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Source: *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture*

Editor(s): Paul R. Cheesman, S. Kent Brown, and Charles D. Tate, Jr.

Published: 1988

Page(s): 100-126



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The Three Nephite Churches of Christ

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Rodney Turner

*T*he earthly church of Jesus Christ in all ages is destined to become the celestial “church of the Firstborn” (D&C 76:67, 92-94). As we individually strive for perfection, so must the Church—the collective body of Christ—do the same. In this respect, the history of Christ’s church in the Book of Mormon is an example, a challenge, and a warning to the Church in the latter days (3 Nephi 30; Mormon 9:28-31).

The word *church* literally means those called out of the world into the kingdom of God—a “peculiar people” (Deuteronomy 14:2; 1 Peter 2:9). In this sense, the Church has been found on the earth in every gospel dispensation since the days of Adam. Although it is always founded upon the keys and powers associated with the Melchizedek Priesthood, and always embodies certain basic doctrines and ordinances, its organizational structure reflects the times and circumstances in which it is established. Thus the Church of each dispensation has had a personality all its own.

Moreover, the word *church* has a number of connotations. It may refer to a given religion, denomination, congregation, place of worship, and so forth. For example,

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its first use in the Book of Mormon is in connection with Nephi's efforts to obtain the brass plates of Laban. Nephi's reference to "my elder brethren" (meaning Laman and Lemuel) was taken by Laban's servant to refer to "the brethren of the church" (1 Nephi 4:26), or, in other words, the Jewish synagogue or assembly of which Laban was a member.

In its broadest sense, the term connotes the powers of both good and of evil as in 1 Nephi 14:10 which states that in the final analysis there are "save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil." In most instances in the Book of Mormon, the term refers to the organized body of believers in Christ or God. False or apostate churches are clearly identified as such.

Nephi's Church of Christ

The prophecy that young Nephi would become "a ruler and a teacher over [his] brethren" (1 Nephi 2:22) was initially fulfilled in a somewhat informal way (2 Nephi 5:19). But within thirty years of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, and following a great schism within his colony (2 Nephi 5:3-14), Nephi consecrated his younger brothers, Jacob and Joseph, "priests and teachers over the land of my people" (2 Nephi 5:26; see Jacob 1:18).¹

Since the gospel is viable only under the authority of the higher priesthood,² and since Nephi was not only a prophet but a seer as well (1 Nephi 10:17; 11:1-15:1), he undoubtedly possessed the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood and its associated ordinances. Although the Book of Mormon does not contain an account of either Lehi's or Nephi's ordination to the "holy order,"³ their visions and prophetic ministries leave no doubt that such divine authority was conferred upon them. This same authority was held by those righteous prophet-kings who succeeded Nephi.

The precedent established by Nephi for the king to consecrate or set apart priests and teachers over the people was continued by his successors (Jarom 1:7). One of King Benjamin's last official acts was to appoint priests to teach

those who, following his address, “had taken upon them the name of Christ” (Mosiah 6:1-3).

Thus, a Nephite theocracy was established with Nephi functioning as high priest⁴ as well as being the first in a dynasty of kings who also bore his name (Jacob 1:11; Mosiah 25:13). This dynasty continued for almost five hundred years—from about 570 B.C. to 91 B.C. when it was replaced by a system of governors and judges (2 Nephi 5:18; Jacob 1:9-11; Mosiah 25:13; 29:41-47).

The Book of Mormon does not indicate the exact nature and extent of the Church, as such, among the early Nephites.⁵ However, it does provide some vital information concerning their religious life. For instance, there were many prophets in addition to priests and teachers (Enos 1:22; Jarom 1:10; Words of Mormon 1:16). Their scripture was the brass plates of Laban containing the writings of Moses and the ancient prophets up to Jeremiah (1 Nephi 4:38). They observed the moral injunctions and ritual aspects of the law of Moses (1 Nephi 4:15-16; 2 Nephi 5:10; 25:24; Jarom 1:5). They built at least one temple patterned after that of Solomon (2 Nephi 5:16).⁶ Most important, they knew of the Messiah and of the first principles and ordinances of the gospel (2 Nephi 9; 25:23-30; 31-32).⁷

Jarom (c. 475-362 B.C.)⁸ writes of prophets, priests, and teachers laboring diligently in teaching the law of Moses in conjunction with faith in the future Messiah “as though he already was” (Jarom 1:11). Although many were spiritually dead, many had revelations and enjoyed “communion with the Holy Spirit” (Jarom 1:3-5).

The Passing of Nephi's Church

The passing of the first Nephite church accompanied the fall of the original Nephite nation in the third century B.C. The seeds of destruction for both were planted during the reign of Nephi's successor in the late sixth century (Jacob 1:15). Jacob, Nephi's brother, warned the people that if they did not repent the Lamanites would conquer the land of Nephi “and the Lord God will *lead away the righteous out from among you*” (Jacob 3:4; emphasis added).⁹ The generations came and went as unnamed

prophets and priests labored to persuade the vacillating populace to honor their covenants with God. This early period presents a mixed picture of zealous but fruitless missionary work among the Lamanites, combined with material prosperity and spiritual apathy.

Enos (c. 535-420 B.C.) wrote: "There was nothing save it was exceeding harshness, preaching and prophesying of wars, and contentions, and destructions, and continually reminding them of death, and the duration of eternity, and the judgments and the power of God . . . [that] would keep them from going down speedily to destruction" (Enos 1:23). Jarom, his son, in describing similar conditions in his day, wrote that the prophets "did threaten" the people, warning them that if they fell into transgression "they should be *destroyed from off the face of the land*" (Jarom 1:10; emphasis added). The fulfillment of this prophecy was temporarily forestalled because the prophets "did prick their hearts with the word, continually stirring them up unto repentance" (Jarom 1:12). But in the end, prophetic warnings were to no avail: the first Nephite civilization was self-doomed. Mosiah II's declaration that God's judgments came when a majority of the people chose iniquity (Mosiah 29:27) proved true with his grandfather's generation.

Armed conflict between the Nephites and Lamanites began in the reign of Nephi (Jacob 1:13-14) and continued in a sporadic, but increasingly intense, fashion throughout the following centuries. Fearful that the Nephites would be destroyed, Enos prayed that "the Lord God would preserve a record of my people" (Enos 1:13). Jarom ruefully observed that God "has not *as yet* swept them off from the face of the land" (Jarom 1:3; emphasis added).

Omni (c. 425-318 B.C.) wrote: "We had many seasons of peace; and we had many seasons of serious war and bloodshed" (Omni 1:3). According to Amaron, by 280 B.C. "the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed" (Omni 1:5). The judgments of God had taken their toll (Omni 1:7).

Abinadom, the nephew of Amaron, wrote the melancholy account of the twilight of the Nephite kingdom—a period in which revelation and prophecy had ceased (Omni

1:11). It only remained for Amaleki to write of its night. By revelation King Mosiah I—the “Moses” of the Book of Mormon—led those who “would hearken unto the voice of the Lord” in an exodus from the land of Nephi northward to the land of Zarahemla (Omni 1:12).¹⁰ This exodus probably occurred around 270 B.C., just prior to the final destruction of the original Nephite nation.¹¹

During the period between Mosiah’s exodus from the land of Nephi and King Benjamin’s discourse on Christ, the law of Moses figured prominently in the religious life of the newly formed Nephite-Mulekite confederation (Omni 1:19; Mosiah 1:10). Several factors account for its emphasis. First, the law of Moses was binding on the entire house of Israel until the death of Christ (2 Nephi 25:24; 3 Nephi 1:24-25). Second, the decimating Nephite-Lamanite wars left but a remnant of Nephites to join the numerically superior people of Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:2). Third, the original language of the people of Zarahemla had become so badly corrupted that the Nephites could not understand them. Having neither scriptures nor prophets to guide them, these “Mulekites” even denied the existence of God (Omni 1:17). Consequently, they had to be taught the Nephite tongue before they could be instructed in even the lesser law of Moses. Although the law of Christ was known to the Nephites,¹² the learning and the living of the preparatory gospel (D&C 84:26-27) was necessarily the initial preoccupation of Zarahemla’s people (Mosiah 2:3).

However, of itself the Mosaic law had no saving power; it was a discipline designed to bring ancient Israel to Christ (Mosiah 3:14-15; Galatians 3:24). Eventually—because “*they have been a diligent people* in keeping the commandments of the Lord” (Mosiah 1:11; emphasis added)—these Nephites¹³ became spiritually prepared for the greater blessings associated with the fulness of the gospel of Christ.¹⁴ King Benjamin’s last major duty was to bring about a spiritual transformation of his subjects.

He did this by testifying of the redeeming blood of the “Lord Omnipotent,” thereby opening the way for his people to enter into a covenant with Christ, taking his name upon them, and obtaining a remission of their sins

and that “peace of conscience” which only the Holy Ghost can bestow (Mosiah 4:2-3, 11; 5:2; 6:2).¹⁵

Alma’s Church of Christ

Benjamin’s people now enjoyed the spiritual blessings of the fulness of the gospel, but they did not have an organized church of Christ per se. Yet one had been established—not by King Benjamin, nor in the land of Zarahemla, but by a descendant of Nephi in the land of their father’s first inheritance—the land of Nephi. His name was Alma—the founder of “the first church which was established among them *after their transgression*” (3 Nephi 5:12; emphasis added).¹⁶

Alma’s church was an outgrowth of an expedition to the land of Nephi in the early second century B.C. Zeniff and “a considerable number” of Nephites obtained Lamanite permission to resettle the lands of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom (Omni 1:29; Mosiah 9:6-8). Appointed king by his people, Zeniff reigned over this southern colony during Benjamin’s concurrent reign over the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 7:9).¹⁷

Following precedent, Zeniff consecrated worthy men to serve as priests.¹⁸ But his son and successor, Noah, practiced a corrupted form of the Mosaic law (Mosiah 11:5, 10-11).¹⁹ He also replaced his father’s priests with his own immoral supporters—the elder Alma being one of them (Mosiah 11:5; 17:1-2). Gross idolatry and immorality characterized Noah’s Solomon-like reign, and his people succumbed to serious transgressions (Mosiah 7:24-25; 11:1-15).

Abinadi, one of Noah’s subjects, fruitlessly preached repentance among the people until he had to flee because of threats against his life. Returning in disguise two years later, Abinadi delivered a final warning to Noah and his priests and also explained the relationship of Christ to the Mosaic law (Mosiah 12-16).²⁰ His powerful discourse was contemptuously rejected, with one critical exception: Alma—the sole defender and convert of the to-be-martyred prophet (Mosiah 17:2).²¹

Cast out, Alma fled for his life and then went about

privately teaching Abinadi's doctrines. Thereafter, "having authority from the Almighty God" (Mosiah 18:13; 23:10; Alma 5:3),²² he proceeded to baptize 204 men and women and to ordain priests, commanding them to teach nothing save that which he taught or which could be found in the writings of the holy prophets (Mosiah 18:18-19; 25:21).²³

Thus was the second Nephite church—"the church of God, or the church of Christ" established around 140 B.C. (Mosiah 18:17).²⁴ The administration of Alma, its founder and first presiding high priest, was to last about fifty years (Mosiah 23:16; 29:47).

Upon escaping to Zarahemla in about 120 B.C. (following the arrival of King Limhi's people), Alma was authorized by King Mosiah II to form branches of the church throughout all of the land. Mosiah also "gave him power to ordain priests and teachers over every church" (Mosiah 25:19-22).²⁵ Although Mosiah granted Alma the legal right—the keys—to do this, it is evident from the foregoing that Alma had not received his original authority from that prophet-king.

That that authority was centered in the Melchizedek Priesthood is clear from Alma the Younger's discourse on the "high priesthood" in Alma 13. His description of the ordination of others to this priesthood is doubtlessly a description of his own ordination as well: "Now they were ordained after this manner—being *called* with a holy calling, and *ordained* with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end" (Alma 13:8; emphasis added).²⁶ In 91 B.C., Alma conferred the office of high priest upon his son Alma and gave him "charge concerning all the affairs of the church" (Mosiah 29:42; Alma 4:4).²⁷

The first reference in the Book of Mormon to the office of elder—the basic office in the Melchizedek Priesthood—appears in connection with the branches of the Church established by Alma the Younger in the land of Zarahemla (Alma 4:7; 6:1). This suggests that the Church underwent an ecclesiastical development somewhat analogous to that of the later primitive-apostolic Church among the Jews or that of the restored Church in this day.

Because the religion of the Nephites (and of those Lamanites who later joined them) was a unique blend of the lesser law of Moses and the greater law of Christ, it was necessary that these two divine laws be administered under the authority of the Melchizedek order (see Hebrews 7:11-12).

The subsequent history of the Church is one of success and failure, dedication and apostasy. Priestcraft appeared for the first time in Alma's church in 91 B.C. (Alma 1:12, 16). Apostasy became so severe in 83 B.C. that Alma surrendered the chief judgeship to devote himself for the next eight years to "bearing down in pure testimony" against "all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people" (Alma 4:18-20). A reform was effected, but it was short-lived. A few years of peace and stability would be followed by still another spiritual decline.

However, the remarkable ministries of the four sons of Mosiah produced the very first conversions—numbering in the thousands—among the Lamanites (Mosiah 27:34-37; 28:1-9; Alma 17-26). A Lamanite branch was established (Alma 19:35). These converts continued faithful, since they "never did fall away" (Alma 23:6). Rejecting the term Lamanites, they adopted the title Anti-Nephi-Lehies "and the curse of God did no more follow them" (Alma 23:16-18; see 2 Nephi 5:21-23).

Following eight years of civil and general warfare, the post-war period (60-53 B.C.) saw the first of several migrations by sea to the land northward where more temples, synagogues and sanctuaries were built (Alma 63:4-9; Helaman 3:14).²⁸ At the same time, the Church in the land of Zarahemla was inundated by blessings, so "that even the high priests and the teachers were themselves astonished beyond measure" (Helaman 3:25). "Tens of thousands" were baptized into the Church in 43 B.C. Even so, the familiar cycle of prosperity, pride, apostasy, judgments, and repentance was repeated between the years 41 and 30 B.C. The corruption of the laws of Mosiah II reflected the corruption of a majority of the people and "the church had begun to dwindle" (Helaman 4:23).

Abandoning his position as chief judge, Nephi (son of

Helaman II), with his brother Lehi, embarked on the widest-ranging mission in all Nephite history. They cried repentance from Bountiful on the north to the land of Nephi on the south. Many Nephite dissenters were reclaimed, and eight thousand Lamanites in the land of Zarahemla were baptized.

These successes were followed by the most remarkable conversion incident recorded in the Book of Mormon. A military garrison of three hundred Lamanites in the land of Nephi experienced an unprecedented manifestation of the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost—accompanied by the ministering of angels (Helaman 5:43-49; cf. 3 Nephi 9:20; Ether 12:14). They then went forth as a missionary force among their own people, testifying with such power that “the more part of the Lamanites were convinced of them” (Helaman 5:50). Weapons were laid down, hatreds abandoned, and Nephite lands returned.

Thus in 30 B.C. the centuries-old wars between the Nephites and Lamanites finally came to an end. They would not be resumed for 352 years! For the first time in history, the two peoples intermingled freely and without fear in all of their lands. And for the first time, Lamanite missionaries labored among the Nephites, including those who had migrated northward (Helaman 6:4-6). A world had turned upside down!

Unfortunately, the first Gadianton conspiracy, which was born in 52 B.C., continued to spread moral corruption and political turmoil among the Nephites whose spiritual decline was in marked contrast to the flowering of the Lamanites. While the Lamanites converted those of their people who belonged to the Gadianton band, the majority of the Nephites entered into covenants with that secret society (Helaman 6:21, 37). The result was chaotic. The period from 29 to 16 B.C. saw chief judges assassinated, the government overthrown, and fratricidal wars breaking out among the Nephites. These ended only because of a heaven-sent famine. Repentance followed.

But in 12 B.C. the second Gadianton band arose, composed of both Nephite and Lamanite dissenters. Like its predecessor, the band’s pernicious influence spread moral corruption throughout most of the Nephite society. Apos-

tasy reigned. In contrast, “the Lamanites did observe strictly to keep the commandments of God, according to the law of Moses” (Helaman 13:1; cf.15:5).

Such was the spiritual state of affairs when the Lamanite prophet Samuel came among the people of Zarahemla. In spite of his powerful warning of the eventual “utter destruction” of the entire Nephite nation, and his prophecies concerning the birth and death of Christ, Samuel’s message was rejected by the majority of the people. Even many Lamanites lost faith. Only the most believing among them and their Nephite brothers stood firm as the time for Christ’s birth drew near. While the miraculous signs attending that event resulted in a majority of the people repenting, within three years the Gadianton disease became virulent again. Due to “the wickedness of the rising generation,” the faith of the Lamanites also declined (3 Nephi 1:30). The threat became so great in A.D. 13 that the Nephites and Lamanites joined forces “to maintain their rights, and the privileges of their church and of their worship, and their freedom and their liberty” (3 Nephi 2:12). The Gadianton band had become the common enemy, the moral opposition, of both peoples.

In spite of their general unworthiness, the two united peoples were led both politically and militarily by great prophets (3 Nephi 3:16, 18-19). It was this inspired leadership which brought about the utter defeat of the Gadianton band and another religious reformation among the people in A.D. 22 (3 Nephi 4:27-5:3; 6:6). The post-war years produced great material prosperity as cities were rebuilt, new highways were constructed, and commerce flourished. Mormon notes the presence of many merchants, lawyers, and officers (bureaucrats), and—for the first time—writes of the rise of a class system based on one’s wealth and education (3 Nephi 6:10-12). “And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up . . . save it were among a few of the Lamanites” (3 Nephi 6:14).

Once more prophets called for repentance and testified of the imminent death and resurrection of Christ. Corruption in high places—among the judges, high priests, and lawyers—resulted in the covert murders of these

prophets. A new secret combination was formed in an effort to overthrow the state and establish an autocratic monarchy. In A.D. 30 the assassination of the chief judge, Lachoneus, brought down the government. It was replaced by independent tribal groups.²⁹ The voice of the people was no longer the voice of God: a majority chose evil. The most devastating divine judgments in all Book of Mormon history were soon to be unleashed.

The Church was shattered: “there were but few righteous men” left (3 Nephi 7:7). Reminiscent of Peter’s later words, Mormon wrote, “And thus six years had not passed away since the more part of the people had turned from their righteousness, like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow to her wallowing in the mire” (3 Nephi 7:8; cf. 2 Peter 2:22). Such was “their quick return from righteousness unto their wickedness and abominations” (3 Nephi 7:15). And it was to be their last; the familiar cycle would not be repeated in that generation. For although prophets continued to cry repentance,³⁰ and many were baptized, the time for the Holy One of Israel to die had arrived. And when he died, the second rebellious Nephite nation died with him. As it was with that ancient people, so will it be with the world in these last days. No longer will the repentance of others save the wicked from the inescapable judgments of the Lord.

The first words that the resurrected Savior spoke to the surviving Nephites and Lamanites (see 3 Nephi 10:18) consisted of a summary of the awesome destructions that had befallen the house of Joseph in America (3 Nephi 8:5-9:12). However, God’s justice was quickly tempered by his mercy as the risen Redeemer pled with the survivors who “were more righteous” than those who had perished to “repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you” (3 Nephi 9:11, 13; 10:12). He then confirmed the words of his prophets: “By *me* redemption cometh, and in *me* is the law of Moses fulfilled” (3 Nephi 9:17; emphasis added).

The Perfected Church of Christ

The golden age of the ancient Church in America

began with the Father's witness of his descending Son: "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him" (3 Nephi 11:7). Thus, at close of the year A.D. 34,³¹ a more perfect order was established by the resurrected Christ in the presence of a "great multitude" gathered at the temple in the land Bountiful (3 Nephi 11:1).³²

This church was to prove unique in several ways. First and foremost, its immediate architect and builder was not a mortal man, but the very Son of God. Then too, he established it upon the personal testimonies of those thousands of men and women who *experienced* the truth that he was the risen Lord, "the God of Israel." They "did *see* with their eyes and did *feel* with their hands, and did *know* of a surety and did *bear record*, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come" (3 Nephi 11:15; emphasis added). Such a "cloud of witnesses" is unprecedented in all known scripture.

Moreover, it was a post-Atonement, post-Resurrection church. Therefore, the heavy yoke of Moses' law (see Matthew 11:28; Acts 15:10)—with its onerous demands and daily sacrifices—was "done away," being replaced by the "easy" yoke of Christ and the offering of a broken heart and a contrite spirit (3 Nephi 9:19; 12:19). Now the people had but one law, the law of Christ; the "schoolmaster" (Galatians 3:24) had served its purpose. Blood sacrifice was immediately replaced by a new ordinance, one that Jesus introduced himself on this earth: the sacrament of bread and wine. Furthermore, the church was led by twelve disciples who, like the original Twelve in Jerusalem, were personally ordained by Jesus.³³

In summarizing the Book of Mormon for John Wentworth, editor of the *Chicago Democrat*, the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote that the Savior, following his resurrection, "planted the Gospel here in all its fulness, and richness, and power, and blessing; . . . they had Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Teachers, and Evangelists; the same order, the same priesthood, the same ordinances, gifts, powers, and blessings, as were enjoyed on the eastern continent."³⁴

The Prophet's statement supports the view that such

a “fulness” did not exist among the Nephites prior to the Savior’s resurrection. The “Elias” churches of Nephi and Alma prepared the way for that more perfect order established by the risen Christ himself.³⁵ For the time had come for Israel to receive a higher spiritual endowment than it had ever known. This endowment was to begin with a remnant of the house of Joseph in America.

In personally overseeing its organization, Jesus laid a firm foundation of doctrine and ordinances upon which his church was to be built.³⁶ There were to be no further “disputations . . . concerning the points of my doctrine” (3 Nephi 11:28). The multitude were eye- and ear-witnesses to almost all that transpired during the Savior’s initial three-day ministry. The Church began in a unity of the faith. Its doctrines and ordinances were defined with unmistakable clarity by its divine Head and safeguarded by the inspired leadership of the twelve disciples—watchmen who saw eye to eye in that Zion-like age (see Isaiah 52:8; 3 Nephi 16:18). The Church was prepared to last. That it did so with perfect unity for 158 years is another factor which distinguished it from its unstable predecessors.

Then too, this church enjoyed a spiritual and temporal oneness never attained in all of Israel’s history (4 Nephi 1: 1-17). In addition to enjoying the Millennium-like state described in Fourth Nephi, the Church was blessed with a rich outpouring of knowledge from Christ himself. “He did expound all things unto them, both great and small” from the beginning of time to the final judgment (3 Nephi 26:1-4). In addition, this remnant of Joseph was the first and, to date, has been the *only* people to whom the glorious visions of the brother of Jared have been revealed (Ether 3: 21-22; 4:1-2).³⁷

In sum, the righteous remnant of American Israel was “added upon” with greater miracles, more splendid manifestations, and more excellent spiritual knowledge than any Israelite group had ever been granted. For as Jesus said, “So great faith have I never seen among all the Jews; wherefore I could not show unto them so great miracles, because of their unbelief” (3 Nephi 19:35).

In testifying of himself, in reconfirming the Sermon on the Mount, in declaring the principles and ordinances

of life and salvation, and in explaining the relationship of latter-day Israel to the Gentiles, Jesus bound together the eastern and western churches in the common bonds of the fulness of the gospel. As the two churches were to be as one in the Lord, so were the members of the "body of Christ" to be as one in all things.

This unity in the pure love of Christ—which Jesus declared the hallmark of true discipleship (John 13:35)—was to be both symbolized and sustained by a new ordinance which he himself introduced in both the eastern and western churches: the sacrament. It not only memorializes the Atonement, it also symbolizes the gift of the Holy Ghost. One partakes of the former as a sign of, and as a means to, the latter. Thus Jesus promised to those who worthily partook of his flesh and blood that they should "never hunger nor thirst, but shall be *filled*" with the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 20:8; 12:6; emphasis added).

In this respect, Mormon's description of the introduction of this ordinance is significant. The assembled Nephites did not simply "partake" of the sacrament, rather they ate and drank until they "were filled" (3 Nephi 18:4-5, 9).³⁸ Being physically "filled" with bread and wine betokened the glorious blessing which was to follow: being *filled* with the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 20:8-9; 27:16). The importance of this spiritual endowment can hardly be overestimated.

The bestowal of the literally glorious baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost was a vital aspect of the Savior's American ministry.³⁹ Whereas the twelve disciples were initially empowered to baptize the people in water, Jesus told the multitude: "*I will baptize you* with fire and with the Holy Ghost" (3 Nephi 12:1; emphasis added). He had promised this spiritual cleansing months before when he spoke out of the darkness following the terrible upheavals attendant on his own death (3 Nephi 9:20). Now the *light* of the world had come, and the promise was to be fulfilled.

The twelve disciples, who were to bear witness of Christ, were to experience the same glory-filled ordinance enjoyed by the three hundred Lamanite missionaries. Theirs had been a transcendently real experience: they were "encircled about, yea every soul, by a pillar of fire . . .

a flaming fire, yet it did harm them not” (Helaman 5:43-44).⁴⁰

Following their *rebaptism* in water, the Nephite twelve were, in like manner, “filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire. And behold, they were encircled about as if it were by fire; and it came down from heaven” (3 Nephi 19:13-14, 20). It was a truly sanctifying washing of their spirits. Mormon writes, “They were as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus” (3 Nephi 19:25). Jesus prayed, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast *purified* those whom I have chosen” (3 Nephi 19:28; emphasis added). The disciples had received far more than a remission of past sins; they had been “sanctified in Christ by the grace of God,” thus becoming “holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:33; cf. 3 Nephi 27:20). In other words, they had been “quicken[ed] by a portion of the celestial glory” (D&C 88:29). Such an endowment was needed, for Jesus told them: “Ye shall be judges of this people. . . . Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, *even as I am*” (3 Nephi 27:27; emphasis added). They could not be what Jesus was if they did not possess the Spirit that he possessed (2 Nephi 31:12).

Subsequent to the Redeemer’s ministry, the disciples went forth proclaiming the message of salvation “and as many as were baptized in the name of Jesus were filled with the Holy Ghost. And many of them saw and heard unspeakable things, which are not lawful to be written” (3 Nephi 26:17-18). Having received “the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:26), they were blessed with a knowledge of the mysteries of God.

While Mormon, under divine instructions, withheld much from his account that Jesus taught the people (3 Nephi 26:6-12), there is every reason to believe that all of those higher principles and ordinances of the gospel associated with a temple of the Melchizedek order were made known to and practiced by them.

The ministry of Christ (3 Nephi 26:13) was the magnificent culmination of all that had been achieved by those dedicated prophets, priests and teachers who had prepared the way for the coming of the Holy One of Israel to the house of Joseph. Branches of the Church were established

in every land, and within two years "the people were all converted" (4 Nephi 1:2). A Millennium-like society arose in America which enjoyed unblemished peace, prosperity, equality, and happiness for more than a century and a half (4 Nephi 1:3-18).

The Passing of the Church

Tragically, after reaching its spiritual zenith through the Redeemer's personal ministry, the church of Christ was to experience its nadir within three centuries (3 Nephi 27:32). Indeed, in terms of sheer barbarity and unmitigated cruelty, nothing that had previously occurred would begin to equal that which was to come in the closing moments of Book of Mormon history.

The decline and fall of the Church and the nation must be briefly summarized. The heavenly unity of the Church became flawed in A.D. 194, when a "small part" of the people assumed the name Lamanites (4 Nephi 1:20). Unable to handle their unprecedented "prosperity in Christ," the third generation abandoned the principle of economic unity and no longer had all things in common (4 Nephi 1:23-24). The year 201 saw the emergence of class distinctions and spiritual disunity as apostate churches arose advocating various corrupt doctrines and practices (4 Nephi 1:26-29). Because of the influence of false prophets and priests, the Lord's disciples and the "people of Jesus" were subjected to physical persecution (4 Nephi 1:30-34).

In A.D. 231, these social and spiritual "disputations" produced the final great division of the once-united peoples into Nephites ("true believers in Christ") and Lamanites (willful apostates) (4 Nephi 1:35-38). History had repeated itself; it was Nephi versus Laman all over again. By 301, both groups had become "exceeding wicked one like unto another" (4 Nephi 1:45).

In 322, the first of the final series of wars between the two peoples began (Mormon 1:8). Soon thereafter, the three translated disciples were taken away, miracles ceased, gifts were lost, "and the Holy Ghost did not come upon any" (Mormon 1:13-14, 16; 8:10). The gifts of God were replaced by the counterfeits of Satan: it was a time of sorcery, witchcraft, and magic; "the power of the evil one

was wrought upon all the face of the land” (Mormon 1:19; 2:10). The end was near. Mormon lamented, “I saw that the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually” (Mormon 2:15). It was the year 344.

However, one last effort to redeem the Church was to be made. In 360 the Lord told Mormon, “Cry unto this people—Repent ye, and come unto me, and be ye baptized, and *build up again my church*, and ye shall be spared” (Mormon 3:2; emphasis added). Mormon did so, but to no avail. Describing their moral state, Mormon writes, “And there never had been so great wickedness among all the children of Lehi, nor even among all the house of Israel, according to the words of the Lord, as was among this people” (Mormon 4:12).⁴¹ Much had been given; much had been betrayed (see D&C 82:3).

Church and nation were inextricably bound together; the fall of one was the fall of the other. Those few Nephites who survived the climactic battles associated with Cumorah were hunted down and killed unless they denied Christ (Moroni 1:2-3). When these martyrs died, the Church died with them. It had been born out of God’s judgments upon the remnant of Israel in America, and had passed away in the chaos of a genocidal war that blotted out the glorious order Christ had established.

A heaven-like season of righteousness and peace had blessed the lives of three generations of Nephites and Lamanites. Now that season was over and a long night of spiritual darkness spread across the Western Hemisphere. Dawn would not break again for more than a thousand years. It would have to await the coming of another restorer, another Joseph, another gospel dispensation.

The Church in the Latter Days

The Book of Mormon was not written for ancient peoples. It was written for us (Mormon 8:35; Ether 12:23). From the standpoint of its prophets, we constitute the latter-day gentile church of Christ (1 Nephi 22:8; 3 Nephi 21:5-6). Nevertheless, the blood of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob flows in our veins (D&C 86:8-10; 113:8; Abraham 2:9-11). We are bound by lineage, by faith, and by covenant

to the Israelites of the Book of Mormon. They knew of us, prophesied of us, prayed for us, and wrote to us. It is for us to learn—both as individuals and as a church—from their achievements and mistakes, and to receive their counsel, admonitions, warnings.

The churches of Nephi and Alma were churches of anticipation. They were admonished to look forward to the coming and redemptive mission of the Holy One in America (1 Nephi 12:6). But while their prophets and leaders were dedicated men of God, the general membership was often unstable, being prone to vacillate between fervent repentance and ungrateful apostasy—a fact which provoked Mormon's lamentation in Helaman 12. This is always the case when men fail to come to need God more than they need his gifts.

Although a degree of unity was achieved from time to time, it was imperfect and short-lived. Those people had the priesthood, the gospel, and inspired leadership, but the enlightening and sustaining power of the Holy Ghost seems to have been only relatively and inconsistently present. Being a mixture of wheat and tares, sheep and goats, these churches were doctrinally and authoritatively true but morally and spiritually imperfect. Not being really one in all things, they could not be wholly claimed by the Lord (D&C 38:27). A great sifting was needed, a refining fire was required. The unprecedented destructions at the time of Christ's crucifixion marked the beginning of that sifting and that fire.

The way was thus prepared for the Son of Man to descend from the heavens and establish his church in all of its power and perfection. His own prayer had—to a degree, and for a season—been answered: the Father's will was done on earth as it was done in heaven (Matthew 6:10; D&C 65:6).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is also a church of anticipation. It, too, anticipates additional revelation, the institution of higher principles, the establishment of Zion, the perfecting of the Saints, and the coming of the Son of Man.

Our leaders and many other faithful Saints are doing all in their power to further the Lord's purposes; however,

we are yet to become truly one in all things (D&C 38:27; 101:6; 105:1-6). Such unity probably lies many years in the future. In the meantime the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares continue to dwell side by side. Consequently, we are not without some contention and dissension. Nor have we wholly escaped the plagues of selfishness, dishonesty, worldliness, immorality, family upheaval, and spiritual apathy that beset Babylon (Revelation 18:4; D&C 133:5). Thus, we comprise those wise and foolish virgins foretold by the Lord (Matthew 25:1-13; D&C 45:56-57; 133:10).

It seems that too many of us have overestimated our virtues by underestimating the Lord's standards. Therefore, the Bridegroom has yet to claim his bride—the Church. But he does not delay his coming; it is right on schedule. He has told his servants, “Be faithful, praying always, having your lamps trimmed and burning, and oil with you, *that you may be ready* at the coming of the Bridegroom” (D&C 33:17; emphasis added). Becoming “adorned as a bride” (D&C 109:74) worthy of her divine husband has been for the Church a long, painful process that is not yet over. But, as John saw in vision, it will be accomplished: “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and *his wife hath made herself ready*” (Revelation 19:7; emphasis added).⁴²

Christ will have a pure people, a Zion people (D&C 82:14; 97:21; 100:16). Indeed, even now we observe an acceleration of the prophesied polarization of the forces of good and evil (D&C 1:35-36). This process will continue for some years until it reaches its climax at the Savior's coming.

The destructions which prepared the way for Christ's appearance to the Nephites and Lamanites will have their counterpart in these last days. In due time the Redeemer's wrath will be felt by all mankind. “And upon my house shall it begin, and from my house shall it go forth, saith the Lord” (D&C 112:23-26; 133:2). The eventual result will be “an entire separation of the righteous and the wicked”—both in the Church and in the world (D&C 63:54).

Prior to this total separation of the human family at his final coming, the Redeemer will manifest himself to his

Saints on several occasions (Isaiah 59:20; Daniel 7:13-14; D&C 133:2; 128:24).⁴³ Precious knowledge will be poured down upon his gathered peoples “by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost” even as it was upon the ancient Nephites and Lamanites (D&C 121:26-33; 101:32-34). A time of spiritual unity and power like unto that enjoyed by ancient Enoch and his city lies ahead for the faithful (Moses 7:16-18; D&C 45:64-71). It will foreshadow the glorious millennial reign of earth’s lawful King wherein the Saints will enjoy a sabbath of righteousness and peace of greater length and magnitude than has blessed any other dispensation since time began (D&C 45:59; Moses 7:65).

The perfected church of Christ in the Book of Mormon, blessed as it was with a truly glorious outpouring of the Holy Spirit, was a prophetic microcosm of the worldwide millennial kingdom of God which will come forth out of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (D&C 65; JST, Revelation 12:1-3, 7).

But even as the “little millennium” of the ancient Church was followed by the most terrible apostasy in Book of Mormon history, so will the Lord’s universal reign be followed, in that “little season” when Satan is loosed for the last time, by probably the greatest apostasy since the War in Heaven (Revelation 20:6-10; D&C 88:110-15). The centuries of spiritual darkness which followed the destruction of the Nephite nation in the fifth century A.D. was a portent of the final fate of Satan and his followers. They will be cast into the bottomless pit of the second death where darkness is absolute and from whence there is no known deliverance.

In 1832, the Lord called upon the Church to repent “and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, *but to do* according to that which I have written”(D&C 84:57; emphasis added). In this regard, the message of the Book of Mormon to the Saints in this dispensation is unmistakable: honor your solemn covenants, magnify the gift of the Holy Ghost which has been bestowed upon you, and become sanctified so that you might partake of the glory of the church of the Firstborn and dwell in his presence forever.

Notes

1. Jacob and Joseph were *consecrated* priests and teachers, but *ordained* to the "holy order" or greater priesthood (2 Nephi 6:2). Elder Joseph Fielding Smith explained that they were priests and teachers in the sense that they were given "a general assignment to teach, direct, and admonish the people" (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1957-66), 1:124). Since there were no known descendants of the priestly tribe of Levi in Lehi's colony, the Nephites doubtless officiated in the duties of the Levitical Priesthood pertaining to the Mosaic law by virtue of the Melchizedek Priesthood which they held.

2. While the lesser (Levitical-Aaronic) priesthood pertains to the preparatory gospel (the law of Moses, etc.), the "greater priesthood administereth the [fulness of the] gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God" (D&C 84:19-27). One evidence of the divine calling of Joseph Smith is that he did not presume to organize the Church of Christ before receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood.

3. Being from the non-priestly tribe of Manasseh (Alma 10:3), Lehi and Nephi were, like Jesus, technically ineligible to hold the Levitical Priesthood (see Hebrews 7:14.)

4. The text does not specifically refer to Nephi as a high priest. The term first appears in Mosiah 23:16 where it is applied to Alma the Elder. However, it is not inappropriate to apply it to Nephi who held the higher priesthood and who presided over those priests whom he had personally appointed.

5. Insofar as a Nephite organization is concerned, the word *church* does not appear in the Book of Mormon until Mosiah 18:27. While it is clear that Nephi and his successors taught the people of Christ, there is no textual evidence that the early Nephites had an ecclesiastical organization independent of that associated with the law of Moses.

6. Lacking literal descendants of Levi, the Nephites were obliged to assign holders of the Melchizedek Priesthood to perform the temple duties normally carried out by men of the Levitical order. While the Book of Mormon is silent as to those ordinances associated with the fullness of the gospel being performed in the temple, Nephi was almost surely acquainted with them.

7. It is apparent from Nephi's teachings on the need and purpose of baptism (2 Nephi 31-32) that baptism and the related ordinance of the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost were practiced in the days of Nephi. However, the first recorded instance of actual baptisms is found in Mosiah 18:13-16. The first explicit instance of the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost involved a group of three hundred Lamanites and occurred about 30 B.C. (Helaman 5:43-45; compare 3 Nephi 9:20; Ether 12:14). It has been suggested that the baptism of the Holy Ghost is implied in connection with the "mighty change" experienced by King Benjamin's

people following his discourse on salvation through Christ (Mosiah 4:1-3, 11; 5:2, 7).

8. The dates given are rather rough approximations. It appears that the early Nephite prophets (except Nephi himself, who died in his seventies) lived a hundred years or more.

9. Jacob's prophecy of a future leading away of a remnant of righteous Nephites seems to have prompted him to laboriously engrave the long, convoluted allegory of Zenos (Jacob 5) concerning the various scatterings and gatherings of Israel throughout the world.

10. Nephi had fled to the land of Nephi ("the land of our fathers' first inheritance"—Mosiah 9:1) to escape his vengeful brothers (2 Nephi 5:4-8). The migration of Mosiah I from that land was to the north, where he encountered the people of Zarahemla, the Jewish colony led by Mulek, the son of King Zedekiah, which fled Jerusalem about 587 B.C. (Omni 1:14-16).

11. Mormon implies that whatever formalized church there was came to an end in connection with the overthrow of the Nephite kingdom. Mosiah I was probably the last of the original Nephite kings. He subsequently reigned over the unified Nephite-Mulekite nation until his death in about 160 B.C., when his son, Benjamin, became king. We can only approximate some Book of Mormon dates. While the Jaredites seem to have lived to a good age (Coriantum lived to be 142; his wife died at 102—Ether 9:24), the few Nephite ages given range from 63 to 82 (Mosiah 29:45-46; 4 Nephi 1:20).

12. Although the people of Zarahemla had to be taught line upon line about Israel's God and his commandments, a clear understanding of Christ was had by the prophets who wrote on the small plates of Nephi. For example, Amaleki—the last writer on these plates—said, "I would that ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption" (Omni 1:26).

13. The term *Nephites* also includes the people of Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:13).

14. It is noteworthy that King Benjamin's testimony of Christ was preceded by a period in which false Christs and false prophets, preachers, and teachers caused much discord leading to the defection of many Nephites to the Lamanites. Only the sharp warnings of King Benjamin and other "holy men" brought peace to the land (Words of Mormon 1:15-18).

15. While it is true that the Nephites had been taught concerning the prophecies on the brass plates as well as "all that has been spoken by our fathers until now" (Mosiah 2:34-35), the relevance of these scriptures must have been overshadowed by the external demands of the Mosaic law. If these *obedient* people already enjoyed the *fulness* of the gospel, then presumably they had already taken Christ's name and received a remission of sins. Had such been the case, Benjamin's appeal, "I would that ye *should take* upon you the name of Christ" (Mosiah 5:8; emphasis added;

see also 6:1-3), and the people's plea for a remission of sins (Mosiah 4:2-3), appear anachronistic. It was *because* of their obedience that Benjamin gave them a unique name by which "they may be distinguished above *all the people*" who had come from Jerusalem (Mosiah 1:11; emphasis added; see also 5:11-12). Before bestowing that name, he revealed the "mysteries of God" to them (Mosiah 2:9). These mysteries—declared by an angel—concerned the identity of the "Lord Omnipotent" who was to come to earth and be crucified and resurrected so that all mankind might be saved *through his atoning blood* rather than through the relatively impotent law of Moses (Mosiah 3:2-19). None could plead innocent once they learned of Christ. Therefore the angel told Benjamin, "And even *at this time*, when thou *shalt have taught* thy people the things which the Lord thy God hath commanded thee, even *then* are they found *no more* blameless in the sight of God" (Mosiah 3:22; emphasis added; see 4:5-6, 11; 5:4; Alma 9:19-21). Convinced of the need for the Savior, the people then cried out for the "atoning blood of Christ" and received a remission of sins and spiritual rebirth, thus becoming, by covenant, "the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters" (Mosiah 4:2-3, 11-12, 20, 26; 5:2-10). They had taken upon themselves a name they had not possessed before—"for behold, *this day* he hath spiritually begotten you" (Mosiah 5:7; emphasis added). The whole tenor of the account indicates that Benjamin did not simply reiterate doctrines already understood by the Nephites. He parted the veil and revealed the redemptive power of "Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent" (Mosiah 5:15).

16. I believe that the phrase "after their transgression" refers to the apostasy in the time of Mosiah I, which led to the destruction of the first Nephite nation (Jarom 1:10; Omni 1:12), rather than that of King Noah and his supporters as described in Zeniff's record (Mosiah 9-22). Had there been a functioning church of Christ in the land of Zarahemla, there would have been no need for Alma to organize a second church, nor for Mosiah to grant Alma permission to set up branches throughout that land. In addressing the Nephites in Zarahemla in 83 B.C., Alma the Younger said, "We were brought into this land, and here we *began* to establish *the* church of God throughout this land *also*" (Alma 5:5; emphasis added). Though it had many branches, at any given time there was but one authorized church of God (Mosiah 25:22).

17. See Omni 1:27-30. The account of this colony of Nephites in their ancient land of Nephi is found in Mosiah 7-22.

18. Prior to leaving Zarahemla, Zeniff very likely had been ordained a high priest of the Melchizedek order by King Benjamin.

19. It is very likely that Zeniff restored the temple originally built by Nephi in the sixth century B.C. (2 Nephi 5:16). King Noah seems to have remodeled this same temple on a grand scale, making it far more elaborate and costly than it previously had been (Mosiah 11:10). Like Herod the Great, who remodeled the second temple (that of Zerubbabel; Ezra 3), Noah's project was doubtless more a matter of personal vanity than genuine piety.

20. Zeniff's group left Zarahemla many years before King

Benjamin delivered his discourse on Christ in 124 B.C. (Omni 1:27-30). The extent to which Zeniff and his people had an understanding of the relationship of the law of Moses to Christ is conjectural. In any event, Noah and his priests seem to have been totally ignorant of that relationship, being steeped in idolatry and gross immorality (Mosiah 11:6-15; 12:27-32). Hence the need for the prophet Abinadi to declare essentially the same message to Noah (Mosiah 13:27-28), and especially to Alma, that Benjamin had delivered to his people.

21. There is no textual evidence that Alma ever conversed privately with Abinadi, or that he was ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood by him. However, Abinadi's initial testimony may have been heard by Alma and may have served to prepare him for the prophet's final witness two years later.

22. The source of Alma's authority is not given. He may have been ordained by Abinadi, by an angel, or by some unknown person. His authority to establish the Church appears independent of any earlier ordination to the priesthood.

23. Lacking such authority, King Limhi made no attempt to organize a church or to perform baptisms (Mosiah 21:33-34).

24. This is the first specific reference in the Book of Mormon to an organized church of Christ.

25. The priesthood offices cited in the Book of Mormon are teacher, priest, elder, high priest and, in effect, presiding high priest. Prophets are frequently mentioned. The gift of seership is also cited in connection with Joseph Smith (2 Nephi 3:6-14) and Mosiah II (Mosiah 8:13-17; see 28:16).

26. Whereas all worthy males are entitled to hold an office in the priesthood in the LDS Church, in Book of Mormon times only selected men were so privileged. From all indications, there was no universal priesthood.

27. Alma the Younger is the only man in the Book of Mormon specifically spoken of as exercising the "high priesthood" (Alma 4:20).

28. The Nephite synagogue was "built after the manner of the Jews" (Alma 16:13)—an evidence that the Jews had synagogues before the Babylonian captivity. It was a place of assembly and a house of worship that served both the practical and the spiritual needs of the people (2 Nephi 26:26; Alma 21:16). The sanctuary may have been a portion of the synagogue reserved strictly for worship. The Nephites had synagogues throughout their history (3 Nephi 18:32; Moroni 7:1). The Lamanites also had temples, sanctuaries and synagogues (Alma 23:2; 26:29).

29. Jesus prophesied a similar condition immediately preceding his second coming. Nations as we know them will be no more (D&C 87:6), "and then shall all the *tribes* of the earth mourn" (Matthew 24:30; emphasis added).

30. The greatest of these was Nephi, the grandson of Helaman, of whom Mormon wrote, "He had greater power than they [his opponents],

for it were not possible that they could disbelieve his words” (3 Nephi 7:18; emphasis added).

31. Third Nephi 10:18 is interpreted to mean that Christ appeared in America shortly after the widespread destructions ended. Yet, Mormon states that he came “in the *ending* of the thirty and fourth year” and the upheavals began on the fourth day of the first month of that year (3 Nephi 8:5). What he means by “ending” is not totally clear. A different interpretation might logically argue for a time sometime after the middle of the year. Whether from a spiritual, psychological, or practical standpoint, the survivors might have been too distraught and disoriented to receive the Lord immediately after his resurrection. They would have needed to make provision for the necessities of life and to rebuild their homes. All this would have taken time. Mormon’s description of the people gathered at the temple in Bountiful discussing the physical changes that had occurred (Helaman 11:1-2), and “conversing about this Jesus Christ,” suggests a settled rather than a chaotic situation. (See S. K. Brown, “Jesus Among the Nephites: When Did It Happen?” in *A Symposium on the New Testament* [Salt Lake City: Church Educational System, 1984], pp. 74-77). Similarly, the worldwide upheavals associated with Armageddon (Revelation 16:16-21; D&C 45:47-53) will be followed by a period of comparative calm ending in the Savior’s second coming (Ezekiel 39; JST, Matthew 24:44-49).

32. Following the Redeemer’s subsequent calling of twelve Nephite disciples (3 Nephi 11:18-22; 12:1), they went forth and “formed a church of Christ in all the lands round about” (4 Nephi 1:1).

33. The office of Apostle was introduced for the first time in history by Jesus himself. Since Apostles are, above all things, special witnesses of the resurrected Lord, such a calling could hardly exist prior to his mortal ministry. The twelve Nephite disciples will be judged by the Twelve in Jerusalem (Mormon 3:19).

34. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1972-73), 4:538.

35. Alma’s church seems to have been somewhat more fully organized than Nephi’s. Even so, Mormon describes its ecclesiastical arrangement as consisting only of teachers, priests, and elders, presided over by a high priest. The doctrines and ordinances of Alma’s church were correspondingly simple, consisting only of such first principles as faith, repentance, baptism, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Judgment, and so forth. The primitive Church among the Jews was similarly limited both as to ecclesiastical development and doctrinal maturity. This is made clear when one contrasts the relevant material in the four Gospels with that found in the other books of the New Testament.

36. Moroni provides valuable information concerning the bestowal of the Holy Ghost, priesthood ordinations, the administration of the sacrament, baptism, and certain other Church procedures (Moroni 2-6).

37. Moroni wrote an account of the visions of the brother of Jared

on the plates of Mormon (Ether 4:4-5). These revelations constitute part, if not all, of the sealed portion of the material left untranslated by Joseph Smith. Most commentators believe that these revelations will not be had again until the millennial reign of Christ. However, Moroni wrote that they would be had by the "Gentiles"— meaning the Latter-day Saints —when they "become clean before the Lord" (Ether 4:6). I believe that this will be before the second, or world, coming of Christ.

38. Commenting on this verse, President George Q. Cannon wrote: "In our Church numerous instances have occurred where . . . bread and wine (or water) have been partaken of as a meal, and not, as is usual when the Sacrament is passed in our general meetings, in the shape of small pieces of bread and a little sip of water. . . . It seems from this that in partaking of this ordinance they satisfied their appetites— that is, they ate and drank until they were filled. This would be the proper manner to administer this ordinance now if circumstances permitted" ("Editorial Thoughts [Passing the Sacrament]," *The Juvenile Instructor* 32 [15 January 1897]:52-53). Philo Dibble told Oliver B. Huntington of an occasion in 1838 in Far West, Missouri, during which "the Prophet Joseph Smith gave the people a true pattern. A pattern of the true manner of Partaking of the sacrament. The people came together in the morning without their breakfast, to the bowery on the Public Square where there was prepared a plenty of good bread and a barrel of wine. The bread and wine was blessed, every person ate bread and drank wine as they wanted all day, when they wanted. . . . No one said 'less [let's] go and get a drink' but with solemnity they commemorated the death and sufferings of Jesus. . . . No one was intoxicated during the day" (*Diary of Oliver B. Huntington, 1847-1900*, part 2 [Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Library, 1942], entry of 4 September 1887).

39. The baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost was not bestowed upon any of Jesus' followers among the Jews until after he was resurrected: "The Holy Ghost was promised unto them who believe *after* that Jesus was glorified" (JST, John 7:39; see Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4; emphasis added).

40. The same baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost was experienced by the Twelve in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). In all likelihood, the original Twelve received this ordinance *before* the Nephite twelve, who are answerable to them. This is a further evidence that the risen Savior did not visit America until the end of A.D. 34.

41. During this period, the Lamanites practiced idolatry, human sacrifice, and forced cannibalism (Mormon 4:14, 21; Moroni 9:8). The Nephites were guilty of torture, rape, and cannibalism (Moroni 9:9-10). Doctrinally, Mormon's polemic against the baptism of little children indicates that it was at least advocated by some Church members around the middle of the fourth century.

42. The Lord's use of the metaphor of an oriental marriage is very meaningful. The bride-to-be goes to her husband's house where she spends the day being dressed and adorned by her attendants (the virgins) for her marriage. Late in the evening, about eleven o'clock, the bridegroom leads

a torchlight procession to his house. As he approaches, the shout is heard, "The bridegroom is coming!" The bride's attendants go to meet him with their lighted lamps and escort him into his house and to his waiting bride. The spiritual "adorning" of the Saints *in his house* precedes the Lord's coming. It is now under way.

43. See also Brigham Young in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855-86), 7:142.