

# 1 nephi 11–14—the visions of nephi

# table of contents

1nephi 11. <sup>1-3</sup> — meditation 1 (1 <sup>st</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	3
1nephi 11. <sup>1-3</sup> — meditation 2 (2 <sup>nd</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	6
1nephi 11. <sup>4-7</sup> — meditation (3 <sup>rd</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	8
1nephi 11.8-11— meditation (4th in "the visions of nephi" series)	10
1nephi 11. <sup>12-18</sup> — meditation (5 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	12
1nephi 11. <sup>19-23</sup> — meditation (6 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	15
1nephi 11. <sup>24-25</sup> — meditation (7 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	17
1nephi 11. <sup>26-29</sup> — meditation (8 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	19
1nephi 11. <sup>30-31</sup> — meditation (9 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	21
1nephi 11. <sup>32-33</sup> — meditation 1 (10 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	23
1nephi 11. <sup>32-33</sup> — meditation 2 (11 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	25
1nephi 11. <sup>32-33</sup> — meditation 3 (12 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	27
1nephi 11. <sup>34-36</sup> — meditation 1 (13 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	30
1nephi 11. <sup>34-36</sup> — meditation 2 (14 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	33
1nephi 12. <sup>1-3</sup> — meditation (15 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	36
1nephi 12.4-5— meditation (16th in "the visions of nephi" series)	38
1nephi 12.6-10— meditation (17th in "the visions of nephi" series)	39
1nephi 12. <sup>11-23</sup> — meditation (18 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	42
1nephi 13. <sup>1-9</sup> — meditation (19 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	43
1nephi 13. <sup>10-14</sup> — meditation 1 (20 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	46
1nephi 13. <sup>10-14</sup> — meditation 2 (21 <sup>st</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	47
1nephi 13. <sup>10-14</sup> — meditation 3 (22 <sup>nd</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	48
1nephi 13. <sup>15-19</sup> — meditation (23 <sup>rd</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	49
1nephi 13. <sup>20-23</sup> — meditation (24 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	50
1nephi 13. <sup>24-25</sup> — meditation (25 <sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)	51

1nephi 13. <sup>26-28</sup> —	meditation	(26 <sup>th</sup> in	"the visions	of nephi"	series)	53
1nephi 13. <sup>29-32</sup> —	meditation	(27 <sup>th</sup> in	"the visions	of nephi"	series)	55

### 1 nephi $11.^{1-3}$ — Meditation 1 (1st in "the visions of nephi" series)

<sup>1\*</sup>After I had desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat pondering in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain, which I never had before seen, and upon which I never had before set my foot. <sup>2</sup>And the Spirit said unto me: "Behold, what desirest thou?"

#### Introduction to the series

There is little doubt that Lehi's dream, commonly called "The Tree of Life Vision," is one of the most beloved sections of the Book of Mormon—right behind 3 Nephi's narrative of Jesus' visit to the Americas. Nephi was certainly impressed by his father's dream. No wonder, since the dream not only contained spiritual direction and doctrinal instruction, but also hinted at Nephi's own future, along with that of his brothers.

Above all, the dream told of "a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy... most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted." Upon eating it, Lehi reported, "it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy." Lehi witnessed many other important symbolic elements in his dream. But another stood apart from the others, placing just behind the tree in significance. This element stood in contrast and opposition to the tree. It was the infamous "great and spacious building." The dream, then, was really about two opposing forces, each vying for the attention and affections of humankind: the tree and the building.

In this series of meditations, we will discuss these opposing forces as they were revealed to Nephi in the course of his tutorial which he received under the direction of, initially, "the Spirit" and then, "an angel." As I understand it, Nephi's tutorial consists of fourteen visions, each, except the first, introduced with a heavenly invitation to "Look!"<sup>2</sup>

#### **M** editation

After the first two introductory visions,<sup>3</sup> Nephi witnesses events from the Savior's life in the third through the ninth vision. Then with the second half of the ninth vision and running through the fourteenth vision, Nephi witnesses the nature and dangers of the great and spacious building, or the wisdom and pride of the world, that stands in opposition to God, and how the Lord responds to its opposition, evils, and dangers. The length of these final visions, which are roughly chronological, illustrate the importance of the building to the vision, how the building stands in opposition to God, and what God does to assist us resist and overcome the allure that the building represents.

Before Nephi's visions can begin, he must be prepared for them. His preparation consists of at least three elements: desire to understand, faith in God's willingness and ability to grant understanding, and the willingness to exert his faith through thought and prayer. We begin with his desire.

"after I had desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>And I said: "I desire to behold the things which my father saw."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See 1 Nephi 8.<sup>10-12</sup>

 $<sup>^2</sup>$  1 Nephi  $\hat{1}1.^1\text{-}14.^{30}.$  As I understand them, the 14 visions of varying lengths, are:  $11.^{1-7};\ 11.^{8\text{-}11};\ 11.^{12\text{-}18};\ 11.^{19\text{-}23};\ 11.^{24\text{-}25};\ 11.^{26\text{-}29};\ 11.^{30};\ 11.^{31};\ 11.^{32\text{-}36};\ 12.^{1-10};\ 12.^{11\text{-}23};\ 13.^1\text{-}14.^8;\ 14.^{9\text{-}17};\ 14.^{18\text{-}30}$   $^3$  1 Nephi  $11.^{1-7}$  and  $11.^{8\text{-}11}.$ 

to make them known unto me, as I sat pondering in mine heart...

Nephi had confessed his desire earlier.

"\*After I, Nephi, having heard all the words of my father, concerning the things which he saw in a vision, and also the things which he spake by the power of the Holy Ghost, which power he received by faith on the Son of God—and the Son of God was the Messiah who should come—I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things..."4

The importance of righteous human desire and God's inclination to respond to it is not to be underestimated. In one of his well-known parables, Jesus tells of a man indebted to the tune of ten thousand talents—a debt impossible to repay. The debtor pleaded with the loaner, who happened to be king, to forgive the debt, whereupon the king, "moved with compassion," "loosed him, and forgave him the debt." Later, when the debtor had forgotten the benefit granted him, the king reminded the debtor of the grace that was shown him: "I forgave thee all that debt, *because thou desiredst* me." 5

Nephi not only possesses a righteous desire to understand. He also possesses a correct idea of God, His character, and His willingness and even joy in responding to righteous human desires. Nephi believes that he can come to understanding

"by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well in times of old as in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men. For he is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and the way is prepared for all men from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him. For *he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them*, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round."

It is always nice to believe that God has given understanding to many past faithful inquirers in innumerable matters. But this is not enough. We must believe that he hasn't changed, that he is always the same, and that he will respond to us as he has responded to the faithful inquirers of the past. Nephi believed this.

But Nephi did not approach God in inquiry empty handed. He believe that God would provide a feast, but that he needed to bring a spoon to the feast with him. So, in preparation for the anticipated revelation, Nephi tells us that he "sat pondering in mine heart."

This is Nephi practicing the principle that God would later teach the young Joseph Smith.

"Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me..."

Because of Nephi's desire, trust in a generous God who opens his heart<sup>8</sup> to faithful inquirers through revelation, and his willingness to evidence his desire and trust through personal spiritual and intellectual

<sup>8</sup> See DC 35.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> 1 Nephi 10.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See Matthew 18.<sup>23-35</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> 1 Nephi 10.<sup>17-19</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> DC. 9.<sup>7-9</sup>

effort, however humble, Nephi was gifted with the fourteen visions that served him and us with understanding, inspiration, and life-direction. Through Nephi, we are reminded of Jesus' beloved invitation.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

As we study take such invitations to heart and study Nephi's fourteen visions, we, like him, can deepen our understanding and appreciation for God's great plan of happiness, salvation, and mercy.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: October 23, 2024)

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Matthew 7.<sup>7-11</sup>

### 1 nephi 11.<sup>1-3</sup>— Meditation 2 (2<sup>nd</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)

<sup>1\*</sup>After I had desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat pondering in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain, which I never had before seen, and upon which I never had before set my foot. <sup>2</sup>And the Spirit said unto me: "Behold, what desirest thou?"

We do not know how long it has been since Lehi related his life-changing "Tree of Life vision" to his family. Whether days, weeks, or months, Nephi is still turning the dream over and over in his mind. He desires to understand. He believes that God is the kind of Being who responds to the sincere desires of a petitioner. Having demonstrated his sincere desire and trusting belief by thinking, pondering, and praying about all that his father told him, Nephi is suddenly "caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain, which [he] never had before seen, and upon which [he] never had before set [his] foot."

One can imagine Nephi's confusion as he looks around and finds himself in an unfamiliar place. One can imagine his heightened concentration as he considers where he might be, which direction home might be, and if and how and when he might be able to return. Perhaps this heightened concentration is one of the purposes behind his sudden removal from a known to an unknown location. To whatever degree Nephi has been thinking and pondering in hopes of understanding his father's dream, it has been insufficient. He needs to be shocked into an even more heightened mode of concentration. Being suddenly and uncertainly whisked off to some unknown height would certainly serve to do just that.

But Nephi's being whisked off to a location "which [he] never had before seen, and upon which [he] never had before set [his] foot," might signify more than the need for increased concentration. It might also signify that Nephi is about to enter a new intellectual and spiritual world unlike anything he has previously experienced. Indeed, unlike anything he has ever even imagined. The dream and the interpretation thereof is expansive in ways far surpassing his previous and present expectations. Whatever Nephi's speculations about the meaning of his father's dream, they were too small. Too provincial.

This can serve as warning, invitation, and encouragement to all of us. We often underestimate God and the degree to which He is willing and able to enter our lives. We underestimate His ability to reveal and create beyond our myopic vision and expectations.

Jesus' mother, Mary, like her ancestress, Sarah, underestimated God. Given her circumstances, she could not imagine how God might fulfill His promise of a son. She needed to be reminded,

"Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" 1

"With God nothing shall be impossible."<sup>2</sup>

No doubt, Jesus learned this lesson through his own experiences with his Heavenly Father, but we have to believe that his mother planted this seed of faith in God in his heart. We hear Jesus speak the truth that his mother had learned when he reassured a wavering father that his demon possessed son could be made well and whole.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>And I said: "I desire to behold the things which my father saw."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Genesis 18.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Luke 1.<sup>37</sup>

"Jesus said unto him, 'If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."

Jesus passed this truth on to his disciple, Saul of Tarsus, who then passed it on to the saints of Ephesus. God, he bore witness "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask of think."

This is true in all aspects of our lives. But, Nephi's experience on the unknown mountain and in receiving a revelation far beyond his previous speculations and imaginings, reminds us that it is certainly true of our ability to receive revelation. In this regard, we too often live, as Brigham Young once complained, "far below our privileges." God does not think small. When it comes to bestowing revelation upon those who love and serve him, He has very, very expansive desires.

"For thus saith the Lord—'I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end. Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory. And to them will I reveal all mysteries, yea, all the hidden mysteries of my kingdom from days of old, and for ages to come, will I make known unto them the good pleasure of my will concerning all things pertaining to my kingdom. Yea, even the wonders of eternity shall they know, and things to come will I show them, even the things of many generations. And their wisdom shall be great, and their understanding reach to heaven; and before them the wisdom of the wise shall perish, and the understanding of the prudent shall come to naught. For by my Spirit will I enlighten them, and by my power will I make known unto them the secrets of my will—yea, even those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor yet entered into the heart of man."

Oh, "who could have supposed that our God would have been so merciful!"6

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Mark 9.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ephesians 3.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> DC 76.<sup>5-10</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Alma 26.<sup>17</sup>

### 1 nephi 11.4-7— Meditation ( $3^{rd}$ in "the visions of nephi" series)

Upon setting Nephi down on the top of an unknown mountain, the Spirit already knows of Nephi's desire to understand his father's dream, his faith in God's willingness and ability to grant his wish, and the effort in thought and prayer that he has already invested in hopes of achieving his desire. Nevertheless, the Spirit allows Nephi to exercise his agency and provides him the opportunity to verbally express his desire. "Behold, what desirest thou?" the Spirit asks. Nephi's answer is immediate.

"I desire to behold the things which my father saw."

It is at this point that the conversation takes an unexpected turn; a turn that, I believe, serves as an early interpretive key to understanding Lehi's dream. We might have expected the Spirit to ask, "Do you believe that your father saw *the vision* of which he has spoken?" But that is not what the Spirit asks. Rather, he asks,

"Believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken?"

This difference between what we might have expected and what we get is important. The Spirit's question serves to remind us that the tree is at the center of the dream. Everything revolves around, leads to, and responds, positively or negatively, to the tree. Without the tree, the dream would be unmoored, pointless, meaningless. The Spirit's tutorial will remain fixed on the tree throughout, though with different perspectives.

Upon hearing Nephi's positive reply, "Yes, I do," the Spirit turns his attention from Nephi to God and expresses praise for God as, apparently, he surmises that Nephi's belief came, largely, due to God's grace in Nephi's life. And, indeed it had.

"I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold *he did visit me*, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father..."

We have, in our first *Short Simple Sermon* in this series, already noted how responsive God is to a mere desire. Often the desire is the merest whisp of a desire to just believe.<sup>2</sup>

After praising God for his merciful oversight over all the earth, the Spirit promises "a sign." This, like the Spirit's unexpected question serves as another interpretive hint. Here is the "sign" or signal.

"After thou hast beheld the tree which bore the fruit which thy father tasted, thou shalt also behold a

1

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>\*And the Spirit said unto me: "Believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken?" <sup>5</sup>And I said: "Yea, thou knowest that I believe all the words of my father."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>And when I had spoken these words, the Spirit cried with a loud voice, saying: "Hosanna to the Lord, the most high God; for he is God over all the earth, yea, even above all. And blessed art thou, Nephi, because thou believest in the Son of the most high God; wherefore, thou shalt behold the things which thou hast desired. <sup>7</sup>And behold this thing shall be given unto thee for a sign, that after thou hast beheld the tree which bore the fruit which thy father tasted, thou shalt also behold a man descending out of heaven, and him shall ye witness; and after ye have witnessed him ye shall bear record that it is the Son of God."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 1 Nephi 2.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See Alma 32.<sup>27</sup>

man descending out of heaven, and him shall ye witness; and after ye have witnessed him ye shall bear record that it is the Son of God."

With the announcement of the "sign," Nephi's first vision closes. He will experience the promised sign in his second through ninth visions. However, the promise itself, as we have suggested is an interpretive key. First, he will see the tree. Then, immediately, he will see Jesus. The tree... then Jesus. The tree.... Jesus. Just to be clear the tree and Jesus are juxtaposed with each other.

#### Why?

We will let the reader ponder on that while we recap.

SPIRIT: "Nephi, what do you want?"

NEPHI: "I want to see what Dad saw?"

SPIRIT: "Do you believe your Dad saw the tree [not 'the vision']?"

NEPHI: "Yes."

SPIRIT: "Thank you, God, for having so blessed this boy!"

SPIRIT: "O.K., then, Nephi. Your visions will begin like this. First, you will see the tree. Then,

immediately afterwards, you will see Jesus, the Son of God."

Clearly, the Spirit is pretty fixated on the tree.

So, again, why juxtapose the tree... and Jesus? Nephi will learn, as, I'm sure, you already know, that the tree and Jesus are intimately connected. In fact, we could just say, indeed, we do say that they are one and the same. The tree is a sign, signal, symbol for Jesus. But we will wait on Nephi before saying more about that.

But we will say, now, as we so often do, "Today is as good a day as any." What's today a good day to do? Today is as good a day as any to acknowledge that we are what we are, we believe the truths that we believe, we do the good that we do, however imperfectly, because of God's merciful intervention and participation in our lives. Today is also as good a day as any to listen carefully to the questions that enter our heads; listen to the questions because they are so very often the initial promptings of the Holy Spirit—promptings that are intended to bring us to greater revelation and to greater understanding of, appreciation for, and intimacy with the Lord Jesus.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

### 1 nephi 11.8-11— Meditation (4th in "the visions of nephi" series)

And I looked and beheld a tree; and it was like unto the tree which my father had seen; and the beauty thereof was far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty; and the whiteness thereof did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow. <sup>9</sup>After I had seen the tree, I said unto the Spirit: "I behold thou hast shown unto me the tree which is precious above all."

<sup>10</sup>And he said unto me: "What desirest thou?"

<sup>11</sup>And I said unto him: "To know the interpretation thereof"—for I spake unto him as a man speaketh; for I beheld that he was in the form of a man; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another.

In his first vision, Nephi was transported to an exceeding high mountain which he had never seen, let alone climbed before. With his transport to this previously unknown mountain, Nephi's mind was more focused and more prepared for the revelations that he was about to receive, first from the Spirit and then from an angel. In addition, his transport to a previously unimagined location signified that the revelations he was about to receive would go well beyond whatever thoughts and speculations he had previously entertained concerning the importance and meaning of his father's dream. His first vision ended with a "sign." This was the sign.

"After thou hast beheld the tree which bore the fruit which thy father tasted, thou shalt also behold a man descending out of heaven, and him shall ye witness; and after ye have witnessed him ye shall bear record that it is the Son of God."

With the angel's "Look!" in today's reading, we come to Nephi's second vision in which he saw the first half of the promised sign: the tree.

I know that it might simply be thought of as the printer's choice, that '!' of the angel. But whoever or whyever they made it, I have always appreciated the choice. In it, I hear the angel's seriousness in wanting Nephi to not only see what he is about to be shown, but to carefully consider and understand its significance. In addition, I think that I hear in the angel's exclamation point the excitement and joy he feels at what he is so privileged to reveal. I can't help thinking of the huge "multitude of the heavenly host"—angels—who appeared to lowly shepherds at Jesus birth and joyously sang,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

There ought to be a '!' on the end of that sentence too. I know I feel it. And I know that the tree that Nephi is about to see is worth a lot more than just one exclamation point. We could fill the universe with exclamation points and still not capture the grandeur of the tree

Nephi's father had described a tree "whose fruit was desirable to make one happy." The tree's fruit, he said, "was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted" and "white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen. Upon eating the fruit, "it filled [his] soul" with such "exceedingly great joy" that he came to feel that "it was desirable above all other fruit."<sup>2</sup>

Now, Nephi sees the selfsame tree. It is everything he had heard it was, and more. "The beauty thereof was far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty," admitted Nephi. "The whiteness thereof did exceed the

1

<sup>8\*</sup>The Spirit said unto me: "Look!"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Luke 2.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> 1 Nephi 8. <sup>10-12</sup>

whiteness of the driven snow." No doubt about it, it was "precious above all."

Some might have been satisfied at that. Walked away full. But, apparently, the Spirit heard something in Nephi's voice or saw something in his countenance, or felt something in his soul that gave him reason to think that Nephi, grateful for what he had been privileged to see, was hungry for more.

"What desirest thou?"

"I want to know what it *means*! I want to know what the tree symbolizes. I am smarter than to be literal minded all the time. I am smart enough to know that whatever appears literal often bears within itself a more lasting and eternal significance."

"As a matter of fact, I know that while you appear in the physical form to be a man, you are something more than a man. You are something more enduring. I know, in fact, that you are God."

I appreciate Nephi's reluctance to settle even in a moment of the utmost gratitude and wonder at what he had already seen. His refusal to settle, his request to know if there was more, propelled him on to the next revelation, and the next, and the next one after that. It propelled him on to a lifetime of revelation and deepening understanding, appreciation, and intimacy with that Being, "even God, the greatest of all."

As we have already suggested, and as will become clear as the visions continue, Nephi was right. The tree is symbolic of something, or, better, of someone. It is, in the end, a multifaceted symbol for Jesus, Son of God. And he does, as Nephi and his father so beautifully testify, have within him a sweetness and whiteness that surpasses all others. He is, indeed, precious above all. His brings a joy that is truly beyond words.

Paul was right to pray that we

"May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God."

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> We will not engage in that old and tired debate about whether Nephi had been speaking to the always disembodied "Holy Spirit," or the still disembodied Yahweh, or whoever. The fact is, he was conversing with a God, whether God, the Father, or God, the Son, or God, the Holy Spirit. That's enough for me. What one hears and sees and feels from any one of them is the same as one hears and sees and feels from each of them.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> DC 19.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ephesians 3. <sup>18-19</sup>

# 1 nephi 11.<sup>12-18</sup>— Meditation (5<sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)

And I looked as if to look upon him, and I saw him not; for he had gone from before my presence. <sup>13</sup>\*I looked and beheld the great city of Jerusalem, and also other cities. And I beheld the city of Nazareth; and in the city of Nazareth I beheld a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white. <sup>14</sup>\*I saw the heavens open; and an angel came down and stood before me; and he said unto me: "Nephi, what beholdest thou?"

Nephi: "What is 8 + 8?"

Spirit: "George Washington."

Nephi: "Excuse me?"

Spirit: "George Washington. He was the first president of the United States."

Nephi: "But, my question was, 'what is 8 + 8?' Why do you answer a question that I did not ask?"

What, you may ask, does this short dialogue have to do with Nephi and his tutorial?

Good teachers and good tutors address needs, concerns, and questions that are pertinent and asked. One doesn't ask for bread only to be given a stone (See Mt. 7.<sup>7-11</sup>). We must keep this in mind as we continue our examination of Nephi's tutorial.

The Spirit has already demonstrated that of all the "symbols" found in Lehi's dream, the one that most interests him is the incomparable tree. Responding to Nephi's desire to "behold the things which my father saw," the Spirit asked him, "Believest thou that they father saw *the tree* of which he hath spoken?" Hearing Nephi's affirmative reply, the Spirit granted Nephi a view of the tree, juxtaposed with "the Son of God." Upon seeing the tree—everything that his father said it was—and sensing, apparently, the Spirit's unwavering focus on the tree above all else, Nephi asked "to know the interpretation thereof."

The vision that follows, Nephi's third in relation to his father's dream, is in direct answer to this question: "What does the tree represent?" Any response that does not answer this direct question would be like answering "George Washington," to the question, "What is 8 + 8?" The answer to the question is "16."

Like a camara that begins its view from afar and then zooms in closer and closer on a specific object, Nephi is first shown the land of Israel with its many cities. As the camara zooms in, he sees first Jerusalem and then Nazareth.

Nephi: "What does the tree represent?"

Spirit: "Here, let me show you Nazareth."

Nephi: "Why Nazareth? What does Nazareth have to do with the tree?

<sup>12\*</sup>He said unto me: "Look!"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup>And I said unto him: "A virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup>And he said unto me: "Knowest thou the condescension of God?"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup>And I said unto him: "I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup>And he said unto me: "Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh."

The camera zooms in closer, entering one of the abodes of the ancient city.

"Nephi: "What does the tree represent?"

Spirit: "Here, let me show you a virgin?"

Nephi: "Why a virgin? What does a virgin from Nazareth have to do with the tree?"

The camera zooms in closer on the virgin, sitting in her abode in Nazareth.

"Nephi: What does the tree represent?"

Spirit: "Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of

the flesh."

It seems to me that unless the Spirit is an unreliable tutor and witness, giving a stone where bread is asked, he has faithfully answered Nephi's specific question: "What is 8 + 8... What does the tree represent?"

"8 + 8 = 16... The tree represents the Son of God."

The visons that follow seem to support and confirm this conclusion. But, before turning to them, we must make note of one central question that the Spirit posed to Nephi: "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" 1

Nephi confesses that he does not. But he does understand that love flows through every scene he has seen. He has felt it engulf the village of Nazareth. Encompass the virgin. "I know," Nephi testifies, "that he loveth his children."

The Psalmist testifies that God

"condescends to look upon heaven and earth."<sup>2</sup>

Now, commensurate with His habit, He has come down, visited, and loved a lowly, powerless virgin. She herself would say,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> I am not really happy to feel the need to address this impossible issue, but, here goes. In the course of addressing it, I will be making several points. I do not know, or care how the virgin, Mary, became pregnant. Whether God somehow mysteriously and spontaneously fertilized an egg as in traditional Christianity, or whether an embodied immortal engaged in sexual intercourse with an embodied mortal as suggested by Brigham Young, who, freed by the bold imagination of his predecessor, Joseph Smith, felt free to entertain any damn thought that popped into his noggin, all speculations are worse than useless. Here, I show my conservatism. Scripture did not address such questions because they did not contribute to the writers' purpose or human advancement. I am interested in the purposes and intentions of scripture, not idle speculation.

While I do not have a dog in this fight, I do have a strong sense that when Nephi speaks of "the condescension of God," he heard, "the condescension of Yahweh." He was no modern day "Christian," with a trinitarian view of the Godhead. Neither was he an modern day "Mormon" with a Godhead constituted by three separate and distinct beings.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Psalm 113.<sup>6</sup>, author's translation.

"He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name."

Or, as the Psalmist put it, God is

"the One who raises the powerless from their humiliation; the One who lifts the destitute out of their desperation, so that they may associate with those who are noble, with the most noble citizens among my people."

Now, commensurate with His character, He is coming down to enter a "tabernacle of clay" (Mos. 3.<sup>3</sup>) and live and move and work among, yea, love a lowly, fallen race. Nephi will see this condescension in its fulness in following visions. He will see just how much God loves a world that is seemingly unloving and unlovable.

"Marvel that he would descend from his throne divine To rescue a soul so rebellious and proud as mine, That he should extend his great love unto such as I, Sufficient to own, to redeem, and to justify. Oh, it is wonderful that he should care for me Enough to die for me! Oh, it is wonderful, Wonderful to me!"

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Luke 1.<sup>48-49</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ps. 113.<sup>7-8</sup>, author's translation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> LDS Hymn: "I Stand All Amazed"

Through personal faith and engaged pondering, Nephi has demonstrated the sincerity of his desire to "behold the things which my father saw," and so come under the tutelage of Spirit on an unknown and "exceedingly high mountain (1<sup>st</sup> vision). Nephi has seen the tree which his father saw, has seen it juxtaposed with "the Son of God," and has seen that the tree is every bit as desirable as his father testified (2<sup>nd</sup> vision). Wanting more, wanting to know what the tree represented, Nephi has been shown the Israelite city of Nazareth, along with one of its residents: the most beautiful virgin imaginable. He has learned that the virgin is "the mother of the Son of God" (3<sup>rd</sup> vision).

As Nephi's 4<sup>th</sup> vision opens, we must remember his question, the question that the angel is surely in the process of answering: "What does the tree represent?" The angel shows Nephi the same virgin as before, but this time "bearing a child in her arms." He then announces,

"Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!"

Just as the Spirit had juxtaposed the tree and "the Son of God" in Nephi's 2<sup>nd</sup> vision, the angel now juxtaposes, once more "the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father" with the tree.

"Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?"

It could not be more obvious. We now anticipate Nephi's answer to the angel's question: "the tree is 'the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father." But, this is not how Nephi phrases his answer.

"Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men..."

It is worth considering why Nephi answers as he does. Nephi does not yet know what kind of life the Son of God will lead—that revelation will come in the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> visions. Nor does he yet know what sort of death he will die—this revelation is pending, awaiting his 9<sup>th</sup> vision. But, having witnessed his birth, Nephi does know that the Son of God will live. Live among human beings!

As we have said so often, while we readily see atonement in his suffering and death, the incarnation of God is, itself, no less an act of at-one-ment, an expression of God's connectedness and solidary with us, even in our weakest, most exposed, naked, and sinful state.

What kind of love is this? What kind of commitment?

Think what it cost him, God the Son, to come to earth, even without suffering and death. Think what glory he left behind, he who left his divine habitation where

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup>\*I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: "Look!"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup>And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms. <sup>21</sup>And the angel said unto me: "Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup>And I answered him, saying: "Yea, it is 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."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup>And he spake unto me, saying: "Yea, and the most joyous to the soul."

"Rectitude and justice are the foundation of Your throne.

Unwavering devotion and fidelity are present with You."

"where thou sittest enthroned, with glory, honor, power, majesty, might, dominion, truth, justice, judgment, mercy, and an infinity of fulness, from everlasting to everlasting."<sup>2</sup>

And think how he left this glory only to be battered every day, day in and day out by human perversion. Think how his holy sensitivities were "offended." Think. Just think what it must have been like to be in such close proximity to the vilest of perversion when once he dwelt in such holiness. Nephi could not know, yet, how the Son of God would respond to these assaults of human perversion, though he would learn as his visions continued.

It boggles the mind. All of it. Boggles the mind just as it did Enoch's when he saw God so attached to human beings that God wept when he saw their suffering.

"And thou hast taken Zion to thine own bosom, from all thy creations, from all eternity to all eternity; and naught but peace, justice, and truth is the habitation of thy throne; and mercy shall go before thy face and have no end; how is it thou canst weep?"

And he didn't even get to come here and live a life of luxury and power and prestige. He was born in a place stinking of manure. Dressed in rags. Laid in a feeding trough. Lived in a backwater region of a backwater country. Here he would suffer the same privations as everyone else. Nay, worse privations than anyone else. Indeed, when it was all said and done, he would have "descended below them all."

Since the beginning of his visions, Nephi has felt the love of God pervading every moment. Nephi will see even more evidence of God's love as his visions multiply and expand. But just this much, just the very divine act of incarnation is enough to help Nephi understand the depth of God's love and commitment to him and to all of us. Even these initial revelations of the incarnation was enough to demonstrate to Nephi that the love of God was "the most desirable above all things."

But the angel, could not leave it at that. The love of God was also "the most joyous to the soul."

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Psalm 89.<sup>14</sup>, author's translation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> DC 109.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Moses 7.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See DC 122.<sup>8</sup>

# 1 nephi 11.<sup>24-25</sup>— Meditation (7<sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)

<sup>24</sup>And after he had said these words, he said unto me: "Look!"

And I looked, and I beheld the Son of God going forth among the children of men; and I saw many fall down at his feet and worship him. <sup>25</sup>And \*I beheld that the rod of iron, which my father had seen, was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; which waters are a representation of the love of God; and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God.

This vision, Nephi's 5<sup>th</sup>, is granted, remember, because of Nephi's sincere desire to "know the interpretation" of the tree which his father and then he have seen. In his two previous visions, Nephi has observed a beautify, but unnamed virgin who anode in the Israelite city of Nazareth. We know this virgin to be Mary. Nephi has seen that she bore a son, who is "the Son of God," Jesus. Seeing all of this in juxtaposition to the tree and in response to his desire to know what the tree represents, Nephi comes to understand that the tree represents the love of God. This love is manifest in the Son of God and his incarnation. In this 5<sup>th</sup> vision, Nephi has a fuller view of the incarnation as he "beheld the Son of God going forth among the children of men." The tree, then, can be understood to be a representation of Jesus himself.

While the tree and the great and spacious building dominate Lehi's dream, and will dominate Nephi's interpretative visions, there are other elements to the dream. In this current vision, Nephi sees that the river of water which, his father saw, "ran along, and... was near the tree," also represented the love of God. In addition, Nephi observed that the "rod of iron, which [his] father had seen, was the word of God." He also observed that this rod of iron "led... to the tree of life." In other words, the rod of iron led to the love of God.

Now, during his earthly ministry, Jesus maintained above all else that he "was in the beginning with God," and that he "proceeded forth and came from God." He was "the Word." who had "come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." Jesus testified of such things over and over again.

Jesus was a revelation. He was God's revelation of Himself; of His true nature and character. Jesus was, then, God's introduction of Himself to humankind.

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared [introduced] him."

Every word Jesus uttered and every act Jesus performed—right up to and including his suffering and death—was Jesus "acting out" the Father. "Do you hear what I am saying? I am saying the very thing that God would be saying if he were here right now." Thus, spoke Jesus. "Do you see what I am doing in this moment? I am doing the very thing that God would be doing if he were here in this moment."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 1 Nephi 8.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> John 1.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> John 8.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> John 1.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> John 6.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> John 1.<sup>18</sup>

"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

Of course, Jesus could say and do and be all of this because he was, in fact, God. His real name, his divine name was Yahweh.

We can see in all of this the powerful versality of symbolism. The tree is a representation of the love of God as revealed by Jesus. The river is a representation of the love of God as revealed by Jesus. The iron rod is a representation of the word of God as revealed by Jesus.

The tree, the water, and the rod of iron are, all at once, representations of Jesus.

Jesus was "the Word" that "was made flesh, and dwelt among us. He was a living message from, of, and about God. He was a living, breathing, thinking, speaking, acting revelation of, from, and about God. His word, his message, his revelation was simple: "God is love." "Don't believe me? Watch me. I am the proof."

The multitudes—including his closest disciples—that followed him, clung to every word he spoke, and marveled at every action he took, were no great theologians. They never did really comprehend who and what he was until after his death and resurrection. But they sensed something. They sensed, I believe, the love of God. It was this that caused so "many [to] fall down at his feet and worship him" as Nephi witnessed.

Nephi does not yet know of his death and resurrection. That will come in a later revelation. But he will eventually learn, like those who knew Jesus during his earthly sojourn,

"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." 10

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> John 14.<sup>9</sup>. Please, do not become distracted by trinitarian questions about the Godhead. Such distraction only serves to confuse and, worse, causes us to appreciate and experience the beauty of Jesus' message less that we might.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> John 1.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> 1 John 4.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>10 1</sup> John 3.16

<sup>26</sup>And the angel said unto me again: "Look and behold the condescension of God!"

<sup>27</sup>And I looked and beheld the Redeemer of the world, of whom my father had spoken; and I also beheld the prophet who should prepare the way before him. And the Lamb of God went forth and was baptized of him; and after he was baptized, I beheld the heavens open, and the Holy Ghost come down out of heaven and abide upon him in the form of a dove. <sup>28</sup>And I beheld that he went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory; and the multitudes were gathered together to hear him; and I beheld that they cast him out from among them. <sup>29</sup>And I also beheld twelve others following him. And \*they were carried away in the Spirit from before my face, and I saw them not.

From his perch on top of an exceedingly high mountain and in response to his sincere desire to see and understand his father's dream, Nephi has been shown the tree which his father had seen—a tree that is desirable above all. In answer to his desire to know what the tree represents, Nephi has seen the tree juxtaposed with "the Son of God," Jesus. He has seen Jesus' virgin mother, Mary, has seen Mary bearing the Son of God in her arms, and has seen Jesus "going forth among the children of men. Nephi has learned that the Son of God, Jesus, is the incarnate manifestation or revelation of God and of his love. The angel has named all of this "the condescension of God!"

In Nephi's sixth vision, all that he has seen is expanded upon through the angelic invitation, "Look and behold the condescension of God!" Upon following the angel's direction, Nephi sees the Son of God and discovers that he is the same being whom his father had called "the Redeemer of the world." He also sees that this Redeemer, also known as "the Lamb of God" (for reasons that will become more clear to him through future visions) subjected himself to baptism, an ordinance intended for sinners with the hope of the remission of sins. This is another act of "condescension," and indicative of the Son of God's intent to "in all things... be made like unto his brethren." He would, in all things, become at-one with them.

Nephi also sees that after participating in this ordinance devoted to the sinner's cleansing, the Son of God was gifted with the Holy Spirit who descended upon him from an open heaven. Here, we should perhaps pause for a moment. It is unsurprising that Nephi would be shown Jesus receiving the Holy Spirit. If Jesus was to be the one who baptized with fire, or with the Holy Spirit, as the Baptist testified, then it only stands to reason that he himself would be so baptized. But, the detail of Nephi's vision is somewhat unexpected. Specifically, the detail about the Holy Spirit descending from heaven and "abiding" on him "in the form of a dove" seems unexpected. Is this aspect of the Spirit's appearance—"in the form of a dove" really that central to Jesus' experience?

Many see the dove as a symbol for peace, without explaining why? Is there something inherent in a dove that makes one think of peace? I have had doves in my backyard for years. They do not inherently bring the subject of peace to my mind. So, what's with the dove?

I don't know for sure, and you are welcome to decide that I am grasping at straws, but I do know that the most famous dove of all, and one that was intimately associated with water was the dove that came back to Noah with an olive leaf/branch—another object associated with peace—in its mouth. Noah took the dove's return with an olive leaf as a sign that the destructive storms were over and that peace and quiet would return to the earth. Whatever else the dove my signify, its appearance at Jesus' rising from baptismal waters that symbolize death and the grave, signifies that in Jesus the storms that threaten spiritual death are quieted. Those who come to him find an ark. And they are ushered into a world in which the storms cannot bring death. Jesus is master of the tempest.

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Hebrews 2.<sup>17</sup>

In the course of his visions, Nephi will observe many storms—storms of human violence and bloodshed and storms of nature. And he will know and lament the fact that these storms are all the result of individuals and societies rejecting Jesus and entering the great and spacious building. Indeed, in this vision, Nephi sees that, like Noah who offered deliverance from the storm and was rejected, Jesus was rejected and "cast... out from among them" notwithstanding the fact that "he went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory."

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

And I looked, and I beheld the heavens open again, and I saw angels descending upon the children of men; and they did minister unto them.

And I looked, and I beheld the Lamb of God going forth among the children of men. And I beheld multitudes of people who were sick, and who were afflicted with all manner of diseases, and with devils and unclean spirits; and the angel spake and showed all these things unto me. And they were healed by the power of the Lamb of God; and the devils and the unclean spirits were cast out.

In his first six visions, Nephi learned of the centrality of the tree in his father, Lehi's, vision. He came to understand that the tree is a representation of the "love of God," a love that is manifest in the Son of God. This son of God, we know, is Jesus of Nazareth, the Redeemer of whom his father spoke, and, indeed, God (Yahweh), Himself.

Nephi's understanding came as a result of his having seen the birth or incarnation of the Son of God. This incarnation is, itself, a revelation of God's love. Nephi observed the Son of God "going forth among the children of men" and engaging in activities that they, themselves, engage. Nephi saw that Jesus specifically and purposefully participates in baptism, an ordinance designed for the remission of sinners' sins. This engagement and participation in human activities is another revelation of God's love and commitment to humankind. Nephi also saw that the Son of God received the Holy Spirit, a sign of the healing he would bring to humankind, and evidence of his authority to bestow the Holy Spirit upon all who come to him.

Now, in his seventh and eighth visions, Nephi is witness to additional important aspects of Jesus' earthly ministry. What Nephi sees in his short seventh vision may surprise us. Nephi "beheld the heavens open again, and... saw angels descending upon the children of men; and they did minister unto them."

We might find this surprising because the New Testament Gospel writers, so focused on Jesus' ministry, do not record the ministry of angels during Jesus' earthly ministry. That said, they do record the ministry of angels leading up to his birth. An angel appeared to Zacharias to inform him that he and his wife would have a son who would prepare the ground for the coming Messiah. The same angel appeared to Mary to inform her that she would bear Messiah. An angel appeared to Joseph to inform him that Mary was bearing Messiah and that he should proceed with his marriage to her. A host of angels appeared to shepherds in Bethlehem's fields to inform them that Messiah had been born, and to invite them to go and see him.

We should not be surprised, then, that angels were likely busy appearing to many during Jesus' ministry. In a time without corporate or social media, angels may have been instrumental in informing individuals of the Messiah's presence and directing them where to go to find him—individuals such as the man covered in leprosy, the woman with an issue of blood, a centurion whose servant died, Jairus who lost a daughter, a father who lost a son to an unclean spirit, short statured Zacchaeus who happened to find a tree to climb so as to see Jesus, etc. etc. Even Jesus, himself, is beneficiary to the ministry of angels as an angel strengthened him during his terrible ordeal in Gethsemane.

In his eighth vision, Nephi watches as Jesus, true to the sign of the dove at his baptism, calms the physical, emotional, and spiritual storms that threaten to overcome and destroy individual lives. Jesus had the power in equal measure to heal the body and heal the soul. Indeed, the former was often a sign for the latter, as Jesus made clear to religious leaders who questioned his power to forgive the sin of a palsied

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup>And \*the angel spake unto me again, saying: "Look!"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup>And he spake unto me again, saying: "Look!"

man.<sup>1</sup> In "casting out" "devils and unclean spirits," Jesus demonstrated his willingness and ability to release, redeem individuals from forces, influences, and powers that overwhelmed individuals' native capacities to resist and conquer.

Other Book of Mormon writers witnessed the incarnation of God and his willingness and power to heal, and his anxiousness to give control back to the individual through his calming influence. Notable among them was King Benjamin. He saw, as Nephi did in his visions, that "with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay." Note, please, his "the Lord Omnipotent," and his testimony that he "reigneth... from all eternity to all eternity," reminders that the Son of God is God, the Son, the great Yahweh.

Like Nephi, King Benjamin saw that this Lord Omnipotent "shall go forth amongst men," and that in going forth, he would work "mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases. And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men."<sup>2</sup>

Others were privileged to view these same events. They too found the tree to be desirable above all.

Nephi asked: "What does the tree represent." In answer to this question, the Spirit of the Lord and then an angel have ushered him through a series of visions in which he witnessed the conception, birth, and earthly ministry of the Son of God, the Redeemer, the Lord Omnipotent, Jesus of Nazareth. Through each event, one overriding reality has impressed itself upon the impressionable, open mind of the young Nephi, "I know that he loveth his children."

In his incarnation, his birth, his life, and his ministry God has gone a long, long way to demonstrating that love. But there is one more act in this passion play, one final demonstration of just how far God will go to prove his love to a humanity that is doubtful, always doubtful about God's commitment to every individuals. We will turn next to that vision, Nephi's ninth.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See Luke 5. <sup>17-26</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Mosiah 3.<sup>5-6</sup>

# 1 = 1.32-33 meditation 1 = 1.00 meditation 1 = 1.00 mediation 1

<sup>32</sup>And \*the angel spake unto me again, saying: "Look!" And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record. <sup>33</sup>And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world.

In response to his desire to know the "interpretation" of the tree that was central in and to his father's dream, an angel has shown Nephi the incarnation of God. This incarnation is a powerful evidence of God's feelings of attachment to and love for his children. In addition, the angel has shown Nephi the love of God in action through Jesus' earthly ministry, a ministry focused on healing and restoration. Nephi was blessed to witness individuals regain control of lives overwhelmed by forces, powers, and influences often previously unrecognized and unmanageable. Such individuals regained control through the physical and spiritual healing brought about by the love and power of God.

Nephi, then, was permitted views of the various manifestations of the love of God. We have highlighted and discussed these manifestations in the order and pace at which Nephi discovered them. His discoveries have guided and determined the nature and pace of our discoveries. In doing so, we have danced around the single greatest manifestation of God's love. But, in this, Nephi's ninth vision, he finally comes to this greatest manifestation of God's love, thus allowing us to revel in it ourselves. In this vision, Nephi sees that God, the Son, died by being "lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world."

The love expressed by God's willingness to be part of individual human lives, as evidenced by his incarnation, is beyond comprehension. The love he shows in his willingness and ability to heal and calm and restore is appreciated beyond our ability to express. The expressions of his love are manifest in innumerable ways. Certainly, he shows his love for us when he answers a prayer, however trivial. He expresses his love when he helps us discover a lost possession, when he assists us with a test, when he gives us wisdom to help a troubled or sick child, when he provides some financial resource, etc., etc. But, as much as we may appreciate all of these blessings, we need to understand and acknowledge that they pale in comparison to the greatest manifestation of his love.

The more "trivial" and mundane expressions of his love must never detract or distract from the greatest expression of his love. If we ever find ourselves questioning his love and commitment to us because our life or the life of loved ones seem not to be going as we wish or expect, we have, perhaps, become guilty of trivializing his love and losing site of this greatest of all manifestations of his love.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

There simply cannot be any greater evidence of his love. Ever. It is a waste of time to look or imagine there is. In looking for the most evident and grandest manifestation of divine love, John landed upon the fact that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" who was "lifted up" on a pole as Moses had "lifted up the serpent" in order to bring healing and wholeness." This same disciple bore witness that, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us."

Jesus, God, Himself, in asking his latter-day disciples to "Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God," pointed to the most incontrovertible proof: "For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered

<sup>2</sup> See John 3. 14-16

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> John 15.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> 1 John 3.<sup>16</sup>

death in the flesh."<sup>4</sup> To remember that he "suffered death in the flesh" is to know just how much value he places upon our souls. Had his incarnation been the most transcendent manifestation of the love he felt for and the value he found in humankind, he might have simply spoken of himself as "the Lord your Redeemer," who "suffered in the flesh." But the most transcendent manifestation of his love was to be found in his "suffering *death* in the flesh."

But Nephi sees a bit more than this. Nay, a lot more than this. He sees that God, the Son, was "lifted up upon the cross." It wasn't, then, only the fact that he suffered death, but the manner in which he suffered death that served as irrefutable proof of his love. Here, we can almost see the tree, over which we, like Nephi and Lehi, have been nearly salivating, transformed into the cruel cross. Here, we think of the witness that Peter bore to the gentile, Cornelius, and those that Cornelius had gathered together at his home.

"We are witnesses of all things which he [Jesus] did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged *on a tree*." 5

Our beloved "tree of life," then, that brings life to us, brought death to the Son of God. The tree becomes a cross, a sign of "the love of God." I will have more to say about this in the next homily.

Up to this point, Nephi's visions have been concentrated on the tree and its "interpretation." His visions have focused on the incarnation and ministry of Jesus, Son of God. With Nephi's vision of Jesus being "lifted up upon the cross"—the ultimate evidence of the love of God, represented by the tree—his visions take a sudden and dramatic turn. Nephi has seen and heard the very best that can be seen or heard about the tree. The visions will leave behind the glorious and healing and restorative ministry of Jesus and begin to focus on why we need healed and from what we must be delivered. From here on out, Nephi's visions will focus on "the great and spacious building," the evils that it represents, the destructive consequences in produces, and God's labors to undermine and, finally, destroy the building that stands "as it were in the air, high above the earth."

Even so, come, Lord Jesus

<sup>6</sup> 1 Nephi 8.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See DC 18.<sup>10-11</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Acts 10.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>32</sup>And \*the angel spake unto me again, saying: "Look!" And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record. <sup>33</sup>And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world.

Through a series of visions Nephi has learned that the beautiful and desirable tree that his father saw in his dream was a representation of "the love of God." He has learned that the incarnation of God was an act of incomprehensible love. He has witnessed the incarnate God, the Son, minister to a humanity that was sick and possessed. He has watched as this Son of God healed these wounded souls and restored to them control in their lives that had previously been, not simply illusive, but impossible. Love has flowed through every word and every scene that Nephi has witnessed.

Now, in his ninth vision, and the final vision in this series of visions that focus on the life and ministry of the Son of God,<sup>1</sup> Nephi witnesses the greatest evidence of love anyone can demonstrate. He sees that the Son of God "was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world."

In this meditation, we want to consider the importance of this ultimate vision. We have noted before that with the second half of this vision, Nephi's attention is directed away from the life and ministry of the Son of God to the great and spacious building. That building and God's response to the evils it represents dominate the remaining visions. It will not be the last time we witness God's love at work, but it will be the last time we see Jesus. So, we are especially interested in the fact that the last time Nephi sees Jesus in this series of visions, Jesus is hanging on a cross, dead.

When I was young, our little struggling branch moved from location to location as we lacked our own building in which to meet and worship. At one point, we met in a Seventh-day Adventist building, as they had no use for the building on Sunday mornings. I will never forget the scene that took place one early, bright, sunny Sunday morning as we prepared to enter the building, so graciously loaned to us. I will never forget the look of gleeful contempt on the face of one of the admired male members of our branch as he stood just outside the entrance to building, looked up, pointed determinedly and uncompromisingly at the cross that stood above the building's entrance, and contemptuously spat something like, "We're meeting here? In a building with a cross? Why do Christians use the cross? Why do they worship a dead rather than a living Christ?"

That moment and the feeling it produced in me is etched, imprinted in my memory. Sadly, it influenced my attitude toward other Christians and toward "the cross" for a couple of decades. Be assured, this is a memory that will stay with me to the end of my days on earth and that I will take with me into the eternities, wherever, there, I end up.

I wish I had known then, what I know now. I would have given him a piece of my mind, probably not as charitably as I should. I might have started by quoting something Jesus said on the road to Emmaus to the two disciples who also found Jesus' death by crucifixion embarrassing and inconvenient: "Oh fools and slow of heart."

I might have continued with a rebuke of his ignorant provincialism and prejudice, followed up with an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> If it is not already clear to the reader why we identify the first half of this ninth vision as the final vision in this series of fourteen visions that is related to Jesus' life and ministry, we feel confident that it will become so as we make our way through all fourteen visions.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Luke 24.<sup>25</sup>

explanation of the central importance of the cross in understanding and appreciating Jesus, his work, his character, and his love for and commitment to each of us. I would have been very clear: "I worship a living Christ who died on a killing cross. Viewing that death, on that cross, is essential to one's salvation." I would inform him that "we can and should without hesitation, embarrassment, or hint of heretical unorthodoxy remember, speak of, glory in, and keep our eyes affixed to Calvary's cross."

I would also remind him, "You do realize, I assume, that the only ordinance in which you participate on a weekly basis is one that remembers, memorializes, and commemorates Jesus' death, broken body, shed blood, and all. So, please, don't tell me we have nothing to do with a dead and dying Christ."

Sadly, I continue to hear this same undiscerning pseudo-theology to the present. It comes from Church leaders—even a prophet has pedaled this trope—and members alike, who parrot and peddle such nonsense. So, now, the little piece of my mind that I wish I could have given to that brother all those years ago has morphed and grown into today's *Short, Simple Sermon*—a sermon inspired by Nephi's ninth vision, and this series of visions' final and ultimate vision of the Son of God hanging on the cross, the ultimate manifestation of God's love.

Many LDS question the use of the cross as a symbol to represent and commemorate Jesus and his atonement. Embarrassingly, some do so in simple, insecure, knee-jerk reaction to the rest of the Christian world, using their use of the cross against them as a sign of alleged LDS superiority. To these, I say, "Grow up."

Others respond negatively, or, at least, agnostically, to the cross because, as the old and tired saying goes, "We worship a living, not dead Christ." Others possess a diminished view of the cross because they feel and believe that Jesus' greatest suffering and real work of atonement was carried out in the Garden of Gethsemane. To such, I am more courteous, believing that they can be reasoned with. In the next meditation, I will bear witness to the cross and that "the preaching of the cross" is "the power of God."

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: October 24, 2024)

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 1.<sup>18</sup>

# 

<sup>32</sup>And \*the angel spake unto me again, saying: "Look!" And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record. <sup>33</sup>And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world.

I'll begin my defense of the cross as an appropriate and powerful symbol and reminder of Jesus and his atonement with what might be the weakest argument—weak only because it comes from the Apostle Paul, of whom LDS people seem to be almost as skeptical as they are of the cross. But that great Apostle of the Gentiles, without whom there may not even be a modern Christianity, often used the symbol of the cross as a representation of all that the gospel stands for. Thus, Paul informs us that he "determined not to know any thing... save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." "God forbid," prayed the apostle, "that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We might boast that "the power of God" is found in the "gospel," or even in the "priesthood." Not so Paul. He could find no greater manifestation of God's power than "the cross."

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

Paul worried that he, himself, or an overly high estimation of him on the part of others, might cause "the cross of Christ" to be "made of none effect." He exalted that Jesus "reconciled" Jew and Gentile alike "by the cross." He boldly accused those who maintain the necessity of circumcision of doing so "lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ," going so far as to call them "the enemies of the cross of Christ."

This brief survey ought to make clear how central "the cross" was to the early Christian Church's message and its remembrances of Jesus. It certainly makes clear that for Paul, "the gospel of Jesus Christ" and the "cross of Christ" were inseparable and, in fact, essentially, synonymous. This is, perhaps, a reflection of Jesus' own teaching, repeated often and variously,

"And whosover doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."8

The cross on which Jesus died is not simply a theological artifact that shapes one's view of atonement. It shapes one's everyday behavior. Disciples without crosses are disciples without discipline—no disciples at all.

Now, let's turn our attention directly to Nephi's ninth vision, his last in this series of visions that relate to the Son of God's earthly mission. It ends, as we have observed, with Jesus hanging dead on the cross. Why? Did he not see the resurrection? If not, why not? If he did, why did he not end with that, rather than ending with Jesus dead on the cross? Was he not worried about people "worshipping a dead, rather than

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 2.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Galatians 6.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 1.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 1.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ephesians 2.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Galatians 6.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Philippians 3.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Luke 14.<sup>27</sup>

living Christ? These are questions that we will leave to the reader to consider and ponder.

While we're at it, we have a few more questions for the reader to consider.

There is no doubt that Jesus' experience in the Garden of Gethsemane is important, even essential to the story of Jesus' own passion, his atonement, and the redemption that comes to us through it. I have suggested elsewhere that Jesus' use of the imagery of a "cup"—"if it be possible, let this cup pass from me"—is powerful and instructive. In fact, upon visiting the Nephites, Jesus declared that his drinking "out of that bitter cup which the Father [had] given [him]" included "all things from the beginning" which the Father had given him to do. The image of Jesus drinking from the bitter cup is powerful, but it is not unique to his Gethsemane experience. In suffering and dying on the cross, Jesus was continuing to drink from the same cup that tortured him in Gethsemane. In fact, I would argue that he drank from this cup every day of his life.

So, why did Paul and other early church leaders not utilize the imagery of the cup or the garden rather than that of the cross? Why did Nephi's visions concerning the life of Jesus not end with his experience in Gethsemane and his drinking a cup? Why not end with, "And I, Nephi, saw that in a dark and depressing garden he drank from the bitter cup for the sins of the world'?

Indeed, why does no one end with or focus on that garden with its perfectly horrific cup if it is so much more significant than, or separate from Jesus experience on the cross at Calvary?

Why does Jacob admonish us to "view his [Jesus'] *death* and suffer his *cross*" rather than "view his bitter cup and drink from it yourselves."

If his suffering and death on the cross are not a vital part of "the bitter cup," why does Jesus invite the Nephites to "Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may *feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet*" as a follow up to his announcement of having drunk from the bitter cup? Why not have them hold the cup in their hands, feel its weight and look into its poisonous maw?

Why not invite Joseph and Oliver to "behold the bitter cup" rather than inviting them to "behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet"—this as a part of his admonition that they "look unto me in every thought"?<sup>12</sup>

Why, throughout the New Testament, throughout the Book of Mormon, throughout the Doctrine and covenants is it always the cross rather than the cup? Why are the remembrances of Jesus' atoning passions always focused on the crucifixion at Calvary rather than the anguish of Gethsemane? Why are there no extended discussions of the meaning of Gethsemane, but so many on Calvary?

The plain and simple fact of the matter is, we can study hundreds of mentions of the cross and of crucifixion. We can explore hundreds of examinations concerning the meaning of the cross and of Jesus' crucifixion. But we find pitifully few mentions of Gethsemane or the cup, or examinations of the meaning of Gethsemane or its cup.

The symbol of the cross is not to be undervalued as we strive to understand, appreciate, remember, and commemorate Jesus' atonement and what it means to us. Indeed, there can be no devaluation of his

<sup>11</sup> 3 Nephi 11.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> See 3 Nephi 11.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Jacob 1.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> DC 6. <sup>16-17</sup>

experience on the cross as we seek to experience the incomprehensible joys that flow to us through his atonement. To devalue the cross, to give second place to his experience at Calvary is not based on scripture precedent or sound doctrine. Sadly, it is more likely based upon embarrassing attempts to justify prejudices and engage in un-Christ-like one upmanship, the prideful competition of ideas.

I am not advocating for the adoption of the cross as an LDS symbol, though it is certainly every bit as appropriate as a gold-leafed angel blowing a trump—a symbol that reminds one as much of the world's materialistic idolatry as the One who is supposed to be worshipped inside the structures atop of which he stands. But I am advocating for a fairer, more honest, less prejudiced view of other's Christian insights into its meaning. The cross, with its dying Christ, is as powerful a symbol of God's love as any symbol can be. It is as powerful a symbol of our own discipleship and what is expected of a disciple as any.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>36</sup>\*I saw and bear record, that the great and spacious building was the pride of the world; and it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: "Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

Because of his desire to understand, his faith in God's openness in responding to human desire, and his willingness to expend time and effort in understanding, Nephi has been privileged to see the manifestations of God's love. This love is expressed through the incarnation of God, the Son; through his earthy ministry with its intimate contact with a wounded and possessed humanity; and, finally and ultimately, through his death on a cross. These manifestations of God's love were represented in his Father, Lehi's, dream by the tree which was beautiful and desirable above all.

With the Son of God hanging dead on a cross, Nephi's ninth vision shifts. It shifts away from the beauty and love of the tree, the principle figure and symbol of the dream, to the ugliness and hate and conflict of the great and spacious building, the second most important figure or symbol of the dream. It is as though, having seen the beauty and desirability of the Son of God, Nephi wonders how and why on earth anyone would want to kill him. Among other things, Nephi's remaining visions answer this question.

There is much to say about the great and spacious building, as is evidenced by the breadth and length of following visions. But, first and foremost, we must recognize this: it is the great and spacious building with its multitudes of occupants that is responsible for Jesus' death and for the resistance that is brought to bear against his disciples, including his apostles. The building stands in direct opposition to Jesus and the principles for which he lived and died. It stands in opposition to anyone who would propagate or live by the principles Jesus lived and taught.

Whereas the Spirit and then the angel slowly, meticulously led Nephi step by step from one insight to another in order to help him understand what the tree represented, the angle takes no such care in explaining the interpretation of the great and spacious building. Rather, he gets right to it with one giant leap. "Behold," says the angel,

"the world and the wisdom thereof."

Nephi immediately discerns the meaning of the tree, a demonstration that his previous visions have brought a deepened spiritual maturity.

"I saw and bear record, that the great and spacious building was the pride of the world."

The tutoring angel will later restate Nephi's insight using slightly different language.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup>And after he was slain I saw the multitudes of the earth, that they were gathered together to fight against the apostles of the Lamb; for thus were the twelve called by the angel of the Lord.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup>And the multitude of the earth was gathered together; and I beheld that they were in a large and spacious building, like unto the building which my father saw. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: "Behold the world and the wisdom thereof; yea, behold the house of Israel hath gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

"The large and spacious building... is vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men."

Unfortunately, when we think of "pride," we too often think of personal arrogance and hubris, with its rudeness toward others. But, as we will see in the following visions, pride is something more than this. Much more. Something far more pervasive and dangerous. To get at this something more pervasive and dangerous, I like to think of it like this: the great and spacious building represents those things, those people, those ideologies, those institutions in which humankind takes pride. The "pride of the world" represents all those worldly people, places and things that humans find so very attractive and alluring; things, people, ideologies, and institutions that the world values above God, Himself, and his divine principles.

As the visions continue, we will see that all these things, people, ideologies, and institutions that are represented by the great and spacious building, or the pride of the world, are those which produce worldly wealth, worldly power, and worldly prestige/influence.

Wealth. Power. Prestige. All temptation is subsumed within this triad of temptation and pride. Nephi's visions will return to these over and over again. Nephi sees, as John would later see in his series of revelations, that it is this pride, this inordinate love and drive for wealth, power, and prestige that brings conflict and destruction and, finally, the fall of societies and civilization. The great Hebrew prophet Jeremiah, himself living through the collapse of his own society, warned,

"Thus saith the LORD,
Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom [prestige],
neither let the mighty man glory in his might [power],
let not the rich man glory in his riches [wealth]:
But let him that glorieth glory in this,
that he understandeth and knoweth me,
that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness,
judgment, and righteousness, in the earth:
for in these things I delight, saith the LORD."<sup>2</sup>

Whereas those who live in the great and spacious building live for wealth, power, and prestige—that which is desirable above all things, in its estimation—those who follow Jesus, as Jesus himself, live for fidelity toward others, justice toward others, and acting rightly toward others.

These two value systems stand in stark contrast to each other. The value system represented by the great and spacious building cannot abide the challenge to its value system that is represented in the tree. The tree sheds too bright a light upon the lies, the false attractions and affections, that the great and spacious building propagates. So, the building must annihilate the tree. The pride of the world must destroy the love of God. The building must kill the messenger, the Son of God, and destroy those who would dare follow him and maintain his faithful, just, and right cause. Thus, the great and spacious building inevitable brings war and rumor of war. It brings, as we will see over and over in the following visions, conflict, war, death, and destruction.

With Nephi, we will watch this contest play out in the course of his remaining visions. But, for now, today is as good a time as any to consider our attitudes toward those things in which the world takes pride: wealth, power, and prestige; for these things not only demanded the death of Jesus on a cross, they bring the death of Christ in our lives. To the extent to which these idolatrous lies have infiltrated our lives,

-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 1 Nephi 12.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 9.<sup>23-24</sup>

today is as good a time as any to expel them and fully replace them with their opposites: fidelity, and justice, and right treatment of others. Today is as good a time as any to follow the Son of God's bright example of love,

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"<sup>3</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Micah 6.<sup>8</sup>

### 1 nephi 11.<sup>34-36</sup>— Meditation 2 (14<sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)

<sup>36</sup>\*I saw and bear record, that the great and spacious building was the pride of the world; and it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: "Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

In our first meditation on 1 Nephi 11.<sup>34-36</sup>, we found that the great and spacious building of Lehi's dream represents the "wisdom," "pride," and "vain imaginations" of the world. The wisdom, pride, and vain imaginations of the world stand in opposition to God, the Son, and were responsible for his murder on the cross. They also oppose any who might adopt and follow the Son's platform of love, acceptance, justice, and service to others. The great and spacious building competes with God for the affections of humankind. It too offers a platform of "love." Unlike God's self-sacrificing love, the world's love is twisted and perverted, based on self-love, injustice, conflict, and selfishness.

We suggested that we should think of the "pride of the world" in terms of "that in which the world takes pride." In a similar vein, we can think of the "wisdom of the world," as that at which the world is skilled. We can think of the "vain imaginations of the world," as those ideologies and behaviors that assume that personal value and individual security is to be found in the things of this world. Principle among the things that the world loves and erroneously believes will bring personal worth and security are wealth. power, and prestige. These are the things in which, above all else, the world takes pride.

These three—wealth, power, and prestige/influence—can be thought of as a kind of false triune God. Idols, in Old Testament terms. It would require an entire book-length homily to adequately explore and expose each member of this anti-godhead for the devil that they are. We will, here, only examine one of them, and that very, very briefly.

In his final vision, Nephi is informed that one of Jesus' original twelve, presumably John, the Revelator, will see everything Nephi saw and then some. In the course of the New Testament "Book of Revelation," John uses different language and symbolism to represent the same insights that Nephi records in his fourteen visions.

John mentions no "great and spacious building." But, we suggest, he uses another symbol to represent the same phenomenon. The shorthand name of the symbol is "Babylon." But its full name is

"Mystery. Babylon the Great. The Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth." 1

Just as Nephi witnessed that the great and spacious building "fell," and that "the fall thereof was exceedingly great" so too, John saw that "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen..." John utilizes a series of seven laments, or taunts to describe this fall. In doing so, he reveals a central aspect the Babylon's

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 18.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup>And after he was slain I saw the multitudes of the earth, that they were gathered together to fight against the apostles of the Lamb; for thus were the twelve called by the angel of the Lord.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup>And the multitude of the earth was gathered together; and I beheld that they were in a large and spacious building, like unto the building which my father saw. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: "Behold the world and the wisdom thereof; yea, behold the house of Israel hath gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Revelation 17.<sup>5</sup>

adulterous and abominable allure—one aspect of its "pride," "wisdom," and vain imagination." In the first lament/taunt, John tells how "all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Then, we are told,

"The kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and *the merchants of the earth are waxed rich* through the abundance of her delicacies [luxuries, extravagancies]."

In the second lament/taunt, a heavenly voice expresses the hope that Babylon will be given "torment and sorrow" to match the degree to which it "lived deliciously [luxuriantly]."<sup>4</sup>

In the third lament/taunt, we hear "the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and *lived deliciously [luxuriantly] with her*" "bewail and lament for her." This monarchic lamentation is followed in the fourth lament/taunt with the lamentations of "the merchants of the earth." These "weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more." Lest we think that this "delicious" or "luxuriant" lifestyle, or its abetting merchants are metaphorical, the fourth lament/taunt takes up space to catalogue the Babylonian merchandise that is no longer available."

"The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men."

Having catalogued Babylonian goods, the fourth lament/taunt grants us a listen into the previously mentioned mourning of the merchants.

"The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought."

The "merchants" are joined in the fifth and sixth lament/taunt by "every *shipmaster*, and all the *company* in ships and sailors, and as many as *trade by sea*." These "stood afar off, and cried when they saw the smoke of her burning." "They cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying,

"Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the seas by reason of her costliness..."

In the seventh and final lament/taunt, we learn that "no *craftsman*, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee, and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee... thy *merchants* were the great men of the earth; <sup>10</sup> for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived." <sup>11</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Revelation 18.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Revelation 18.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Revelation 18.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Revelation 18.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Revelation 18.<sup>12-13</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Revelation 18.<sup>15-17</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Revelation 18.<sup>17-18</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Here, the third member of Babylon's triune god, Prestige, raises its ugly head.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Revelation 18.<sup>22-23</sup>

Well, all of this gives us insight into the nature of one aspect of the world's pride, wisdom, and vain imaginations represented by Lehi's great and spacious building with its triune pagan god, "Wealth/Power/Prestige."

It should be clear that when we speak of "wealth" we are speaking of something far more pervasive and insidious than personal income wealth; as insidious as this can be. 12 When we speak of "wealth" in this context, we are talking about "economy" from manufacturing to transportation logistics to merchant to buyer to the economist—more conjurer, sorcerer than scientist—that provides the whole complex with its aura of mystery and phony spirituality. Economy is a principle source of worldly pride and one of the things at which the world is most skilled. It is the false god, "Economy," we are informed—indoctrinated—that makes the world turn and brings joy, contentment, peace, and security. However, such false doctrine is part of the world's vain imaginations. As it is practiced in this world, Economy is the exact opposite. It is, in fact, as John recognizes, "a great millstone" that drags the convert and practitioner into the depths of hell.

We do not need to understand the exact nature of "marks" on hands and foreheads or the arithmetic behind the satanic number 666 to appreciate the fact that individuals, billions of them, sell their souls for the privilege of "buying and selling" (See Rev. 13.<sup>18</sup>). Indeed, to see the lie, we only require the wisdom and patience of "saints"—those dedicated to the true God and opposed to the false god, Wealth/Power/Prestige, worshipped so ardently in the false temple of the great and spacious building.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Due to the global nature of things, it is doubtful that personal income wealth has ever been more insidious than it is today in the form of the Jeff Bezoses of the world.

<sup>1\*</sup>The angel said unto me: "Look, and behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren." And I looked and beheld the land of promise; and I beheld multitudes of people, yea, even as it were in number as many as the sand of the sea. <sup>2\*</sup>I beheld multitudes gathered together to battle, one against the other; and I beheld wars, and rumors of wars, and great slaughters with the sword among my people. <sup>3\*</sup>I beheld many generations pass away, after the manner of wars and contentions in the land; and I beheld many cities, yea, even that I did not number them.

Through seven visions—the third through the ninth—Nephi has basked in the love of God. His visions of God's love end with the greatest manifestation of divine love of all: the death of God, the Son. However, accompanying that final glorious vision of divine love came an ugly vision of hate—the hate that the world, in all its pride, wisdom, and imagination, aimed at God, the Son. With that hate it shockingly killed him who was desirable above all, and then turned its hate upon any who might dare love and follow him.

All this pride and wisdom and hate is represented by a great a spacious building. Standing tall on the opposite side of the river, and separated from the love of God by the very depths of hell, this building stands in committed, aggressive, and violent opposition to God and his love. It stands in opposition to all self-sacrificing love that seeks the welfare of others. It promotes—demands, even—self-serving and self-promoting love. It seeks to quench all sense of God's love for humankind, humankind's love for God, and humankind's love for its own kind by replacing it with the love of self through the worship of the false triune god, Wealth/Power/Prestige.

In our previous homily, we looked at the Wealth aspect of this perverted triune god. We found that it has as much to do with the economies of nations as it does with personal income wealth. In today's reading, the opening salvo in Nephi's tenth vision, we see the consequences that flow from the worship of this devious triune god.

What follows next; what follows the introduction of the great and spacious building—the love of and desire for wealth, power, and prestige—is as natural as night following dusk, dawn following night, day following dawn, and dusk following day.

"I beheld multitudes gathered together to battle, one against the other; and I beheld wars, and rumors of wars, and great slaughters with the sword among my people. \*I beheld many generations pass away, after the manner of wars and contentions in the land."

The contentions, the battles, the wars, the continuous warfare, the great slaughters... all of these are the direct result of entrance into the great and spacious building. How could it be otherwise? The pride and the wisdom of this world, with its mad and insatiable desires for wealth and power and prestige is bound to lead to conflict and contentions. Left unchecked, the madness can only lead to battle, slaughters, and wars and continuous warfare until naught but destruction, collapse, and, finally, annihilation remains.

The contentions, the battles, the wars, the continuous warfare, the great slaughters represent some of the world's most prized skills; part of the wisdom of the world. They flow directly from the pride of the world with its love of, desire for, and pursuit of wealth, power, and prestige.

It is pure madness.

Nephi watches all of this happen among his own people. But, we should not be fooled. What Nephi sees among his own people is simply a microcosm of that which has happened to very people, society, kingdom, and nation. It is a microcosm of what is happening across the globe and what will continue to happen until peoples and nations reject the false god, Wealth/Power/Prestige, and worship the only and true living God.

Unfortunately, the present offers little reason for hope that such repentance is in the offing. Just the opposite.

As we mentioned and briefly examined in our second homily on 1 Nephi 11.<sup>34-36</sup>, John the revelator saw all that Nephi saw, and then some. Using different language and symbolism, John saw the same great and spacious building. He saw its occupants indulge in a worldwide love affair with the idolatrous god, Wealth/Power/Prestige. And he saw, as Nephi saw, the devastating consequences of this indulgence. Indeed, it is precisely this vision with which his entire great apocalyptic vision began. All evil begins with this indulgence.

John's apocalyptic vision begins with the famous Four Horses of the Apocalypse. The first sits atop a white horse and represents the desire to conquer, dominate, and excel. The means and ends of such desire is, of course, our false god, Wealth/Power/Prestige. Driven by this unholy desire, the white horse becomes a red horse, symbolic of blood—the blood that flows and splatters the horse from violence, war, and "rumor of war." Next comes the black horse, symbolic of the blood, now dried, that was splattered upon the horse. It is also symbolic of famine with its burnt crops, burn cities, and malnourished noncombatants. Finally comes the pale horse. Death of all sorts feeds upon the rotting corpses of a humanity enthralled by the madness of Wealth/Power/Prestige, while Hell sucks the soul into its murky depths.

Entire nations are consumed. Disappear. Where are the Sumarians? Where are the Babylonians? Where, the Assyrians, the Hans, the Greeks, the Romans, the British Empires, the Third Reich, and so on, and so on, and so on? The planet is littered with the dead—dead nations that engaged in the insane madness that is the great and spacious building. There can be little doubt that the madness continues; continues to feed on the foolish peoples and nations of planet earth. No doubt, there will yet be many national corpses littering the planet earth consumed by the mad desires of the great and spacious building.

How much longer do we imagine we have? How long before we join the corpses that have proceeded us? How long before Death and Hell devour all that we hold precious?

We've been warned.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>4</sup>\*I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many cities that they were sunk; and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof. <sup>5</sup>\*After I saw these things, I saw the vapor of darkness, that it passed from off the face of the earth; and behold, I saw multitudes who had not fallen because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord.

## 1 nephi 12.6-10 — Meditation (17th in "the visions of nephi" series)

<sup>6</sup>And I saw the heavens open, and the Lamb of God descending out of heaven; and he came down and showed himself unto them. <sup>7</sup>And I also saw and bear record that the Holy Ghost fell upon twelve others; and they were ordained of God, and chosen. <sup>8</sup>And the angel spake unto me, saying: "Behold the twelve disciples of the Lamb, who are chosen to minister unto thy seed."

<sup>9</sup>And he said unto me: "Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb? Behold they are they who shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, the twelve ministers of thy seed shall be judged of them; for ye are of the house of Israel. <sup>10</sup>And these twelve ministers whom thou beholdest shall judge thy seed. And, behold, they are righteous forever; for because of their faith in the Lamb of God their garments are made white in his blood."

Today's passage continues the theme of the great and spacious building, and describes one of the Lord's strategies for combating the allure that the building represents. It is a marvel, really. In some ways, this part of His strategy is nearly as nonsensical as garments being washed in blood and coming out white. I will confess that I find the latter mystery far more compelling than the mystery of God's calling of "twelve others."

I must also confess that today's reading is not my favorite. Far from it. I was tempted to skip right over it, but decided that honesty is better than avoidance. Some of those few who read this sermon will probably not agree with my decision, feeling that I should have just remained silent. The reader will either love what follows or hate it. It seems unlikely that any reader will be able to stake out a middle ground.

This business of 12 apostles, past, present, or future, leaves me underwhelmed. The institution, strange as it will sound to so many, doesn't strike me as all that Biblical. Jesus sent his disciples into the world to evangelize, to be sure. But, to be a governing body... I don't know. I'm not feeling it. It doesn't ignite my mind, nor does it cause my bosom to burn.

First, there is the matter of those original 12. When I think of Jesus' apostles, I am unimpressed. It is difficult to think of them as more than disciples, followers. And, based on the Gospel accounts, they aren't all that great at being disciples. They are mostly clueless. They have no idea who and what Jesus is. They seem unable to evaluate him on any basis other than that by which the world judges character and nobility and power and greatness. Perhaps they have all of this in common with modern disciples that call themselves apostles.

And we never learn to think any better of them after Jesus' death and resurrection. Yes, Peter has a moment here and there now and again in Acts, but, even here, he seems unimaginative and parochial. He is open enough to God that he can receive a revelation that the Gospel message is not exclusively for Jews. But then he can't really live it as he remains stuck in his Jewish box. At least that is how Paul sees things as he lumps Peter in with "false brethren" and calls him a hypocrite. The church certainly didn't become the "global" mega-church it became because of Peter's efforts. That miracle seems to have flowed from the creativity of Paul, an uncertain "institutional" apostle who seems to have been barely tolerated by the original 11 survivors of Jesus' inner circle.

	Then there's the	"latter-day" 12	numbering no	w. after nearly 200 years	many dozens
--	------------------	-----------------	--------------	---------------------------	-------------

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See Galatians 2

Some years ago a fellow member attempted to have me removed from my paid teaching position in the Church. He complained that he had never heard me testify that "the Church is true" (which seems to mean something different to everyone who parrots it) or that "the Church is led by a prophet." He was correct. He hadn't. That wasn't how I spoke. It's surprising, really, that others hadn't caught on.

I might say the church was led—that, itself, that "leading," meant something different to me than him—by prophets, *plural*, but never *a* prophet. God is too wise to give that sort of power to an individual. Any individual. However well vetted they may be. Even when placed in the hands of a body of 15, it's a dicey proposition, giving that kind of power to mortals.

Anyway, had my prosecutor been cleverer and just left it at that, he might have had me. I might have been out of a job. Fortunately, he didn't have the sense to quit while he was ahead. He also had to add another charge. "The love of God. The love of God." The volume in his voice grew as his frustration mounted and his contempt grew. "I am sick and tired of hearing about the love of God from this man!"

Did I mention what a spectacularly strict follower of apostles and prophets he was? You probably already guessed it.

But, he was right on this count as well. I was obsessed with God and his unimaginably loving and generous character. Nothing excited me as He did. I wasn't much interested in teaching much else. I "testified" constantly. Incessantly. But it was always focused on Jesus. Like Paul, I had made a very conscious determination. "I determined not to know any thing... save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." This is, perhaps, what made me so slippery for those who felt some indeterminant reservation about what they heard coming from my mouth.

No, I am not all that impressed by "the Church" or its "apostles." Part of the reason, perhaps, is that after meeting that most loving God up close and personal, "the greatest of all," no one seems all that impressive. But, if I am honest, that's not the whole story.

"The Church," it's members, and its apostles seem, to me, to be pathologically authoritarian and autocratic—in a patriarchal sort of way. All thinking comes from the top down and everyone falls in line without thought. It can feel very Orwellian. It is this, perhaps, that accounts for the unimaginative and provincial nature that I find in "The church," it's members, and its apostles. With so little creativity, I can't imagine the worlds they imagine they will create so day. It seems likely that they will be square or rectangular worlds as it often seems to me that they now live in a tiny little box. The light that enters the box is so modest as to allow their surroundings to be seen only in black and white.

But, I live in a world with innumerable colors. A world in technicolor. I wouldn't have it any other way. In fact, it is this metaphor of light and color that dominates my perspective on apostles, rather ancient or modern, old world or new.

The Book of Mormon story is barely out of the shoot when Lehi has his second vision.

"And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God. And\* he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day. And

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 2.<sup>2</sup>

he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament."

Of anything ever written or spoken about apostles, this may just be the truest. The light they radiate is a bit brighter that a starry, moonless night. This is certainly a boon in a world that the temple characterizes as a "dark and dreary world," and that scripture describes as "darkness" itself.<sup>4</sup> Here, "the people that walk in darkness." require that "the hidden things of darkness" be illuminated. The apostolic light seems rather shadowy in comparison to that light which is "above that of the sun at noon-day."

I, for one, prefer to walk by the light of the sun. And not just any sun, but a sun whose luster is "above that of the sun at noon-day." In so confessing, I do not belittle "the twelve" any more than Lehi did. They are not to be criticized when their light fades to near nothingness when placed next to him who is "the light of the world."

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> 1 Nephi 1.<sup>8-9</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See, for example, John 1.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See Isaiah 9.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See 1 Corinthians 4.<sup>5</sup>

And I looked, and beheld three generations pass away in righteousness; and their garments were white even like unto the Lamb of God. And the angel said unto me: "These are made white in the blood of the Lamb, because of their faith in him." <sup>12</sup>And I, Nephi, also saw many of the fourth generation who passed away in righteousness.

<sup>13</sup>And \*I saw the multitudes of the earth gathered together. <sup>14</sup>And the angel said unto me: "Behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren.

<sup>15</sup>\*I looked and beheld the people of my seed gathered together in multitudes against the seed of my brethren; and they were gathered together to battle. <sup>16</sup>And the angel spake unto me, saying: "Behold the fountain of filthy water which thy father saw; yea, even the river of which he spake; and the depths thereof are the depths of hell."

<sup>16</sup>And the angel spake unto me, saying: "Behold the fountain of filthy water which thy father saw; yea, even the river of which he spake; and the depths thereof are the depths of hell. <sup>17</sup>And the mists of darkness are the temptations of the devil, which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men, and leadeth them away into broad roads, that they perish and are lost. <sup>18</sup>And the large and spacious building, which thy father saw, is vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men. And a great and a terrible gulf divideth them; yea, even the word of the justice of the Eternal God, and the Messiah who is the Lamb of God, of whom the Holy Ghost beareth record, from the beginning of the world until this time, and from this time henceforth and forever."

<sup>19</sup>And while the angel spake these words, I beheld and saw that the seed of my brethren did contend against my seed, according to the word of the angel; and because of the pride of my seed, and the temptations of the devil, I beheld that the seed of my brethren did overpower the people of my seed. <sup>20</sup>And \*I beheld, and saw the people of the seed of my brethren that they had overcome my seed; and they went forth in multitudes upon the face of the land. <sup>21</sup>And I saw them gathered together in multitudes; and I saw wars and rumors of wars among them; and in wars and rumors of wars I saw many generations pass away.

<sup>22</sup>And the angel said unto me: "Behold these shall dwindle in unbelief."

<sup>23</sup>And \*I beheld, after they had dwindled in unbelief they became a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup>And the angel said unto me: 'Look!'

And I said: "I behold many nations and kingdoms."

<sup>6</sup>And \*I beheld this great and abominable church; and I saw the devil that he was the founder of it. And I also saw gold, and silver, and silks, and scarlets, and fine-twined linen, and all manner of precious clothing; and I saw many harlots. And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the gold, and the silver, and the silks, and the scarlets, and the fine-twined linen, and the precious clothing, and the harlots, are the desires of this great and abominable church. <sup>9</sup>And also for the praise of the world do they destroy the saints of God, and bring them down into captivity."

Today's reading begins the twelfth and longest of Nephi's fourteen visions. His first eight visions were focused on Jesus, who was represented in Lehi's vision by the tree of life. The ninth vision served as a transition vision from Jesus to the forces that oppose him and his followers. These opposing forces were symbolized in Lehi's vision by a great and spacious building, which represented the wisdom and pride of the world, or that about which the world is skilled and in which it takes pride: wealth, power, and prestige.

The tenth vision<sup>3</sup> begins with a description of the great and spacious building's destructive nature as wars and rumors of wars break out for many generations, presumably over competition for wealth, power, and prestige. Then, after these many generations, we see Jesus's opposition to the great and spacious building as he appears and puts a temporary end to the wars and rumors of wars. Here, we should assume that a commitment to Christ and his teachings checks individual, societal, and national drives for wealth, power, and prestige.

The eleventh vision<sup>4</sup> is a near mirror image of the tenth. It begins with peaceful impact of Jesus' ministry and ends, as the tenth vision began, with wars and rumors of wars dominating many generations. Sandwiched in between the peace<sup>5</sup> and the war<sup>6</sup> is a return to the nature and impact of the great and spacious building, signifying, again, its opposition to Jesus and the deleterious effects that the drive for wealth, power, and prestige have on humankind.<sup>7</sup>

In the tenth vision, then, we witnessed war and rumor of war among Nephi's descendants brought on by the great and spacious building's presence among them. In the eleventh vision, we witnessed war and rumor of war among Nephi's brothers' descendants brought on by the great and spacious building. As we

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>The angel spake unto me, saying: "Look!"

And I looked and beheld many nations and kingdoms. <sup>2</sup>And the angel said unto me: "What beholdest thou?"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>And he said unto me: "These are the nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>And \*I saw among the nations of the Gentiles the formation of a great church. <sup>5</sup>And the angel said unto me: "Behold the formation of a church which is most abominable above all other churches, which slayeth the saints of God, yea, and tortureth them and bindeth them down, and yoketh them with a yoke of iron, and bringeth them down into captivity."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 11. <sup>1-7</sup>; 11. <sup>8-11</sup>; 11. <sup>12-18</sup>; 11. <sup>19-23</sup>; 11. <sup>24-25</sup>; 11. <sup>26-29</sup>; 11. <sup>30</sup>; 11. <sup>31</sup>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> 11.<sup>32-36</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> 12.<sup>1-10</sup>

<sup>4 12.11-23</sup> 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Verses 11-12

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Verses 19-23

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Verses 13-18

begin the twelfth vision, we see the presence of the great and spacious building among the gentiles.

At this point, one might object: "Wait," I see no mention of the great and spacious building in today's reading."

We will refrain from saying, "O fools and slow of heart," and just move on to a demonstration of how, though the symbolism and vocabulary of this vison differs from the proceeding, its message remains the same. You will remember that in our meditations on 1 Nephi 11. 32-36, we noted the visions' interpretation of the great and spacious building as being the "pride" and "wisdom" of this world. Put differently, the great and spacious building represents those things in which the world takes pride and possesses skill. The world takes pride in the acquisition of wealth, power, and prestige, and is very good at it. With this in mind, we can have a look at today's reading and the existence of this building in the gentile world.

Nephi sees the "formation of a great church. He sees that this church is "most abominable above all other churches." He then characterizes the church. First he notes that the church "slayeth the saints of God, yea, and tortureth them and bindeth them down, and yoketh them with a yoke of iron, and bringeth them down into captivity." Here, we see the exercise of power. Whereas the great and spacious building exercised its power to kill and persecute Jesus and his apostles, here, the great and abominable church exercises its power to kill and persecute all of Jesus' disciples. In other words, both the great and spacious building and the great and abominable church stand in opposition to Jesus. They seek and use power in this opposition.

We saw earlier that the great and spacious building represents all those individuals and institutions that take pride in prestige. In this reading, we find that the great and abominable seeking prestige: "Also for *the praise of the world* do they destroy the saints of God, and bring them down into captivity."

So far, then, the great and abominable church possesses two of the three drives characterized by the great and spacious building: power and prestige. We now turn our attention to the third of the triumvirate of drives: wealth.

"I also saw gold, and silver, and silks, and scarlets, and fine-twined linen, and all manner of precious clothing; and I saw many harlots. And the angel spake unto me, saying: 'Behold the gold, and the silver, and the silks, and the scarlets, and the fine-twined linen, and the precious clothing, and the harlots, are the desires of this great and abominable church."

Unlike power and prestige, which are less tangible and visible, wealth is extraordinarily tangible and easy to see. Elsewhere, we will want to explore in depth the relationship between materialism, or the drive for wealth and harlots. The pair of materialism and prostitution—and sexual immorality in general—have much in common and often run in tandem. But for now, we point out that the three gods worshipped in the great and spacious building—wealth, power, and prestige—are the same three gods worshipped in the great and abominable church.

Like the great and spacious building, the great and abominable "church" represents all institutions, secular or sacred, that have as their reason for being the accumulation of wealth or power or prestige or all of them together. It is these institutions and this prideful drive for wealth, power, and prestige that is a the very heart of all conflict, individual, societal, and national. It stands in opposition to Jesus and his principles. Safety from the all conflicts, wars, and rumors of wars is only found in adherence to Jesus' teachings which warn of the dangers of the desire and accumulation of wealth, power, and prestige.

\_

<sup>8 11.32-36</sup> 

## 1 nephi 13.<sup>10–14</sup>— Meditation 1 (20<sup>th</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)

<sup>10</sup>And I looked and beheld many waters; and they divided the Gentiles from the seed of my brethren.

<sup>12</sup>And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land. <sup>13</sup>And \*I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters. <sup>14</sup>And \*I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles upon the land of promise; and I beheld the wrath of God, that it was upon the seed of my brethren; and they were scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten.

Today's text must be read within its context. It is a portion of Nephi's twelfth vision (there will be a total of fourteen). While interpreting many events from his father's dream, these fourteen visions seek especially to explicate the meaning and significance of the two most important elements: the tree and the great and spacious building. These two elements stand in opposition to one another. The first is the love of God and the things of God. The second is the love of this world and the things of this world."

This twelfth vision, which began at 1 Nephi 13.<sup>1</sup>, seeks to explicate the second element of the dream: the love of this world and the things of this world—especially wealth, power, and prestige. It is important to note, then, that immediately before today's text, Nephi saw that the world was driven by its desire and love for wealth, power, and prestige (vs. 1-9).

This is the context for this reading. A "gentile" man, followed by other "gentile "men, followed by "multitudes of the Gentiles" came to America. They came, we should understand from the context, in search of wealth, power, and prestige. This was the driving force of the "gentile" culture and theology from which they cmme. The "gentiles" believed that they were God's (exceptional) people. They believed that the indigenous population was something less than human (remember how the great and spacious building's dwellers "point the finger of scorn." a anyone who does not live in and abide by the values of the building). Therefore, the invading "gentiles" claimed that the "wrath of God" rested heavily upon the indigenous peoples, justifying their violence against those very people. All this proved catastrophic for the indigenous people.

These "gentile" cultural and theological beliefs have persisted to this day. People all over the globe, in fact, have suffered "the wrath of God" as the "gentile" nations have scoured and scorched the earth in search of wealth, power, and prestige. But what, really, one must ask, is "What part did God play in all this? Does the fact that He predicted and described the events mean that He condoned them? Something to think about. Something we must take up in another meditation.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: October 24, 2024)

.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup>And \*the angel said unto me: "Behold the wrath of God is upon the seed of thy brethren."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 1 Nephi 8.<sup>33</sup>

## 1 nephi 13.<sup>10–14</sup>— Meditation 2 (21<sup>st</sup> in "the visions of nephi" series)

<sup>10</sup>And I looked and beheld many waters; and they divided the Gentiles from the seed of my brethren.

<sup>12</sup>And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land. <sup>13</sup>And \*I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters. <sup>14</sup>And \*I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles upon the land of promise; and I beheld the wrath of God, that it was upon the seed of my brethren; and they were scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten.

Today's text represents a portion of Nephi's twelfth of fourteen visions. In it, he seems to see the man we know as Columbus. He seems to see that Columbus, with God's help, defied the intellectual "captivity" that maintained the flatness of the earth, and so sailed to America. So far, so good. But bad things would come from this good. America's indigenous peoples, as Nephi also saw, would suffer immensely and die by the millions, often violently at the hands of "gentiles."

In the current environment of 2022 America, we are engaged in a debate, again, about which part of this story we will allow to be told. Part of the problem is that we imagine, wrongly, that if the bad parts are told, the good parts will become illegitimate. Within my faith, there is the false notion that because God foretold the good and the bad, He is responsible for both—responsible for the good because of revelation, and responsible for the bad because of His "wrath." Because He predicted the bad, we seem to want to think that He condoned it. But predicting does not imply condoning. Prediction is simply truth telling, a description of "what really will be" without justifying or pardoning it.

Fortunately, I will not be asked to judge the man we call Columbus. God will do that. And He will do that in the spirit of truth; knowing what really was; knowing that the man really was insightful enough to go against the grain of the ignorant cultural biases of his day, and depraved enough to engage in irrefutable barbaric acts of violence against other human beings.

But we must be clear about this much. We need not rely on the interpretations of a dream. We have it from God's own mouth: "This is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger [or with the desire for wealth, power, and prestige], one against another, but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away." This should put to rest all notions that the stirring up of gentiles to come to America and the subsequent rape, plunder, and murder of millions of God's children occurred under the inspiration of heaven. Yes, He described it. No, He did not prescribe it. And no, no, no, He did not inspire or condone it.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup>And \*the angel said unto me: "Behold the wrath of God is upon the seed of thy brethren."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 3 Nephi 11.<sup>30</sup>

## 1 nephi $13.^{10-14}$ — Meditation 3 ( $22^{nd}$ in "the visions of nephi" series)

<sup>10</sup>And I looked and beheld many waters; and they divided the Gentiles from the seed of my brethren.

<sup>12</sup>And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land. <sup>13</sup>And \*I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters. <sup>14</sup>And \*I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles upon the land of promise; and I beheld the wrath of God, that it was upon the seed of my brethren; and they were scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten.

I do not know what the future will know or think about events transpiring in the United States of America of 2022. I do not know what it will know or think about the current attacks on truth and reason that abound among its people. I do not know what the future will know or think about the current desires to censor and whitewash the past, including and especially our nation's past. I do know, though, that my faith has used passages such as today's to whitewash the past.

Now, if it were only a matter of whitewashing the past, we might not care. Who, after all, really cares about history? But the past and the doing and writing of history is often used to inform the present and as preamble to the future. So, we must care about the past and how it is understood. We must have an honest and true history of the past in order to assure an honest future.

And here's another thing I know. I know that "truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come," or, in the language of Jacob, "things as the *really* are." Reality... such a slippery little devil to balance.

The reality is that "a man," presumably Columbus, but others as well, escaped the "captivity" of ignorance that taught, among other things, that the world was flat. The reality is that he sailed in hopes of acquiring the wealth and power and prestige that was the be all and end all of his culture—this, according to Nephi's visions. The reality is that he boldly sailed the oceans blue and came upon a land previously unknown to him. The reality is that here he found people, indigenous people, living on the land. The reality is that he and his crew began a campaign of rape, plunder, mutilation, and murder that lasted centuries.

That's all simply fact. The reality is that, eventually, a new nation was born on this land that had been discovered by a man enlightened enough to think a new thought and depraved enough to engage in violence that was as old as human history. All of this is what really happened. It is truth, the brilliance and the ugliness together. We must be true enough to maintain the balance to hold it all together at once. And never, ever can we use the ugliness of the past to justify any ugliness in the present or to invent new ugliness in the future. For, truly, through the past, we hold the future in our hands.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup>And \*the angel said unto me: "Behold the wrath of God is upon the seed of thy brethren."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> DC 93.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Jacob 4.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>15</sup>And I beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon the Gentiles, and they did prosper and obtain the land for their inheritance; and I beheld that they were white, and exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain. <sup>16</sup>And \*I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles who had gone forth out of captivity did humble themselves before the Lord; and the power of the Lord was with them. <sup>17</sup>And I beheld that their mother Gentiles were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them. <sup>18</sup>And I beheld that the power of God was with them, and also that the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle. <sup>19</sup>And I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles that had gone out of captivity were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations.

For many centuries now, scholars have conducted close, "critical" examinations of Hebrew and Greek Biblical texts. Such close examination has been a mixed bag. It has brought many insights that have increased our understanding and appreciation of the Bible's genius. It has also led to false openings that have distracted and yielded little increased understanding and appreciation.

Notwithstanding the tremendous disadvantage of not having access to the original language texts, I am sympathetic to the increased interest in reading the Book of Mormon more critically, i.e. seriously. I am sympathetic to questions of authorship and translation methodology. What we know of the Book of Mormon "translation" process is such as to convince us that it was not traditional. According to those who witnessed the process, there were times, for example, when the text was covered with cloth or was not even in the same room as Joseph recited text to his various scribes. It is impossible to know how much Joseph's thoughts and views interplayed with those he found in the text.

Today's reading is an example. The racism expressed, presumably, by Nephi as he spoke glowingly of "gentile" whiteness and disparagingly of Lamanite darkness sounds an awfully lot like the feelings and beliefs that nearly every American in Joseph's day held toward their own race and native Americans. The view of America's founding and of its revolt from English domination found in this passage sounds strikingly familiar to the views of 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans. None of this diminishes my personal appreciation for the Book of Mormon or its messages. It does, however, drive me to read all scripture, including the Book of Mormon, as seriously and carefully as it so richly deserves. It truly is one of America's greatest treasures.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

And I, Nephi, beheld it; and he said unto me: "The book that thou beholdest is a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; and it also containeth many of the prophecies of the holy prophets; and it is a record like unto the engravings which are upon the plates of brass, save there are not so many; nevertheless, they contain the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; wherefore, they are of great worth unto the Gentiles."

In my lifetime there has been an increased emphasis on reading the Book of Mormon. I am old enough to remember how the increased emphasis came about. I am old enough to remember then President Benson utilizing DC 85.<sup>54-57</sup> to inform Church members that we were "under condemnation" because we had "treated lightly the things you have received" and that one of those things treated lightly was the "new covenant, even the Book of Mormon." Though the passage goes on, he stopped there for his purposes.

Now, much good has come of this increased emphasis on reading the Book of Mormon. Anything that encourages individuals to spend more and quality time in scripture is to be applauded. However, the DC passage does not end where Benson cut it off. It goes on to say "and the former commandments which I have given them." Among the "former commandments" is certainly the Bible. It might be good, today, to bring this latter phrase—"and the former commandments"—back into awareness.

Too often, it seems, individuals have and do neglect the Bible in their daily habit of scripture reading. This is unfortunate. The Bible is, as the angel of God bears witness, "of great worth." While not every portion of the Bible is of equal benefit and utility, it is impossible to overestimate the value and importance of the New Testament Gospels, for example. Here, we hear the words and see the actions of God through words and actions less filtered through human interpretation than anywhere else—though the filter is still present, of course. It is difficult to overestimate the value of an Isaiah (whom Jesus himself recommended for our attention), a Jeremiah, an Amos, a Psalmist, or a Paul. In my view, the Bible plumbs depths that the Book of Mormon barely acknowledges as existing.

It is important to note, however, that whatever one's priority and preference in scripture reading, the condemnation under which the Church found itself in DC 85 was not, in fact, a consequence of an absence or lack of scripture *reading*. It was the absence of "scripture *doing*." The saints were "not only to say" and/or read the Book of Mormon and "the former commandments" found in, among other places, the Bible, "but to *do* according to that which I have written. We want to be good readers of the word of God so that we know what it means to be good doers of the word of God. And by assisting us to know what is required to be good doers of the word, scripture inspires us to more faithfully strive to be better doers of the good found in the good word of God.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup>And \*I, Nephi, beheld that they did prosper in the land; and I beheld a book, and it was carried forth among them. <sup>21</sup>And the angel said unto me: "Knowest thou the meaning of the book?"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup>And I said unto him: "I know not."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup>And he said: "Behold it proceedeth out of the mouth of a Jew."

<sup>24</sup>And the angel of the Lord said unto me: "Thou hast beheld that the book proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew; and when it proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew it contained the fulness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record; and they bear record according to the truth which is in the Lamb of God. <sup>25</sup>Wherefore, these things go forth from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles, according to the truth which is in God.

Antisemitism is as old as Christianity. Perhaps even older. It has waxed and waned over the centuries and millennia. It has, it seems, waxed and waned according to the policies and propaganda of societal leaders and institutions. These leaders and institutions have set the tone.

While there have always been individuals who privately held vile antisemitic attitudes, they have been kept at bay, publicly quieted, during periods, all too short lived, when societal leaders and institutions shamed such attitudes by calling them out for the evil that they are. Vile antisemitic feelings and actions have waxed, becoming more public when societal leaders and institutions have failed to name them for the evil that they are or have, themselves, engaged in antisemitic propaganda and policies.

In today's America, public antisemitism is waxing. As usual, its ascendancy can be directly traced to societal leadership. One particular societal leader has done more for the public antisemitic revival than any other American leader is the past half century. I do not need to name him. We all know who he is. Number 45. He gave American antisemites who had been quieted for decades, shamed for their wickedness, these he gave permission to come out of the closet to reveal and express their hateful nature. Perdition is too good for such a man.

Notwithstanding the vile immorality of this man, the base of his support has come from so called "Christians." Not surprisingly, the waxing of American antisemitism is particularly strong among so called "Christian Nationalists." The vile irony of this fact is obvious, if tragic.

These selfsame "Christians" proclaim their love for the Bible. The proclaim their love of Jesus. But this book for which they proclaim such admiration, "proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew." Many of them, in fact. Furthermore, "the book [that] proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew" went "forth from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles." Jews, hundreds of them, wrote the Bible. Jews, untold thousands of them, maintained the purity of its divine message for millennia. Most ironic of all, of course, is the fact that the man whom "Christian" antisemites call "Son of God," "Lamb of God, indeed, "God," himself, was a Jew.

We will read in coming verses of the impurities that gentile "Christians" introduced into the book that Jews presented them in purity. While we have reservations about the degree to which "Christianity" corrupted the Bible, we have no doubt as to the impurity of Christian attitudes and behaviors, including that found in antisemitism. These impurities of behavior, including those found in antisemitism, form the truest "Christian" impurity—often based on impure readings and interpretations of the Bible.

We cannot, then, escape the inescapable. We cannot escape the conclusion that these antisemitic, Jewhating "Christians" of latter-day American Christendom hate the greatest Jew of them all, the truest of all Jews, Jesus of Nazareth? Refusing to be guided by the pure Biblical message and accept its message of universal sin, American "Christians" would as certainly kill their beloved Jesus as did the Jews upon whom they heap hate. This truth is, in the end, more than ironic. It is damning.

<sup>26</sup> And after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles, thou seest the formation of that great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away. <sup>27</sup>And all this have they done that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men. <sup>28</sup>Wherefore, thou seest that after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God.

In a previous meditation belonging to this series, we commented on the LDS tendency, now decades long, of ignoring the Bible for the simpler and more assessable Book of Mormon. LDS skepticism of the Bible is even longer, going back to the very beginnings of Mormonism and likely finding its genesis in passages such as this one. The traditional LDS understanding of the Bible is that it was corrupted by the early Christian Church, identified with Nephi's "great and abominable church," in the earlier decades and centuries of the common era. There are a number of difficulties with this understanding. We will briefly address only two.

We address the first difficulty repeatedly in this series of meditation and so will spend little time with here. It is the near exclusive identification of Nephi's "great and abominable church" with the early Christian Church, and particularly the Catholic Church. While characteristics of the "great and abominable church"—the desire for wealthy, power, and prestige—are found in the Catholic Church of all ages, as they are in the LDS Church and every other church that has ever existed, the "great and abominable church" is not to be thought synonymous with the Catholic Church or any other church. It represents any and all institutions, sacred or secular, that have as motives and reasons for their existence the acquisition of wealth, power, and prestige and use their powers to oppress in their drive to acquire, maintain, and grow in these "lustful and covetous desires."

Thus, it is our view that any interpretation of this reading that assigns responsibility for any corruption of the Bible exclusively to the Catholic Church is wholly mistaken. This brings us to our second difficulty. Any understanding that assigns responsibility for the alleged *textual* corruption of the Bible to the Catholic Church is beyond wholly wrong—an error of the first magnitude.

We cannot present all the reasons for these assertions here. For now, we will only consider a couple of historical facts that call into question the previously mentioned difficulties. With the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, it has become clear that the text of the Old Testament has remained largely unchanged since, at least, the 1st and 2nd centuries B.C. This means that the Christian church, of any era, has made few if any significant changes to the Old Testament text and that any changes made to the Old Testament text came at the hands of Jews before the first two centuries BC. Thus, if the Old Testament is massively and meaningfully textually corrupt, Jews, not gentiles are responsible.

Textual matters are not significantly different when we turn our attention to the New Testament. The earliest New Testament texts, text fragments, and text quotations that we possess are not significantly different from the text as we have it today. Differences are minor and not of a significant doctrinal nature. This means that if there were significant textual changes to the New Testament that created significant change to doctrine, they came almost immediately and were made by the first generation or two of church leaders. One would expect these earliest church leaders to be more not less ardent in their determination

to maintain the integrity of the text.

All of this leads us to give serious consideration to the following conclusions.

First, whatever plain and precious doctrines were lost to those gentiles who brought the Bible across the seas were lost due to the corruption of the *interpretation* of the text rather than to the corruption of the text itself. We can, therefore, read and appreciate the Bible with a high degree of confidence that we are reading it as it was written originally. It is by no means perfect. There are textual corruptions, to be sure. But they are not such that they call into question the integrity of the messages and doctrines that were originally intended. The LDS skepticism of the Bible, often mere pretense for dismissing inconvenient tensions that exist between the plain meaning of the text and LDS doctrine, is unjustified. More appreciative, confident, and discerning reading of the Bible should be the order of the day.

Now, for our second conclusion. We accept without reservation that the gentiles who crossed the seas to come to America came with a Bible whose interpretation had been corrupted by the "great and abominable church"—institutions of all sorts that took as life's highest goals and achievements the acquisition of wealth, power, and prestige." This leads us to the suspicion that much, if not most of the interpretive corruption that the Bible suffered involved passages and statements that addressed matters associated with the acquisition and use of wealth, power, and prestige.

Our "suspicion" turns almost to "certain conclusion" when we observe America's obsession with all things related to wealth, power, and prestige from its very inception to this very day. Above all else, America has erred in matters related to wealth and power and prestige. One thinks of one of Alexis De Tocqueville's many observations concerning the colonial America in which he so studiously traveled,

"I know of no country, indeed, where the love of money has taken stronger hold on the affections of men and where a profounder contempt is expressed for the theory of the permanent equality of property"

This reality of the "gentile" American spirit is as good an example as any of the perversion that the "great and abominable church" brought to America through its perverted interpretation of that Holy Book we call the Bible.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Democracy in America, Vol. 1, p. 35.

<sup>29</sup>And after these plain and precious things were taken away it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles; and after it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles, yea, even across the many waters which thou hast seen with the Gentiles which have gone forth out of captivity, thou seest—because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book, which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God—because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them.

<sup>30</sup>Nevertheless, thou beholdest that the Gentiles who have gone forth out of captivity, and have been lifted up by the power of God above all other nations, upon the face of the land which is choice above all other lands, which is the land that the Lord God hath covenanted with thy father that his seed should have for the land of their inheritance; wherefore, thou seest that the Lord God will not suffer that the Gentiles will utterly destroy the mixture of thy seed, which are among thy brethren. <sup>31</sup>Neither will he suffer that the Gentiles shall destroy the seed of thy brethren. <sup>32</sup>Neither will the Lord God suffer that the Gentiles shall forever remain in that awful state of blindness, which thou beholdest they are in, because of the plain and most precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back by that abominable church, whose formation thou hast seen.

We have suggested that there is very little evidence that the Bible which the gentiles turned Americas brought across the seas was textually corrupted by the Catholic Church, or anyone else for that matter. Rather, the corruption responsible for "taking away" "plain and precious things" from the Bible was interpretive and based on false traditions of Biblical interpretation. These false interpretations were propagated by the "great and abominable church" which was all human institutions, sacred and secular, that prioritized the accumulation and growth of wealth, power, and prestige. With their having this triumvirate of idolatrous gods as their highest priority, these institutions worked diligently to confuse and stifle Biblical interpretations that focused, among other things, on the evils of this triumvirate of gods. They managed to leave Americans with their corrupted interpretive traditions with a Bible they could use to justify abject materialism, inequality, and the oppression, such as slavery, that was used to achieve their evil lustful ends.

Today's passage provides indications of the success of these devious, even Satanic machinations. Speaking of gentiles turned Americans, Nephi informs us that "because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them."

Nephi understands the hand of God to have been in the coming of gentiles to America and their success in throwing off the yoke of tyrannical European monarchy. We find in this a rhetoric that simply sees God as an active participant in every aspect of human life at every moment. While we do not accept such rhetoric as literal and cosmos, we'll just let it slide for now.

But what is very, very clear, unquestionably so, is that, having arrived in America, these gentiles "stumbled." And not only so, their stumbling was "exceedingly great." And the *exceedingly great* stumbling was not an isolated phenomenon. "Many" did stumble. American society itself was stumbling about in a darkness manufactured by those institutions that had corrupted the Bible and, among other evils, made a virtue out of vice—made a virtue of the lust for wealth, power, and prestige, and happily entered the great and spacious building. Indeed, the darkness was so complete that the gentiles turned Americas were in an "awful state of blindness." I don't know what the difference is between blindness and "awful" blindness, but whatever it is, America's blind state fell into the latter category of *awful*.

Such exceeding great stumbling and such awful blindness granted "Satan" an opportunity to have "great power over them." Satan did not simply hold way in America, he gripped it tightly by the neck. He had "great" power over the nation. He was as much in charge as anyone or anything. America looked to him for deliverance.

Don't blame the messenger. I am simply repeating what Nephi saw in vision.

The Satanic inspired stumbling was great and multifaceted. Among the many American evils was the early and oft-repeated murder of the indigenous populations that the gentile Americans found inconvenient, a stumbling block to their goals of acquiring more wealth and more power and more prestige. God, according to Nephi, foresaw the butchery. But prediction should not be thought of as or be confused with prescription. God did not prescribe it. He did not direct it. He did not command it. He did not condone it. Murder and genocide are a human labor, not a divine one.

God's labor, whatever form it takes, is to save and advance life. And so God set to work to see that the gentiles failed in their intents and actions to "utterly destroy" the indigenous populations. No matter how hard or how often the gentiles turned Americans tried to exterminate the indigenous peoples—and they did work often and hard at it—their labors would not be successful.

In the next reading, we will see a part of God's labor in behalf of the indigenous peoples of America. As we think of God's labor to deliver them, we are reminded of that which an ancient pack of Egyptian slaves who were oppressed and threatened with genocide discovered about God. He is an emancipator. He cares much for the downtrodden. He comes to their rescue. If and when mortals refuse to step forward and labor with Him, then He stretched out His powerful arm and does His own work all by Himself. Lord help such an obstinate, stumbling, blinded people, society, or nation.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!