

1 NEPHI 11–15

John W. Welch Notes



1 Nephi 11

1 Nephi 11–14 — Overview: The Four Stages of Nephi’s Prophetic Worldview

Nephi’s vision, which stands at the center of the book of 1 Nephi, is four chapters long. It is a powerful and unforgettable prophetic statement. It clearly sees the future of the world, commencing from Nephi’s moment in time, in four major stages:

Stage 1 foresees the coming to earth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God (Found in 1 Nephi 11).

Stage 2 laments the rejection of Christ by most of the people He lived with, visited, and taught, resulting in their being scattered (Found in 1 Nephi 12).

Stage 3 anticipates the role of the Gentiles in preserving parts of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and bringing the word of God to the remnant of scattered Israel (Found in 1 Nephi 13).

Stage 4 speaks of the restoration of the house of Israel and Christ’s ultimate victory over the forces of evil (Found in 1 Nephi 14).

Nephi introduced these four stages in 1 Nephi 11–14. This same sequence will be repeated by Nephi in 1 Nephi 19–22 (See Figure 1).

Four Stages of the Nephite Prophetic View

Number	Stage	1 Nephi 11-14	1 Nephi 19-22
1	 Christ's Coming	1 Nephi 11	1 Nephi 19
2	 His rejection by the Jews and their scattering	1 Nephi 12	1 Nephi 20 (Isaiah 48)
3	 The day of the Gentiles	1 Nephi 13	1 Nephi 21 (Isaiah 49)
4	 The restoration of Israel and the ultimate victory of good over evil	1 Nephi 14	1 Nephi 22

Figure 1 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. “[Four Stages of the Nephite Prophetic View](#).” In *Charting the Book of Mormon*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999.

Indeed, Nephi will again use this same prophetic worldview as the underlying structure behind his teachings in 2 Nephi 25–30, and it will become the foundational framework within which Jacob, Abinadi, and several other Nephite writers will subsequently see the future of their world. I call this “the Nephite prophetic worldview.” Knowing this framework can help all readers in many ways. For example, it helps readers get through

the Isaiah chapters in the Book of Mormon, understanding why the Nephite writers used the particular chapters from Isaiah that they did.

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Vision Guides Nephi's Choice of Isaiah Chapters?](#)" (2 Nephi 11:2)," *KnoWhy* 38 (February 22, 2016).

John W. Welch, "[Getting through Isaiah with the Help of the Nephite Prophetic View,](#)" in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 19–45.

1 Nephi 11–14 — Like Father, Like Son: Aspects of Lehi's Vision Repeated in Nephi's Vision

One of the most interesting things about Nephi's vision in 1 Nephi 11–14 is how subtly and how fully it relates to other prophecies given a few years earlier by his father Lehi. Nephi's vision closely builds on his father's visions in 1 Nephi 1 and also his father's dream of the Tree of Life in 1 Nephi 8, as one should expect it to. And why? Nephi's vision occurred because he wanted to know the meaning of all the things that his father had seen and taught. And consequently, Nephi's vision unfolds precisely that. Nephi saw, learned, and explained what his father had seen, revealed, and boldly testified. An attentive reader will see how aspects of Lehi's vision are repeated and amplified in Nephi's vision.

Indeed, in 1 Nephi 10:17, Nephi tells us that when he heard his father Lehi speaking about the things he had seen in his visions in 1 Nephi 1 and 8, Nephi wanted to "see, and hear, and know of these things" for himself. As he pondered these things, he was "caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain" (1 Nephi 11:1). Nephi later bore record that he indeed "saw the things which [his] father saw" (1 Nephi 14:29).

Astute readers can draw these connections. For example, in 1 Nephi 1:9, Lehi saw "One descending out of the midst of heaven," and in 1 Nephi 11:15–28 Nephi learns about the "condescension of [the Son of] God" (1 Nephi 11:16, 26). In 1 Nephi 8:10, Lehi sees a tree whose fruit is "*desirable*." Nephi similarly describes the Tree of Life as a representation of the "love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most *desirable* above all things" (1 Nephi 11:22).

At least twenty-five elements in Lehi's vision will show up in Nephi's vision. They are fun to find. For example, there is a *great and spacious* building in Lehi's vision (1 Nephi 8:26, 31); this relates to the "*great and abominable* church" repeatedly mentioned in Nephi's vision (see 1 Nephi 13–14). There is a man dressed in a white robe leading Lehi (1 Nephi 8:5); for Nephi, this is the Spirit of the Lord who guides him (1 Nephi 11:11).

Lehi is taken to a “dark and dreary waste” (1 Nephi 8:7); Nephi first sees Jerusalem, and he knows that it is a dark and dreary place.

Lehi goes on to see the head of a river. Nephi will see a fountain of living waters—that fountain being Jesus Christ. Lehi will call out with a loud voice. At that point in Nephi’s vision, Nephi sees Christ with John, the apostle, crying out with a loud voice proclaiming the gospel. Later, Lehi sees that Laman and Lemuel will not come to partake of the fruit. Nephi similarly sees that people reject Christ. Lehi then sees numberless concourses of people, while Nephi sees multitudes like the sands of the sea (See Figure 2).

While reading the Book of Mormon, one is always looking for ways to know that it is true. One of the ways that we can know that this text is true is by noticing and appreciating the overall complexity of Nephi’s account. His vision works beautifully as an interpretive, deeper understanding of what Lehi saw, giving us confidence that there are two witnesses of this great story, justifying that we should be commandment keepers who hold steadfastly to the iron rod.

1 Nephi 11:1 — Desiring Knowledge, Nephi Is Carried Away into a Mountain

One may wonder: Did Nephi go up to an actual mountain or was he just taken there in spirit? Perhaps both. It may well be that as he pondered on his father’s visions and dreams, Nephi wanted to get away from the group’s base camp, and so he went into a nearby mountain or high place. It was common for Jesus to go to the mountains and there to pray and receive transfiguring manifestations.

Back in chapter 2, the Lord told Nephi that he would be a ruler and a teacher over his brothers (1 Nephi 2:22), and that word from the Lord was confirmed by the angel speaking to Nephi and his three brothers (1 Nephi 3:29). That calling would have weighed heavily on Nephi’s mind. So when he wanted to see what his father saw in vision, it was likely because Nephi knew that the Lord had called him to do something meaningful. Nephi testified, “I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Nephi 3:7). How could Nephi accomplish the task of correctly ruling over his elder brothers without seeing what his father saw — without understanding that vision and prophetic perspective?

Nephi puts his account of this vision at the very center of his first book written on his small plates. There are twenty-two chapters in 1 Nephi, and the entire book appears to have been arranged as a chiasm, where elements in the first part of the book are reversed and then repeated in the second part (See Figure 3).

A Comparison of Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision



Lehi's Dream 1 Nephi 8	Reference	Nephi's Vision 1 Nephi 11-14	Reference
Dark and dreary wilderness	8:4	High mountain	11:1
Man dressed in white robe	8:5	Spirit speaks	11:2, 11
Man leads the way	8:6	Spirit's introductory questions	11:2
Man leaves (implied)	8:7-8	Spirit departs	11:12
Dark and dreary waste	8:7-8	Jerusalem	11:13
Prayer for mercy	8:8		
Large and spacious field	8:9		
Tree	8:10	Tree	11:7, 13-18, 20-25
Fruit desirable to make happy	8:10	Love of God most desirable	11:22
Fruit sweet and white above all	8:11	Virgin most beautiful and fair	11:15
Soul filled with joy	8:12	Carried away in the spirit	11:19
Desire to share with family	8:12		
Head of river near the tree	8:14	Fountain of living waters	11:25

(Continued on Next Page)

Call with loud voice	8:15	Christ, John, apostles preach	11:24–31
Come partake of fruit	8:15–16		
Laman, Lemuel do not partake	8:17–18	People reject Christ	11:32–33
Rod of iron	8:19	Rod of iron	11:25
Strait and narrow path	8:20	The apostles preach	11:34
Large and spacious field	8:20	Large and spacious building	11:35
Numberless concourses coming	8:21	Multitudes like sand	12:1
Mist of darkness	8:23	Mists of darkness	12:17
Lose their way and are lost	8:23	Broad roads and are lost	12:17
Others come to tree and partake	8:24	Four generations	12:10–12
River is a divider	8:26	Great gulf divideth them	12:18
Great and spacious building	8:26	Large and spacious building	12:18
Fine dress, mocking	8:27	Pride and vain imaginations	12:18
They fell away	8:28	The good are overpowered	12:19
[Break in Nephi's recitation]	8:29	War between seed	12:20–23
Other multitudes partake	8:30	Gentile nations	13:3
Great and spacious building	8:31	Great and abominable church	13:4–9
		Restoration of Lehi's seed through a great and marvelous work	13:10–14:7
Many drowned in the depths	8:32	Whore upon the waters	14:11
Many are lost in strange roads	8:32	Wars and chaos	14:16

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Figure 2 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "A Comparison of Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision." In *Charting the Book of Mormon*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999.

- A Lehi prophesies warnings of destruction to the Jews and foresees the mercy of God (Chapter 1)
- B Lehi's group departs from Jerusalem (2:2–15)
- C Nephi establishes himself over his brothers by obtaining the Plates of Brass (2:16–4:38)
 - D The sword of fine steel (4:9)
 - E Sariah's concern (5:1–9)
 - F The Plates of Brass as a guide (5:10–6:6)
 - G The sons of Lehi get the daughters of Ishmael and Ishmael joins the group (7:1–5, 22)
 - H Nephi bound with cords in the wilderness (7:6–21)
 - I Lehi's vision of the Tree of Life (8:1–38)
 - J Lehi prophesies about the Old World and about the coming of the Lamb (10:1–22)
 - K Nephi and the Spirit of the Lord (11:1–36)
 - J Nephi prophesies about the New World and the coming of the Lamb (12:1–14:30)
 - I Lehi's vision of the Tree of Life interpreted (15:1–36)
 - G The sons of Lehi marry the daughters of Ishmael and Ishmael dies (16:1–8, 34–35)
 - F The Brass Ball as a guide (16:9–17, 26–33)
 - D The bow of fine steel (16:18)
- C Nephi establishes himself over his brothers by building a ship (17:1–18:4) (3:7; cf. 17:3)
 - H Nephi bound with cords on the ship (18:11–16, 20–21)
 - E Sariah's afflictions (18:17–19)
- B Lehi's group arrives at the Promised Land (18:23–25)
- A Nephi prophesies concerning the fate of the Jews and concerning the mercy of the Lord unto the afflicted (chapters 19–22)

Figure 3 Chiastic Structure of 1 Nephi.

The central point of a chiasm usually contains its most important or pivotal concept. It is thus significant that chapter 11—the center point of First Nephi and its chiastic structure—contains Nephi's vision of the coming of the Lord, of the tree of life, of the iron rod, and the relation of various groups to the Tree of Life, which Nephi understands is a representation of the love of God as manifested by Jesus.

For Nephi, this was likely the most critical vision he ever received, and it proved foundational for him. It can be seen as a kind of Sacred Grove or Sacred Mountain experience for him. That kind of magnitude, allowing Nephi to understand things of the Spirit more fully and in a way that he had never experienced before, made this vision the focus of his first book.

1 Nephi 11:2 — The Spirit Questions Nephi about What He Desires

“What desirest thou?” Have you ever noticed in the New Testament, when the Lord is about to heal someone, He will ask them first what it is that they want from Him? The question “What desirest thou?” precedes the miracle, in Jesus’s day and still today. Nephi was specific in what he asked for. There is a lot to be learned just from how this vision unfolds. Not only was Nephi’s specific question answered, but much more was given, things that likely surprised him, which he had not previously even imagined. Also worth pondering is the possibility that if Nephi had not asked, we and the whole world might never have received the important interpretation and expansion of Lehi’s vision. Asking is important. But be prepared to give an answer to the question: What do you desire? What do you really desire?

1 Nephi 11:16 — The Condescension of God

To “descend” means to “come down.” “Condescend” means to come down “*with* or to a level *with* another.” Nephi saw the condescension of the Messiah on several different levels:

1. Jesus was born as a baby, just like everyone else.
2. He was also born into a lowly social station. Jesus could have been born into an aristocratic or royal family, with wealth and status. But no, He was born as lowly as possible.
3. Nephi saw the baptism of Jesus. What did Jesus condescend to by participating in the ordinance of baptism? He condescended to the Father’s will. He condescended to say, “I will be obedient, and I will submit myself to the will of the Father.” Baptism is a symbol of death followed by being raised to a new life. So, Jesus’ participation in the ordinance of baptism symbolized His willingness to submit to the will of the Father, even unto the point of death.
4. Nephi saw Jesus casting out evil spirits. Is that condescension? He was doing the dirty work, interacting with some pretty nasty folks. Jesus was even willing to deal with wicked, evil spirits. That’s condescension.
5. Following that, Nephi saw Jesus suffer, condescending to experience not just some pain, but pain to the fullest extent.
6. Next, Nephi was shown that Christ would die. That also is a type of condescension, going into the world of the dead, those who have died.
7. And finally, even after Christ was exalted, what did Nephi see Him do? Christ *came down* among the Nephites as a glorified being. What does that say? Even after Christ has overcome, when He could sit on His cloud of glory forever, He is still willing to descend again, and again, to care for those who will come unto Him.

1 Nephi 11:17 — “I Know That He Loveth His Children...”

In 1 Nephi 11:16, the Spirit asked, “Knowest thou the condescension of God?” Nephi answered, “I know that [God] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things” (v. 17). This was one of Elder Maxwell’s favorite verses. Isn’t that the crucial recognition—knowing that God loves His children? Everything else can wait. Even though we do not know the meaning of all things, as long as we know that the Lord loves us and is going to see that things will turn out right, we know what really matters. That is what will sustain us.

How do you deal with the fact that you do not know as much as you would like to know? Can you still be obedient even though you do not know everything? Did Nephi know everything after he had been taught by the Spirit of the Lord? No. Even after all that, revelations will yet continue in Nephi’s life, and so will it be with you.

1 Nephi 11:22 — How is the Tree of Life the Love of God?

Does the Book of Mormon answer the question, “What is the Tree of Life that Lehi saw?” What is this tree that the people are all pressing toward? In 1 Nephi 11:22, Nephi learns that it is a representation of the love of God. Not just the love of God in an abstract way, but the love of God who condescended and came down into this world that He might die for us. That love—that is what the Tree of Life represents.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Didn’t Nephi Mention Mary’s Name?](#) (1 Nephi 11:22),” *KnoWhy* 542 (December 24, 2019).

“What better way to emphasize God’s love than by drawing attention to Christ’s mother, who by the very meaning of her name was love personified and who brought forth the most desirable gift of God? It appears that by using the root meanings of Mary’s name, instead of the name itself, Nephi subtly drew attention to her divinely appointed role to bring forth and raise the Christ Child.”

1 Nephi 12

1 Nephi 12:17 — The Mists of Darkness

Is it important to have a testimony of the reality of Satan? Nephi was shown the doings of Satan many times throughout his vision. I think that it was important for Nephi to know the enemy that he was dealing with and would be dealing with. Nephi will later articulate the many devious ways of the Devil. In reading 2 Nephi 28, look back to what Nephi learned in 1 Nephi 12–14 about Satan’s tactics. Nephi knew the Enemy of all Righteous both by his vision and by his own experiences in life (See Figure 4).

The Ways of the Devil

2 Nephi 28:3–30

Tactic	Quotation	Verse
Misappropriation	"built up, and not unto the Lord"	3
Exclusivism	"I am the Lord's"	3
Disputation	"contend one with another"	4
Sophism	"teach with their learning"	4
Cynicism	"deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance"	4
Secularism	"deny the power of God"	5
Historicism	"the Redeemer hath done his work"	5
Empowerment	"he hath given his power unto men"	5
Skepticism	"believe it not"	6
Naturalism	"he is not a God of miracles"	6
Hedonism	"eat, drink, and be merry"	7
Fatalism	"tomorrow we die"	7
Cavalierism	"it shall be well with us"	7
Popularism	"many . . . shall say"	8
Appearances	"nevertheless, fear God"	8
Rationalizing	"justify in committing a little sin"	8
Criticism	"take the advantage of one because of his words"	8
Entrapment	"dig a pit for thy neighbor"	8
Legalism	"no harm in this"	8
Permissivism	"do all these things"	8
Leniency	"God will beat us with a few stripes"	8
Faddism	"many . . . shall teach after this manner"	9

Sensationalism	*false*	9
Egotism	*vain*	9
Imprudence	*foolish*	9
Arrogance	*puffed up in their hearts*	9
Self-Deception	*hide their counsels from the Lord*	9
Persecutionism	*blood of the saints shall cry*	10
Corruptionism	*they have become corrupted*	11
Oppressionism	*rob the poor*	13
Ostentationism	*because of their fine sanctuaries*	13
Narcissism	*their fine clothing*	13
Supremism	*persecute the meek and poor in heart*	13
Elitism	*stiff necks and high heads*	13
Immorality	*abominations and whoredoms*	14
Distortionism	*pervert the right way of the Lord*	15
Trivialism	*turn aside the just for a thing of naught*	16
Meanness	*revile against that which is good*	16
Dismissivism	*say that is of no worth*	16
Tantrumism	*rage in the hearts of the children*	20
Emotionalism	*anger against that which is good*	20
Mollifying Pacifism	*others will he pacify*	21
Materialism	*into carnal security*	21
Toadyism	*others he flattereth*	22
Relativism	*there is no hell*	22
Complacency	*wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion*	24
Secularism	*we need no more of the word of God*	29
Faithless Humanism	*putteth his trust in man*	30

Figure 4 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "The Ways of the Devil." In *Charting the Book of Mormon*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999.

1 Nephi 13

1 Nephi 13:7–8 — The Desires of the Great and Abominable Church

The church of the devil, in the apocalyptic view, is filled with those who are interested in money, power, prestige, and status. That was what Nephi saw and described. To an extent, we are all guilty of being influenced by that great and abominable church and must take heed.

1 Nephi 13:12 — Columbus Sails to the New World

We now know that Columbus described himself as being the one whose main mission was not to find gold and silver but, as we know because he quoted John 10 in his journal, he saw his main mission as to find "lost sheep somewhere." Columbus attributed his success to the Lord.

Grant Hardy, "[Columbus: By Faith or Reason?](#)" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 32–35.

Arnold K. Garr, [Christopher Columbus A Latter-Day Saint Perspective](#), ed. Arnold K. Garr (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992).

1 Nephi 13:26–28 — Plain and Precious Truths Would Be Taken from the Bible

How would this happen? In what order were things lost? Reading these verses carefully we learn what was lost first. The *gospel*—the basic principles of the gospel were lost first: "they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious" (1 Nephi 13:26). And once a basic knowledge of the Atonement and repentance was lost, what else was consequently lost? The Plan of Salvation.

And second, once a knowledge of the Plan of Salvation was lost, then "many covenants of the Lord" were lost (1 Nephi 13:26). The covenantal nature of baptism, the covenantal renewal in the sacrament, the covenant of marriage, and all other temple covenants were lost. With the understanding of covenants lost, so too was the oath and covenant of the priesthood. It is not as if a few, small, unimportant truths were lost. The very foundation of the gospel was somehow taken or fell away.

Third, once the very foundation of the gospel and its covenantal nature had disappeared, what was lost next? Only then were things "taken away from the book" (1

Nephi 13:28). With the foundation missing, the text and doctrine that was left needed to be justified and explained. Because of this, certain writings (like some texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls) were no longer seen as necessary, or became an embarrassment. For example, the Gospel of Barnabas (a very early Christian text) talks a lot about the physical resurrection of the Lord. That was standard doctrine until about the 3rd century, and then it became a point of contention. Why? Well it became a snag in the gospel fabric already made of tatters. If you believe that God is without a body and is now dwelling in the heavens, then you cannot have scripture that conflicts with that. You must take it out and remove it from the Bible. Things were removed and then even more was taken out to account for the holes. But often, the words of the Bible remained, but their meanings were shifted. Things can be taking out of an ancient text simply because their meanings are not preserved and become lost due to lack of memory when no one remembers what they originally meant.

Book of Mormon Central, "[Were Plain and Precious Doctrines Lost?](#) (1 Nephi 13:26)," *KnoWhy* 15 (January 20, 2016).

1 Nephi 13:35–36 — Nephi Sees Latter-day Scripture Come Forth

Do you feel Nephi's heart when you read these verses? Do you feel his compassion, his empathy and his grief in all the things that he sees? How do you think Nephi must have felt when he was then shown these records coming forth? He probably had many emotions—tremendous excitement, hope and joy. Perhaps, he felt relief. Nephi may have also felt a burden.

When Nephi began his record, he knew he was inspired to write for "a wise purpose," but he did not know the details. Now, in the midst of this grand vision, he learned a little more about the reasons for keeping a record of sacred things. There was so much at stake. There was a tender mercy for Nephi in this experience, for him to see what would be lost and to understand the scope of what he and his posterity must do.

In all of this, we see the love and omniscience of God. Remember that Nephi was shown this vision hundreds of years before Christ was born, before the events of the New Testament, and certainly before those plain and precious things would be lost over the centuries after Christ's death.

1 Nephi 13:38–39 — Other Books Will Come Forth

When Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, there had been no significant discoveries of ancient manuscripts. Joseph Smith was killed in June of 1844. In August of 1844, just two months after the Prophet's death, another young man, Constantin von Tischendorf, wandered out into the Sinai Peninsula and found his way to St. Catherine's

Monastery. There, Tischendorf discovered a full 4th Century Greek Bible which contained texts like the Gospel of Barnabas, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermas, as well as other texts that had not been seen for a long, long time. Subsequently, there came over the next years, an outpouring of ancient texts. Archaeologists went into Iraq and into Egypt and they started finding old records. People started looking in the Vatican and found manuscripts. It became a cottage industry, everybody looking to find ancient texts.

One British archeologist who was digging in Egypt in 1905, looking for gold and mummies, found a mummified crocodile (the Egyptians buried crocodiles) and then another crocodile, and another crocodile. He kept searching, expecting to find a human mummy. In disgust, as the leader of the expedition, picked up one of the crocodiles and threw it down on the ground, and it split open, revealing that someone had stuffed the crocodile full of wadded-up old papyri. To their surprise and joy, the archaeological expedition had discovered a whole trove of early manuscripts, some of which were Christian—for example, a fragment of the Gospel of John from the 2nd Century AD.

Later, other ancient manuscripts were discovered—The Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi Library, the texts from Ebla, and the texts from Ugarit. Hugh Nibley once called this unusual outpouring of ancient records “the peculiar blessing of our generation.”

Let me share a personal story to illustrate this point. During my time in law school at Duke University, I attended a class in the Duke Divinity School from James Charlesworth. He was a very prominent Dead Sea Scrolls scholar working at that time on a translation of Jewish and Christian texts from around the time of Christ that had never been translated and published in English. In this class, we were charged with reading a certain text. Charlesworth presented it as one of the most puzzling texts he had ever run across. His question was: Is it Christian or Jewish? He had no idea where it might have originated, because it was quite unlike anything else that he had ever seen. He explained to this seminar that it tells a story about a man named Zosimus who leaves Jerusalem. He goes out into the desert, wanders and gets lost in a big mist of darkness. He then arrives at the banks of a big ocean or river. He cannot move. He is afraid because he wants to know the way to a life of righteousness. He prays earnestly, and out of the mist he sees the branch of a tree emerging. He holds onto that branch firmly and the tree transports him across the ocean and sets him down in a lovely, beautiful place beneath a tree. He then notices that this tree has white fruit on it that is delicious, and out of the root of the tree is coming a sweet river of fluid. He drinks this and he feels like he has found a life of joy in paradise.

Then, a man walks up to him and says, “Zosimus, what are you doing here? How did you get here?” Zosimus answers, “I prayed and the Lord brought me here.” The man says, “Well, then it must be okay for me to tell you a little bit about who we are. We left Jerusalem at the time it was about to be destroyed by the Babylonians. The Lord brought us over here to this part of the world where we have preserved the way of righteousness. We have been keeping our records, and we have been told that someday these records will go back to Jerusalem. If you have been brought here by the Lord, then I can show these to you.” The text then has about six or seven paragraphs of what was read and what Zosimus was taught.

Zosimus is exuberant and joyous that he now has accomplished his mission. He is then taken back across the ocean and he goes back to Jerusalem. Zosimus’ dream finishes with him building a monument of covenant where he takes the texts and the things that he has learned.

Now you can just imagine: there I was in Charlesworth’s class as he was talking about this recently discovered record from around the time of Christ. Later, he said, “Jack, I thought you were levitating.” I replied, “Well, this may sound strange to you, but it sounded very familiar to me.” I quickly mentioned just a few of the ways the *Narrative of Zosimus* seemed to be a cousin to 1 Nephi. There were many striking similarities.

I was assigned to come back the next class period with a more extensive comparison, which was easy to do. I had mentioned the Book of Mormon on several occasions before in this class which had always been received with mocking and scorn. But when I finished, the class was silent and Charlesworth said, “Well class, as you are thinking about what to make of the *Narrative of Zosimus*, you might want to think about what to make of the Book of Mormon.” Then somebody asked, “Well, when was the Book of Mormon written?” And I answered, “it was translated in 1829 and published in 1830.” They then asked, “When was the narrative of Zosimus first found?” Charlesworth answered, “It was found in an old Slavonic text in Yugoslavia in 1880 and was first translated and published in Volume 10 of the Ante-Nicene Fathers in 1890. There is no way the Zosimus text was known to anyone before then.”

The class was now in an uproar. One of them joked, “Maybe Joseph Smith was a reincarnated Jewish Monk.” To which I answered, “I find it easier to believe the Moroni story than that.” But one smart-aleck classmate, who had always given me the most grief about the Book of Mormon, was the one who came up to me and asked, “Can I get a copy of that book?” I gave him one.

Later, when I met with Charlesworth in his office, he said, “I am beginning to understand why you are so drawn to these texts that I am interested in.” I replied, “Yes, and also because we have a prophecy in the Book of Mormon that says that other books would come forth.” “Really? Where?” he asked. I explained that the prophecy could be found in 1 Nephi, Chapter 13. Charlesworth jumped up and retrieved his copy of the Book of Mormon which was high on a high shelf, blew off the dust, and opened it up. I said, “Look in Verse 39.”

And after it had come forth unto them I beheld *other books*, which came forth by the power of the Lamb, from the Gentiles unto them, unto the convincing of the Gentiles and the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the Jews who were scattered upon all the face of the earth, that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true. (1 Nephi 13:39)

Charlesworth looked at that and asked, “When was *this* written?” I said, “Let’s see, that would have been about 550–540 BC.” He said, “No, no, remind me, when was this published? When did this appear in English?” I said, “This verse was probably translated in June of 1829 and published in March of 1830.” “That’s impossible! No one could have known—none of these books had been found at that time.” At that point Charlesworth stated, “You Mormons, you cannot believe that anymore. You have to *know* that it is true. You have seen it come to pass in your lifetime.”

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Were the ‘Other Records’ Nephi Saw in Vision?](#) (1 Nephi 13:39),” *KnoWhy* 376 (October 26, 2017).

John W. Welch, “[The Narrative of Zosimus and the Book of Mormon](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (1982): 311–332; revised and updated as “[The Narrative of Zosimus \(History of the Rechabites\) and the Book of Mormon](#),” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 323–374.

1 Nephi 14

1 Nephi 14:10 — What Are the Two Churches?

The use of the word “church,” in this context, can easily trip-up modern readers. The word “church” in ancient languages meant “assembly,” “company,” or “congregation.” Thus, in Greek, the word *ecclesia* (often translated as “church”) simply implied a gathering.

In Nephi's vision, we learn that there are two gatherings and that there are *only* two. You are either in the Church of the Lamb of God—the assemblage of the Lamb of God—or in the church/company of those aligned with Satan. We can't always tell who's on the Lord's side, who? It will ultimately be the justice of God that will finally separate all people into one of two groups in that last day. So it is not for us to say who will ultimately be in one group or the other. Nephi wrote chapter 14 with an apocalyptic view, which pertains to the end times and shows how things are going to *conclude*. In the end, there will be only two choices. You either are with the Lord or you are not.

What did Lehi see as the great and abominable church? Lehi called it the great and spacious building. Anybody in the great and spacious building who points fingers at and mocks those who are righteous is in the great and abominable building or church. The word "great" means "very." So, it is *very* abominable and *very* spacious. It is a big building filled with a large crowd.

In contrast, what did Nephi say about the gathering of the righteous? "And I saw that they were few." This is true. There may be more than 16 million people who are members of the Church today, and we are happy for it. But 16 million is a drop in the bucket when compared to the entire world population. That is not to say that a little leaven cannot leaven the entire loaf, or a little salt cannot season an entire pot of stew. But the word few still tells us something about the demographics of righteousness.

Book of Mormon Central, "[Are There Really Only Two Churches?](#) (1 Nephi 14:10)," *KnoWhy* 16 (January 21, 2016).

1 Nephi 14:13–14 — Persecuted Saints Receive Power through Christ

Verse 13 speaks of multitudes fighting against the Lamb of God. Have we not seen Christians and others horrifically massacred throughout history? Yet I believe that verse 14 is the most hopeful verse from Nephi's vision. It shows that the power of God is something that the Saints can count on. This must have been a comfort to Nephi. After he saw this horrible evil and wickedness, Nephi saw little pockets of saints—people who were trying to follow Christ and were blessed with power.

1 Nephi 14:25–28 — John the Apostle Will Write the Rest of the Vision

Finally, there is a lesson in the fact that Nephi was commanded not to write everything that he had seen in his vision. There were things left for John the Apostle to explain centuries later. The Lord directed Nephi to record the vision up to a point. Then, it became someone else's responsibility. It is interesting to think that we each have specific responsibilities, duties, or callings. We should not overstep our bounds. We are allotted

a particular responsibility, and then we must trust that the Lord will call another to finish the task.

Jasmin Gimenez Rappleye, "[How Nephi and the Tree of Life can help you make sense of the Book of Revelation](#)," Book of Mormon Central (Blog), December 10, 2019.



Figure 5 *The Apocalypse of Saint John the Evangelist on the Island of Patmos* by Jan Matsys, 1563. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

1 Nephi 15

1 Nephi 15:1–10 — Have Ye Inquired of the Lord?

At the opening of 1 Nephi 15, after Nephi returned from having his vision, he found his brothers “disputing one with another” about what Lehi had told them. Nephi was exhausted. He had just seen the destruction of his people, and was overwhelmed at the great Plan of Redemption that he had just witnessed. And now he returned to see his brothers arguing.

Remember what he asked them? “Have ye inquired of the Lord?” (v. 8). And what was their response? “We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us” (v. 9). This answer probably left Nephi utterly flabbergasted. How could they possibly not understand that they could ask the Lord and receive the information they needed? Of course the Lord would talk to Laman and Lemuel! But they were not obedient. They were hard-hearted, quick to anger, and filled with doubt. Their wickedness was like a degenerative disease that became worse and worse until there was nothing but emptiness and cynicism left in their hearts. But Nephi saw that this could have been a turning point for them, so he encouraged them to pray and learn for themselves.

As human beings, we all know the general result we want. Most of us want good outcomes as often as possible. What we lack, more often than not, is the understanding of how to get from where we are now to where we want to be. Because the path is unclear, we end up disagreeing about the means and methods to employ to get where we want to go. We disagree on what the consequences might be if we employ “Method A” or “Method B.” Laman and Lemuel likely wanted a similar outcome as Nephi and Lehi—to inherit a good land, to have security in their families, and to live successful lives. However, I do not think they were on board with exactly what needed to be done along the way and what the end results should specifically look like. They certainly had their disagreements about the methods that they would use, some of which were founded in their cultural experience. When they said, “the Lord does not reveal those things to us,” it’s not that they necessarily thought He wouldn’t reveal those things to them at all, but maybe they did not see themselves as recipients of revelation. Within the cultural context of Laman and Lemuel’s world, the high priest of the temple or certain prophets like Moses or Isaiah received revelation. Perhaps they were saying, “the high priest can go into the Holy of Holies and receive revelation, but that’s not our job.” What they were missing, of course, was the reality and importance of individual, personal revelation.

Now, what about you? When was the last time in your prayers you said, “Heavenly Father, teach me something?” We spend a lot of time with the Lord saying, “please bless...,” “thank you for...,” “I’m worried about my children...,” or “help me find a job.” All these things are completely fine in prayers. However, Nephi was a great example. He prayed for his people, for his family, and for his own grace. He prayed for all of those same things we do, *but* he also said, “Heavenly Father, please teach me something. Please help me understand something better.” I think the Lord expects us to do that. He is very generous with answers to those kinds of questions. As we develop that attitude—the attitude of “please help me understand something about the gospel better”—we will have more light to live by, more light to help us understand pros and

cons. The Lord wants and needs us to have more light. He needs us to shine brighter than ever before.

Book of Mormon Central, "[Acquiring Spiritual Knowledge: Act in Faith](#) (1 Nephi 2:16)," *KnoWhy* 260 (January 11, 2017).

1 Nephi 15:30 – The Justice of God

Nephi said that his father Lehi saw the "justice of God." When did Lehi see the justice of God? It is never mentioned specifically in any text from Lehi that we have. But perhaps all that Lehi saw in vision or in dream was a depiction of God's justice— the way in which God will separate the righteous from the wicked. In the dream there was a gulf and there were mists of darkness. People were either under the tree or they were heading to or living it up in the great and spacious building. Such a *division* is, in essence, the way in which ancient people thought of justice.

What symbol do we often use to depict justice? Two pans on a scale. When the scales are balanced, with compensation given to offset damages, we see justice as having been achieved. Somehow, the scales end in equilibrium. In the modern world, we also see justice as being blind. That is why we put a blindfold on Lady Justice.

But in the ancient world, there were no blindfolds associated with the idea of justice. Justice stood with eyes wide open. Justice was a respecter of persons. One's character mattered. Indeed, the symbol of justice in the Book of Mormon and in the Bible is not the scales, but the sword. What does a sword do? The sword divides, it cuts asunder. Justice divides the sheep from the goats. It divides the righteous from the wicked. Even though the sword is not mentioned anywhere in accounts of Lehi's visions (maybe it was present in the lost Book of Lehi on the 116 pages), the sword, in any event, would surely have been there in Lehi's understanding of God's justice.

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Are Rod and Sword Connected to the Word of God?](#) (1 Nephi 11:25)," *KnoWhy* 427 (April 24, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, "[What was the Great and Terrible Gulf in Lehi's Dream?](#) (1 Nephi 12:18)," *KnoWhy* 14 (January 19, 2016).

1 Nephi 15:33–36 – The Wicked Will Be Cast into Hell

There's a wonderful concluding section at the end of chapter 15, in which Nephi wrote about justice and how we will all stand to be judged according to our works and be rewarded with eternal blessings. That is when he said,

... and if their works have been filthiness they must needs be filthy; and if they be filthy it must needs be that they cannot dwell in the kingdom of God; if so, the

kingdom of God must be filthy also. But behold, I say unto you, the kingdom of God is not filthy, and there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God; wherefore there must needs be a place of filthiness prepared for that which is filthy. (vv. 33–34)

This is not to say that a human being can be considered trash. But filthiness (or impurity) are consequences of choices made, and were of great concern to the Israelites. Nephi, who lived under and respected the Law of Moses, would have been particularly concerned about what would be done to purify or deal with the impurities that are natural consequences of sinful behavior or even unconsciously coming into contact with anything that was impure.

Nephi explained that impurity will be discarded and put into what he called “hell,” behind which word may have been *Gehenna* (the Hebrew word often translated as “hell”). *Gehenna* was the valley just south of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and that *Gehenna* was the city garbage dump. At that time, there were a lot of animals in Jerusalem, and *Gehenna*, being the lowest part of the Jerusalem area, was where the people would sweep out all the dung, manure and garbage. That was *Gehenna*, and so, understandably, *Gehenna* was hell. Moreover, there were a lot of things burned in the dump. So, *Gehenna* was a place of trash and burning fires. It was a place of unpleasantness—the flaming fires of justice. That was the image of the burning and purification of filthiness which may well have stood behind what Nephi was describing. Here, again, we have an example of Lehi providing us the principle and Nephi going into greater detail in giving us the explanation.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Do the Scriptures Compare Hell to an Unquenchable Fire?](#) (Mosiah 2:38),” *KnoWhy* 81 (April 19, 2016).