unto the people of Nephi, after the death of Nephi:**

**2 Now, my beloved brethren, I, Jacob, according to the responsibility which I am under to God, to magnify mine office with soberness, and that I might rid my garments of your sins, I come up into the temple this day that I might declare unto you the word of God.**

**verses 1-2** After his brother Nephi's death, Jacob went up to the temple in the land of Nephi to deliver an important discourse. There are three other temple discourses in the Book of Mormon. Jacob delivered another two-day sermon at the temple in the Land of Nephi prior to Nephi's death about fifteen years before the occasion of this present sermon (2 Nephi 6-10). King Benjamin will teach the people in the temple in the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 2-5). And the resurrected Jesus Christ will deliver two discourses to the people at the temple in the land Bountiful (3 Nephi 12-14).

In the verses that follow, Jacob's discourse will cover three topics: wealth, pride, and chastity.

Since Jacob was probably not the king of the people, this temple sermon was specifically directed against the political and social elite, and not simply against the people at large.

**verse 2** For a discussion of the phrases: "magnify mine office" and "rid my garments of your sins" see the commentary for Jacob 1:19.

**verses 3-11** Previously the people of Nephi had been generally obedient to the words of God which Nephi, Jacob, and Joseph had diligently taught them. Now, however, the Spirit has prompted Jacob to discern a growing tendency toward grievous sins arising in the thoughts and hearts of his people. Jacob has received a divine charge to speak frankly to his people, but in these verses he reflects his apprehension that the candor of his reprimand will be disappointing or even offensive to some of his people. He worries that those with tender feelings and "delicate minds" who have come to the temple to hear a message of comfort and inspiration will be offended by his call to repentance. This sensitivity and timidity are typical of the prophet Jacob.

**3 And ye yourselves know that I have hitherto been diligent in the office of my calling; but I this day am weighed down with much more desire and anxiety for the welfare of your souls than I have hitherto been.**

**4 For behold, as yet, ye have been obedient unto the word of the Lord, which I have given unto you.**

**verse 4 “as yet”** This might be interpreted as “to this point” or “previously.”

**5 But behold, hearken ye unto me, and know that by the help of the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth I can tell you concerning your thoughts, how that ye are beginning to labor in sin, which sin appeareth very abominable unto me, yea, and abominable unto God.**

**verse 5 “labor in sin”** This phrase implies that Jacob’s people were not guilty of mere inadvertent and minor sins. Rather they had become obsessed and preoccupied with serious sins.

**6 Yea, it grieveth my soul and causeth me to shrink with shame before the presence of my Maker, that I must testify unto you concerning the wickedness of your hearts.**

**verse 6** This verse is vintage Jacob—intimate and vulnerable (see also verse 3). His words paint the unmistakable picture of one who is sensitive, apprehensive, and passionate. He is obviously pained at having to preach a harsh message.

**“shrink with shame before the presence of my Maker”** Jacob feels that because of his people’s grievous sins he is no longer able to function as an advocate for his people before the throne of God.

**7 And also it grieveth me that I must use so much boldness of speech concerning you, before your wives and your children, many of whose feelings are exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate before God, which thing is pleasing unto God;**

**8 And it supposeth me that they have come up hither to hear the pleasing word of God, yea, the word which healeth the wounded soul.**

**verse 8** What is the “pleasing word of God”? Surely this must include the doctrines of salvation, the exciting mysteries of the kingdom, and the lofty promises of the life that is to come. These are the parts of the doctrine that are edifying, exciting, and pleasant to hear. The wives and children have come to hear an inspiring and edifying message. But instead, Jacob is constrained to deliver a stern rebuke and warning.

**9 Wherefore, it burdeneth my soul that I should be constrained, because of the strict commandment which I have received from God, to admonish you according to your crimes, to enlarge the wounds of those who are already wounded, instead of consoling and healing their wounds; and those who have not been wounded, instead of feasting upon the pleasing word of God have daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds.**

**verse 9** “Crimes” are sins.

**“to enlarge the wounds of those who are already wounded”** To whom is Jacob referring here? Who has been “wounded” by sin? The sinner? The sinners loved ones? Certainly both, but the context here suggests that Jacob may have mainly the loved ones of the sinner in mind. He is troubled that his stern admonitions directed at the sinners will further injure those in the crowd who have already been injured by the thoughtless and sinful deeds of those sinners.

**“those who have not been wounded”** These are apparently people who are not guilty of sin themselves and who do not have loved ones who are guilty of grievous sin. These are the “pure in heart” and those with a “broken heart” spoken of in the following verse. They have come to the temple to hear a positive and sweet message of hope. Instead they will hear Jacob’s candid call to repentance which will be traumatic for them; Jacob fears that he may “pierce their souls” with “daggers” and “wound their delicate minds.”

**10 But, notwithstanding the greatness of the task, I must do according to the strict commands of God, and tell you concerning your wickedness and abominations, in the presence of the pure in heart, and the broken heart, and under the glance of the piercing eye of the Almighty God.**

**verse 10** The word “greatness” here means difficulty. The phrase “broken heart” is a variation of the phrase “broken heart and contrite spirit.” For a discussion of this phrase, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 2:7. See also “The Solution to Pride—A Broken Heart and Contrite Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and the “Spiritual Self.”*

In commanding Jacob to deliver this sermon, the Lord apparently delivered Jacob a “strict command” the intent of which could not be mistaken.

The word “abominations” is found some seventy-five times in the Book of Mormon text (see also verse 31 of this chapter). It is a broad term and covers every thought, deed, and attitude that is offensive to God who “cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (Alma 45:16; D&C 1:31). All abominations are a reflection of the carnal mind and, therefore, of ungodliness.

**“in the presence of the pure in heart, and the broken heart”** Those present at the temple that day included, in addition to those guilty of grievous sin, some sweet and

innocent souls. The phrase “and the broken heart” may refer to the fact these innocents possess the spiritual gift of “a broken heart and contrite spirit.”

**“and under the glance of the piercing eye of the Almighty God”** Jacob expects that those sinners whom he admonishes will be brought low by the spirit of God’s justice.

**11 Wherefore, I must tell you the truth according to the plainness of the word of God. For behold, as I inquired of the Lord, thus came the word unto me, saying: Jacob, get thou up into the temple on the morrow, and declare the word which I shall give thee unto this people.**

**12 And now behold, my brethren, this is the word which I declare unto you, that many of you have begun to search for gold, and for silver, and for all manner of precious ores, in the which this land, which is a land of promise unto you and to your seed, doth abound most plentifully.**

**verse 12** At this point, Jacob turns his attention to the general topic of pride. As we read the scriptures, we are inclined to read words or phrases and apply to them only the secular definitions which we carry in our minds. It is important to keep in mind that several words may have a simple secular definition, and, at the same time, represent a concept which has a much richer scriptural or spiritual meaning. A simple example might be *eternal life*. In a secular context, this phrase simply means living forever. However, we know that eternal life is a rich spiritual concept which means living forever in the presence of God and progressing toward a sublime fulness of all that God has and is. Another example of a word with both a simple secular meaning and a richer spiritual meaning is *pride*. In a secular context, pride as a negative quality is an exaggerated opinion of oneself—haughtiness and arrogance. Its scriptural or spiritual meaning, however, is different. Here, pride is a fixation upon, an abiding desire for, and an inappropriate seeking after, things of the world. It is also an inclination to seek after these things in a competitive and contentious way. For a more complete discussion of the sin of pride, see the commentary for Helaman 3:1 and “Pride” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and the “Spiritual Self.”*

**“in the which this land . . . doth abound most plentifully”** Gold, silver, and all manner of precious ores are plentiful in this new land.

Is Jacob warning here against the evils of prospecting for and mining precious metals? It is more likely that his reference to gold, silver, and precious ores is more metaphorical; that he had in mind the sins of pride and, more specifically perhaps, materialism—placing mammon, or things of the world, before things of the Spirit.

**13 And the hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly, that you have obtained many riches; and because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts,**

**and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they.**

**verse 13** Materialism is an important sub-topic of pride. We tend to assume that material wealth is a sign of virtue, that it comes only to those who possess the qualities of intelligence, thrift, and industry. We may reason that those who have material wealth deserve it because of their hard work, and conversely, the poor are similarly deserving of their circumstances. This is dangerous and flawed logic. The Lord is the “hand of providence” that distributes material wealth to us mortals. By design, he does so unevenly. Let us not forget the role of industry and work in acquiring the things of the world that are needed. Nevertheless, even if we assume a good work ethic and initiative, to some he gives abundantly, and to others he gives but little. He may or may not dispense these temporal blessings to those whom the world might regard as “deserving.” Sometimes also, material things may go to those who seem to deserve them least. Those upon whom he bestows abundantly will be watched by the Lord. Will they share of their abundance with those who are less blessed (see D&C 56:16; 107:18)? Or will they use their wealth to proudly adorn themselves with expensive clothing and other trappings to prove to the world that they are people of status and position and they are better than those with less intelligence and industry? Will an individual’s material blessings become, for him, a basis for judging others? Will they “wear stiff necks” that will not bow before God and acknowledge his hand in their material blessings. Will they carry “high heads” in their haughty pride? Those who receive from the Lord little in the way of material wealth will also be observed by the Lord. Will they accept their lot and strive to learn humility, thrift, and industry, or will they fret and chafe and covet the possessions of others. Will they adopt a good work ethic and strive to obtain sufficient for their basic needs?

**“costliness of your apparel”** Costly apparel includes expensive attire and costly ornaments (jewelry). It has oft been decried by prophets as being prototypical of excessive pride. It is the universal wont of those whose hearts are set too much upon worldly riches (e.g., Alma 1:6, 32; 5:53; 4 Nephi 1:24; Alma 31:28). It would appear that avoiding costly apparel is one key to avoiding the negative effects of prosperity.

**14 And now, my brethren, do ye suppose that God justifieth you in this thing? Behold, I say unto you, Nay. But he condemneth you, and if ye persist in these things his judgments must speedily come unto you.**

**verse 14** We are aware of a recurring theme found in the pages of the Book of Mormon. It is the prosperity–pride–destruction cycle. Whenever a group chooses to keep the commandments of God, the Lord blesses them, and they prosper. Often the people, in the midst of their prosperity, lose sight of the source of their blessings, and they attribute the virtue to themselves. Wealth becomes an end rather than a means. Acquiring it becomes more important than how it is acquired. Soon there emerge class

distinctions, caste systems, and persecution of the poor. The Lord is disappointed and causes his prophets to warn the people. The wealthy and prosperous disregard the warnings. After all, the prophets seem to the wealthy to be merely spokesmen for the poor who are coveting their possessions. The Lord then withdraws his blessings, and allows the destruction of the people by outside and inside forces. These forces include war, bondage, or natural calamity. There is then a return to humility and repentance by the people because of their miserable and lowly circumstances, which brings again the blessings of the Lord, including prosperity. And the cycle is repeated. Two complete and yet succinct descriptions of the cycle of prosperity and destruction are offered in Helaman 11 and in 4 Nephi.

**15 O that he would show you that he can pierce you, and with one glance of his eye he can smite you to the dust!**

**verse 15** Jacob's meaning seems to be: "Oh that God would demonstrate his awful power for you so that you might be reminded to repent before he is compelled to actually smite you!"

**16 O that he would rid you from this iniquity and abomination. And, O that ye would listen unto the word of his commands, and let not this pride of your hearts destroy your souls!**

**verse 16** How does pride destroy one's soul? One of mortality's prime deterrents to maintaining a spiritual, eternal perspective is pride. It keeps a man's head turned toward things of the world and away from eternal issues. President Ezra Taft Benson observed, "Pride does not look up to God and care about what is right. Instead it looks sideways to man and argues who is right. . . . To the proud, the applause of the world rings in their ears; to the humble, the applause of heaven warms their hearts" (*CR*, April 1986, 6). See also *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *Our "Natural Self" and Our "Spiritual Self."*

**17 Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you.**

**verse 17 "Think of your brethren like unto yourselves"** Here is a restatement of the golden rule. We may regard the golden rule as the golden rule of charity. A practical, yet meaningful, definition of charity is this: When you come to yearn for the temporal welfare and spiritual welfare of another as much as you yearn for the temporal and spiritual welfare of yourself, then you have charity.

**"be familiar with all"** Here is a command to become aware of the circumstances and needs of those around us.

**"that they might be rich like unto you"** A simple statement of Chauncy C. Riddle's is worth pondering: "In any mortal situation, a righteous person who has the

strength to do so will be voluntarily producing physical goods and services for the society in which he dwells. He will consume only what is necessary of these self-gained benefits, and will voluntarily share the surplus with others who are in need of his surplus” (*The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn With Joy*, Religious Studies Center, BYU, 225-26). The Lord himself said, “If any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment” (D&C 104:18).

### **18 But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.**

**verse 18** We should not pass this verse without asking ourselves, “What, in actual fact, is my priority? What is my treasure?” If you wish to ponder this verse for a few moments, you might also review the story of Jesus’s encountering the rich young man, and ponder those verses as well (Luke 18:18-30; Mark 10:17-26). Riches are not intrinsically evil. The central issue is the priority we place on them.

While you are pondering, consider this question: If we truly live the gospel of Jesus Christ, must we be willing to be poor? Certainly the Lord generally blesses the industrious and hard-working individual with sufficient material possessions. Yet, should not each of us possess an innate willingness to give up those possessions in favor of our spiritual growth?

### **19 And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted.**

**verse 19** “**after ye have obtained a hope in Christ**” As Jacob speaks of obtaining “a hope in Christ” (see also Jacob 4:6). He seems to intend more than just seeking for the secular quality of hope. He is speaking of the assurance that comes after one has consecrated one’s life to the Lord and to his kingdom—that spiritual witness that you are “on track” for exaltation. Obtaining a “hope in Christ” implies a particular spiritual level or special relationship with the Lord. The person with hope maintains that quiet and humble assurance that he will one day live in the celestial heaven with the Father and the Son. See further discussion of this important spiritual gift in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. See particularly “Two Little-Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith* and in “The Fruits of Faith” in 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 chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

It would seem that after one has obtained the gift of hope, then it follows naturally that he will feel compelled to continue on to obtain an even greater gift, that of charity. He will come to possess the pure love of Christ for his fellow men. He will yearn for

their exaltation every bit as much as he yearns for his own. Again, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, see “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

This verse implies that the Lord may bless certain such righteous individuals, if they so desire, with material wealth providing it is their intent to use the wealth for righteous purposes.

It turns out that pride is the great impediment to our developing charity. Responsiveness to the Spirit instills in man a constant need to repent and strive and improve, whereas worldly pride stifles this need for spiritual improvement. Pride also pits the proud man against his brothers and sisters. He is in competition with them rather than praying for their success. Even those in the Church may often be found guilty of this pride. Another reflection by Chauncy C. Riddle is food for thought:

Why do some of us resist [our development of love for our neighbors]? Is it not because we somehow see ourselves as being sufficient as we are? Do we not believe in our hearts that we are already good enough, that the Savior may indeed have to forgive us of a few things, but his love and generosity will easily take care of those things and we will then be ushered ceremoniously into the blessings of the great beyond? Such a belief is what the scriptures call pride. It is the belief that we are good, though perhaps our deeds are not. This is the belief that the old us does not need to die and become a new creature, but only our garments need to be cleansed. In pride we see ourselves as eternal creatures who may need to be forgiven and lifted up by Jesus Christ, but who do not need to be essentially changed by him. We do not need that new and pure heart which only he can give to us.

My understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that no mortals are just and righteous enough of themselves to go to the same kingdom as Jesus Christ unless they are remade in the image of Christ, heart and mind, body and soul. For without that pure heart, that charity, we are nothing (Moroni 7:44), and can, of ourselves, do no good thing (John 15:1-5). We must cease to exist as the old selfish persons we were and take upon ourselves new hearts and new minds.

Then in the humility of being salvaged from damnation by the Savior’s love, we will never again consider that we are better than anyone else. Then we will know that we stand only in the grace of Christ, and will never be found looking down on anyone, including the worst sinner and Satan and his angels. We will then know our true place and being in the universe, and will say of the sinner, “There, but for the grace of God, go I.”

Pride is the root of our evil, the source of our selfishness, the great barrier to our salvation. It is the pride of our hearts from which we need to be saved more than from anything else. Once we are saved from that, then all good things can be added to us. Then we will see as we are seen, know as we are known, and we will be familiar and free with our substance, treating all men as brothers. Then indeed we will have heaven

on earth” (*The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn With Joy*, Religious Studies Center, BYU, 231-33).

**“to clothe the naked”** This might apply to those without clothing to cover their bodies or perhaps also to those who might be naked emotionally such as the sick or the bereaved.

**“to liberate the captive”** There many “jailors” in the world including ignorance, undue or unrighteous dominion, sin, and drugs, to name a few.

**20 And now, my brethren, I have spoken unto you concerning pride; and those of you which have afflicted your neighbor, and persecuted him because ye were proud in your hearts, of the things which God hath given you, what say ye of it?**

**verse 20 “those of you which have afflicted your neighbor, and persecuted him because ye were proud in your hearts”** Again, Nephi emphasizes that pride is essentially competitive in nature. The proud man seeks to better himself at the expense of his neighbor, thus injuring his neighbor.

**“what say ye of it?”** Jacob asks for the people to judge themselves—to either exonerate or condemn themselves out of their own mouths. They may confess their sins and forsake them or they may murmur their rebellious position and persist in evil.

**21 Do ye not suppose that such things are abominable unto him who created all flesh? And the one being is as precious in his sight as the other. And all flesh is of the dust; and for the selfsame end hath he created them, that they should keep his commandments and glorify him forever.**

**verse 21 “all flesh is of the dust”** All men are equally subject to the corrupting influences of mortality and to the vicissitudes of life. Also no man has claim on superior origins. We all share the same heavenly father.

**22 And now I make an end of speaking unto you concerning this pride. And were it not that I must speak unto you concerning a grosser crime, my heart would rejoice exceedingly because of you.**

**verse 22** Here Jacob shifts his attention from the sin of pride to the sin of immorality. Is there a relationship between the two? Indeed so—an intimate one, in fact. The inappropriate seeking after the lusts of the flesh is an important sub-topic of pride.

**23 But the word of God burdens me because of your grosser crimes. For behold, thus saith the Lord: This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures, for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son.**

**verse 23 “whoredoms”** This word is found twenty-seven times in the Book of Mormon text. It is the general Book of Mormon term for unchastity in all of its forms. Here it likely refers to adultery and fornication. These are the “grosser crimes” spoken of in this verse and in the previous verse.

Apparently some of the Nephites who were guilty of sexual sin in Jacob’s day were using the scriptural account of David and Solomon found in the plates of brass to excuse their lascivious behavior. By what logic, though certainly it is specious logic, were they doing this? Doubtless they were saying, “David and Solomon had multiple wives and concubines, why shouldn’t we?” The truth about David and Solomon is that they did practice plural marriage, and their wives were given to them by the Lord. However, both took wives beyond those sanctioned by the Lord. In doing so, they were guilty of the sin of unchastity.

#### **24 Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord.**

**verse 24** The term “concubine” may refer to one of two things. At times she is simply a woman kept for lewd purposes. More commonly a concubine is a lawful wife of a lower social standing than her husband’s other wives. Usually they were captive slaves or foreigners who had legitimacy but not full honor. Sarah’s handmaid Hagar, the plural wife of Abraham, would be an example of the latter. We know that Abraham’s taking Hagar the concubine to wife was approved by the Lord since Abraham did only that which he was commanded (D&C 132:37). The children of concubines enjoyed no rights of inheritance.

Concubinage reflected the realities of the ancient world. It was a lesser law for a lesser time. In viewing those times, the issue is not what was ideally right or wrong, fair or unfair, but what was workable. If concubinage was a relative evil, it was the lesser of evils; better a concubine than a woman alone, or a harlot. That the Lord justified his servants in having concubines, and he did, is no proof that he viewed the practice as more than a necessary, albeit unfortunate aspect of an imperfect order of things (Rodney Turner, *The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn With Joy*, 280-81).

**“which thing was abominable before me”** What is antecedent here of the phrase “which thing”? What exactly is the Lord condemning here? Is it the practice of plural marriage? We know that it is not the practice of plural marriage. From time to time in the past God has called upon his people to enter into the practice of plural marriage. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses were examples of righteous men who were commanded by the Lord to take more than one wife (D&C 132:37-39). What is it, then, that is being denounced as being “abominable” before the Lord? Surely it is the unauthorized marriages entered into by both David and Solomon. We have already considered the matter of David and Bathsheba in the commentary for Jacob 1:15 (see

also 2 Samuel 11). Solomon's marriage to "strange women" who "turned away his heart after other Gods" was displeasing to the Lord and certainly unauthorized (1 Kings 11).

**25 Wherefore, thus saith the Lord, I have led this people forth out of the land of Jerusalem, by the power of mine arm, that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph.**

**verse 25 "thus saith the Lord"** Beginning in this verse and extending through verse 33, we are apparently reading a direct quote from the Lord. Where might Jacob have obtained this quote? It is possible that it was received as a revelation directly to him. There is some evidence, however, to suggest that Jacob may have been quoting from a revelation received by his father Lehi and recorded on the record of Lehi. In the following chapter, Jacob will observe that the Lamanites "have not forgotten the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our father—that they should have save it were one wife, and concubines they should have none" (Jacob 3:5; see also Jacob 2:34).

**"I have led this people forth . . . that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph"** The Lord desires that this people remain free from sexual sin.

**26 Wherefore, I the Lord God will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old.**

**verse 26** What action or characteristic of "them of old" is so displeasing to the Lord? Is it their practice of the principle of plural marriage? No. Rather it is the tendency toward sexual immorality found among them.

**27 Wherefore, my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none;**

**verse 27** It was the Lord's intent that the principle of plural marriage not be practiced among the Book of Mormon peoples. Why was this so? We can only speculate. Perhaps it was because of the historical tendency for the principle to be abused. Also, the practical basis for polygamous marriages did not exist among the Book of Mormon peoples. They did not practice slavery, nor did they take female captives and marry some of them as had their Israelite ancestors (Numbers 31:9; Deuteronomy 21:11). Actually at one point in time the same command was given to the Latter-day Saints in this dispensation: One man shall have one wife and one woman shall have one husband unless otherwise commanded (D&C 49:16). It is likely that some of the Nephites of Jacob's day were trying to justify forbidden practices by appealing to the scriptural precedents wherein the Lord had previously authorized the taking of plural wives and concubines. It has always been that the Lord's people are

bound by the commandments given them through the prophet of their own day, not those of an earlier time.

**“hearken to the word of the Lord”** 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, “hearken to [hear] the word of the Lord,” is called the proclamation formula and is an emphatic summons to hear God’s word (e.g., 1 Kings 22:19; Amos 7:16; Isaiah 49:1). Other instances of use in the Book of Mormon include 3 Nephi 30:1 and Helaman 13:21.

## **28 For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me; thus saith the Lord of Hosts.**

**verse 28 “whoredoms are an abomination before me”** Here the Lord is not equating the principle of plural marriage with “whoredoms,” nor is he declaring that all previous plural marriages have been an “abomination” in his sight. He is denouncing the abuse of the principle, not the principle itself.

As an interesting aside, some have pointed to Jacob 2 as evidence that there may have been a major city populated with non-Nephites near the city of Nephi. Where, for example, did these Nephites get all these plural wives and concubines? The Nephites hadn’t been in the Americas long enough to have a surplus of women who were of marriageable age. Nephite men were committing whoredoms, and Jacob chastised them. Just where did all these women come from? Such a major city may have been populated before Nephi and his followers ever traveled inland. Or, it has also been speculated that some Lamanites may have later joined forces with the Nephite inhabitants of the city of Nephi, and that this city became a major Lamanite (as well as Nephite) population center. Thus, there could have been a Nephite city of Nephi (later called the city of Lehi-Nephi) and a Lamanite city of Nephi. Perhaps the Lamanite city of Nephi was even *the* major Lamanite population center in the land.

## **29 Wherefore, this people shall keep my commandments, saith the Lord of Hosts, or cursed be the land for their sakes.**

**verse 29** Here again is one of the tenets of the promised land concept. If the inhabitants of the promised land abide the commandments, they will prosper. If they do not, they will be swept off the land. This principle will be aptly summarized by Moroni centuries later: “And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God or they

shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity” (Ether 2:9). The Lord’s warning in this case particularly applies to the people’s remaining free of sexual sin.

**30 For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things.**

**verse 30** The phrase “raise up seed unto me” refers to the Lord’s command, given from time to time, to practice the principle of plural marriage. There is yet another implication contained in this phrase. It is that the practice of plural marriage may result in more offspring if all of the women in a population are allowed to marry and bear children. The Lord says, If I decide that my people should practice plural marriage, then I will so command them. Otherwise they should hearken unto the commandments given in previous verses to take only one wife. It is obvious from this verse that Jacob knew the restriction placed upon the Nephites was neither universal nor absolute.

This verse teaches an important principle of marriage throughout the history of the world. Monogamy is the rule, and polygamy is the exception. Unless God commands otherwise, a man should have but one wife. The Nephites were also aware from the scriptural accounts of the Old Testament prophets that God occasionally called upon his people to practice plural marriage, and thus “raise up seed unto” him. In this dispensation, Joseph Smith said, “I have constantly said no man shall have but one wife at a time, unless the Lord directs otherwise” (*TPJS*, 324). It is clear that at one time in this final dispensation the Lord did direct otherwise.

**31 For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem, yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands.**

**verse 31** There ought to be a spirit of chastity in every marriage. This spirit of chastity concerns more than just sexual matters. It implies a husband’s commitment to the physical and emotional well-being of his wife. When a husband renders the wife a mere object by any implication of his own, then the spirit of chastity departs.

**32 And I will not suffer, saith the Lord of Hosts, that the cries of the fair daughters of this people, which I have led out of the land of Jerusalem, shall come up unto me against the men of my people, saith the Lord of Hosts.**

**33 For they shall not lead away captive the daughters of my people because of their tenderness, save I shall visit them with a sore curse, even unto destruction; for they shall not commit whoredoms, like unto them of old, saith the Lord of Hosts.**

**verses 32-33** “I will not suffer” means I will not allow. I will not permit. I will forbid or hinder. The Lord warns that he will not tolerate rampant sexual sin among the Book of Mormon peoples. If it should occur, he will respond by cursing and destroying them.

**verse 33** “They” are the wicked husbands whose wives are susceptible to lives of tyranny and captivity, because of the wives’ “tenderness” and submissiveness, should their husbands prove unfaithful and unrepentant. Note that the Lord’s emphasis here is chastity on the part of the husband and not the wife. Perhaps in that day, moral sin among women was not as common as it is today.

**34 And now behold, my brethren, ye know that these commandments were given to our father, Lehi; wherefore, ye have known them before; and ye have come unto great condemnation; for ye have done these things which ye ought not to have done.**

**verse 34** Here is another reference to a revelation and commandment given by the Lord to Lehi and quoted by Jacob in verses 25 through 33 of this chapter. Jacob accuses his fellow Nephites of already having violated this commandment with which they were all familiar—to “have save it were one wife, and concubines they should have none, and there should not be whoredoms committed among them” (Jacob 3:5). As mentioned above, it is likely that, while Jacob’s teachings on marriage did come from the Lord, they were probably received by father Lehi. Jacob probably obtained them from the record of Lehi and simply quoted them from that record (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:17).

**35 Behold, ye have done greater iniquities than the Lamanites, our brethren. Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children, because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you. And because of the strictness of the word of God, which cometh down against you, many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds.**

**verse 35** “many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds” As the judgments of God are meted out to those sinners who warrant them, their loved ones become two-fold losers. First these loved ones are deeply hurt by the infidelity and disloyalty of the sinner. Their hearts are further pierced as they helplessly watch the Lord’s promised cursings and destructions which are wrought upon the sinner according to “the strictness of the word of God.” When hearts are pierced and die, love may actually depart from relationships.

## Jacob Chapter 3

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**1 But behold, I, Jacob, would speak unto you that are pure in heart. Look unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith, and he will console you in your afflictions, and he will plead your cause, and send down justice upon those who seek your destruction.**

**verse 1** Jacob is addressing those whose “hearts [have] died” (Jacob 2:35)—those who have been hurt by a loved one’s sexual sin.

“Firmness of mind” implies consistency, patience, and steadfastness.

**“he will console you in your afflictions”** No one of us will escape serious afflictions and vicissitudes in mortality. These may come in the form of serious illness, bereavement, divorce, problems in our relationships with others, and host of other problems. In these times, it is not justice we seek, rather we long for peace, comfort, and hope. How blessed we are to have access to the Comforter who can, if we seek diligently, infuse quiet peace to our souls.

**“he will plead your cause”** Take a moment to consider D&C 45:3-5: “Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—saying; Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified; wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life.”

Here the Savior is pleading the cause of mortals before the Father. One verse of scripture teaches plainly that the Father has left all judgment to his Son (see John 5:22). It would seem that Jesus’s pleading here is a mark of veneration, deference, and respect. But it is also a manifestations of his matchless love, his grace.

**“send down justice”** There is nothing whimsical in God’s judgments. He is a God of perfect justice, though his timetable and methods may differ from our intuitive preconceptions.

**2 O all ye that are pure in heart, lift up your heads and receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love; for ye may, if your minds are firm, forever.**

**verse 2** The idea of “the pleasing word of God” has been discussed previously. See the commentary for Jacob 2:8. This concept likely includes the doctrines of salvation, the exciting mysteries of the kingdom, and the lofty promises of the life that is yet to come.

**“for ye may . . . forever”** Apparently the intent of this counsel to the pure in heart is that if they persist in purity they may feast upon God’s love forever in his celestial presence.

**verses 3-9** It is probably a mistake to think of the Lamanites as a benighted, hardened, indolent, and by nature a ferocious people. Certainly many among them were basically good, loving, gentle, and morally upright. Why then do we tend to form a contrary opinion about them as we read the Book of Mormon? Why do we intuitively regard them as an evil and loathsome people who are almost without redeeming qualities? What are the characteristics of this people that cause us to think so negatively about them?

To understand the answer to these questions, it is vital to understand the so-called “founding myth” of the Lamanites. The Lamanites had deeply rooted in their culture a tradition of hatred of the Nephites. This profound legacy of hatred began at the time of Laman, Lemuel, Lehi, and Nephi, and was passed along from father to son. From the Lamanites’ point of view, this basic founding myth probably was told something like this: Our Father Lehi and our younger brother Nephi stole from us everything we ever wanted and deserved. We wanted to remain at home in Jerusalem, among our friends, and enjoy our cherished possessions. We didn’t want to leave and embark on the rather ill-defined mission that our father Lehi had decided upon. Lehi and Nephi were oppressive and uncaring. They would not listen to us. They made us go with them. They virtually robbed us of our homes, and told us lies about some far away promised land. They would not allow us to decide for ourselves. They unjustly robbed us of the right to govern ourselves. When we arrived at the great ocean, they commanded us to help build a boat. We did not want to build a boat because we were frightened to try to cross the great water on a small boat. Again, we were forced, not only to help with the building but also to embark on this seemingly hopeless journey. Once on the boat, we tried to forget our fears by organizing a little lighthearted revelry. Nephi thought that this would offend the Lord and would not allow it! Again he tried to rule over us. We believed that Nephi was leading us to some wilderness where he might dominate us and subject us to his will and pleasure. Just as Nephi tried to take away our freedoms and govern us against our will, so will all Nephites do the same to us. The only way we can stop them from doing this is to use force against them—to smite and kill them. It is our only hope for happiness!

This Lamanite tradition of hatred for the Nephites is often referred to in the Book of Mormon as the “tradition of their fathers” or “the iniquity of their fathers.” It dominated the relations between the two peoples throughout the Book of Mormon story. Lamanite children were doubtless indoctrinated with it from an early uncritical age. It was firmly imbedded in their very bones, and it dominated their feelings and thoughts about the Nephite peoples. It virtually represented the national identity of the Lamanites, and with it the Lamanite leaders could stir their people up to anger (see Alma 43:7). It fueled the nearly continuous wars the Lamanites made against the Nephites. As the Nephites experienced the expression of this tradition of hatred, they

generally came to perceive the Lamanites as ferocious and hard. The Lamanites acted as if they felt nothing but hatred for the Nephites.

For an interesting exposition of this tradition of hatred uttered by a Lamanite king, read the letter written to Captain Moroni by Ammoron in 63 BC (Alma 54:15-24). Indeed, understanding the genesis of this heritage of hatred may even give us a measure of sympathy and understanding for the Lamanite people.

It is important to keep in mind that the Book of Mormon was written by Nephite authors who perceived the Lamanites generally as hateful, vicious, and dangerous. It is natural that the reader will be persuaded to believe the authors' biases. Thus, most of us who read the Book of Mormon will also come to regard the Lamanites as wicked and violent. In fairness we ought to try to keep in mind the authors' prejudices.

**3 But, wo, wo, unto you that are not pure in heart, that are filthy this day before God; for except ye repent the land is cursed for your sakes; and the Lamanites, which are not filthy like unto you, nevertheless they are cursed with a sore cursing, shall scourge you even unto destruction.**

**verse 3** **“they . . . shall scourge you even unto destruction”** This prophecy was to find fulfillment just after 210 BC. In that year Mosiah will lead a righteous remnant of Nephites out of the land of Nephi northward to the land of Zarahemla (see Omni 1:12-13). Presumably this migration preceded captivity or destruction by the Lamanites of the less righteous Nephites who remained behind. Thus, we can see and understand that this fall of the first Nephite civilization occurred at least in part because of pride and immorality.

**“they are cursed with a sore cursing”** It is necessary to remind ourselves repeatedly that the sore cursing placed upon the Lamanites was not their dark skin. Rather, it was the fact that they were denied the gospel and the priesthood. The dark skin was not evil or wicked or even a negative characteristic except that it served as a (rather arbitrary) marker for those upon whom the curse was placed.

**4 And the time speedily cometh, that except ye repent they shall possess the land of your inheritance, and the Lord God will lead away the righteous out from among you.**

**verse 4** **“will lead away the righteous out from among you”** See the commentary on the previous verse for the fulfillment of this prophecy. The land of Nephi, where the Nephites now live, will become the center of the Lamanite culture and remain so throughout the Book of Mormon following the “expulsion” of the Nephites in 210 BC.

**5 Behold, the Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins, are more righteous than you;**

**for they have not forgotten the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our father—that they should have save it were one wife, and concubines they should have none, and there should not be whoredoms committed among them.**

**verse 5 “the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our father”**

The Lord had given a commandment to father Lehi prohibiting the practice of plural marriage (Jacob 2:27, 34). It is interesting to note that the printer’s manuscript of this verse had the word “father” as it is here—in the singular. However, all subsequent editions, until this present edition, have mistakenly rendered this word in the plural—“fathers.” This latter mistaken use suggested to some that Jacob attributed a restriction on plural marriage to earlier Israelite fathers, whereas historical evidence of any such legal restriction in Hebrew tradition is lacking (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, Deseret Book Company and FARMS, 79).

Jacob’s commendation of the Lamanites is in sharp contrast to the whoredoms he accuses the Nephites of committing (Jacob 2:23). Spiritually benighted though they were, the early Lamanites had one important, redeeming virtue: fidelity in marriage. It is, of course, unlikely that all of the Lamanites observed the law of chastity, but it appears that sexual immorality was not one of their dominant sins. It is food for thought that even though the Nephites had the gospel, the church, and prophets to guide them, in this matter they were considered less righteous than the Lamanites who had none of these advantages.

**6 And now, this commandment they observe to keep; wherefore, because of this observance, in keeping this commandment, the Lord God will not destroy them, but will be merciful unto them; and one day they shall become a blessed people.**

**7 Behold, their husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children; and their unbelief and their hatred towards you is because of the iniquity of their fathers; wherefore, how much better are you than they, in the sight of your great Creator?**

**verses 6-7** Other Book of Mormon prophets will yet prophesy concerning the ultimate fate of the Lamanite people (Alma 9:16-17; Helaman 7:24; 15:11- 12). The essence of these prophecies is that the Lamanites are not fully to blame for their state of spiritual ignorance. The “traditions of their fathers” had played a major role in preventing their access to the Gospel of Jesus Christ—see the commentary for verses 3-9 of this chapter. Accordingly the Lord will be merciful to them (see also D&C 68:25; 93:39).

**8 O my brethren, I fear that unless ye shall repent of your sins that their skins will be whiter than yours, when ye shall be brought with them before the throne of God.**

**verse 8** Again, the color of the skin was designated as an arbitrary marker of spiritual status among the Book of Mormon peoples. The statement here that the skin of the Lamanites will be “whiter than yours” is a metaphor implying that the Lamanites will be more righteous than the Nephites.

**9 Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins; neither shall ye revile against them because of their filthiness; but ye shall remember your own filthiness, and remember that their filthiness came because of their fathers.**

**verse 9** What does it mean to “revile” against another person? It may mean to abuse, both physically and verbally, or to despise. Jesus said: “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother: Let me pull the mote out of thine eye—and behold, a beam is in thine own eye?” (see Matthew 7:1-5).

**10 Wherefore, ye shall remember your children, how that ye have grieved their hearts because of the example that ye have set before them; and also, remember that ye may, because of your filthiness, bring your children unto destruction, and their sins be heaped upon your heads at the last day.**

**verse 10** Can parents really “bring [their] children unto destruction”? Jacob has just explained how the Lamanites are “cursed with a sore cursing”—they have lost the priesthood because of decisions and actions of their fathers, Laman and Lemuel. They have had to live in relative spiritual ignorance. Nevertheless, since the subsequent generations of Lamanites were not responsible for this sore cursing, they will be judged more leniently. If they are true to the limited light they do receive, then they shall receive their eternal reward. Every man is judged according to the circumstances he encounters and the light he receives. It would be unfair to judge a man on any other basis.

In this verse Jacob reminds the unrighteous Nephites of the profound effects their actions may have upon their children. While it is true that a child will not be punished for the sins of his parents, it is also true that a parent’s negative example may lead a child away from eternal things and toward worldly things. A child is inclined to look to his parents as an example. If that child finds a pattern of rebellion and disobedience, then he may be inclined toward the same pattern in his life. Such a child will be judged by the merciful and all-knowing Lord, and the circumstances of each child will certainly be a factor in the Lord’s judgment. Some will, of course, still be judged unworthy of a celestial inheritance. A parent who sets a poor example may bear the responsibility for some his child’s sins, since a truly righteous parental example might have a redemptive spiritual effect on a child inclined to seek after things of the world.

**11 O my brethren, hearken unto my words; arouse the faculties of your souls; shake yourselves that ye may awake from the slumber of death; and loose yourselves from the pains of hell that ye may not become angels to the devil, to be cast into that lake of fire and brimstone which is the second death.**

**verse 11 “arouse the faculties of your souls, shake yourselves that ye may awake from the slumber of death”** Jacob attempts to awaken his brethren from their spiritual apathy. Nephi warned that Satan will win over some by lulling them into a sense of apathy, a “slumber of death”: “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 28:20-22).

**“loose yourselves from the pains of hell that ye may not become angels to the devil”** Again, here is a reminder that the doctrine of the post-mortal existence taught in the Book of Mormon is a simplified version that includes only eternal life with God or eternal life with Satan as a son of perdition. There is no mention of degrees of salvation.

**“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 9:19.

**“second death”** This term is used several times in the Book of Mormon. Here its meaning is clear—it refers to that place of eternal damnation where Satan and his sons live, so-called outer darkness (see also Alma 12:16,32; 13:30; and Helaman 14:18-19). More commonly, however, the term “second death” is used to refer to the spiritual death or that separation from God which may be suffered by mortals due to their sins (see the commentary for Alma 12:16).

**12 And now I, Jacob, spake many more things unto the people of Nephi, warning them against fornication and lasciviousness, and every kind of sin, telling them the awful consequences of them.**

**verse 12 “warning them against fornication and lasciviousness”** *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *lasciviousness* as, “Looseness; irregular indulgence of animal desires; wantonness; lustfulness.”

**13 And a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people, which now began to be numerous, cannot be written upon these plates; but many of their proceedings are written upon the larger plates, and their wars, and their contentions, and the reigns of their kings.**

**verse 13 “a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people . . . cannot be written upon these plates”** It is possible that Jacob gets into trouble with his double negative, and that his meaning is the opposite of what he intends to say. That would be

so if his intended meaning is that only a hundredth part of the proceedings can be written on these plates. Perhaps, however, he intends to say that there is not room on these plates for *even a hundreth part* of the proceedings of this people.

“These plates” are the small plates of Nephi. The “larger plates” are the large plates of Nephi. See the supplemental article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

**14 These plates are called the plates of Jacob, and they were made by the hand of Nephi. And I make an end of speaking these words.**

**verse 14** It is interesting to note that at the time of Jacob, the small plates of Nephi were called after Jacob himself. Perhaps the same was true of the other prophet engravers of the small plates of Nephi. When Enos had possession of the small plates of Nephi, perhaps they were called the plates of Enos.

This verse marks the end of the first section of the book of Jacob. An outline of the book is provided in the introductory commentary.

## Jacob Chapter 4

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### Scripture Mastery

**Jacob 4:4** All the holy prophets knew of Christ.

**Jacob 4:10** Seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand.

**Jacob 4:13** The Spirit speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be.

Jacob 4 is a rich doctrinal chapter. It contains doctrines that were revolutionary at the time of the publication of the Book of Mormon. These include: (1) the fact that all true prophets back to the time of Adam knew of and prophesied of the birth of Christ; (2) the doctrine that the redemptive effects of Christ's atonement extend back to the days of Adam; (3) the announcement that the prophets worshiped God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ; (4) the important concept that the law of Moses including its rituals were symbolic of Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice, just as was the story of Abraham's offering of Isaac as a sacrifice; (5) a warning to religious zealots not to look beyond the mark as did the Jews at the time of Christ; and (6) the concept that the Jews will one day acknowledge Christ as the Messiah.

**verses 1-3** A careful study of these verses leads to an interesting conclusion. As we read through the Book of Mormon we may intuitively conclude that what a prophet engraved upon the plates was all the writing he did. These verses suggest that Jacob, and likely all of the other Book of Mormon prophets, also wrote on other materials, probably leather or paper. We might logically conclude that what a prophet finally engraved, with "difficulty," upon the plates was a well-edited final version of his writings.

**1 Now behold, it came to pass that I, Jacob, having ministered much unto my people in word, (and I cannot write but a little of my words, because of the difficulty of engraving our words upon plates) and we know that the things which we write upon plates must remain;**

**verse 1 "we know that the things which we write upon plates must remain"**

Jacob's use of "we" here and in the verses which follow refers to himself and his brother Nephi. Note his reference to himself and his brother in the previous verse: "These plates are called the plates of Jacob, and they were made by the hand of Nephi." See also verse 4 of this chapter.

**2 But whatsoever things we write upon anything save it be upon plates must perish and vanish away; but we can write a few words upon plates, which will**

give our children, and also our beloved brethren, a small degree of knowledge concerning us, or concerning their fathers—

**3 Now in this thing we do rejoice; and we labor diligently to engraven these words upon plates, hoping that our beloved brethren and our children will receive them with thankful hearts, and look upon them that they may learn with joy and not with sorrow, neither with contempt, concerning their first parents.**

**verse 3 “that they may learn with joy and not with sorrow, neither with contempt, concerning their first parents”** Part of the magic of delving into our own family histories is to learn that our ancestors were much like we are today. They were real people who had concerns and feelings of hope and fear similar to our own. Without effort on our part to learn of them we may regard them with little feeling. They may seem to be parents or ancestors who didn’t know us and had little regard for us. Once we do come to know them, however, we realize they were concerned for us and certainly will love us as family once we are reunited with them.

**“concerning their first parents”** Some may interpret this phrase as a reference to Adam and Eve. However, the context suggests that Jacob is referring to Lehi and Ishmael and their families who migrated to the New World.

**4 For, for this intent have we written these things, that they may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us.**

**verse 4 “for this intent have we written these things, that they may know that we knew of Christ”** Jacob and his brother Nephi have written the materials on the small plates so their “beloved brethren and [their] children” (their descendants) will know that they knew of Christ.

Make certain that you do not take this verse for granted! It is almost a revolutionary verse, yet it has become a fundamental gospel principle. Generally speaking, biblical scholars today do not believe that it was possible for an Old Testament prophet to receive any specific revealed information about an event which was to occur hundreds of years in the future. The word *Christ* is not even mentioned in modern translations of the Old Testament. Secular scholars feel that the prophets and people of the Old Testament did not even know of Christ, and certainly the Old Testament in its present form is not clear on this topic. This and other verses in the Book of Mormon, however, teach that the prophets did know—“all the holy prophets” knew of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament prophets had revealed to them specific information about the coming of the Savior centuries hence, and they taught these glorious truths to their people (see also Moses 6:51-68; 7:55; 8:24; JST, Genesis 15:11-12; Jacob 7:11; Mosiah 13:33; 3 Nephi 20:24; Helaman 8:17-19; John 8:56; Acts 3:21; 10:43).

For a summary of the Book of Mormon passages that contain specific prophetic information about the future birth, life, ministry, and crucifixion of the Savior see the commentary for Mosiah 15:5-7.

Keep in mind that when Jesus Christ walked the earth and taught the gospel, and when Peter and Paul went out preaching, they used the scriptures which at that time consisted of only the Old Testament. They obviously had no New Testament from which to teach. The Apostle John quotes Jesus as saying, relative to the scriptures of his day, “They are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). Jesus, in teaching the disciples on the road to Emmaus following his resurrection, said to them, “Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27). The version of the Old Testament to which we have access today is not the same as they used. Many “plain and precious things” have been removed from our present-day Bible.

**“a hope of his glory”** This phrase suggests more than the fact of the prophets’ knowing beforehand of his coming into mortality. It suggests that the prophets had a hope of partaking of the same glory as Christ—that is, they had a hope of exaltation (see also Moroni 9:25). This same idea will be expressed somewhat differently in verse 11 of this chapter: “a good hope of glory in him.” See also the commentary for Jacob 4:6.

**5 Behold, they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son.**

**verse 5** 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. These critics have not carefully read the Book of Mormon text.

**“they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name”** The “they” in this phrase refers back to the phrase “all the holy prophets” in verse 4. Just as we today worship the Father in the name of the Son, so did all the ancient prophets. This is the order of heaven (see also Moses 1: 17; 5:8; 8:24).

**“it pointing our souls to him”** This is a remarkable verse. “It” refers to the law of Moses. Jacob here gives us vital information about the relationship between the law of Moses and Jesus Christ, and also about the story of the Lord’s command for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22. The purpose of the law of Moses was to

point to the coming of Christ (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 16, *The Law of Moses*). Genesis 22 tells the story of Abraham's being "tempted" or tested by the Lord when Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac. The whole story, we are taught by Jacob, is a similitude or type of God the Father's offering his son Jesus Christ as a sacrifice. Thus in this story, which we now see as metaphorical, Abraham corresponds to God the Father and Isaac is likened to Jesus Christ.

Let us now look briefly at this story in Genesis 22:1-18 with this new insight: Isaac had a miraculous birth. Recall that God had to intervene since Isaac's mother Sarah was barren. Notice that in these verses in Genesis, Isaac is referred to as Abraham's only son (see verses 2, 12, and 16). We know of course that Isaac wasn't, in actual fact, Abraham's only son since Ishmael had previously been born to Abraham and Hagar. Isaac was, however the only son in the patriarchal or covenant line. Isaac is referred to in verse 2 as the son "whom thou lovest," the beloved son. Notice in verse 8 that "God will provide himself a lamb." The wood to be used in the sacrificial procedure was carried on the backs of both Isaac and Jesus Christ (the patibulum or horizontal cross piece—see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 14, *Crucifixion*). The location of Isaac's near sacrifice was on one of the hills of the region called Moriah. Jesus was sacrificed on another of the hills in the region of Moriah, the hill Golgotha. Both Isaac and Jesus were in their early thirties when these analogous events occurred. Thus we should regard this wonderful story in Genesis as a witness of Jesus Christ. The sacrificial rituals of the law of Moses wherein the "unspotted lamb" was sacrificed by the Levite priests is similarly analogous with Christ's own sacrifice (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 11:4). Yet, it is remarkable how few can see and understand this concept which seems so obvious to us.

**"for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness"** "It" here refers to the law of Moses. In Old Testament times, those who lived in faithful conformity to the law of Moses could be sanctified—brought to a testimony of Jesus Christ—and prepared to receive a celestial reward.

**6 Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelations and the spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea.**

**verse 6 "we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken"** Jacob seems to intend a unique and rich meaning when he speaks of "obtaining a hope in Christ" (see also the commentary for Jacob 2:19). He seems to intend more than simply possessing hope in a secular sense. He is referring to our ability to obtain the assurance that we have reached a particular spiritual level or special relationship with the Lord. The process by which this special spiritual plateau is reached is mentioned in this verse. It consists of diligently searching the scriptures and of seeking and striving for a witness of the Spirit. For a discussion of the gift of hope, see "Two Little-

Appreciated Gifts of the Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*. See also “The Fruits of Faith” in volume 1, chapter 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

**“we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea”** Those who achieve this lofty level in their spiritual progress will have the power to perform miracles.

Here is a reminder that the plants and the so-called inanimate things of the earth all contain intelligences and spirits and have the right to choose (agency) and the ability to hear, understand, and obey.

**7 Nevertheless, the Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace, and his great condescensions unto the children of men, that we have power to do these things.**

**verse 7** It would seem to be the very nature of mortality that during this earthly experience, each of us will be humbled and caused to realize our weakness before God. The Savior will later say to Moroni, “If men come unto me, I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble” (Ether 12:27).

**“it is by his grace, and his great condescensions unto the children of men”** The concepts of grace and the condescension of God have been discussed previously. The condescension of God is a sacred and profound concept which we should know and hold dear. It is discussed in the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:16. *Grace* refers to that love extended to us by the Savior evidenced by his willingness to offer us our exaltation even though we have not merited that exaltation by any act of our own. We are absolutely powerless to save ourselves and are utterly dependent on this grace. To Moroni, the Savior also said, “My grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

**“that we have power to do these things”** One tends to see “the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea” as the antecedent for “these things.” Actually the exaltation of man is a better antecedent for “these things,” as that which comes by virtue of the Lord’s “grace” and “his great condescensions” is salvation or exaltation.

**8 Behold, great and marvelous are the works of the Lord. How unsearchable are the depths of the mysteries of him; and it is impossible that man should find out all his ways. And no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God.**

**verse 8 “mysteries of him”** For a discussion of the two definitions of the concept of the “mysteries of God” see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1. It should be emphasized that the sophistication of man is miniscule compared to the works and

mysteries of God. There are many mysteries or unknowns concerning the laws of God that will remain so—they will remain mysteries—during our mortal experience. Apparently there are points of doctrine for which we will have to await an explanation until a later stage in our progression. Those worldly sophisticates who consider a faith in God as unsophisticated and naive will certainly appear ridiculous and foolish when the veil is removed, and we are all granted an eternal perspective.

**“no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him”** This is a profound truth which is discussed in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:28. 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 know spiritual truths: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know [them], because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

There is another important concept that is pertinent here. What does it really mean to “learn” spiritual truths? Does it mean simply to come to a mental comprehension and a willingness to give intellectual assent? For example, when we *learn* the doctrine of the Godhead, do we merely understand clearly that God the Father and God the Son are separate beings with tangible bodies of flesh and bone and that the Spirit of God is yet a third being with a body of spirit matter? Obviously, the concept of learning spiritual truths is richer than that. When we learn spiritual truths, they are witnessed to our heart by the Spirit of God. A basic change is wrought in us when we receive truths by personal revelation. We become different people—more spiritually refined, indeed, more like God. For us, Jesus Christ is the source of all spiritual truth, and when we learn any spiritual truth, we take upon ourselves an increment of his attributes. We become more like him.

**“despise not the revelations of God”** This phrase utilizes an interesting figure of speech that is characteristic of biblical writings called “antenantiosis” (“FARMS Update,” July 1991, number 77). Jacob could have said, “Esteem highly the revelations of God.” Instead he made the statement as a negated opposite. This is antenantiosis. In this figure of speech “an expression is stated in terms of its negated opposite. The result is to [emphasize] the positive to a very high degree.” Here Jacob “is not merely saying not to despise the revelations; he is actually urging the righteous to hold the revelations of God in the highest esteem!” Other examples include the promise, “if ye do this, and endure to the end, ye will in nowise be cast out” (Mormon 9:29). Moroni is actually promising that the faithful who endure will be blessed beyond measure. When

Mosiah says, “It is not expedient that such abominations should come upon you” (Mosiah 29:24), he is not merely saying that the people should not commit or allow such abominations, he is forcefully admonishing the people to prevent them. When Amulek warns that “he [the devil] rewardeth you no good thing” (Alma 34:39), he does not mean just the lack of a good reward, but the surety of tremendously evil results—torment, captivity, and damnation. Other Book of Mormon uses of antenantiosis appear in Mosiah 2:9; 19:17; Alma 12:14; 30:21; 34:39; 46:30; 50:27; and 3 Nephi 5:1; 6:18; 7:18.

**9 For behold, by the power of his word man came upon the face of the earth, which earth was created by the power of his word. Wherefore, if God being able to speak and the world was, and to speak and man was created, O then, why not able to command the earth, or the workmanship of his hands upon the face of it, according to his will and pleasure?**

**verse 9** This verse may be summarized by saying, “When the very Creator of man and of earth speaks, we are well-advised to listen.”

Did Jacob believe that the creator of the earth was the Father or the Son? It is clear that the pronoun “his” in the expression “his word” refers to “the Lord” in the previous verse. We will learn in verses 10 and 11 below that “the Lord” is the Father. Thus it would appear that “the Lord” is described as being the creator of the earth. Today we understand that the creator of the earth and the Lord God of the Old Testament were both Jesus Christ himself. Did the prophet Jacob clearly understand this? It is clear that Jacob understood the godhood and the relationship between the Father and the Son as evidenced by verse 5 of this chapter. Yet this verse leads us to believe that in Jacob’s mind “the Lord” or the Father was the Creator.

**10 Wherefore, brethren, seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand. For behold, ye yourselves know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all his works.**

**verse 10** A powerful verse, well worth remembering.

**11 Wherefore, beloved brethren, be reconciled unto him through the atonement of Christ, his Only Begotten Son, and ye may obtain a resurrection, according to the power of the resurrection which is in Christ, and be presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God, having faith, and obtained a good hope of glory in him before he manifesteth himself in the flesh.**

**verse 11** It is fascinating to learn of the very specific doctrines Jacob knew and was able to teach the Nephites concerning the atonement and resurrection even centuries before Christ’s mortal ministry.

**“be reconciled unto him”** For a review of the concept of justification or reconciliation see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17, *Justification and*

*Sanctification.* To be reconciled means to be restored to favor. Every man loses favor with God by committing sin. A man is said to be “reconciled to God” or “justified” when all penalties are removed, and he is brought into perfect harmony with God to the point where he can be exalted. The following statement is absolute: No man can be exalted in the celestial kingdom without being reconciled to God.

**“the power of the resurrection which is in Christ”** Jesus possesses the “power of the resurrection” at least in part because of his ordeal in Gethsemane and on the cross.

**“and be presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God”** For a discussion of the concept of first-fruits and its variations, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 2:9. In this instance, the “first-fruits of Christ,” of course, are those who are resurrected with celestial bodies who will inherit that degree of glory. Here, this resurrection is referred to simply as “resurrection.” Today we refer to this resurrection as the “first resurrection.” It was a custom in ancient Israel for the head of the family to go into the field before harvest time and mark the best of the fruit crop even before it was ripe. These were the “first fruits.” This portion was then dedicated or set apart to be later offered to the Lord at the temple.

This verse might read a little better if the word “having” were inserted between “and” and “obtained.”

The concept of “a good hope of glory in him” seems to be the same as that of “obtaining a hope in Christ” discussed in the commentary for Jacob 2:19, Jacob 4:4, and Jacob 4:6.

**12 And now, beloved, marvel not that I tell you these things; for why not speak of the atonement of Christ, and attain to a perfect knowledge of him, as to attain to the knowledge of a resurrection and the world to come?**

**verse 12 “why not speak of the atonement of Christ”** Here Jacob asks a question which is thought by many to introduce the sweeping prophecy contained in Jacob 5—Zenos’s allegory of the tame and wild olive trees. In asking the question, “why not speak,” Jacob seems to be asking, “Why should we not now consider in more detail the atonement of Jesus Christ?” In the allegory in Jacob 5, one of the central themes is the reuniting or the “at-one-ment” of scattered Israel. Here is a vital point regarding the concept of the atonement that we have not discussed previously. The concept of the *atonement* refers not only to the egregious sacrifice of suffering Christ was required to make in Gethsemane and on the cross, but also to the Savior’s ongoing labors to bring his children back into oneness with him and with each other. The word *atonement* does not derive from Greek or Latin roots, but is pure English. It arose from the attempts of the earliest translators of the English versions of the Bible to find a word that described reconciliation with Christ—literally, *at-one-ment*. The Savior yearns for this state of oneness with his children (see also the great intercessory prayers in John

17 and in 3 Nephi 19). In an important way, the whole plan of salvation centers in our learning to be one with Christ as he is one with the Father.

**“attain to a perfect knowledge of him”** Jacob never defines exactly what he means by “a perfect knowledge” of Christ. In the context of this verse, it may well be that a perfect knowledge is acquired by seeing the Savior in vision. At the very least, it speaks of a special and intimate relationship with the Savior—a oneness that implies complete conversion. This intimate oneness is available to each of us as a gift of the Spirit. It results from our diligent and persistent obedience to the Lord’s commands. It comes to us, when we demonstrate ourselves worthy, by personal revelation. We may refer to this special and intimate relationship as “a testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Whatever the meaning of this phrase, it is clear in this verse that attaining “a perfect knowledge of him” leads also to one’s acquiring a testimony of one’s own eventual “resurrection and the world to come”—indeed, the gift of hope.

**13 Behold, my brethren, he that prophesieth, let him prophesy to the understanding of men; for the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls. But behold, we are not witnesses alone in these things; for God also spake them unto prophets of old.**

**verse 13 “he that prophesieth, let him prophesy to the understanding of men”** Here Jacob, in order to teach an important principle, speaks hypothetically to all prophets who would prophesy in the name of the Lord. His point is that only when prophets speak by the influence of the Holy Ghost do they truly speak the truth and are they understood by those who also possess the Holy Ghost who is also called the Spirit of prophecy and the Spirit of truth.

**“it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be”** Who is “it”? “It” is the influence of the Spirit of God. And what is truth? Here Jacob plainly defines truth and tells us how we can learn it. He explains that truth is reality, learned through the Spirit. This is compatible with a definition of truth given by the Lord in latter-day scripture: “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24).

**“these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls”** “These things” are spiritual truths available to all mortals who seek them in righteousness.

Extensive and specific spiritual truths have been revealed to prophets since Adam. See the commentary for verse 4.

**14 But behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not**

understand. Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it. And because they desired it God hath done it, that they may stumble.

**verse 14 “the Jews were a stiffnecked people”** One interesting aspect of this verse is that it is written entirely in the past tense. Does Jacob have reference to the Jews before the time of Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem? A careful consideration of the verse suggests that it refers to a time yet in the future from Jacob’s day. The most important application of the verse seems, at least in part, to be the Jews’ response to the Savior’s mortal ministry, an event more than five centuries in Jacob’s future! Is it appropriate then for the verse to be written in the past tense? It *is* appropriate. This is another example of “prophetic perfect” tense often found in prophetic writings. An event yet in the future is referred to as if it had already occurred.

**“they despised the words of plainness”** When declared outright, gospel truths sound uncomplicated and even simplistic. To people of worldly sophistication who lack the Spirit, they often seem embarrassingly simplistic, even silly and naive. The sophisticated Pharisaic and Sadducean Jews are just such an example of this worldly sophistication. They despised plainness, sought complexity, and hence God took away the plainness. Only those in tune with the Spirit see things in their true light—as they really are. Satan has always worked to corrupt our minds and lead us away “from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

**“they . . . killed the prophets”** There are a few scriptural examples of the Jews’ killing the Lord’s prophets, including the beheading of John the Baptist (Mark 6:25), the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:59), and the martyrdom of James the brother of John (Acts 12:2).

**“sought for things that they could not understand”** They spent their energies in speculative and theoretical matters rather than in learning and pondering fundamental spiritual truths.

**“blindness which came by looking beyond the mark”** The word “mark” means target or main objective, something to aim at. The prophet would have understood this meaning of *mark*, as the word was generally used as “target” in nineteenth century English. Today, the word *mark* has evolved away from this meaning. Incidentally, the meaning of the word *target* has also evolved in the past. At the time of the translation of the King James Version of the Bible, the word *target* meant shield (see, for example, see 1 Samuel 17:6). Indeed Christ is the mark. Jesus said of himself, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

The Jews were unique in their apostasy. They did not apostatize out of passivity and indifference. Rather, from a need for worldly intellectual gratification, they looked

beyond the simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ and created a complex monster of apostate ritualistic man-made gospel rules. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, “My fellow men, it matters so very much how we regard and view Jesus Christ. Some seek to substitute Caesars for Christ. Others are blinded because they are ‘looking beyond the mark’ when the mark is Christ” (CR, April 3, 1976).

Brother Daniel H. Ludlow taught:

In trying to explain why the Jewish people did not accept the Savior when he came, Jacob said it was because of the blindness of the Jews “which blindness came by looking beyond the mark.” Although the meaning of this idiomatic expression is not absolutely clear, some Book of Mormon scholars have suggested that the Jewish people were “looking beyond the mark” insofar as they expected the Savior to do at his first coming those things which it was prophesied he should do at his second coming. Thus, when the Savior did not lead the Jewish people to victory over their enemies during his earthly existence, he was largely rejected by the Jews. Jacob, however, prophesies that in the last days the Jews will once again build upon the sure foundation of Jesus Christ (*A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*, 160).

**“God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it”** Because the Jews rejected the light they were given, God has withdrawn the light and left them to flounder along in their contrived and complex apostate system of gospel laws. They deliberately sought to distance themselves from God and render him incomprehensible. They sought to create a God they could not understand. And therein they find stimulating intellectual excitement.

**15 And now I, Jacob, am led on by the Spirit unto prophesying; for I perceive by the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that by the stumbling of the Jews they will reject the stone upon which they might build and have safe foundation.**

**verse 15 “I, Jacob, am led on by the Spirit unto prophesying”** Jacob is preparing to deliver the sweeping allegory written by Zenos which prophesies of the fate of the house of Israel. In these final verses of chapter 4, Jacob will begin to lay a foundation for this great allegory.

“The stone” in this and the following verse is Jesus Christ, “the only sure foundation upon which the Jews can build.” Apparently there was a Jewish tradition that during the reconstruction of the temple under Solomon’s direction, the builders mistakenly rejected an ideal cornerstone. Hence, we encounter the use, in the Old and New Testaments, of the analogy of Christ as the chief cornerstone.

**16 But behold, according to the scriptures, this stone shall become the great, and the last, and the only sure foundation, upon which the Jews can build.**

**verse 16** Jesus himself will become the chief cornerstone of the house of Judah and reign as king of the Jews and king of all the earth.

**17 And now, my beloved, how is it possible that these, after having rejected the sure foundation, can ever build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner?**

**verse 17** Jacob now asks a question which also serves to introduce the chapter that follows, Jacob 5. He asks, “How is it possible that the Jews, after having rejected Christ during his mortal ministry, will ever become subject to him and look to him as their king?”

**18 Behold, my beloved brethren, I will unfold this mystery unto you; if I do not, by any means, get shaken from my firmness in the Spirit, and stumble because of my over anxiety for you.**

**verse 18** What is this “mystery” which will be unfolded unto us? More about that in the following chapter.

Jacob knows that the doctrine he will now expound (in chapter 5) is vastly important, and he expresses some concern that he may not be able to do it justice.

## Jacob Chapter 5

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### Scripture Mastery

**Jacob 5** Zenos's allegory of the tame and wild olive trees

**Jacob 5:71-72** The Lord of the vineyard said: This is the last time that I shall nourish my vineyard; for the end is nigh at hand.

Jacob 5 is the longest and probably the most complex chapter in the Book of Mormon. Here Jacob records, onto his record, a lengthy quote taken from the brass plates (see commentary for 1 Nephi 5:16). This is the allegory of the olive tree which is an allegory concerned with the scattering and gathering of Israel. This allegory was written onto the brass plates by the prophet Zenos.

Zenos was an ancient Israelite prophet whose writings are not found in the biblical texts to which we have access. Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, "I do not think I overstate the matter when I say that next to Isaiah himself . . . there was not a greater prophet in all Israel than Zenos. And our knowledge of his inspired writings is limited to the quotations and paraphrasing summaries found in the Book of Mormon" (*The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, editors Monte S. Nyman and Robert L. Millet, 17).

We actually know little about the prophet Zenos. He did obviously write his record before 600 BC. He perhaps lived in the northern kingdom of Israel some time before the Assyrian captivity of the ten tribes between 732 and 722 BC. Alternatively he may have lived in Judah before the major rift in Israel at the death of Solomon in 931 BC. He probably descended from ancient Joseph and thus he was a kinsman of the Nephites. Apparently he was eventually martyred for his beliefs (Helaman 8:19). Nephi quoted from Zenos (1 Nephi 19, 22), and Alma used his words in speaking to the Zoramites on the subjects of worship and prayer (Alma 33:3-11).

It would be appropriate to review the concepts of scattering and gathering of Israel before continuing your study of this chapter. For that review, please see the introductory comments for 1 Nephi 20.

A common literary form used by many of the prophets in ancient Israel is the metaphor. It is a literary device in which a comparison is drawn between two unlike or unrelated objects. For example, "the curtain of night descended" or "all the world's a stage" or "thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass" (1 Nephi 20:4). Even the word "stiffneckedness" is itself a metaphor.

Perhaps this is a good time to briefly mention the other figures of speech found in the Book of Mormon. Figures of speech are a non-literal means of expressing ideas through images or changes in standard word order. They help to bring abstract

concepts to life and enrich expressions in memorable ways. Examples found in the Book of Mormon include:

1. We have already mentioned the metaphor which is comparing unlike objects or terms.

2. A simile is a comparison between two objects showing an aspect of similarity through the use of “like” or “as.” For example, “And from this time forth did the Nephites gain no power over the Lamanites, but began to be swept off by them even as a dew before the sun” (Mormon 4:18). Or, the Nephites “are led about by Satan, even as chaff is driven before the wind, or as a vessel is tossed about upon the waves, without sail or anchor, or without anything wherewith to steer her” (Mormon 5:18).

3. A personification is treating inanimate things as persons, such as, “And her gates shall lament and mourn” (2 Nephi 13:26).

4. An allegory is a form of extended metaphor in which the literal level refers to another level of meaning: “I will liken thee, O house of Israel, like unto a tame olive-tree” (Jacob 5:3).

5. An allusion is an indirect reference to historical events: “Let us be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground” (1 Nephi 4:2).

6. A simile curse uses simile to warn and set limits: “Even as this scalp has fallen to the earth, which is the scalp of your chief, so shall ye fall to the earth except ye will deliver up your weapons of war and depart with a covenant of peace” (Alma 44:14).

7. Rhetorical figures of speech are a departure from the customary uses of language. These may be divided into:

a. Apostrophe is addressing someone not present: “Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God” (Alma 31:15).

b. Repetition is just what it says: “Yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord . . . yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever” (Alma 37:36).

c. Antithesis: “Inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But . . . inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 50:20).

d. Parallelism (including chiasmic parallelism)—see the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*.

e. Hyperbole is exaggeration: “O that I were an angel . . . that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth” (Alma 29:1-3).

f. A paradox is something apparently contradictory but true: “If they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

g. Metonymy is the use of the name of one thing in place of something related: “That I might rid my garments of your sins” (Jacob 2:2).

h. Synecdoche (sin ek' da kee) is the use of part to signify the whole or the use of the whole to signify a part: "Many hearts died" (Jacob 2:35).

Why did the Lord choose the metaphor of an olive tree to dramatize the destiny of his chosen people? Consider these possibilities: An olive tree almost never dies. It may be pruned and worked with over many generations. Before the fruit is fully satisfactory to the keeper of the vineyard, it is often necessary to apply many cuttings and trimmings and graftings and replantings. So it has been with the house of Israel. The Lord's chosen people have often required chastening and pruning. The Lord, like the dedicated gardener, has refused to allow his chosen people to perish. He prunes and cuts and coaxes and grafts and pleads. Grafting is a common horticultural practice whereby a branch or bud of one plant is attached to and allowed to grow from the root stock of a compatible plant variety. This process allows the desired qualities (usually the fruit) of the top of one plant to grow from a plant with desirable root qualities.

The olive tree is an apt metaphor in other ways as well. It was certainly an integral part of ancient biblical culture. Olive oil was an important dietary commodity. In addition, it was burned for lighting, used as a solvent for various spices and incenses, and used in religious rites such as anointing the sick. Because of the olive tree's unique and admirable characteristics, it has long been a universal symbol of life, hope, and peace. It is tough and durable and lives long. It can readily be transplanted. With a little encouragement it survives in stony soil. It is evergreen, a beautiful sight offering shade and rest. Its fruit produces soothing oil. The olive leaf brought back by the dove of peace showed Noah that life could again exist on earth (Genesis 8:11).

The botanical features of Jacob 5 have long been of interest particularly to those interested in that scientific discipline. It is felt that the science of horticulture as it applied to olive trees was well established in ancient times. The botanical principles mentioned or implied in Jacob 5 have been generally held to be correct with some few exceptions ("Botanical Comparisons in the Allegory of the Olive Tree," in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn With Joy*, 87-102). In the commentary for this chapter some specifics of these principles will be mentioned. Joseph Smith likely had little or no knowledge of olive trees in New York in 1829, as they do not grow in the northeastern United States. As we consider the few botanical aspects of olive trees, you might repeatedly ask yourself, "Could Joseph Smith have written this from his own background, knowledge, and experience?"

Regarding the botanical aspects of Jacob 5, Brother Hugh Nibley has written:

Jacob's (or rather Zenos's) treatise on ancient olive culture (Jacob 5) is accurate in every detail: Olive trees do have to be pruned and cultivated diligently; the top branches are indeed the first to wither, and the new shoots do come right out of the trunk . . . the ancient way of strengthening the old trees (especially in Greece) was to graft in the shoots of the oleaster or wild olive; also, shoots from valuable old trees were transplanted to keep the stock alive after the parent tree should perish; to a surprising

degree the olive prefers poor and rocky ground, whereas rich soil produces inferior fruit; too much grafting produces a nondescript and cluttered yield of fruit; the top branches if allowed to grow as in Spain or France, while producing a good shade tree, will indeed sap the strength of the tree and give a poor crop; fertilizing with dung is very important, in spite of the preference for rocky ground, and has been practiced since ancient times; the thing to be most guarded against is bitterness in the fruit. All these points, taken from a treatise on ancient olive culture, are duly, though quite casually, noted in Zenos's Parable of the Olive Tree (*Since Cumorah*, 238-39; see also Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 250).

Some have wondered at the use of the term "vineyard" for the place where olive trees are planted. Wouldn't "orchard" be more appropriate? It seems clear that the Hebrew word from which "vineyard" was translated means just that—a place where grapes are grown. It is also interesting to note, however, that the vineyard in biblical times was considered a garden where many other things were grown including corn (Deuteronomy 23:24-25), olive trees (Amos 4:9), fruit trees (Nehemiah 9:25), herbs (1 Kings 21:2), pomegranates (Song of Solomon 7:12), and fig trees (Luke 13:6-9) (John A. Tvedtnes, "Vineyard or Olive Orchard?" a FARMS reprint).

We read scripture to enhance our understanding of the Lord and his purposes. Unfortunately, in Jacob 5, there is danger of becoming lost in its metaphorical aspects. It is difficult to understand this chapter without help, yet it is vital that we do come to understand it. It is in our dispensation that many of the Lord's promises to his covenant people will be fulfilled.

Fundamental to understanding Zenos's allegory is learning the meaning of the individual specific metaphors it contains. The following interpretation is provided with the help of Monte S. Nyman's book *An Ensign to All People*, 21-36, and an article by Kent P. Jackson, "Nourished by the Good Word of God" found in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 190-94. These meanings are:

1. natural or tame olive tree: the house of Israel, the Lord's covenant people
2. wild olive tree: the Gentiles or non-Israelites. Later in the parable, "wild branches" are apostate Israel or the influences of the world which caused their apostasy.
3. the vineyard: the world
4. the man, master, or lord of the vineyard: the Lord Jesus Christ. An alternate meaning for the lord of the vineyard is God the Father with the servant being Jesus Christ.
5. the servant: a prophet, or prophets
6. branches: various groups of people, both Israelite and non-Israelite, both righteous and unrighteous
7. grafting natural branches into the wild trees: branches of Israel scattered among the Gentiles

8. transplanting the branches: scattering of groups throughout the world or restoring them to their original position

9. grafting: the process of spiritual rebirth wherein one is connected to the healing influence of the roots of the tame olive tree; whereupon one acquires the same inclination to accept the truth as is possessed by those of the blood of Israel. See the meaning of the “roots of the tame olive tree” below.

10. pruning: The opposite of grafting—that is, the cutting off of evil individuals from spiritual instructions and influences.

11. grafting wild branches into the natural tree: the accepting of Gentiles by adoption into the house of Israel. After Christ’s mortal ministry, this process occurred as Gentiles accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ, were baptized, and entered his church.

12. the roots of the tame olive tree: the intrinsic goodness of those of the house of Israel—their natural inclination to accept the truth, which inclination was earned over time in the pre-existence. We will also learn of other meanings for roots in the commentary which follows.

13. decaying branches: wickedness and apostasy

14. digging, pruning, nourishing, fertilizing, and cultivating: the Lord’s merciful efforts and those of his earthly servants (the prophets) to save his chosen people, the house of Israel

15. casting the branches into the fire: the judgment of God

16. fruit of the tree: the souls of men or their works

17. natural fruit: the lives or works of those of the house of Israel

18. wild fruit: unrighteous people and their evil works

19. young and tender branches: righteous subgroups of Israel who are willing to accept and live the gospel

Another interpretive note is important before we begin our study of Jacob 5. In an important way, this chapter concerns itself with the atonement. Not so much with the Savior’s sufferings in Gethsemane and on the cross, but more with another part of his atonement—his additional efforts to help man achieve the overcoming of their spiritual death and to reunite with him, the so-called “at-one-ment.” Please review the commentary in Jacob 4:12 for the phrase “why not speak of the atonement of Christ.” To properly understand Jacob 5, it is important to understand the intensity of the divine desire behind the process of atonement. Here is the “mystery” of Jacob 5 spoken of in Jacob 4:18. At the deepest level of meaning, the olive tree is symbolic of the Savior himself and his work is to gather mankind to himself. While the Lord Jesus is the agent of this gathering, the medium of the at-one-ment is the Holy Ghost (M. Catherine Thomas, “Jacob’s Allegory: The Mystery of Christ,” a FARMS reprint).

It is interesting to note the close correlation between the tree of life in Nephi’s vision (1 Nephi 11-15) and the olive tree in Jacob 5. Both are ultimately symbolic of the Lord himself. The olive tree and the tree of life in Nephi’s vision are the same tree, and

the merging of the two trees enhances the message of at-one-ment between man and Christ. Nephi taught that the covenant people will receive “nourishment from the true vine” when they are grafted “into the true olive-tree” (1 Nephi 15:15-16). Jacob 5 concerns itself with the reuniting of each individual (Israelite and Gentile) with Christ. We will read repeatedly the phrase “preserve them unto myself.” We will also read of the ceaseless activity of “nourishing,” “digging,” and “pruning” as the Lord seeks to bring men into his presence.

One of the vital insights we may draw from Jacob 5 is that the atonement operates at every level of man’s existence. “It urges people to gather geographically into Zions. It promotes generosity and consecration of goods. It prompts people to resonate emotionally and to synergize spiritually. The Lord says, ‘I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine’ (D&C 38:27)” (*Ibid.*).

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it is important to emphasize the most essential point Jacob had in mind when he included this allegory in his writings: God loves the house of Israel and looks after his chosen people no matter where they are scattered. We have mentioned previously that 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 seemed to take special comfort in the promises made to that people. He obviously acknowledged that he and his people were among those of scattered Israel. It has been suggested that Jacob 5 ought to take its place beside the parable of the prodigal son, as both are poignant reminders of God’s love and long suffering.

Now, keeping the above metaphors and symbolisms in mind, let us attempt to interpret the allegory.

### **1 Behold, my brethren, do ye not remember to have read the words of the prophet Zenos, which he spake unto the house of Israel, saying:**

**verse 1** The first person in this verse is the prophet Jacob. Beginning in verse 2, however, the prophet Zenos becomes the first person. The parable actually begins with verse 2.

**“do ye not remember to have read the words of the prophet Zenos”** Today this might be rendered, “do you not remember reading the words of the prophet Zenos?” Obviously this allegory of Zenos’s was available to the Nephites and is something with which they should already have been familiar.

### **2 Hearken, O ye house of Israel, and hear the words of me, a prophet of the Lord.**

**3 For behold, thus saith the Lord, I will liken thee, O house of Israel, like unto a tame olive-tree, which a man took and nourished in his vineyard; and it grew, and waxed old, and began to decay.**

**verse 3** The “tame olive tree” is the house of Israel. The “man” is the master of the vineyard, Jesus Christ. The man “nourished” his covenant people Israel by making all of the blessings of his gospel available to them. This was done “in his vineyard” which is the world.

**“it grew, and waxed old, and began to decay”** After its beginning with father Abraham in about 2000 BC, the house of Israel began to fall into apostasy. After entering the promised land of Palestine (about 1220 BC) many of the Israelites eventually fell into apostasy. The period of time referred to is likely that between the foundation of the house of Israel and about 1000 BC just before the Israelite prophets were dispatched to the earth. Some have suggested that this period of apostasy might have occurred while Israel was detained in Egypt or even while they were wandering in the wilderness. A word of warning is appropriate here. It may not always be possible to apply Zenos’s allegory to one specific time period. Some verses might even have a general application to the house of Israel in future dispensations. An attempt will be made, however, in this commentary to provide plausible temporal correlates.

The botanical concept of the “tame” or domesticated olive tree is a sound one. Though the olive tree is an ancient plant, it has changed little through time. The species which produces fruit eaten by man has two botanical varieties; one is cultivated or domestic (tame), and the other is wild. Both of these forms were present in ancient times. From examination of archaeological records, it is evident that domestication of the olive tree took a very long time. Domestication resulted from selection of desirable genetic characteristics, and these genetically variant plants were less hearty and relied more upon man for maximal production. In some instances, highly domesticated plants failed to survive if not tended and nurtured by men. On the other hand, non-domesticated (wild) plants are well-adapted genetically to survive without man’s intervention. The extra care required for the domestic trees was worthwhile, since they produced better and more plentiful olives (Hess, 91).

**verses 4-14** This is the period of nurturing extending from the beginning of the period of Israelite prophets about 1000 BC to the completion of the first great scattering of all Israel shortly after 600 BC.

**4 And it came to pass that the master of the vineyard went forth, and he saw that his olive-tree began to decay; and he said: I will prune it, and dig about it, and nourish it, that perhaps it may shoot forth young and tender branches, and it perish not.**

**verse 4 “And it came to pass”** This phrase is found frequently in Jacob 5. It seems to be used here by Zenos as a constant reminder of the passage of time.

**“The master . . . saw that his olive-tree began to decay”** Apostasy occurred among the Israelites.

**“I will prune it, and dig about it, and nourish it”** I will send my prophets to preach, teach and warn.

**“It may shoot forth young and tender branches, and it perish not”** Some subgroups of Israel may repent and prove to be the salvation of all Israel.

### **5 And it came to pass that he pruned it, and digged about it, and nourished it according to his word.**

**verses 4-5** The earliest of the prophets sent to warn Israel was Samuel who preached in the eleventh century BC. He was followed by the likes of Elijah, Elisha, and Jeremiah.

We cannot pass the concept of “pruning” without recalling Hugh B. Brown’s little parable of the currant bush. As we are pruned in life by the divine will, we often suffer pain as we are usually subjected to refining influences which we would elect to avoid if given our choice. Hugh B. Brown wrote:

Do not cry . . . what I have done to you was necessary . . . you were not intended for what you sought to be . . . if I had allowed you to continue . . . you would have failed in the purpose for which I planted you and my plans for you would have been defeated. You must not weep; some day when you are richly laden with experience you will say, “He was a wise gardener. He knew the purpose of my earth life . . . I thank him now for what I thought was cruel. Help me, dear God, to endure the pruning, and to grow as you would have me grow; to take my allotted place in life and ever more to say, Thy will not mine be done” (“The Gardener and the Currant Bush” in *Eternal Quest*, 243).

The pruning of olive trees maintains the proper amount of foliage and permits sufficient light to strike the branches, thus maximizing fruit production. Without pruning fruit production suffers, as the trees become too bushy. It is also well known that pruning encourages the development of “young and tender branches” (Hess, 93).

### **6 And it came to pass that after many days it began to put forth somewhat a little, young and tender branches; but behold, the main top thereof began to perish.**

**verse 6** Some Israelites accepted the prophets’ warnings—the “young and tender branches”—but only a few. And those accepted the warnings only “somewhat a little.”

**“the main top thereof began to perish”** The teachers, rulers, and priests did not accept the prophets. Two rulers who became infamous apostates were Jeroboam and Manasseh. Jeroboam was the military leader under King Solomon who broke with Judah and became the first king of the northern Kingdom of Israel. He introduced idol worship to his people. Manasseh was a king of the southern kingdom under whose evil leadership the spiritual state of Judah declined to new lows.

**verses 7-10** Here the lord of the vineyard outlines a plan for saving the tame olive tree, consisting of three steps: (1) destroying the apostate parts of Israel—mainly the upper classes, (2) grafting non-Israelites into Israel, and (3) relocating the righteous subgroups of Israel away from Jerusalem so they might survive elsewhere.

**7 And it came to pass that the master of the vineyard saw it, and he said unto his servant: It grieveth me that I should lose this tree; wherefore, go and pluck the branches from a wild olive-tree, and bring them hither unto me; and we will pluck off those main branches which are beginning to wither away, and we will cast them into the fire that they may be burned.**

**verse 7 “the master of the vineyard saw it”** The Lord saw the apostasy of Israel, so he gave instructions to his “servant” or prophet.

**“It grieveth me that I should lose this tree”** This phrase is repeated eight times in Zenos’s allegory. It is a poignant celebration of the Lord’s long-suffering love.

**“go and pluck the branches from a wild olive-tree, and bring them hither unto me”** These Gentiles will be discussed in the commentary for verse 9.

**“we will pluck off those main branches which are beginning to wither away, and we will cast them into the fire that they may be burned”** In order to preserve the righteous element of Israel (“this tree”), the Lord allowed Gentile nations to purge Israel. The northern kingdom, the kingdom of Israel, was destroyed and scattered by the Assyrians between 734 and 720 BC. The Babylonians routed the southern kingdom, the kingdom of Judah, between 605 and 586 BC. And the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and killed, captured, or scattered all of Israel in AD 70. The Lord thus allowed the great Gentile nations (Assyria, Babylonia, and Rome)—the branches from a wild olive tree—to mete out his judgment upon Israel.

As in the days of Zenos, it is not only possible but even standard practice to graft branches from one olive tree to another. Archaeological records show that this practice goes back to very ancient times (Hess, 89).

This verse implies that the Lord’s servants, the prophets, had some role in encouraging the Gentile destruction of parts of Israel. It is more likely that they simply warned Israel, and when their warnings went unheeded, they pronounced the judgments of God upon Israel (“cast them into the fire that they may be burned”).

It is well known that an untended olive vineyard can decay as limbs become infested with parasitic and saprophytic microorganisms and insects. Thus the burning of infested limbs is desirable to prevent the spread of pestilence. Burning also keeps the ground open and unencumbered (Hess, 92).

**8 And behold, saith the Lord of the vineyard, I take away many of these young and tender branches, and I will graft them whithersoever I will; and it mattereth not that if it so be that the root of this tree will perish, I may preserve the fruit**

**thereof unto myself; wherefore, I will take these young and tender branches, and I will graft them whithersoever I will.**

**verses 8, 13-14** “I take away many of these young and tender branches, and I will graft them whithersoever I will” The leading away of the family of Lehi fits nicely into this category, and there may have been other righteous groups as well. We obviously know nothing of the latter, however. Perhaps even a righteous remnant of the scattered ten tribes was led away and preserved.

If the foliage of an otherwise healthy olive tree is removed or even reduced, the roots may perish. In contrast when branches are grafted, the new foliage can carry on photosynthesis and supply the necessary carbohydrates to nourish the roots (Hess, 94).

**“I will graft them”** Grafting is the process of allowing a spiritual rebirth by moving righteous Israelites to a safer location where they can live the law of Moses

**“if it so be that the root of this tree will perish”** The metaphor of the “root” or “roots” in Zenos’s allegory is used with various meanings. Here its meaning seems to be the established hierarchy or aristocracy of Israel—the teachers, rulers, and priests. Though these should perish spiritually, the Lord will preserve unto himself those willing to live the law of Moses by relocating them.

**verses 9-12** The Lord instructs his prophets to accept righteous Gentiles into the house of Israel by adoption, in place of those unrighteous elements that have been plucked off from the metaphorical olive tree and then burned. This “burning” may refer to the specific destruction of parts of Israel mentioned in the commentary for verse 7.

Gentiles will eventually be combined with remnants of Israel to form the early Christian church (from about AD 30 to AD 100).

**9 Take thou the branches of the wild olive-tree, and graft them in, in the stead thereof; and these which I have plucked off I will cast into the fire and burn them, that they may not cumber the ground of my vineyard.**

**verse 9** The word “cumber” here means the same as encumber—to interfere with, obstruct. One of the definitions of *cumber* in *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, “To trouble; to be troublesome to; to cause trouble or obstruction in, as anything useless” (see an alternate meaning for the word *cumber* in the commentary for Jacob 5:39).

**10 And it came to pass that the servant of the Lord of the vineyard did according to the word of the Lord of the vineyard, and grafted in the branches of the wild olive-tree.**

**verses 9-10** “Take thou the branches of the wild olive-tree, and graft them in” After the destruction of the northern kingdom, Assyria moved some Assyrians into Palestine in place of the deported northern kingdom. These intermarried with the

Israelites left behind by the Assyrians. Also some of the Jews intermarried with their Babylonian captors. Some of the descendants of these mixed-racial marriages were likely those who would accept the gospel after the Lord's ascension.

**11 And the Lord of the vineyard caused that it should be digged about, and pruned, and nourished, saying unto his servant: It grieveth me that I should lose this tree; wherefore, that perhaps I might preserve the roots thereof that they perish not, that I might preserve them unto myself, I have done this thing.**

**12 Wherefore, go thy way; watch the tree, and nourish it, according to my words.**

**verses 11-12** The Lord reminds his prophets to watch after Israel. The lord of the vineyard expresses his hope that some of the Israelites will remain true to the potential spiritual receptivity they earned in the pre-existence.

**verses 13-14** These verses refer to the fact that Israel will be scattered to the four corners of the earth, and they raise an interesting question. We have previously concluded that the scattering of the Lord's chosen people occurs because of apostasy, and we have assumed that the scattering occurs as a form of punishment for disobedience. Apparently, however, a people is occasionally scattered to isolate them from a wicked governing hierarchy and thus preserve their spiritual integrity.

**13 And these will I place in the nethermost part of my vineyard, whithersoever I will, it mattereth not unto thee; and I do it that I may preserve unto myself the natural branches of the tree; and also, that I may lay up fruit thereof against the season, unto myself; for it grieveth me that I should lose this tree and the fruit thereof.**

**verse 13** **“And these will I place in the nethermost part of my vineyard”** This phrase refers to the “young and tender branches” in verse 8. *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *nethermost* as, “lowest.” These are the few remaining righteous Israelites whom the lord of the vineyard is scattering in order to preserve their righteousness.

**“that I may lay up fruit thereof against the season, unto myself”** This phrase conveys the idea that the Lord knows that “winter” is coming and he must place in storage a supply of food. The Lord acknowledges the coming universal apostasy, and he wants to “lay up” as many souls of men unto himself before the coming dry spell.

**“for it grieveth me that I should lose this tree and the fruit thereof”** The lord of the vineyard has resigned himself to the loss of the people of the main body of Israel.

**14 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard went his way, and hid the natural branches of the tame olive-tree in the nethermost parts of the vineyard, some in one and some in another, according to his will and pleasure.**

**verse 14 “hid the natural branches of the tame olive-tree in the nethermost parts of the vineyard”** In a manner of speaking the Lehites were “hid” or hidden from the rest of the world.

**verses 15-28** These verses cover the period of time from the Savior’s birth to about AD 100 when the priesthood was taken from the earth and revelation ceased.

**15 And it came to pass that a long time passed away, and the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: Come, let us go down into the vineyard, that we may labor in the vineyard.**

**verse 15 “a long time passed away”** A few centuries have passed.

**verses 16-18** The early Christian church flourished in righteousness partly because of the adoption of Gentiles into the house of Israel through baptism into the church. Many faithful saints brought forth righteous works between AD 30 and AD 100. Doubtless many of these Gentiles were the descendants of the former intermarriages between Israelites and their conquerors, the Assyrians and Babylonians.

**16 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard, and also the servant, went down into the vineyard to labor. And it came to pass that the servant said unto his master: Behold, look here; behold the tree.**

**17 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard looked and beheld the tree in the which the wild olive branches had been grafted; and it had sprung forth and begun to bear fruit. And he beheld that it was good; and the fruit thereof was like unto the natural fruit.**

**verse 17 “the fruit thereof was like unto the natural fruit”** The spiritual quality of the people, especially those Gentiles who had been adopted into the house of Israel—their lives and works—was equal to that of the Lord’s chosen.

Botanists have struggled with one aspect of Zenos’s allegory—the idea that a wild or non-domesticated branch which is grafted into a domesticated or tame tree might bear tame fruit. It is known that a wild olive branch grafted onto a tame tree will remain wild and will produce only wild or small-seeded, bitter fruit of low quality. That branch will never have the genetic potential of the branches from domesticated trees. It is likely that Zenos had in mind another true botanical principle—that a wild plant properly tended will produce better fruit than a domestic plant which is neglected (Hess, 94-95).

**18 And he said unto the servant: Behold, the branches of the wild tree have taken hold of the moisture of the root thereof, that the root thereof hath brought forth much strength; and because of the much strength of the root thereof the wild branches have brought forth tame fruit. Now, if we had not grafted in these branches, the tree thereof would have perished. And now, behold, I shall lay up much fruit, which the tree thereof hath brought forth; and the fruit thereof I shall lay up against the season, unto mine own self.**

**verse 18 “the branches of the wild tree have taken hold of the moisture of the root thereof”** The branches of the wild tree have taken hold of the moisture of the root of the tame olive-tree. In other words the Gentiles have developed a true proclivity for righteousness as is possessed by those of the house of Israel.

**“the wild branches have brought forth tame fruit”** The Gentiles have become righteous and have manifest good works.

Without the conversion and adoption of Gentiles into the house of Israel, Israel would have spiritually perished.

**“and the fruit thereof I shall lay up against the season, unto mine own self”** Perhaps this is a prophecy of the great apostasy of the early Christian church which is to come.

**verses 19-28** The Lord goes forth to inspect the “fruits” of the scattered remnants of Israel. At least three groups were identified and found to be bearing good fruit. It is difficult to know the identity of the first two groups. Perhaps they are existing groups from the northern kingdom and from the scattered Jews. The third group seems to be the Leuites.

**19 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Come, let us go to the nethermost part of the vineyard, and behold if the natural branches of the tree have not brought forth much fruit also, that I may lay up of the fruit thereof against the season, unto mine own self.**

**verse 19 “that I may lay up of the fruit thereof against the season”** Again, a prophecy suggesting the coming major apostasy.

**20 And it came to pass that they went forth whither the master had hid the natural branches of the tree, and he said unto the servant: Behold these; and he beheld the first that it had brought forth much fruit; and he beheld also that it was good. And he said unto the servant: Take of the fruit thereof, and lay it up against the season, that I may preserve it unto mine own self; for behold, said he, this long time have I nourished it, and it hath brought forth much fruit.**

21 And it came to pass that the servant said unto his master: How comest thou hither to plant this tree, or this branch of the tree? For behold, it was the poorest spot in all the land of thy vineyard.

22 And the Lord of the vineyard said unto him: Counsel me not; I knew that it was a poor spot of ground; wherefore, I said unto thee, I have nourished it this long time, and thou beholdest that it hath brought forth much fruit.

23 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: Look hither; behold I have planted another branch of the tree also; and thou knowest that this spot of ground was poorer than the first. But, behold the tree. I have nourished it this long time, and it hath brought forth much fruit; therefore, gather it, and lay it up against the season, that I may preserve it unto mine own self.

**verses 21-23** We can only speculate as to the identity of the two righteous branches of Israel planted on “poor” land. Perhaps these were a few from among the ten tribes, taken captive into Assyria, and also a few from among the Jews who had languished in Babylon.

24 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said again unto his servant: Look hither, and behold another branch also, which I have planted; behold that I have nourished it also, and it hath brought forth fruit.

25 And he said unto the servant: Look hither and behold the last. Behold, this have I planted in a good spot of ground; and I have nourished it this long time, and only a part of the tree hath brought forth tame fruit, and the other part of the tree hath brought forth wild fruit; behold, I have nourished this tree like unto the others.

**verse 25** This third natural branch planted in “a good spot of ground” is likely Lehi’s descendants in the western hemisphere. Among them were both faithful and unfaithful individuals. Only part of this tree has brought forth good works. This is likely a reference to the believers (generally the Nephites) and the non-believers (the Lamanites) among the Lehites.

26 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Pluck off the branches that have not brought forth good fruit, and cast them into the fire.

27 But behold, the servant said unto him: Let us prune it, and dig about it, and nourish it a little longer, that perhaps it may bring forth good fruit unto thee, that thou canst lay it up against the season.

**verses 26-27** Prophets were sent to Lehi’s descendants to persuade them to repent. There were perhaps times when the Lord would have destroyed the non-believers among the Lehites had it not been for the prophets who served as mediators

for their people before the throne of God. This is a vital function of prophets (see also JST, Exodus 32:9-11, 14, 30-33).

**28 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard and the servant of the Lord of the vineyard did nourish all the fruit of the vineyard.**

**verse 28** The Lord agrees to stay his hand and not destroy the unrighteous among the descendants of Lehi. Instead the Lord and his prophets patiently continue to minister to both the believers and non-believers.

**verses 29-49** These verses are concerned with the period of time near the end of the dark ages, that period of great apostasy, but before the restoration of the gospel in 1830.

**29 And it came to pass that a long time had passed away, and the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: Come, let us go down into the vineyard, that we may labor again in the vineyard. For behold, the time draweth near, and the end soon cometh; wherefore, I must lay up fruit against the season, unto mine own self.**

**verse 29 “a long time had passed away”** The priesthood was taken from the earth and revelation ceased about AD 100. Spiritual darkness prevailed. This period of the so-called dark ages was to last until the sixteenth century when spiritual light again began to pour forth upon the earth. It seems certain that the Lord inspired the great leaders of the reformation such as Martin Luther, Huldreich Zwingli, John Calvin, and John Knox. In some mysterious way the reformation prepared the earth for the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ which began in AD 1820 with Joseph Smith’s first vision. This verse probably refers to a time prior to Joseph Smith’s ministry when the Lord and his prophet servant, as they inspected the fruit of the vineyard, found “none of it which is good” (verse 32).

**“For behold, the time draweth near, and the end soon cometh”** Reference is made to the time of the Lord’s second coming in glory and the destruction of the wicked—the “end of the world.”

**“I must lay up fruit against the season, unto mine own self.”** This refers to the Lord’s searching for and nurturing righteous individuals. Hopefully The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will prove to be the Lord’s most significant resource as he seeks to “lay up fruit [to himself] against the season.” The season “against” which he is seeking to lay up fruit is the period of destruction of the wicked just prior to his second coming.

**verses 30-32** The Lord and his prophet servant find virtual complete apostasy. The house of Israel is in near total disarray.

**30 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard and the servant went down into the vineyard; and they came to the tree whose natural branches had been broken off, and the wild branches had been grafted in; and behold all sorts of fruit did cumber the tree.**

**verse 30** As the Lord and his servant came to inspect the spiritual status of Israel, the Lord's chosen people, what did they find?

**“they came to the tree whose natural branches had been broken off”** The people of Israel were scattered to the corners of the earth.

**“wild branches had been grafted in; and behold all sorts of fruit did cumber the tree”** The “wild branches” and various “fruit” here seems less likely to refer to non-Israelites who have been adopted into the house of Israel because during this period there is no cohesive righteous body of Israel extant. It is more likely that this phrase refers to the extraneous and apostate doctrinal ideas, philosophies, and means of worship that “cumber the tree.” One of the definitions of *cumber* in *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, “to load, or crowd.”

**31 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard did taste of the fruit, every sort according to its number. And the Lord of the vineyard said: Behold, this long time have we nourished this tree, and I have laid up unto myself against the season much fruit.**

**verse 31** This verse implies that the lord of the vineyard was patient and long-suffering as he examined the apostate souls and their doctrines. It is interesting to ponder the patience, persistence, and forbearance with which the Lord has nurtured intransigent Israel since the days of father Jacob. Perhaps those of us who are having to nurture a wayward and rebellious child should take note.

**“I have laid up unto myself against the season much fruit”** In effect he says, “It's a good thing I have many righteous souls with me already because I don't find many here.”

**32 But behold, this time it hath brought forth much fruit, and there is none of it which is good. And behold, there are all kinds of bad fruit; and it profiteth me nothing, notwithstanding all our labor; and now it grieveth me that I should lose this tree.**

**verse 32 “there is none of it which is good”** We should certainly recognize and acknowledge the righteous individuals and worthwhile teachings found in most of the world's churches. At the time of the restoration of the gospel, the churches near Joseph Smith's home taught many sound Christian principles. Yet as institutions they find themselves condemned in this verse. Here, all churches save for the Lord's authorized church, are referred to as “bad fruit” which “profiteth [the Lord] nothing.”

**“and now it grieveth me that I should lose this tree”** Here is a hint that the Lord gave some thought to completely destroying his chosen people.

**33 And the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: What shall we do unto the tree, that I may preserve again good fruit thereof unto mine own self?**

**verse 33** Certainly this is a rhetorical question. The Lord intends that the gospel be restored in its fulness.

**34 And the servant said unto his master: Behold, because thou didst graft in the branches of the wild olive-tree they have nourished the roots, that they are alive and they have not perished; wherefore thou beholdest that they are yet good.**

**verse 34** The servant makes the observation that the roots of the tree are still potentially salvageable, though in a dilapidated condition. There are still people with the blood of Israel on the earth who have a particular proclivity for believing eternal truths. In the commentary for verses 17 and 18 above, it was pointed out that in one period of the church’s existence, probably between AD 30 and AD 100, the church was saved from extinction by an infusion of strength from the Gentile world. This infusion came in the form of Gentiles’ accepting the gospel and joining the church—grafting in the branches of the wild olive-tree.

**35 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: The tree profiteth me nothing, and the roots thereof profit me nothing so long as it shall bring forth evil fruit.**

**verse 35** A person’s inheritance or his spiritual inclinations at birth mean little if there is no associated righteous performance. The apostle Paul warned, “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Romans 9:6).

**36 Nevertheless, I know that the roots are good, and for mine own purpose I have preserved them; and because of their much strength they have hitherto brought forth, from the wild branches, good fruit.**

**verse 36 “the roots are good”** The “roots” are symbolic of Israel’s intrinsic inclination for obedience and acceptance of truth. Those born into the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are those who earned, during their preexistent lives, the gift and capacity to yearn for eternal things and to recognize truth. Tragically, many Israelites prove disloyal to their royal ancestry.

**“because of their much strength they have hitherto brought forth . . . good fruit”** The natural heavenly endowment that Israelites possess often has manifest itself in the world’s history. To illustrate, we might point to a few specific events such as the great reformation, the colonization of America, the establishing of the constitution of the

United States of America, and the willingness and spirit to fight for freedom in the Revolutionary War and in other wars.

**37 But behold, the wild branches have grown and have overrun the roots thereof; and because that the wild branches have overcome the roots thereof it hath brought forth much evil fruit; and because that it hath brought forth so much evil fruit thou beholdest that it beginneth to perish; and it will soon become ripened, that it may be cast into the fire, except we should do something for it to preserve it.**

**verse 37** The influences of the Gentile world have not always been supportive of the gospel message and cause. Humanistic philosophies have at times overwhelmed the Church of God and driven it “into the wilderness” (D&C 86:3).

The pronoun “it” in this verse refers to “the tree” in verse 35—in other words to Israel.

It is well known among those who grow olive trees that when good branches are allowed to become too thick, the developing fruit will be of poor quality. The amount of root needs to be balanced with the amount of foliage (Hess, 93).

**verses 38-40** The lord of the vineyard and his servant will now inspect those three young and tender branches that the Lord had hidden in the nethermost part of his vineyard (see verses 13-14).

**38 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: Let us go down into the nethermost parts of the vineyard, and behold if the natural branches have also brought forth evil fruit.**

**39 And it came to pass that they went down into the nethermost parts of the vineyard. And it came to pass that they beheld that the fruit of the natural branches had become corrupt also; yea, the first and the second and also the last; and they had all become corrupt.**

**verses 38-39** All three branches of Israel planted in or scattered to the “nethermost parts” of the vineyard were found by the Lord to be corrupt. What peoples comprise these groups? We have previously speculated that those in the first two groups are a few among the ten lost tribes and among the scattered Jews. The third or “last” group seems to be the Lehites.

**40 And the wild fruit of the last had overcome that part of the tree which brought forth good fruit, even that the branch had withered away and died.**

**verse 40** The unrighteous influences among Lehi’s descendants had destroyed all righteousness (between AD 200 and AD 421).

**verses 41-47** The lord of the vineyard realizes that the apostasy is complete and universal. Between AD 421 and AD 1820, there was complete and worldwide apostasy. Thus we know that all of scattered Israel, including the lost ten tribes, had apostatized from the truth. These verses form a section that might be referred to as the Lord's dismay or the Lord's quandary. He asks, "What could I have done more?"

**41 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard wept, and said unto the servant: What could I have done more for my vineyard?**

**verse 41** This verse is a remarkable witness of God's love.

**42 Behold, I knew that all the fruit of the vineyard, save it were these, had become corrupted. And now these which have once brought forth good fruit have also become corrupted; and now all the trees of my vineyard are good for nothing save it be to be hewn down and cast into the fire.**

**verse 42** "These" refers to the "natural branches" of scattered Israelites in verses 38 and 39.

In their current state of apostasy all Israel is good for nothing save it be subjecting them to the judgments of God.

**43 And behold this last, whose branch hath withered away, I did plant in a good spot of ground; yea, even that which was choice unto me above all other parts of the land of my vineyard.**

**verse 43** Lehi's descendants were separated from the rest of the world and "planted" in a chosen land, choice above all others.

**44 And thou beheldest that I also cut down that which cumbered this spot of ground, that I might plant this tree in the stead thereof.**

**verse 44** "that which cumbered this spot of ground" This phrase may refer to the Jaredites who were "cut down" so that "this tree" (Lehi's descendants) might be planted.

**45 And thou beheldest that a part thereof brought forth good fruit, and a part thereof brought forth wild fruit; and because I plucked not the branches thereof and cast them into the fire, behold, they have overcome the good branch that it hath withered away.**

**verse 45** The Lehites brought forth both righteous and unrighteous works. Because the Lord did not destroy the unrighteous influences among the Lehites, evil finally overcame righteousness, and the entire nation was overcome by sin (AD 200 to AD 421).

**46** And now, behold, notwithstanding all the care which we have taken of my vineyard, the trees thereof have become corrupted, that they bring forth no good fruit; and these I had hoped to preserve, to have laid up fruit thereof against the season, unto mine own self. But, behold, they have become like unto the wild olive-tree, and they are of no worth but to be hewn down and cast into the fire; and it grieveth me that I should lose them.

**verse 46** In spite of the Lord's efforts, evil influences prevailed and complete apostasy has resulted (AD 421 to AD 1820).

**“and these I had hoped to preserve”** One editorial note of some interest is that this phrase in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon was rendered, “and these I had hope to preserve.” In his editing for the second edition of the Book of Mormon (1837, Kirtland), Joseph Smith made this change. In doing so he reinterpreted the original main verb had and the direct object noun *hope* as a past perfect verb phrase (had hoped). In doing so he created an exception to the pattern found consistently throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon text. Elsewhere in the book there are seventeen examples of the main verb have taking the noun hope as a direct object. See, for example, Jacob 7:5 and Mormon 6:4.

**47** But what could I have done more in my vineyard? Have I slackened mine hand, that I have not nourished it? Nay, I have nourished it, and I have dugged about it, and I have pruned it, and I have dunged it; and I have stretched forth mine hand almost all the day long, and the end draweth nigh. And it grieveth me that I should hew down all the trees of my vineyard, and cast them into the fire that they should be burned. Who is it that has corrupted my vineyard?

**verse 47** There is no part of the vineyard (the earth) where the nourishing influence of the Lord is not felt. He is a just and impartial God. The Lord concludes this verse by asking, “What influences are responsible for this universal apostasy”? The servant will answer in the following verse.

It is still common practice to use dung, including human dung, to fertilize olive trees, although commercial fertilizers are becoming more common in industrialized nations (Hess, 92).

**48** And it came to pass that the servant said unto his master: Is it not the loftiness of thy vineyard—have not the branches thereof overcome the roots which are good? And because the branches have overcome the roots thereof, behold they grew faster than the strength of the roots, taking strength unto themselves. Behold, I say, is not this the cause that the trees of thy vineyard have become corrupted?

**verse 48** Here the servant senses that the master is sufficiently distressed that he is about to decide to destroy the entire vineyard, roots and all. This implies a

destruction of the whole earth. In an attempt to get the master to change his mind, the servant suggests that the roots are still good—the blood of Israel still maintains its propensity for righteousness. But the “loftiness” of the vineyard, that is its pride or worldliness, has overcome the tendency for good. The meaning of the word “loftiness” is further evidenced in 2 Nephi 12:11: “And it shall come to pass that the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down.” This pride or loftiness with its intellectualism has the tendency to gain momentum in and of itself, thus threatening to overcome the roots or fundamental truths in the church. The servant emphasizes that a good potential remains, and he implies that the situation may be remedied. The roots of Israel represent the proclivity for righteousness referred to in the commentary on the phrase “the roots are good” in verse 36. The branches represent the responses of individual Israelites to the mortal experience including the temptations of the world. Those born into the lineage of Abraham did not come by this privilege by chance. They earned their royal heritage by their performance in the premortal world. Yet tragically in mortality this hard-won proclivity for eternal truths can be overcome by other mortal influences. When the branches become corrupt, they may overwhelm the native inclination for goodness—the roots. This causes the entire tree to become corrupt.

In mortality it is possible for any man to forsake his spiritual gifts and lose them even though they may represent centuries of striving and obedience in the preexistence. All he has to do is become preoccupied with the pulls of the world such as a desire for popularity, material possessions, power, and an over-reliance on self.

**verses 49-54** In these verses the Lord is initially inclined to give up on the vineyard and completely destroy it, even its roots. At the bidding of the servant, however, the Lord makes a decision to “spare it a little longer.”

**49 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Let us go to and hew down the trees of the vineyard and cast them into the fire, that they shall not cumber the ground of my vineyard, for I have done all. What could I have done more for my vineyard?**

**verse 49** This is not the first time God had threatened to destroy all the inhabitants of the earth (see Genesis 6:7) or all his chosen people (see Exodus 32:9-11).

**50 But, behold, the servant said unto the Lord of the vineyard: Spare it a little longer.**

**verses 51-74** These verses describe the final gathering of Israel in our dispensation beginning in 1830.

**51 And the Lord said: Yea, I will spare it a little longer, for it grieveth me that I should lose the trees of my vineyard.**

**verses 49-51** Here again we see the influence of the prophet's pleading for his people and causing the Lord to stay his hand. The Lord decides that the time of complete destruction of the wicked is not yet. As in the parable of the wheat and the tares, the Lord determines not to destroy the world yet, lest chances for future righteousness be destroyed with the wicked (see D&C 86:4-7). One is reminded here of the incident in Genesis 18:23-32 wherein Abraham pleads with the Lord to spare Sodom and Gomorrah.

**52 Wherefore, let us take of the branches of these which I have planted in the nethermost parts of my vineyard, and let us graft them into the tree from whence they came; and let us pluck from the tree those branches whose fruit is most bitter, and graft in the natural branches of the tree in the stead thereof.**

**verse 52** "let us take of the branches of these which I have planted in the nethermost parts of my vineyard, and let us graft them into the tree from whence they came" Once the Lord decides to spare the earth a little longer, he determines what must be done. Scattered Israel ("the branches of these which I have planted in the nethermost parts of my vineyard") must be gathered ("let us graft them into the tree from whence they came"). The scattered remnants of Israel from throughout the world will be gathered into the Lord's latter-day Church in this final dispensation (AD 1830 to the onset of the Millennium). During this period the Church will be maintained in a righteous state, purged of all evil influences and constantly infused with righteous obedient Israelites ("let us pluck from the tree those branches whose fruit is most bitter, and graft in the natural branches of the tree in the stead thereof.")

**53 And this will I do that the tree may not perish, that, perhaps, I may preserve unto myself the roots thereof for mine own purpose.**

**verse 53** The word "perhaps" here should give us pause. We cannot merely assume that the Church today will succeed in its latter-day mission of gathering Israel. We must strive mightily.

**"mine own purposes"** We should be reminded that the purposes of God include more than gathering his chosen people Israel. The latter-day gathering will establish the mechanism whereby all mankind may be gathered in to the house of Israel some by adoption, and then nourished spiritually so that they might be gathered to him in the celestial kingdom.

**54 And, behold, the roots of the natural branches of the tree which I planted whithersoever I would are yet alive; wherefore, that I may preserve them also for**

mine own purpose, I will take of the branches of this tree, and I will graft them in unto them. Yea, I will graft in unto them the branches of their mother tree, that I may preserve the roots also unto mine own self, that when they shall be sufficiently strong perhaps they may bring forth good fruit unto me, and I may yet have glory in the fruit of my vineyard.

**verse 54** “the roots of the natural branches of the tree which I planted whithersoever I would are yet alive” The Lord affirms that wherever scattered Israelites are found, their propensity to receive eternal truths is still alive.

This interesting verse teaches yet another principle. Israel will not all be physically gathered to one place. The Lord will arrange for missionaries to come out from the central gathering of Israel to strengthen the outlying remnants, and the latter will flourish where they are. Note that he says, “I will take of the branches of this tree [the central gathering], and I will graft them [the nurturing influences of the center of gathering] in unto them [the outlying remnants of Israel].” This will hopefully result in strengthening of the outlying branches and eventually bring to pass the exaltation and eternal life of souls—“glory in the fruit of my vineyard.”

In this latter day, the “mother tree” is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Church will have self-sufficient branches throughout the world.

**55 And it came to pass that they took from the natural tree which had become wild, and grafted in unto the natural trees, which also had become wild.**

**verse 55** “They” are the servants of the Lord. The “natural tree which had become wild” is the central church which had formerly been apostate but is now newly restored. The “natural trees, which also had become wild” are the outlying remnants of Israel which had also recently been apostate.

**56 And they also took of the natural trees which had become wild, and grafted into their mother tree.**

**verses 55-56** During the final gathering of Israel there will pass infusions of spiritual strength and the message of the gospel both from the central gathering to outlying remnants of Israel (verse 55), and from the outlying remnants back to the central gathering place (verse 56). These influences will be communicated via the Lord’s servants, his missionaries and priesthood leaders.

**verses 57-59** These verses refer to our own dispensation. During this period, the Lord will be long suffering. Only the “most bitter,” the most wicked, are to be expelled from the Lord’s latter-day Church. These are the individuals whose sins are so egregious that they must be expelled to protect the righteous.

These verses refer to the principle the Lord taught in his parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; D&C 86). Let us briefly review this principle. A tare is a noxious weed, known today as darnel. It could be sown in a wheat field by an enemy of the farmer and prove to be most troublesome because it cannot be distinguished from the wheat among which it is growing until it ripens and its seed turns yellow. Hence, the farmer must allow both the wheat and the tares to grow together until the harvest. After harvesting farmers assigned their wives and children the tedious task of pulling out the tare kernels one by one from the good grain. If tares are ground into meal, they spoil the flour and may cause dizziness or nausea when eaten. The bundled tares are burned or fed to the chickens. The application of this principle to the final dispensation is obvious. The Lord will be long-suffering and will allow the wicked to exist among the righteous until the final cleansing of the earth prior to the Lord's second coming. This he will do to avoid destruction of some righteous during a wholesale destruction of the wicked.

**57 And the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Pluck not the wild branches from the trees, save it be those which are most bitter; and in them ye shall graft according to that which I have said.**

**verse 57 “and in them ye shall graft according to that which I have said”**

In place of the pruned wild branches, the servants of the Lord are commanded to “graft in the natural branches of the tree in the stead thereof” (verse 52). In other words infuse spiritual strength into the mother church by continuing to gather repentant scattered Israel.

**58 And we will nourish again the trees of the vineyard, and we will trim up the branches thereof; and we will pluck from the trees those branches which are ripened, that must perish, and cast them into the fire.**

**verse 58 “we will nourish again the trees of the vineyard”** We will give

Israel one more chance.

**“those branches which are ripened”** These are individuals who have ripened in iniquity.

**59 And this I do that, perhaps, the roots thereof may take strength because of their goodness; and because of the change of the branches, that the good may overcome the evil.**

**verse 59 “And this I do that, perhaps, the roots thereof may take strength because of their goodness”** The Lord prunes the wild branches and adds natural branches hoping to strengthen his Church by “their goodness.” Reference has been made previously (see the commentary for verse 48) to the natural goodness of those who carry the blood of Israel in their veins. They have an affinity for spiritual truths

which was earned by diligence in the preexistence. This affinity, however, may be overcome or lost because of the distractions of worldly influences.

Paul Y. Hoskisson has observed:

The allegory makes it clear that the grafting and pruning process, the gathering of Israel and the trying of the nations of the earth, will continue simultaneously until the Millennium. This means that as the Saints accept and assimilate additional nourishment from their scriptural sources, the Lord will require a higher level of performance. Thus the allegory foresees in the grafting and pruning process a reversal of what President Benson has called the Samuel principle. According to this principle, “within certain bounds [God] grants unto men according to their desires.” The principle received its name from the story in 1 Samuel 8 where the people of Israel demanded, contrary to the wishes of God and his prophet Samuel, that God give them a king. God granted them their desire to their own eventual sorrow.

The reverse of the Samuel principle during the Restoration can be illustrated by the Word of Wisdom. As the Saints assimilated and lived the Word of Wisdom, God saw fit to require a more strict application of it, until today it is often used as a measure of a member’s commitment to the kingdom (*The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, 90-91).

**verses 60-62** These verses, which refer to the missionary effort of this final dispensation, are reminiscent of the Lord’s call to arms issued to latter-day missionaries and found in D&C 4:4 and D&C 33: “For behold the field is white already to harvest; and it is the eleventh hour, and the last time that I shall call laborers into my vineyard” (D&C 33:3). The missionary program of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the final major effort of the Lord to gather Israel.

It should be emphasized that Ephraim is the birthright tribe (Jeremiah 31:9) and is responsible for redeeming the three branches which were planted in the nethermost parts of the vineyard—the Lehites, the Jews, and the ten lost tribes, as well as all others who qualify themselves for adoption into the house of Israel. In other words, the present-day Church of Jesus Christ is responsible for bearing the message of the restoration of the gospel to the entire world and for gathering scattered Israel.

**60 And because that I have preserved the natural branches and the roots thereof, and that I have grafted in the natural branches again into their mother tree, and have preserved the roots of their mother tree, that, perhaps, the trees of my vineyard may bring forth again good fruit and that I may have joy again in the fruit of my vineyard, and, perhaps, that I may rejoice exceedingly that I have preserved the roots and the branches of the first fruit—**

**verse 60** “I have preserved the roots and the branches of the first fruit”  
The concept of “first fruits” has been commented upon previously. These are those who

will be resurrected with celestial bodies who will inherit that degree of glory. It was a custom in ancient Israel for the head of the family to go into the field before harvest time and mark the best of the fruit crop even before it was ripe—that showing the most promise. These were the “first fruits.” This portion was then dedicated or set apart to be later offered as a sacrifice to the Lord at the temple.

**61 Wherefore, go to, and call servants, that we may labor diligently with our might in the vineyard, that we may prepare the way, that I may bring forth again the natural fruit, which natural fruit is good and the most precious above all other fruit.**

**verse 61** The Lord instructs the servant, his prophet, to call other servants—missionaries—to assist in the final gathering of Israel.

The Lord’s exhortation “go to” means, in the common vernacular, “Go get ‘em.”

**“that we may prepare the way”** The earth is being groomed for the Lord’s second coming. The Lord said to Joseph Smith: “I have sent mine everlasting covenant into the world, to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people, and for the Gentiles to seek to it, and to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me” (D&C 45:9).

What is this “natural fruit” which is “the most precious above all other fruit”? These are the potentially retrievable souls that may be gathered to Christ and eventually exalted by his atoning power.

**62 Wherefore, let us go to and labor with our might this last time, for behold the end draweth nigh, and this is for the last time that I shall prune my vineyard.**

**63 Graft in the branches; begin at the last that they may be first, and that the first may be last, and dig about the trees, both old and young, the first and the last; and the last and the first, that all may be nourished once again for the last time.**

**verse 63 “begin at the last that they may be first”** The last group scattered, the Lehites, will be the first to be grafted back. The second group to be grafted back will be the ten lost tribes, and the last branch will be the Jews.

**64 Wherefore, dig about them, and prune them, and dung them once more, for the last time, for the end draweth nigh. And if it be so that these last grafts shall grow, and bring forth the natural fruit, then shall ye prepare the way for them, that they may grow.**

**verse 64 “if it be so that these last grafts shall grow . . . then shall ye prepare the way for them, that they may grow”** This almost sounds like a warning to the Jews and other apostate Israelites. If they will accept the gospel, then they will be blessed with further light. The initial step is their responsibility.

**verses 65-69** The servants will clear away the branches which bring forth bitter fruit, but not all at once, so the roots will still have strength. They will maintain equal root and top growth enabling the roots to remain viable while the good branches overcome the bad. Thus, the branches of the natural tree will be grafted again into the natural tree, and the bad will be eventually and finally cast away into the fire.

**65 And as they begin to grow ye shall clear away the branches which bring forth bitter fruit, according to the strength of the good and the size thereof; and ye shall not clear away the bad thereof all at once, lest the roots thereof should be too strong for the graft, and the graft thereof shall perish, and I lose the trees of my vineyard.**

**66 For it grieveth me that I should lose the trees of my vineyard; wherefore ye shall clear away the bad according as the good shall grow, that the root and the top may be equal in strength, until the good shall overcome the bad, and the bad be hewn down and cast into the fire, that they cumber not the ground of my vineyard; and thus will I sweep away the bad out of my vineyard.**

**verses 65-66 “as they begin to grow ye shall clear away the branches which bring forth bitter fruit”** Keep in mind that the Lord has been tolerating the presence in his latter-day Church of those peoples who may not be fully committed. Their presence has been tolerated so that the Church may continue to function and remain viable. The day is coming, however, when only the most committed will be allowed to stay, and the others will be “cleared away.” “They” in verse 65 refers to those scattered Israelites which have been gathered in, including the Lehitites, the Gentiles, and the Jews.

As these new grafts gain in strength so that they become spiritually mature and self-sustaining, then the less committed “dead wood” in the Church can be pruned without threatening the stability of the Church.

**“Lest the roots thereof should be too strong for the graft”** Here the term “roots” seems to refer to the lofty doctrinal truths in the church. These set a standard for the members. If the standard is too high for the new members then the fledgling members will fall away, and the integrity of the church may be threatened. Allowing old members to remain even though their living up to the doctrinal standard is less than ideal may mean stability for the church organization while the new members are growing into mature and self-sustaining leaders.

**67 And the branches of the natural tree will I graft in again into the natural tree;**

**verse 67** Nonetheless, the previously apostate Israelite groups, the branches of the natural tree, such as the Jews and the ten tribes, will eventually be successfully grafted back into the mother tree.

**68 And the branches of the natural tree will I graft into the natural branches of the tree; and thus will I bring them together again, that they shall bring forth the natural fruit, and they shall be one.**

**verse 68** The previously apostate Israelite groups will join with those previously apostate who have already been grafted in, and eventually all Israel “shall be one.”

**69 And the bad shall be cast away, yea, even out of all the land of my vineyard; for behold, only this once will I prune my vineyard.**

**verse 69** This verse may refer to that final destruction of the wicked which will precede the Lord’s second coming. But keep in mind that “the bad” may also refer to the luke-warm members of the Church whose presence in the Church has been previously tolerated as an expediency.

**70 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard sent his servant; and the servant went and did as the Lord had commanded him, and brought other servants; and they were few.**

**verse 70** The Lord’s “servant” here might be the prophet Joseph Smith. The “other servants” are the priesthood leaders and missionaries who will do the work of gathering. Their combined numbers will be relatively “few” compared to the masses who must be reached.

**71 And the Lord of the vineyard said unto them: Go to, and labor in the vineyard, with your might. For behold, this is the last time that I shall nourish my vineyard; for the end is nigh at hand, and the season speedily cometh; and if ye labor with your might with me ye shall have joy in the fruit which I shall lay up unto myself against the time which will soon come.**

**verse 71** Here is the Lord’s charge to the latter-day missionaries. The feeling is one of urgency, for “the end is nigh at hand.” The Lord’s exhortation to “go to” is explained in the commentary for verse 61.

**“if ye labor with your might with me ye shall have joy in the fruit which I shall lay up unto myself”** Here we have a coming together of a very ancient scripture with its modern-day counterpart: “And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father! And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!” (D&C 18:15-16).

**72 And it came to pass that the servants did go and labor with their mights; and the Lord of the vineyard labored also with them; and they did obey the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard in all things.**

**verse 72** The fact that the Lord labors with his missionaries should be a fact of great comfort to all who labor. President Harold B. Lee, in closing a general conference of the Church, said: “There has come to me in these last few days a deepening and reassuring faith. I can’t leave this conference without saying to you that I have a conviction that the Master hasn’t been absent from us on these occasions. This is his Church. Where else would he rather be than right here at the headquarters of his Church? He isn’t an absentee master; he is concerned about us. He wants us to follow where he leads” (*CR*, October 1972, 176).

**verses 73-76** It is prophesied that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will prosper in righteousness, will establish Zion, and will be found worthy to stand in the Lord’s presence when he comes again.

**73 And there began to be the natural fruit again in the vineyard; and the natural branches began to grow and thrive exceedingly; and the wild branches began to be plucked off and to be cast away; and they did keep the root and the top thereof equal, according to the strength thereof.**

**verse 73** “**they did keep the root and the top thereof equal**” The growth of the church must be orderly. This orderly growth is required so that a large sudden infusion of one cultural group may not overcome the roots, that is—the basic integrity of the doctrine of the church.

**74 And thus they labored, with all diligence, according to the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard, even until the bad had been cast away out of the vineyard, and the Lord had preserved unto himself that the trees had become again the natural fruit; and they became like unto one body; and the fruits were equal; and the Lord of the vineyard had preserved unto himself the natural fruit, which was most precious unto him from the beginning.**

**verse 74** “**they became like unto one body**” The previously divided and variously apostate groups of Israelites will begin to join together in the Lord’s church. Also the Gentiles will be grafted into the “mother tree” and the whole will form “one body.” Here, again, is the ultimate goal of the Savior—to see his people gathered to him and to each other; to enjoy the atonement or at-one-ment which awaits all who will accept him.

“**and the fruits were equal**” No longer are there tame and wild fruit.

“**the natural fruit, which was most precious unto him from the beginning**” Those in the house of Israel have been particularly precious to the Lord not only since the mortal existence of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but even from premortal times when they distinguished themselves by righteous conformity to the laws of God.

**verses 75-76** This is the period of the Millennium.

**75** And it came to pass that when the Lord of the vineyard saw that his fruit was good, and that his vineyard was no more corrupt, he called up his servants, and said unto them: Behold, for this last time have we nourished my vineyard; and thou beholdest that I have done according to my will; and I have preserved the natural fruit, that it is good, even like as it was in the beginning. And blessed art thou; for because ye have been diligent in laboring with me in my vineyard, and have kept my commandments, and have brought unto me again the natural fruit, that my vineyard is no more corrupted, and the bad is cast away, behold ye shall have joy with me because of the fruit of my vineyard.

**verse 75** Now the great work of latter-day gathering is completed, and the Millennium is about to begin.

**“blessed art thou . . . ye shall have joy with me”** Great blessings await those who labor diligently in the kingdom.

**76** For behold, for a long time will I lay up of the fruit of my vineyard unto mine own self against the season, which speedily cometh; and for the last time have I nourished my vineyard, and pruned it, and dug about it, and dunged it; wherefore I will lay up unto mine own self of the fruit, for a long time, according to that which I have spoken.

**verse 76** **“for a long time will I lay up of the fruit of my vineyard unto mine own self against the season”** This “long time” likely refers to the Millennium.

**“against the season, which speedily cometh”** Here is already a reference to that ominous time at the end of the Millennium when Satan and his forces shall again be unleashed.

**77** And when the time cometh that evil fruit shall again come into my vineyard, then will I cause the good and the bad to be gathered; and the good will I preserve unto myself, and the bad will I cast away into its own place. And then cometh the season and the end; and my vineyard will I cause to be burned with fire.

**verse 77** This verse has reference to the end of the Millennium when Satan will again gain an influence in the hearts of men. The Lord will gather the good to himself, and Satan and his adherents will come up to do battle. This will obviously be an emotional event in the world's history.

John the Revelator wrote: “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the

number of whom is as the sand of the sea” (Revelation 20:7-8). In modern revelation we read: “And then [Satan] shall be loosed for a little season, that he may gather together his armies. And Michael, the seventh angel, even the archangel, shall gather together his armies, even the hosts of heaven. And the devil shall gather together his armies; even the hosts of hell, and shall come up to battle against Michael and his armies. And then cometh the battle of the great God; and the devil and his armies shall be cast away into their own place, that they shall not have power over the saints any more at all” (D&C 88:111-114).

The wicked will be banished to their “own place” to suffer eternal condemnation, and, finally, the earth will be burned to prepare it for celestial glory. This is the final “end of the earth.” The world’s first “end” (the “end of the world”) occurred when the telestial earth was purged to prepare it for its terrestrial phase, the Millennium. After each of the earth’s “ends,” the scriptures teach that “there shall be a new heaven and a new earth” (D&C 29:23).

Speaking of this final end of the earth, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “There was a new earth and new heavens when the Millennium commenced. This is a second new heaven and new earth; it is the celestial earth and its heaven. The language in each instance is similar, but the meaning is different. In one instance the new earth is the paradisiacal [millennial] earth; in this case it is the celestial globe” (*Millennial Messiah*, 696).

The end of the *world* should not be confused with the end of the *earth*. The former occurs when Christ comes in his glory, the latter follows his millennial reign (JS-M 1:4, 55; D&C 29:22-23). The latter will occur as the earth is changed to a celestial sphere by the glory of God.

## Jacob Chapter 6

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Chapter 6 is Jacob's brief commentary on the previous chapter. Jacob emphasizes certain points of Zenos's prophetic allegory.

**1 And now, behold, my brethren, as I said unto you that I would prophesy, behold, this is my prophecy—that the things which this prophet Zenos spake, concerning the house of Israel, in the which he likened them unto a tame olive-tree, must surely come to pass.**

**verse 1 “this is my prophecy”** Undoubtedly Jacob had studied, pondered, and prayed about Zenos's allegory. This verse provides evidence that the Holy Ghost had borne witness to Jacob of its truth. Zenos's prophecy had become Jacob's prophecy.

**2 And the day that he shall set his hand again the second time to recover his people, is the day, yea, even the last time, that the servants of the Lord shall go forth in his power, to nourish and prune his vineyard; and after that the end soon cometh.**

**verse 2 “he shall set his hand again the second time to recover his people”** This phrase refers to the second gathering of Israel. The first took place when Moses led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt. Or, perhaps the first gathering occurred following the Babylonian captivity. The second gathering is now in progress as Israel gathers to the gospel and to the stakes of Zion. Thus, the verse refers to the latter days—to this final dispensation.

**3 And how blessed are they who have labored diligently in his vineyard; and how cursed are they who shall be cast out into their own place! And the world shall be burned with fire.**

**verse 3 “how blessed are they who have labored diligently in his vineyard”** These are they who have participated in the divine activity of at-one-ment (see the commentary for Jacob 4:12).

We have learned that there will be two cleansings of the earth. The first will occur prior to the Lord's second coming and will lead to the terrestrialization of the earth as it is prepared for the millennial thousand years. This event is referred to as the end of the *world*. The second occurs at the end of the thousand years and prepares the earth to become the celestial kingdom. This event is referred to as the end of the *earth*. In this verse it seems likely that the former reference pertains. At this cleansing it is likely the world of spirits, specifically the spirit prison, will receive a huge influx.

**4 And how merciful is our God unto us, for he remembereth the house of Israel, both roots and branches; and he stretches forth his hands unto them all the day long; and they are a stiffnecked and a gainsaying people; but as many as will not harden their hearts shall be saved in the kingdom of God.**

**verse 4 “the house of Israel, both roots and branches”** One might interpret “roots” and “branches” in various ways such as the blood of Israel for “roots” and the various divisions or tribes of Israel for “branches.” However one might choose to define these two terms, it seems clear that the phrase “both roots and branches” refers to the whole of the house of Israel.

**“he stretches forth his hands unto them all the day long”** His offer to accept to himself the repentant sinner is constant and unchanging.

**“a stiffnecked and a gainsaying people”** This seems an apt description of historical Israel. “Stiffnecked,” of course, means stubborn or bullheaded. To “gainsay” is to contradict, deny, or oppose.

**“as many as will not harden their hearts shall be saved in the kingdom of God”** See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

**5 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I beseech of you in words of soberness that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you. And while his arm of mercy is extended towards you in the light of the day, harden not your hearts.**

**verse 5 “cleave unto God”** Here is another way of expressing the concept of at-one-ment (see the commentary for Jacob 4:12).

**“arm of mercy”** This phrase is unique to the Book of Mormon and is not found in the Old Testament. It is found two additional times in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 29:20 and 3 Nephi 9:14). It, of course, implies the idea that the Lord is offering forgiveness to all those who repent. In fact, he is mercifully offering to each of us more than we actually merit.

**“in the light of the day”** This phrase simply means while the opportunity is presenting itself. The converse was expressed by Amulek: “there cometh a night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed” (Alma 34:33).

**6 Yea, today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts; for why will ye die?**

**verse 6** We might rephrase this verse: If you have any inclination to accept his gospel, then do so now. Why take the chance of being separated from him eternally?

Again, see the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

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

**verse 7 “after ye have been nourished by the good word of God all the day long”** This phrase refers to the many spiritual resources that have ever been available to those of the house of Israel including scripture, prophets, and the promptings of the Spirit.

**“hewn down and cast into the fire”** Subjected to an adverse judgment of God.

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

**verse 8 “all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ”** Here, again, is a reference to the important fact that all of the prophets since father Adam have preached and prophesied explicitly of Christ’s birth and ministry (“the good word of Christ”)—a fact long since lost to the world because of vital alterations and deletions from the scriptural record (see Jacob 4:4; see also Luke 24:25-27).

**“deny . . . the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost”** If you study 1 Nephi 10:17 carefully, you may logically conclude that Jacob here in this verse is referring to denying the gift of revelation. Jacob is actually borrowing his brother’s terminology—see 2 Nephi 28:26.

**“quench the Holy Spirit”** Scripturally, the word “quench” means to snuff out or douse the light or fire of (see also 2 Samuel 21:17; Jeremiah 4:4; 21:12; Ephesians 6:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). Thus to *quench* the Holy Spirit is to ignore his promptings and to contend against his teachings.

**“the great plan of redemption”** This is the plan of salvation which is God’s plan to redeem us from our two major predicaments here in mortality—physical and spiritual death. See the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:6.

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

**verse 9 “if ye will do these things”** If you reject Jesus Christ.

**“the power of the redemption and the resurrection, which is in Christ”** This phrase refers to Christ’s power and authority, earned in Gethsemane and on the cross, to judge mankind. This judgment may be one of blessing and exaltation or one of condemnation.

**10 And according to the power of justice, for justice cannot be denied, ye must go away into that lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and**

**whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever, which lake of fire and brimstone is endless torment.**

**verse 10 “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. In scripture this expression is used to refer to the torment of those in the spirit prison and also those who become sons of perdition. Joseph Smith explained 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).

**11 O then, my beloved brethren, repent ye, and enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until ye shall obtain eternal life.**

**verse 11** By this time it is not likely necessary to mention that “strait” does not mean straight. Rather it means narrow, demanding, rigorous, difficult to negotiate (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 8:20). For a discussion of why the word strait is appropriate here (rather than straight), see the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

**12 O be wise; what can I say more?**

**13 Finally, I bid you farewell, until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear. Amen.**

**verse 13 “until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God”** Here and in Moroni 10:34, the prophets Jacob and Moroni refer to meeting us when we appear before “the pleasing bar” of God to be judged. Dr. Royal Skousen has reported that Christian Gellinek (who studied law at the University of Gottingen in Germany) believes that the textually difficult reading “the pleasing bar of God” can be readily resolved if we replace the word *pleasing* with *pleading*—in other words, Jacob and Moroni will meet us before “the pleading bar of God” (*FARMS Update*, no. 172, volume 24, 2004). Phonetically, the words pleading and pleasing are nearly identical. Dr. Royal Skousen suggests that what seems to have happened is that Oliver Cowdery, being completely unfamiliar with the legal term pleading bar, twice substituted the more familiar word pleasing for pleading, even though pleasing does not make much sense. The term pleading bar appears to have been used in the English courts of earlier times. Literature from the early 1600s from England does contain this term. This term is now archaic in England. The legal language now used in England refers to the defendant as “in the dock” (no longer “standing at the pleading bar”).

The farewell in this verse could only be written by Jacob, of all the Book of Mormon authors. Jacob's tone here is very different from that of his brother's powerful farewell. Where Jacob ends quietly and on a minor key of distress, Nephi concluded with timpani rolls and cymbal clashes: "I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus." Nephi was all confidence. Nephi's words challenge us to be righteous, as he had his older brothers: "You and I shall stand face to face before his bar." His final statement restated his lifelong commitment to absolute obedience; it could serve as an epitaph: "For thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey" (2 Nephi 33:6-7, 11, 15). Jacob's farewell is moving, but in a very different way. He felt assured of personal salvation, and he looked forward to meeting the reader at the "pleasing" judgment bar of God (Jacob 6:13). But his farewell seems much less optimistic about the salvation of others.

It seems that Jacob intended that his farewell in this verse would be the end of his writings. His comments on Sherem the antichrist in the next chapter were apparently something of an afterthought written "some years" later.

## Jacob Chapter 7

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### Scripture Mastery

**Jacob 7** The Antichrist Sherem comes among the Nephites and leads many away from the coming Christ. He demanded of Jacob a sign, and consequently he was struck down. Several days later he died by not before calling together the Nephites and denying his previous erroneous teachings.

This chapter consists largely of Jacob's report of his experience with the antichrist Sherem. As we consider this account, we will take special note of Sherem's strategy for leading the Nephites astray, so that we might fortify ourselves against the apostate philosophies of our own day. Writing about the Book of Mormon, President Ezra Taft Benson taught: "The Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ. It confounds false doctrines and lays down contention (see 2 Nephi 3:12). It fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day. The types of apostates in the Book of Mormon are similar to those we have today. God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might become aware of the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time" (*A Witness and a Warning*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988, 3).

**1 And now it came to pass after some years had passed away, there came a man among the people of Nephi, whose name was Sherem.**

**verse 1** Sherem is unlike some of the infamous apostates we will encounter later in the Book of Mormon (Nehor, Zeezrom, and Korihor—see a discussion on these three in the commentary for Alma 1:2). Sherem is not an atheist or opposed to religion. Rather he is a purist who wishes to continue living the law of Moses but resists the idea of a Messiah. He accuses Jacob of blasphemy, and for that he is ultimately punished.

**2 And it came to pass that he began to preach among the people, and to declare unto them that there should be no Christ. And he preached many things which were flattering unto the people; and this he did that he might overthrow the doctrine of Christ.**

**verse 2** Sherem denies the reality of and the necessity for Jesus Christ. His implications are that there will be no Messiah, no Christ, and no man has the ability to prophesy of future things. We will later learn that typically the antichrist even denies man's fallen condition, and thus he also denies the fact that man has any need to be liberated from anything. Typically, today's antichrists espouse the philosophy of humanism, the idea that man, not God, is the center of the universe. According to this

school of thought, there is no higher law to which man is accountable. Thus, humanism emphasizes the self-sufficiency of man, his agency, and his unencumbered right to self-determination. A humanist is inaccessible to promptings of the Spirit. He feels he is alone in the universe and therefore feels he must get by as best he can on his own. Only those influences in his world which he can perceive with his physical senses are meaningful to him. He might well be considered a “good man” and a noble man and even a distinguished man. He often possesses the virtues of the world such as “common sense,” integrity, education, and material success. He is an advocate, often a vocal and active advocate, for personal freedoms. He would be likely to advocate the woman’s right of choice relative to the issue of abortion, and he would find nothing wrong with sex between two consenting adults. He would not oppose secular laws, so long as they did not compromise personal freedoms. He is “naturalistic” and would be inclined to be skeptical and even cynical about any idea of a divine being or any life beyond this mortal one. He might claim that a “sign” would be necessary, one which he might perceive with his senses, before he could believe. However, because he lacks responsiveness to the promptings of the Spirit, no sign could ever really convert him. No spiritual truth is actually within his reach.

**“he preached many things which were flattering unto the people”** What does it mean in this context to *flatter*? To *flatter* is to make people feel comfortable and encouraged when circumstances are neither comfortable nor encouraging, and to make them feel that all is well when, in fact—spiritually speaking—all is not well. To flatter also means to raise false hopes and expectations. In the context of this verse, it is likely Sherem attempted to make the people feel comfortable in their sins.

The “doctrine of Christ” is the gospel. The very essence of the doctrine of Christ is: Deliverance from death and hell and eternal torment is available through the atonement of Jesus Christ. For a discussion of the doctrine of Christ, see the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 31.

**3 And he labored diligently that he might lead away the hearts of the people, insomuch that he did lead away many hearts; and he knowing that I, Jacob, had faith in Christ who should come, he sought much opportunity that he might come unto me.**

**verse 3 “And he labored diligently that he might lead away the hearts of the people”** Why was Sherem so aggressive in promulgating his humanistic philosophy? Why did he not simply hold to his own beliefs and leave other people to theirs? Perhaps the answer is found in verse 14 where Jacob is inspired to know that Sherem once possessed a testimony of the Savior. A verse in the book of Alma is helpful here: “And thus we can plainly discern, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more

hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things” (Alma 24:30). It would seem that the apostate is often driven to justify himself. He must prove—mostly to himself—that there is nothing beyond this natural world. It is obvious he possesses a subtle fear he may be wrong; and that there is in fact a God. And God is aware of him. Indeed, this fear may become an obsession. He may appear unable to rest until he convinces others—and thereby himself—that he is right.

**“he sought much opportunity that he might come unto me”** It is obvious that Sherem was not shy in trying to promulgate his beliefs. He wanted to go right to “the top”—to the prophet himself with his message.

**4 And he was learned, that he had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people; wherefore, he could use much flattery, and much power of speech, according to the power of the devil.**

**verse 4** In modern day terminology, Sherem was articulate, attractive, charismatic, and he appealed powerfully to the people. Typically antichrists are worldly-wise, polished, glib, and clever at manipulating human behavior. We thus see an example of the principle that virtually all of the gifts of God are subject to perversion. Sherem, and indeed all antichrists, strive to make their adherents feel comfortable and at home in their carnality.

**5 And he had hope to shake me from the faith, notwithstanding the many revelations and the many things which I had seen concerning these things; for I truly had seen angels, and they had ministered unto me. And also, I had heard the voice of the Lord speaking unto me in very word, from time to time; wherefore, I could not be shaken.**

**verse 5** Remember that Jacob also had actually seen the Savior (2 Nephi 2:3-4).

**6 And it came to pass that he came unto me, and on this wise did he speak unto me, saying: Brother Jacob, I have sought much opportunity that I might speak unto you; for I have heard and also know that thou goest about much, preaching that which ye call the gospel, or the doctrine of Christ.**

**verse 6** Sherem confronted directly and boldly the Lord’s prophet. Sherem addresses Jacob as “Brother Jacob” in an ingratiating attempt to flatter and befriend him. This presumptuousness seems characteristic of Satan and his adherents; recall that the Lord himself was confronted personally by the devil.

**“Brother Jacob, I have sought much opportunity that I might speak unto you; for I have heard and also know that thou goest about much, preaching”** It is estimated that the adult male population descended from the original Nephite group could not have exceeded fifty by this time. This number of men is only enough to

populate one modest size village. In light of this, does it not strike you as unusual that Sherem would not have had more interaction with Jacob who was the head priest and religious teacher of the Nephites? Why did he have to seek “much opportunity” to speak to Jacob in such a tiny settlement? Also where would Jacob have to go on his preaching travels to which Sherem refers if only a modest size settlement was involved? Is it possible that Sherem was a Lamanite? It seems unlikely that one from the enemies’ camp would be allowed to wander into the Nephite settlement and preach at will to the people there. One solution is that the number of Nephites was much larger than we can estimate, perhaps because the descendants of Lehi joined with some other peoples which they encountered in the land on their arrival (John L. Sorenson, “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1 [Fall 1992], 1-34). John L. Sorenson wrote: “Archaeology, linguistics, and related areas of study have established beyond doubt that a variety of peoples inhabited virtually every place in the Western Hemisphere a long time ago. The presence of almost 1,500 different languages belonging to dozens of major groupings which were found in the Americas when the Europeans arrived can be explained only by supposing that speakers of the ancestral tongues had been in America for thousands of years. The notion that ‘the [Mesoamerican] Indians’ constituted a single ethnic entity is a totally outdated one which neither scholars nor lay people can justifiably believe nowadays. Abundant facts are completely contrary to the idea. The most that is possible is that in some limited territory in a part of America, Lehi’s people and those who came with Mulek had their chance to establish their own niches where they could control their own fate. . . . It seems unavoidable that other peoples were in the land, somewhere, when Nephi’s boat landed on the shore of the ‘west sea,’ and quite certainly some of them were survivors from the Jaredite people.”

The “doctrine of Christ” is the gospel. See the commentary for verse 2 of this chapter.

**7 And ye have led away much of this people that they pervert the right way of God, and keep not the law of Moses which is the right way; and convert the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence. And now behold, I, Sherem, declare unto you that this is blasphemy; for no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come. And after this manner did Sherem contend against me.**

**verse 7** It interesting to note that the accusations of Sherem are essentially the same as those that will be leveled by two other antichrists who will come later in the Book of Mormon, Nehor (Alma 1) and Korihor (Alma 30).

**“I, Sherem, declare unto you that this is blasphemy; for no man knoweth of such things”** Blasphemy is of two types: (1) speaking or acting offensively to or about

the divine, and (2) claiming the attributes or prerogatives of Deity. Here Sherem wrongly accuses Jacob of the second type.

**“for no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come”**

An extreme naturalistic view of reality is typical of the antichrist. That is, they rely exclusively upon human sensory perception and human reason to discern truth. Naturalistic thoughts and preachings often contain much in the way of truth. It does not and cannot include spiritual truths, as humanists are quite unresponsive to the Spirit's promptings. And the natural man cannot accept spiritual truths (1 Corinthians 2:14). Sherem, as is typical of all doubters, assumes that since he has not experienced Christ, then there is no Christ, and no one else has experienced him either.

Among the Nephites, the Mosaic law was in force (2 Nephi 5:10; Jarom 1:5). John W. Welch has pointed out that Sherem's allegations against Jacob were not merely random criticisms but rather well-constructed accusations based on the provisions of the law of Moses (FARMS Update, no. 74, January 1991). Sherem believed that the law of Moses was wholly sufficient. If proven to be correct, these charges might have justified Jacob's being indicted and even executed. Sherem's complaints against Jacob might be summarized as follows: (1) causing public apostasy (“Ye have led away much of this people that they pervert the right way of God, and keep not the law of Moses”). This, according to Deuteronomy 13:1-18 was a sin punishable by death. (2) blasphemy (“I, Sherem, declare unto you that this is blasphemy”). This is another capital offense (Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 24:10-16). (3) false prophecy (“no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come”). Deuteronomy 18:20 requires that a man shall be put to death if he speaks “in the name of other gods.”

It is likely that Sherem was to some degree sincere in his criticism and committed to his views since he was putting his own life on the line by making these accusations. The ancient punishment for a false accuser was to suffer that which “he had thought to have done unto his brother” (Deuteronomy 19:19).

**8 But behold, the Lord God poured in his Spirit into my soul, insomuch that I did confound him in all his words.**

**verse 8** The Lord blessed Jacob with spiritual discernment and insight, and he was able to “confound” Sherem. To *confound* is to bewilder, confuse, throw into a state of disorder, stupefy (Webster).

**9 And I said unto him: Deniest thou the Christ who shall come? And he said: If there should be a Christ, I would not deny him; but I know that there is no Christ, neither has been, nor ever will be.**

**verse 9** “**If there should be a Christ, I would not deny him**” Sherem is saying, “If there were a Christ here and now for me to see and touch and hear, then I

would believe.” Do you suppose Sherem would have accepted Christ had Sherem lived at the time of Christ’s mortal ministry?

**“I know that there is no Christ”** Here again we see evidence of Sherem’s naturalistic bent: “Since I have not experienced him, then he does not exist.”

**10 And I said unto him: Believest thou the scriptures? And he said, Yea.**

**verse 10** Keep in mind that it is not possible to obtain a testimony of Jesus from the scriptures or from any other source without being receptive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Sherem’s “belief” in the scriptures was obviously based solely on an intellectual understanding.

**11 And I said unto him: Then ye do not understand them; for they truly testify of Christ. Behold, I say unto you that none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ.**

**verse 11** An individual can truly “understand” the scriptures only if he is responsive to the promptings of the Spirit of God. To understand the scriptures in this way is to truly feel the eternal significance of them.

Read this important verse again, and let its vital message sink in. See the commentary for Jacob 4:4. All of the prophets since Adam knew and preached of the coming of Jesus Christ.

**12 And this is not all—it has been made manifest unto me, for I have heard and seen; and it also has been made manifest unto me by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, I know if there should be no atonement made all mankind must be lost.**

**verse 12 “I have heard and seen”** Jacob’s father, Lehi, said of his son Jacob, “Thou hast beheld in thy youth his glory; wherefore, thou art blessed even as they unto whom he shall minister in the flesh” (2 Nephi 2:4).

**“if there should be no atonement made all mankind must be lost”** Here is a reiteration of the important concept that without Christ’s atonement, all mankind would become sons of perdition (see 2 Nephi 9:8 and its commentary).

**13 And it came to pass that he said unto me: Show me a sign by this power of the Holy Ghost, in the which ye know so much.**

**verse 13** Antichrists are typically sign seekers. The gift of faith does not come to an individual until after a trial of that faith. The prophet Moroni wrote: “Dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6). A person receives no “witness” or confirmation of his faith until after his faith is tried. How does this “trial” occur? The trial comes in the “experimenting upon [the] words” of God—the deliberate acting upon his words hoping to obtain the gifts of faith.

The trial of the faith is in the “experimenting.” When the Spirit judges that sufficient effort has been expended—including diligently working, pondering, praying, and persisting—then the gifts of faith will be granted. For a comprehensive discussion of the concept of faith, 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*.

A person might say, “Before I pay my tithing, I must know for sure that it is a true principle.” The Lord’s way is just the opposite. His way is to first act in faith and deliberately pay your tithing. Then over time your faith in the law of tithing will be granted as a revealed spiritual gift.

An individual who demands outward evidence of the power of God as a condition for his believing is seeking to circumvent the process by which faith is universally developed. He wants proof without paying the price. As with an adulterer, he wants the benefits, superficial and transient though they may be, without accepting any responsibility—pleasure without obligation. This is exactly the opposite of the Lord’s way. Thus it is “a wicked and adulterous generation [that] seeketh after a sign” (Matthew 16:4). Joseph Smith affirmed this principle, saying it “is eternal, undeviating, and firm as the pillars of heaven; for whenever you see a man seeking after a sign, you may set it down that he is an adulterous man” (*TPJS*, 157). Though the sexual sin of adultery is warned against abundantly in scripture, adultery is referred to by the Lord, at times, in quite another context. In scripture the Lord often characterized himself as the bridegroom or husband while his people or the church are symbolized as the bride or wife. When the symbol of the adulterous wife is used, it may refer to the unfaithful breaker of covenants, one who chases after other gods leaving behind the true Lord and Master. Hence, a “wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign” (Matthew 16:4).

Almost all heavenly signs are given as a reward for great faith to further strengthen those who manifest that faith (D&C 63:11). The doubting sign seeker is only rarely afforded the opportunity to witness a miracle. In these unusual instances the sign usually takes the form of a divine judgment upon the doubter (Alma 30:48-56).

**14 And I said unto him: What am I that I should tempt God to show unto thee a sign in the thing which thou knowest to be true? Yet thou wilt deny it, because thou art of the devil. Nevertheless, not my will be done; but if God shall smite thee, let that be a sign unto thee that he has power, both in heaven and in earth; and also, that Christ shall come. And thy will, O Lord, be done, and not mine.**

**verse 14** This is a remarkable and difficult verse. Jacob discerns that Sherem is requesting a sign for something he already knows is true. It seems likely that he had previously received a witness of the truth of the gospel and of Jesus Christ. Without continued re-enforcement of one’s testimony by ministrations of the Spirit, a testimony

will deteriorate and soon disappear. Therefore, it seems unlikely that Sherem at this particular time still possessed a testimony of the Savior.

**15 And it came to pass that when I, Jacob, had spoken these words, the power of the Lord came upon him, insomuch that he fell to the earth. And it came to pass that he was nourished for the space of many days.**

**verse 15 “he was nourished for the space of many days”** This may mean that since Sherem was unable to care for himself, his physical needs were provided for. It might also mean something quite different. Study the use of the word “nourished” in Jacob 6:7. Perhaps Sherem’s spiritual needs were addressed as well.

**verses 16-19** In this incapacitated state, it is obvious that Sherem still had use of his mental faculties. Why would a man who is about to die confess his sins? See the commentary for Alma 1:15.

**16 And it came to pass that he said unto the people: Gather together on the morrow, for I shall die; wherefore, I desire to speak unto the people before I shall die.**

**17 And it came to pass that on the morrow the multitude were gathered together; and he spake plainly unto them and denied the things which he had taught them, and confessed the Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost, and the ministering of angels.**

**18 And he spake plainly unto them, that he had been deceived by the power of the devil. And he spake of hell, and of eternity, and of eternal punishment.**

**verse 18 “he had been deceived by the power of the devil”** Sherem was now apparently speaking the truth. He had been deceived. Those who teach doctrines which appeal to the carnal and materialistic within us, in due time, come to believe and practice their own teachings.

**19 And he said: I fear lest I have committed the unpardonable sin, for I have lied unto God; for I denied the Christ, and said that I believed the scriptures; and they truly testify of him. And because I have thus lied unto God I greatly fear lest my case shall be awful; but I confess unto God.**

**verse 19** Sherem is desperate and fearful and is attempting a “death-bed” repentance. It seems highly unlikely that Sherem had committed or even was capable of committing the unpardonable sin. In order to commit such a sin, one must reach a rather lofty state of spiritual development and then turn altogether therefrom. Sherem had not likely reached this requisite spiritual state. In addition, even though his death-bed repentance was not optimal, it is obvious that he was at least inclined toward some

form of repentance, a characteristic which is foreign to those who will become sons of perdition (*TPJS*, 358).

Some critics of the Book of Mormon have seen a doctrinal anachronism here (see a discussion of anachronisms in the Book of Mormon in the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:18). They see the mention of the unpardonable sin (see also Alma 39:6; cf. 2 Nephi 31:14) as anachronistic because the doctrine of an unpardonable sin is not taught in the Bible until New Testament times, well after Lehi and his family left Jerusalem (e.g., Matthew 12:31; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10; cf. Hebrews 10:26; 1 John 5:16-17). In response, it should be noted that the unpardonable sin is defined as “deny[ing] the Holy Ghost when it once has had a place in you” (Alma 39:6). It is evident from the text of the Book of Mormon that the descendants of Lehi knew of and received the witness of the Holy Ghost (e.g., 1 Nephi 10:17-19, 22; 2 Nephi 31:13, 18; Jacob 6:8; Alma 9:21). They thus had knowledge sufficient to commit such a sin and to be warned against committing it.

**20 And it came to pass that when he had said these words he could say no more, and he gave up the ghost.**

**21 And when the multitude had witnessed that he spake these things as he was about to give up the ghost, they were astonished exceedingly; insomuch that the power of God came down upon them, and they were overcome that they fell to the earth.**

**verse 21** The “power of God” in this context is the Holy Spirit.

**22 Now, this thing was pleasing unto me, Jacob, for I had requested it of my Father who was in heaven; for he had heard my cry and answered my prayer.**

**verse 22** “this thing was pleasing unto me” Jacob refers to the spiritual renewal of his people not the pitiful fate of Sherem.

**23 And it came to pass that peace and the love of God was restored again among the people; and they searched the scriptures, and hearkened no more to the words of this wicked man.**

**verse 23** You might read this verse and say, “Of course the people didn’t hearken any more to Sherem’s words, he was dead!” However, he could well have left behind written records that were still circulating, and adherents to his worldly philosophies who were still inclined to proselyte.

Jacob has now completed his account of Sherem. He concludes this chapter by reflecting on the sorry plight of the Lamanites, expressing his desire that his son Enos inherit the small plates, and saying goodbye to his readers.

**24 And it came to pass that many means were devised to reclaim and restore the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth; but it all was vain, for they delighted in wars and bloodshed, and they had an eternal hatred against us, their brethren. And they sought by the power of their arms to destroy us continually.**

**verse 24** This verse is particularly poignant and sad. The reader should keep in mind that Jacob grew up in a house divided. He saw a family feud evolve into a more or less permanent state of war. Consider what it meant to be Laman and Lemuel's brother. The Lamanites were not distant, faceless, nameless enemies. They were kinsmen—brothers, nephews, and cousins whose names and families he knew. Here, Jacob seems to suggest that he feels some personal responsibility for failing to “reclaim and restore” his brethren the Lamanites.

**25 Wherefore, the people of Nephi did fortify against them with their arms, and with all their might, trusting in the God and rock of their salvation; wherefore, they became as yet, conquerors of their enemies.**

**verse 25** The expression “as yet” in this verse carries with it an ominous implication. To this point the Nephites had held their own against the Lamanites. Jacob suggests that he holds a suspicion that the Lamanites might eventually overrun the Nephites.

**26 And it came to pass that I, Jacob, began to be old; and the record of this people being kept on the other plates of Nephi, wherefore, I conclude this record, declaring that I have written according to the best of my knowledge, by saying that the time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness, and hated of our brethren, which caused wars and contentions; wherefore, we did mourn out our days.**

**verse 26** The “other plates of Nephi” are the large plates of Nephi. “This record” refers to the small plates of Nephi.

**“the time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream . . . wherefore, we did mourn out our days”** This melancholy and poignant verse speaks powerfully of the hardships that had occurred in Jacob's life. Jacob also may have had in mind the transient nature of this mortal life. A verse with similar meaning is 1 Chronicles 29:15: “For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow.” When viewed in hindsight this mortal probation is fleeting and over almost in an instant.

**27 And I, Jacob, saw that I must soon go down to my grave; wherefore, I said unto my son Enos: Take these plates. And I told him the things which my brother Nephi had commanded me, and he promised obedience unto the**

**commands. And I make an end of my writing upon these plates, which writing has been small; and to the reader I bid farewell, hoping that many of my brethren may read my words. Brethren, adieu.**

**verse 27 “I told him the things which my brother Nephi had commanded me”** Jacob gave to his son Enos the same commandments his brother Nephi had given him. These can be reviewed in Jacob 1:1-4. They included that Enos should write a few precious spiritual things that occurred among the Nephites and not spend too much time recounting their history. Also he should preserve these small plates that they might be handed down from generation to generation.

**“he promised obedience unto the commands”** Already Enos displays inclination toward obedience to the Lord’s commands.

**“which writing has been small”** Jacob probably intended by this phrase that his writings were not as lengthy as those of his older brother Nephi.

**“adieu”** Some have poked fun at the Church because of the way in which Joseph translated Jacob’s farewell. Why would Joseph have used the French word for “goodbye”? After all, Jacob was writing over four centuries before Christ, and the French language didn’t even come into existence until the eighth century AD. We should remind ourselves that in a translated document such as the Book of Mormon, we are bound to see evidences of influences from various sources. The personality and character of the author himself will be evident. The original documents were written by men fluent in the Hebrew tongue, and they wrote down their Hebrew expressions in an Egyptian-type glyphic form. Thus we will see elements of Hebrew and of Egyptian language and culture. Part of the record was abridged by the prophet Mormon. Some of his idiosyncrasies and thought processes are undoubtedly present in our present day Book of Mormon text. The original plates were likely engraved and abridged in Mesoamerica. Thus, Mesoamerican culture and language are likely evident, if only we knew what to look for. Finally, the plates were translated by Joseph Smith, Jr., in Pennsylvania and New York in 1829. Certainly, we would expect to see features of the book that reflect Joseph’s environment, culture, and period. Every translation contains features which are characteristic of the translator. Similarly, every translation is at the same time an interpretation—by the translator.

Why would Joseph have chosen to use “adieu”? Was there any French influence in the area of New York? Certainly there was. Just across the St. Lawrence River is located French Canada. The word “adieu” is a word rich in meaning. It may be translated roughly “that you may hasten on your way back to God” or “I commend you to God.” Undoubtedly Joseph was inspired to know Jacob’s farewell, and the word “adieu” came into his mind. Perhaps it seemed to catch Jacob’s meaning better than simply “farewell” or “goodbye.”

There are other words found in the Book of Mormon that did not exist at the time the plates were originally engraved. Examples included words of Greek origin such as

“Bible” (e.g., 2 Nephi 29:3-4, 6), “baptize” (e.g., 1 Nephi 10:19; 2 Nephi 31:4), “Christ” (e.g., 2 Nephi 25:26), “synagogues” (e.g., 2 Nephi 26:26) “Timothy” (3 Nephi 19:4), and even the Greek expression “alpha and omega” (e.g., 3 Nephi 9:18). After all, if the Nephites had really been Hebrews they would never have used such terms, say the critics. The same explanation pertains for these words and expressions’ being found in the Book of Mormon. They were both familiar to Joseph Smith and are familiar to us. They help us to understand the concepts being taught.

Some critics have gone so far as to conclude that the use of the word “adieu” here creates for the Latter-day Saint a major dilemma. “Either he must admit that there was French on the plates, a thousand years or so before French came into existence, or we must admit that the Book of Mormon is a late forgery.” Daniel C. Peterson in answering such a critic said:

How absurd! Had Joseph Smith been so inclined, he could have translated the Nephite word, whatever it was, as “shalom,” “ciao,” or “sayonara.” “Adieu” was simply a word in his vocabulary—and a word, by the way, that so unsophisticated a young man as Joseph Smith was might not even have known to be French (*Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* includes “adieu,” as does the 1980 Oxford American Dictionary). What difference does it make if Joseph Smith used “adieu” to render what he found on the plates? If, instead, he had said “good-bye,” would that have proved that there was English on the plates? If so, we don’t need to read until Jacob 7:27 in order to find clear disproof [sic] of the Book of Mormon’s antiquity. The very first word in 1 Nephi 1:1 would serve just as well: The first-person, singular English pronoun “I” certainly did not exist in 600 BC (*Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 60).

Thus in translating the original language of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith used the English words and expressions of his day that would be best understood by his contemporaries, without concern that some might appear anachronistic. His major concern in translating was understanding. God does the same, for he “speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding” (2 Nephi 31:3; cf. D&C 1:24). For additional discussion of the issue of anachronisms in the Book of Mormon, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:18.