

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



Edited by
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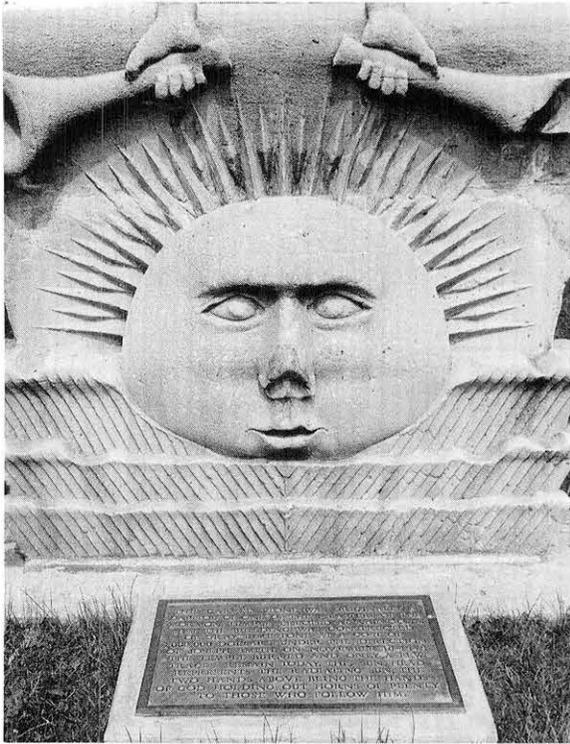
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One of the few surviving sunstones from the Nauvoo Temple, at the Nauvoo State Park. Another sunstone is in the Smithsonian Museum, Washington, D.C.

Mob forces desecrated and defiled the sacred structure. Some physical damage, though not extensive, was sustained. Attempts were later made to sell the temple, but these proved unsuccessful. The building was consumed by fire in October 1848, by the deliberate act of arson. Only the bare walls were left standing. A French Icarian community purchased the site and was preparing to reclaim the structure when it was struck by a tornado, which knocked down some of the walls and damaged others so severely that they had to be razed. Much of the structural stone was later re-used in other Nauvoo buildings.

Today the temple site has been repurchased by the Church. A Nauvoo Temple exhibit is a key part of the Nauvoo Visitors Center. A small model built to scale is on the exact location of the original temple. The well that supplied water for the baptismal font is preserved. Some sunstones and moonstones that once adorned the building remain here and in museums as a reminder of the beauty of this once majestic temple.

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DON F. COLVIN

NEHOR, NEHORISM

See: Antichrists; Secret Combinations

NEPHI₁

The first of several leaders named Nephi in the Book of Mormon, Nephi₁ was an influential prophet and the founder of the NEPHITE people. He was apparently well-educated, faithful and obedient to God, courageous, and bold. An inspired prophet, he had visions of Jesus Christ and of the world's future; he also interpreted the prophecies of others, such as his father, LEHI, and Isaiah. He authored the first two books in the Book of Mormon, which provide virtually all known information about him. He was a skilled craftsman and leader, and succeeded Lehi as leader of the family (ahead of his three older brothers). Above all, he trusted in God: "My voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God" (2 Ne. 4:35).

HISTORY. Nephi was born c. 615 B.C. His father, the prophet Lehi, led his family group out of Jerusalem just after 600 B.C., through the Arabian desert, and across the ocean to the Western Hemisphere. While in the wilderness, Nephi saw a vision that was to shape many of his basic views; it is partially reported in 1 Nephi 11–14. In the promised land, he was designated by his father to succeed him as leader of the family (2 Ne. 1:28–29), but his older brothers LAMAN and Lemuel rebelled and half the group associated with them. Nephi was inspired to flee with all who believed in the warnings and revelations of God (2 Ne. 5:6) and set up a new city, the city of Nephi.

Nephi established his people on sound political, legal, economic, and religious bases. They acclaimed him king, although he resisted this action initially. He taught them to be industrious and to provide for their needs, and he prepared them

with training and weapons for defense against their enemies. He followed the law of Moses, built a temple like the temple of Solomon (though without “so many precious things”), and anointed his younger brothers Jacob and Joseph as priests and teachers to instruct the people and lead them in spiritual matters (2 Ne. 5:10, 16, 26). Before he died, he appointed a new king (called the “second Nephi”; Jacob 1:11) and appointed his brother Jacob as the caretaker of religious records (Jacob 1:1–4, 18).

VISIONS. Because of the great visions and revelations he received, Nephi shared a role with his father as a founding prophet. At a young age he was inspired by the Holy Spirit and believed his father’s words. He heard the voice of the Lord telling him that he would become a ruler and teacher over his brothers (1 Ne. 2:22). He witnessed the vision of the **TREE OF LIFE** shown earlier to his father (1 Ne. 8), which showed him the future birth, baptism, and ministry of Jesus Christ, as well as the future rise and demise of his own people. He was shown also the future establishment of the Gentiles in the Western Hemisphere and the restoration of the gospel in their midst (1 Ne. 11–14). Because of these revelations, Nephi was able to teach his people the gospel or “doctrine of Christ”—the means by which they could come unto Christ and be saved (2 Ne. 30:5; 31:2–32:6). His carefully formulated teaching of this doctrine provided a model that other Nephite prophets invoked repeatedly (*see* **GOSPEL**).

Because the Nephites had received the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, their strict observance of the **LAW OF MOSES** was oriented toward its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, and Nephi explained to his people that they should observe the law of Moses as a means of keeping Christ’s future atonement always in their minds (2 Ne. 25:29–30). The law itself had become “dead” to those who were “made alive in Christ” and who knew that Jesus was the one to whom they could look directly “for a remission of their sins” (2 Ne. 25:25–27).

RECORD KEEPING AND LITERACY. Nephi founded the extensive Nephite tradition of record keeping (*see* **BOOK OF MORMON PLATES AND RECORDS**). He was inspired to keep two separate accounts, both of which were continued for hundreds of years. The official record kept by the kings, known as the large plates of Nephi, began

with the book of Lehi and contained the historical chronicles of the Nephites for one thousand years. The **GOLD PLATES** given to Joseph Smith contained Mormon’s abridged version of Nephi’s large plates and provided most of the text for the Book of Mormon (from the book of Mosiah to the book of Mormon). However, thirty years after leaving Jerusalem, Nephi was instructed by God to compose a second record focusing on spiritual matters. Known as the small plates of Nephi, this record contains Nephi’s retrospective account of the founding events and subsequent prophecies of a line of prophets and priests that descended from Jacob down to about 200 B.C. The opening books in today’s printed Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi through Omni, come from this record. Nephi’s revelations and inspired teachings shaped the religious understanding of his followers, the Nephites.

When Nephi began writing his small plates, he was a mature prophet-king. The record reveals his concern with helping his people and their descendants to understand the future atonement of Jesus Christ and the legitimacy of his own calling as their ruler and teacher. In composing this record, Nephi used his father’s record and his own earlier and more comprehensive record, both unavailable today.

The exceptional literacy of the later Nephite leaders may have been due to the fact that Nephi was a man of letters. The text suggests that he was probably fluent in both Hebrew and Egyptian and states that he had been “taught somewhat in all the learning” of the Jews and of his father (1 Ne. 1:1–3).

Nephi displayed literary learning in the way he organized his writings and in the variety of literary forms and devices he employed, including those of narrative, rhetoric, and poetry, including a psalm. The techniques, stories, prophecies, and teachings of Nephi provided models and substance for his successors (*see* **BOOK OF MORMON LITERATURE**). He loved the writings of Isaiah and quoted them extensively (e.g., 1 Ne. 20–21; 2 Ne. 12–24), often providing interpretations.

THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGES. Nephi constructed the book of 1 Nephi on a tightly balanced and interrelated set of founding stories and revelations, all designed to show “that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Ne.

1:20). Nephi supports this thesis in 1 Nephi with stories of how God has intervened in human affairs to deliver his faithful followers, and Nephi in particular, from their enemies. But these are only types and shadows. Nephi's true proof is set forth in 2 Nephi, where he says that the atonement of Jesus Christ makes available to all who have faith in Christ a liberation from sin and spiritual redemption from hell and the devil, their greatest enemy. All men and women who follow the example of Christ and enter into his way through repentance and baptism will be blessed with a baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost—which brings a remission of sin and individual guidance—so that they might endure to the end in faith and receive eternal life (2 Ne. 31).

Into a more spiritual account on his small plates, Nephi also wove a vivid defense of his own political primacy by using allusions to MOSES and JOSEPH OF EGYPT (Reynolds, 1987). In defending his ruling position as a younger son, Nephi tells how the two oldest sons rejected their father and the Lord and how he (Nephi) was selected and blessed by the Lord and his father. He relates how, with the help of the Lord, he acquired the brass plates (1 Ne. 3–4), persuaded Ishmael and his family to join Lehi's group (1 Ne. 7), prevented starvation in the wilderness (1 Ne. 16), and constructed a ship and sailed it successfully across the ocean (1 Ne. 17–18). In these exploits, Nephi was consistently opposed and threatened, even with death, by Laman and Lemuel; but in each crisis, he was miraculously delivered by the power of the Lord and blessed to complete his task.

Though unable to bridge the gulf between himself and his brothers, Nephi's writings reveal that he was a man with an impressive range of human sensitivities, and he yearned for their welfare. He developed his enormous faith in his father and in the Lord at a young age and never faltered. Consequently, he obeyed without murmuring. He pondered his father's prophecies and repeatedly asked the Lord for personal understanding and direction. He had a deep love and sense of responsibility for his people: "I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them" (2 Ne. 33:3). He also had charity for all other people. Nephi gloried in plainness and in truth, and he knew that his words were harsh against unrepentant sinners (2 Ne. 33:5–9). He anguished deeply because of temptations and his own sins, and particularly because of his feelings of

anger against his enemies (2 Ne. 4:26–29). His spiritual strength and depth were grounded in the knowledge that Jesus Christ had heard his pleas and had redeemed his soul from hell (2 Ne. 33:6).

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NEPHI₂

Nephi₂ succeeded his father HELAMAN₃ in 39 B.C. as the Nephite chief judge, evidently at a young age. Because of wickedness among the Nephites, he resigned the judgment seat in 30 B.C. and went with his younger brother Lehi to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ among the Lamanites. Although imprisoned and threatened with death, they were preserved by the power of God and converted thousands of Lamanites (Hel. 5).

Nephi returned thereafter to Zarahemla, boldly condemned the corrupt Nephite leaders, miraculously revealed the identity of a murderer, and exercised the power of God to invoke a famine on the Nephites. Although the Nephites repented occasionally, their conversion and the peace that followed did not last. When time was about to expire on the prophecy of SAMUEL THE LAMANITE regarding the birth of Christ, Nephi passed the records to his son Nephi₃ and left, never to be heard of again (3 Ne. 1:3; 2:9).

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