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Learning to Love the Book of Mormon - Fourth Nephi, The Book of Nephi, Who is the Son of Nephi—One of the Disciples of Jesus Christ

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

Learning to Love the Book of Mormon

Updated August 2013 to February 2014

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

President Benson would later write:

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

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

Further:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Michael J. Preece

Fourth Nephi
The Book of Nephi
Who is the Son of Nephi—One of the
Disciples of Jesus Christ

An account of the people of Nephi, according to his record.

This chapter illustrates a typical example of the so-called prosperity—pride—destruction cycle repeatedly manifest in the Book of Mormon (see the commentary for Jacob 2:14).

4 Nephi Chapter 1

Who wrote 4 Nephi? It was Nephi, but was it that Nephi who was one of the twelve disciples (apostles) of the Lord? Or, was it the son of that same Nephi. A careful look at the heading above indicates that it is ambiguous regarding this question.

There is some evidence that it was the Lord's disciple himself:

1. We find no account in the Book of Mormon text of the disciple (apostle) Nephi's having a son or passing on the plates to a son named Nephi. Hence, perhaps Nephi, the disciple of the Lord, lived on to minister in the Lord's kingdom, write 4 Nephi, pass the plates on to his son Amos, and die in about AD 111.

2. 4 Nephi 1:19 describes the death of Nephi, the author of 4 Nephi. A footnote for the word Nephi in that verse refers us back to 3 Nephi 23:7 which has reference to Nephi, the Lord's disciple.

There is also evidence that it was the son of the Lord's disciple—also named Nephi:

1. The heading of 4 Nephi in our 1989 edition of the scriptures reads: "Fourth Nephi, the book of Nephi, who is the son of Nephi—One of the disciples of Jesus Christ." Though this wording is ambiguous, it has often been interpreted as suggesting that the Nephi who wrote 4 Nephi is the son of the Lord's disciple Nephi. In other words, the heading is often interpreted to mean: "Fourth Nephi, the book of Nephi, and this latter Nephi, the book's author, is the son of Nephi, the Lord's disciple. And that disciple is also named Nephi." The ambiguity lies in the fact that the heading may also have been intended to teach that the book's author is not only the son of Nephi, but he is also one of the disciples of Jesus Christ."

2. Nephi, the Lord's disciple, was his father's eldest son, and he took possession of the plates in AD 1. The author of 4 Nephi died in AD 111. This would mean that the Lord's disciple, were he the author of 4 Nephi, would have been significantly older than 111 years of age at his death.

3. The compiler of the Index for the 1989 edition of our scriptures lists four Nephis in the Book of Mormon including Nephi, the son of the Lord's disciple Nephi (page 242).

4. 3 Nephi 28:2-3 gives the account of the nine Nephite disciples who chose not to be translated, rather they requested "that after we have lived unto the age of man, that our ministry, wherein thou hast called us, may have an end, that we may speedily come unto thee in thy kingdom. And he said unto them: Blessed are ye because ye desired this thing of me; therefore, after that ye are seventy and two years old ye shall come unto me in my kingdom; and with me ye shall find rest." Therefore if the disciple Nephi was not translated, and if the Lord intended the "seventy and two years" literally, then we might expect him to have died at age 72 and not live to be more than 111 years old.

5. Finally, 4 Nephi 1:14 explains that by the year AD 72, all of the Savior's disciples had "gone to the paradise of God, save it were the three who should tarry." This would suggest that the Nephi who was the original disciple of Christ was either dead by AD 72 or he was one of the three who had been translated.

The reader must decide for himself which Nephi wrote 4 Nephi. It is likely it was Nephi, the son of the Lord's disciple (apostle).

The two hundred years following the Savior's visit to the Nephites has been called the golden age of the Nephites or the "mini-Millennium." In fact it is a type of the great millennial day just as the period of destruction at the time of Christ's crucifixion (3 Nephi 8) is a type of the ultimate destruction of the ungodly at the time of the Savior's second coming.

The original authors of the book of Fourth Nephi are: Nephi (either the disciple of Christ or his son), Amos (the son of the author Nephi), Amos (the son of Amos), and Ammaron (the brother of the younger Amos). The prophet Mormon obviously faced an unusual challenge as he set about to abridge the records of this period. We do not know the size of the original records or the amount of information kept by the original authors of 4 Nephi, but they covered nearly one-third of the entire period of Book of Mormon history (AD 36 to AD 321). Mormon distilled them down to just forty-nine short verses.

In these verses we are shown the heights and depths of a civilization's spiritual and moral fluctuations. We observe the practical workings of the celestial law and the basest impulses of a telestial society.

In the first edition of the Book of Mormon, both the books of 3 Nephi and 4 Nephi were entitled the Book of Nephi. In 1879 the First Presidency authorized Orson Pratt to prepare a new edition of the book, and he separated the Book of Nephi into 3 Nephi and 4 Nephi.

The book of 4 Nephi contains only forty-nine verses and yet covers about 285 years of Nephite history. It has been pointed out, borrowing from the words of Charles

Dickens, that it recounts “the best of times” and the “worst of times.” For the first 170 years, extending until about AD 200, the people experienced a golden era of righteousness. They lived a Zion-like social order and, as Mormon said of them, there could not be a happier people.” Then, over a period of about one hundred years they descended into wickedness. By about AD 300 there was widespread pride, greed, dissension, doctrinal apostasy, persecution of humble believers, rejection of the prophets, division of the people into “-ites,” secret combinations, and finally war and continual bloodshed. Both the Nephites and Lamanites were wicked and rebelled against God. They were all the more hardened because of the magnificent spiritual legacy they had rejected.

1 And it came to pass that the thirty and fourth year passed away, and also the thirty and fifth, and behold the disciples of Jesus had formed a church of Christ in all the lands round about. And as many as did come unto them, and did truly repent of their sins, were baptized in the name of Jesus; and they did also receive the Holy Ghost.

verse 1 The Church was established by the twelve Nephite disciples.

2 And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another.

verse 23 “**there were no contentions and disputations among them**” Here is one of the keys phrases identifying a Zion people. See the discussion of contention in the commentary for 3 Nephi 11:28-30.

3 And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift.

verse 3 “**And they had all things common among them**” It is obvious these blessed Nephites lived the law of consecration and became a united order. Joseph Smith pointed out that such a system was not a type of Christian communism. Every covenant member of this order held some private property (his stewardship) and had access to consecrated surpluses according to justified “wants” and “needs” (D&C 82:17-18).

“**they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift**” They became free from the fetters of sin and spiritual ignorance, and they became recipients of the gift of the Holy Ghost. “Blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and power of the Holy Ghost” (1 Nephi 13:37).

4 And it came to pass that the thirty and seventh year passed away also, and there still continued to be peace in the land.

5 And there were great and marvelous works wrought by the disciples of Jesus, insomuch that they did heal the sick, and raise the dead, and cause the lame to walk, and the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear; and all manner of miracles did they work among the children of men; and in nothing did they work miracles save it were in the name of Jesus.

verse 5 All activities of the spiritual ministry of the twelve Nephite disciples were done in the name of Jesus Christ.

6 And thus did the thirty and eighth year pass away, and also the thirty and ninth, and forty and first, and the forty and second, yea, even until forty and nine years had passed away, and also the fifty and first, and the fifty and second; yea, and even until fifty and nine years had passed away.

verse 6 In the commentary for Helaman 1:1, we discussed the technique of “annalistic” writing utilized by the prophet editor Mormon. This particular verse is an almost comical example of the conscientious Mormon’s trying doggedly to be consistent and stick to his annalistic style. Yet he obviously found little, in the voluminous materials available to him on the large plates of Nephi, during these years that would be of value to his readers.

7 And the Lord did prosper them exceedingly in the land; yea, insomuch that they did build cities again where there had been cities burned.

verse 7 Note Mormon’s orientation here. The people did not *prosper themselves*, as the humanists would say. Rather “the Lord did prosper them exceedingly in the land.” The only way to resolve the prosperity—pride—wickedness cycle is to acknowledge the hand of the Lord in all things (D&C 59:21).

8 Yea, even that great city Zarahemla did they cause to be built again.

verses 7-8 The civil structure described in 4 Nephi displayed a total absence of destructive or divisive elements, including poverty, selfishness, and “social Darwinism” (survival of the fittest). This resulted in a classlessness that eliminated crime and allowed society’s resources to be applied to and focused on urban renewal.

9 But there were many cities which had been sunk, and waters came up in the stead thereof; therefore these cities could not be renewed.

10 And now, behold, it came to pass that the people of Nephi did wax strong, and did multiply exceedingly fast, and became an exceedingly fair and delightsome people.

verse 10 “exceedingly fair and delightsome people” Keep in mind that the dark skin among the Book of Mormon peoples, existed as a mark of the curse. There was nothing inherently wicked or evil about a dark skin (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 5:20-21). That curse was now removed.

11 And they were married, and given in marriage, and were blessed according to the multitude of the promises which the Lord had made unto them.

verse 11 It seems likely these Nephites participated in celestial or eternal marriage (see the commentary for 3 Nephi 25:5-6).

12 And they did not walk any more after the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses; but they did walk after the commandments which they had received from their Lord and their God, continuing in fasting and prayer, and in meeting together oft both to pray and to hear the word of the Lord.

verse 12 “continuing in fasting and prayer” They were living the law of the fast. The Savior spoke to the saints in this dispensation in 1832: “I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall continue in prayer and fasting from this time forth” (D&C 88:76).

13 And it came to pass that there was no contention among all the people, in all the land; but there were mighty miracles wrought among the disciples of Jesus.

14 And it came to pass that the seventy and first year passed away, and also the seventy and second year, yea, and in fine, till the seventy and ninth year had passed away; yea, even an hundred years had passed away, and the disciples of Jesus, whom he had chosen, had all gone to the paradise of God, save it were the three who should tarry; and there were other disciples ordained in their stead; and also many of that generation had passed away.

15 And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.

verse 15 Those filled with charity, the pure love of Christ seek to build and lift people and lighten the burdens of others. They are turned outward, not inward. They glory in the accomplishments of their fellows and mourn those who have cause to mourn.

16 And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.

verse 16 The saga of the Nephites, following Christ’s appearance, will turn out to be one of the great tragedies of human history. Their story could have ended with an

ending similar to that of the city of Enoch. We will learn, however, that they turned to iniquity and plummeted to the depths of degradation.

17 There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.

verse 17 “neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites” Verse 10 of this chapter has suggested that the mark of the curse, the dark skin, was removed from the Lamanites. Apparently all physical, spiritual, and cultural distinctions of any kind were eliminated. It seems likely that during this period there was much intermarriage between those descended from Nephi and those descendants of Laman. It is likely that this righteous remnant of the Lamanite nation were completely assimilated into the Nephite nation.

18 And how blessed were they! For the Lord did bless them in all their doings; yea, even they were blessed and prospered until an hundred and ten years had passed away; and the first generation from Christ had passed away, and there was no contention in all the land.

19 And it came to pass that Nephi, he that kept this last record, (and he kept it upon the plates of Nephi) died, and his son Amos kept it in his stead; and he kept it upon the plates of Nephi also.

verse 19 The “plates of Nephi” were, of course, the large plates of Nephi. Again, the year in which the author Nephi delivered these plates to his son Amos was about AD 111. The “he” referred to in the following verse is this Amos.

20 And he kept it eighty and four years, and there was still peace in the land, save it were a small part of the people who had revolted from the church and taken upon them the name of Lamanites; therefore there began to be Lamanites again in the land.

verse 20 “there began to be Lamanites again in the land” For a summary of the history of the Lamanite peoples, see the commentary for Mormon 5:15. These Lamanites’ desire to again be recognized as a distinct and separate people—likely an early sign of pride. The truly righteous feel no need for attention, no desire to be praised, no inclination to seek for recognition.

Here, sometime around AD 194, about 160 years since the Savior’s appearance, there appears the first crack in the Zion society which had been established among the Nephites following Christ’s appearances to them. The classic definition of apostasy from the original Greek term *apostasia* is “to stand apart from,” “to rebel,” or “to revolt.” At first this involved only a small group of people.

21 And it came to pass that Amos died also, (and it was an hundred and ninety and four years from the coming of Christ) and his son Amos kept the record in his stead; and he also kept it upon the plates of Nephi; and it was also written in the book of Nephi, which is this book.

verse 21 It is interesting to learn that the large plates had divisions or “books.” We might presume that the “book of Nephi” consisted of what is now 3 Nephi and 4 Nephi.

During the days of the elder Amos, “there was still peace in the land,” however, “a small part of the people . . . revolted from the church and [took] upon them the name of Lamanites” (verse 20). The younger Amos, however, over the course of his life, will witness the complete moral collapse of the Nephite nation as had been prophesied by his predecessors (4 Nephi 1:21-47; cf. 2 Nephi 26:10; Alma 45:10-12).

22 And it came to pass that two hundred years had passed away; and the second generation had all passed away save it were a few.

verse 22 The “second generation” were the children of those Nephites and Lamanites to whom the Savior appeared personally.

23 And now I, Mormon, would that ye should know that the people had multiplied, insomuch that they were spread upon all the face of the land, and that they had become exceedingly rich, because of their prosperity in Christ.

24 And now, in this two hundred and first year there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and of the fine things of the world.

verse 24 “all manner of fine pearls” Although the Book of Mormon is largely silent on the subject of precious stones which are native to Book of Mormon lands, the pearl is the one gem acknowledged by the Nephites in the context of their own lifestyle. It was probably taken from the coastal waters of the southern Caribbean, west coast Central America, or the Gulf of California, judging from modern sources of supply. Any large river of the temperate zones may have provided freshwater pearls.

25 And from that time forth they did have their goods and their substance no more common among them.

verse 25 Pride and the law of consecration cannot coexist.

The great Nephite apostasy began about 194 years after the birth of Christ. It is interesting that archaeologists have decided that the “classic” Mayan period began in Mesoamerica in about AD 200. Archaeologists have characterized this Mayan period as follows: There was a division of classes in which the priests distinguished themselves by wearing elaborate and costly apparel. A priestly hierarchy ruled the area for the next 700 years and controlled the social, religious, and commercial activities of

the people. A massive building program was instituted in which churches were built and adorned elaborately, but they had very little practical function (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 391-93). As you read through the remainder of 4 Nephi, notice how the Book of Mormon's descriptions correspond to the archaeologists' findings.

26 And they began to be divided into classes; and they began to build up churches unto themselves to get gain, and began to deny the true church of Christ.

27 And it came to pass that when two hundred and ten years had passed away there were many churches in the land; yea, there were many churches which professed to know the Christ, and yet they did deny the more parts of his gospel, insomuch that they did receive all manner of wickedness, and did administer that which was sacred unto him to whom it had been forbidden because of unworthiness.

verse 27 “and did administer that which was sacred unto him to whom it had been forbidden because of unworthiness” Apparently this refers to the administering of the sacred emblems of the sacrament to the unworthy (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

verses 26-27 During the third century AD, increased wickedness led to the establishment of many false Christian churches.

28 And this church did multiply exceedingly because of iniquity, and because of the power of Satan who did get hold upon their hearts.

verse 28 “This church” refers to the false Christian churches.

29 And again, there was another church which denied the Christ; and they did persecute the true church of Christ, because of their humility and their belief in Christ; and they did despise them because of the many miracles which were wrought among them.

verse 29 “another church which denied the Christ; and they did persecute the true church of Christ” In addition to the false Christian churches mentioned in verses 26-28, another, non-Christian, church arose which was aggressive in its opposition and persecution of members of the Church of Christ. This was obviously a church that denied Christ.

30 Therefore they did exercise power and authority over the disciples of Jesus who did tarry with them, and they did cast them into prison; but by the power of the word of God, which was in them, the prisons were rent in twain, and they went forth doing mighty miracles among them.

verse 30 To these apostates, the three translated Nephite apostles (“the disciples of Jesus who did tarry with them”) were an irritating constant reminder of the power of God over the puny abilities of man. Apparently it was the non-Christian apostate church that imprisoned the three disciples.

31 Nevertheless, and notwithstanding all these miracles, the people did harden their hearts, and did seek to kill them, even as the Jews at Jerusalem sought to kill Jesus, according to his word.

verse 31 Here is more evidence of a well established principle. Miracles do nothing to convert the wicked. Rather the wicked deny them as miracles. Ironically, however, the wicked resent them are still provoked to anger by them. See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

32 And they did cast them into furnaces of fire, and they came forth receiving no harm.

33 And they also cast them into dens of wild beasts, and they did play with the wild beasts even as a child with a lamb; and they did come forth from among them, receiving no harm.

34 Nevertheless, the people did harden their hearts, for they were led by many priests and false prophets to build up many churches, and to do all manner of iniquity. And they did smite upon the people of Jesus; but the people of Jesus did not smite again. And thus they did dwindle in unbelief and wickedness, from year to year, even until two hundred and thirty years had passed away.

verse 34 “they were led by many priests and false prophets” These were guilty of practicing priestcraft as described in 2 Nephi 26:29: “Priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion.” Here the editor Mormon links apostasy and priestcraft. He had previously linked apostasy with pride and social stratification (verses 23-26).

It is alarming to see how quickly a people so blessed can become spiritually degenerate and hardened against the truth. A verse in the book of Alma is enlightening: “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).

35 And now it came to pass in this year, yea, in the two hundred and thirty and first year, there was a great division among the people.

verse 35 As noted previously the first sign of dissolution of the Zion society in the Nephite mini-millennium began in about AD 194. By AD 231 the apostasy was advanced. By AD 300 there will be virtually complete wickedness.

Finally, there occurs a major division of the people into the believers, the Nephites, and the rebellious, the Lamanites. What a poignant type or analogy of that which will occur at the end of the Millennium which is yet in the future. This Millennium will eventually be brought to a close because of the rise of those who begin to deny their God, those who deny and defy that which is of God (see D&C 29:22). President George Q. Cannon suggested that the future Millennium will come to a close partly because men and women will begin to depart from the principles of consecration and stewardship (see *JD*, 16:120).

36 And it came to pass that in this year there arose a people who were called the Nephites, and they were true believers in Christ; and among them there were those who were called by the Lamanites—Jacobites, and Josephites, and Zoramites;

37 Therefore the true believers in Christ, and the true worshipers of Christ, (among whom were the three disciples of Jesus who should tarry) were called Nephites, and Jacobites, and Josephites, and Zoramites.

38 And it came to pass that they who rejected the gospel were called Lamanites, and Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites; and they did not dwindle in unbelief, but they did wilfully rebel against the gospel of Christ; and they did teach their children that they should not believe, even as their fathers, from the beginning, did dwindle.

verses 36-38 It is likely that this re-division of the Book of Mormon peoples into “Nephites” and “Lamanites” has little to do with their family trees or bloodlines. It seems to be based solely upon their religious propensities. Those who accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ became Nephites and those who did not were Lamanites. The motivated reader can quite easily trace the erosion of the distinction between the descendants of Nephi and the descendants of Laman (Mosiah 20:4-5; 23:30-35; Alma 2; Alma 46-47; Alma 19:33-35; 23:5-7; Helaman 4:4, 11-15; 6:1-7; 3 Nephi 2:12, 14-15; 4 Nephi 1:2-3, 17, 20). This eradication of the ancestral separation seemed to be complete by the time of the nearly two-century “golden age” which followed the Savior’s visit (4 Nephi 1:2-3, 17). With so much genealogical intermixing and intermarrying over the many years, it would have been virtually impossible for any clear cut separations to occur among the people based upon their ancestry. Hence the labeling or sub-classification of the people into “Jacobites,” “Josephites,” “Zoramites,” “Lemuelites,” and “Ishmaelites” would be largely arbitrary and based on factors other than their ancestry (see also the supplemental article, *Book of Mormon Myths*).

“they did not dwindle in unbelief” Their apostasy was no gradual and insidious spiritual slippage or dwindling. Rather, it was a bold, overt, and rapid spiritual downturn driven by a Satanic enthusiasm.

39 And it was because of the wickedness and abomination of their fathers, even as it was in the beginning. And they were taught to hate the children of God, even as the Lamanites were taught to hate the children of Nephi from the beginning.

verse 39 It is presumed that the ancient “mark” or sign of the loss of the Spirit, the dark skin, was re-imposed upon these apostates. Whether it was imposed immediately, or gradually over a period of many years, is not known. There is no explicit reference to the restoration of the dark skin in the Book of Mormon, although Nephi had previously seen in vision that the mark would be restored (1 Nephi 12:22-23). Also, Mormon will make a similar prophecy in the future tense (Mormon 5:15).

And isn't it illogical that these Lamanites came to hate the Nephite believers in the same way and probably for many of the same reasons that the earlier Lamanites had despised the Nephites?

40 And it came to pass that two hundred and forty and four years had passed away, and thus were the affairs of the people. And the more wicked part of the people did wax strong, and became exceedingly more numerous than were the people of God.

41 And they did still continue to build up churches unto themselves, and adorn them with all manner of precious things. And thus did two hundred and fifty years pass away, and also two hundred and sixty years.

42 And it came to pass that the wicked part of the people began again to build up the secret oaths and combinations of Gadianton.

verse 42 Here is perhaps the most extreme consequence of the apostasy among the people, the establishing of secret covenant organizations. Isn't it fascinating to learn that the secret oaths of the Gadianton band had persisted even through the mini-Millennium. How resilient and determined are Satan and his influences!

43 And also the people who were called the people of Nephi began to be proud in their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, and become vain like unto their brethren, the Lamanites.

verse 43 And now even the formerly righteous Nephites turn spiritually downward.

44 And from this time the disciples began to sorrow for the sins of the world.

verse 44 This verse refers to the three translated Nephites. Translated beings are not subject to accidental death and will not suffer pain and sickness, yet they will experience a variety of emotions. “Ye shall not have pain while ye shall dwell in the flesh, neither sorrow save it be for the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 28:9). By AD 326 the wickedness of the people will become so prevalent that the Lord will take the three Nephite disciples away from openly ministering among the people (Mormon 1:13; 8:10).

45 And it came to pass that when three hundred years had passed away, both the people of Nephi and the Lamanites had become exceedingly wicked one like unto another.

46 And it came to pass that the robbers of Gadianton did spread over all the face of the land; and there were none that were righteous save it were the disciples of Jesus. And gold and silver did they lay up in store in abundance, and did traffic in all manner of traffic.

verse 46 Apparently only the three Nephites and a few others could be called righteous. We know, for example that Amos the son of Amos and his brother Ammaron were among the righteous.

“and did traffic in all manner of traffic” To *traffic* (actually *traffick* in modern English) is to trade mercenarily or meanly, exclusively for monetary reward.

47 And it came to pass that after three hundred and five years had passed away, (and the people did still remain in wickedness) Amos died; and his brother, Ammaron, did keep the record in his stead.

48 And it came to pass that when three hundred and twenty years had passed away, Ammaron, being constrained by the Holy Ghost, did hide up the records which were sacred—yea, even all the sacred records which had been handed down from generation to generation, which were sacred—even until the three hundred and twentieth year from the coming of Christ.

49 And he did hide them up unto the Lord, that they might come again unto the remnant of the house of Jacob, according to the prophecies and the promises of the Lord. And thus is the end of the record of Ammaron.