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Victor L. Ludlow

Covenant Teachings of the Book of Mormon

Summary:

Victor Ludlow shows that covenants are prominent in the scriptures. He distinguishes between horizontal covenants, which take place between individuals, and vertical covenants, which take place between God and mortals. He discusses what it means to "cut a covenant" and its various applications. He notes how covenants entail requirements that find expression in obedience or disobedience with the consequences of blessings or punishments. He comments on how in 3 Nephi the Savior devotes significant time to speaking about covenants directly or dealing with subjects that are rooted in covenants, such as the teachings found in the Sermon at the Temple, which corresponds to the Sermon on the Mount. Charts and graphs are included.

Transcript
Book of Mormon, Teachings

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Covenant Teachings of the Book of Mormon

Victor L. Ludlow

Today we are gathered together to learn a little bit about some of the covenant teachings of the Book of Mormon, particularly those presented by the Savior as a resurrected being in 3 Nephi. But actually covenant teachings are not only a part of the Book of Mormon. Some of you Bible scholars may be aware of the fact that in the earliest English editions and translations of the Bible, the two parts of the Bible were known as the Old Covenant and the New Covenant that we now identify as the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Covenant teachings are also an important part of that work of scripture Joseph Smith brought forth, as evidenced in its title, the Doctrine and Covenants. Sometimes we may not appreciate how much covenant teachings are a part of the Book of Mormon, but we find it starting right on the front page, on the very title page. Do you remember from the title page of the Book of Mormon what the first stated purpose of the Book of Mormon is? Most people would respond, "To convince Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ," and that's a very important purpose, but it's not the first stated. In fact, if you remember, that phrase begins with the words, "and also unto the convincing of Jew and Gentile." There's something that precedes it.

If you have your Book of Mormon with you, you might want to turn to the title page and you'll notice it's basically divided into two paragraphs. Most of the first paragraph, and part of the second, tell us what the Book of Mormon is—the different types of plates and records. But starting on the fourth line in the second paragraph we find the purpose of the Book of Mormon, which is, "to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever." So the first stated purpose is to teach the House' of Israel a little bit about some of their ancient history, what God has done for their forefathers, so that they can know the covenants of the Lord.

The term *covenant* shows up one way or another, in one form or another, over a hundred and fifty times in the Book of Mormon, and what I would like to do is indicate where some of these references are. Basically there are two types of covenant references in the Book of Mormon. We might call them horizontal and vertical. The horizontal covenant references are those covenant promises given by one individual to another, one mortal, one human being to another. King So-and-So of the Lamanites covenants with General So-and-So of the Nephites something-or-another. And there are about 4 dozen of those references. I think of greater importance to us are the

113 vertical covenant references. That's what we usually think of; a covenant is an agreement between God and a mortal being and there are 113 of them in the Book of Mormon.

Now the word *covenant* itself comes from an ancient Hebrew phrase *karat b'rith*. It has a variety of different translations. Literally, it means "to cut a bond," but scholars aren't quite sure how to translate this phrase, and so they usually summarize as one of three possible meanings (see figure 1). The first, "to select or choose," is usually indicated by some kind of a cutting motion. This could be analogous to, say, a woodsman going into the forest and covenanting or selecting or choosing certain trees to be harvested, and he would cut or make a mark on the trunk of those trees. Well, the way the ancients, at least in the Semitic culture, did this, they would have a sacrifice, an animal sacrifice that they would give. And part of that cutting motion would be a symbol of this treaty or covenant relationship that these individuals would be entered into. This may be, I don't know, but maybe a part of the origin of the Native American custom of Blood Brothers, where they would make a bond with each other by cutting their wrists and then joining them together to literally exchange a little bit of blood with each other.

A second possible meaning of the term is "to bind" or "to join or chain together," "to bond or link in a mutual agreement one with another." We often associate that with covenants or contracts or bonds and the like. The third is "to cut or break or share bread with each other." Bread was often a symbolic ritual in a special meal that would be used to indicate a special covenant relationship one with another. This is still true among some of the Bedouin and some of the Arabs to this day, so that if they invite you into their home or tent and you share bread with them, they break bread or eat bread with you, then they are duty bound as your host to defend or protect you even though just a few minutes ago you may have been complete strangers. They would give their life for you if you shared bread with them under their roof.

Now there are many purposes for covenants (see figure 1). We don't have time to go into them. Any one of them would be worthy of a well-defined discussion or talk. Covenants give us teachings about purposes of life, our existence, our relationship with our Heavenly Father, the plan of Salvation. Covenants also indicate God's commandments and expectations for us, because usually a part of the covenant relationship or certain specific stipulations that the different parties have of each other and Heavenly Father's expectations are usually defined in the form of laws or covenants. He tells us that when we do what He has asked, he is bound to give us those blessings that are part of the stipulations or part of the covenant contract.

Covenants also provide incentives for obedience. One part of a covenant

Figure 1

COVENANT = karat b'rith
"to cut a bond"

To select or choose (by a cutting motion)
To bind, join, or chain together
To cut, break, or eat bread together

Give **teachings** about life's purposes
Indicate God's **commandments**
Provide **incentives** for obedience
Promise **blessings** and rewards
Establish **gateways** for salvation
Show **measurements** towards perfection
Develop **patterns** of behavior

is usually a listing of certain blessings and warnings for disobedience of that covenant contract. This was true of the ancient Kings with their vassals; this is true of God with His children. There are certain blessings attached to these covenants, but if they are disobeyed, there are warnings and punishments attached to them as well. Sometimes, for positive reasons, sometimes maybe out of negative fear, these covenants could nevertheless be an incentive to obey and keep the commandments.

Now they do, as indicated in the fourth reason here, promise blessings and rewards, and God is absolutely sure with His promises. He considers Himself duty-bound. In fact, I think that maybe is one of the reasons He gives us so many commandments—you know, maybe we'll keep a few of them and that gives Him a few more reasons to give us some blessings. That's just my feeling on that. But one of the most important purposes of covenants is they provide gateways for salvation. There are certain covenants, such as baptism by water and spirit, that are absolutely prerequisite for a person to enter into the kingdom of God. And there are other covenants like those of the temple that are necessary gateways for special Celestial blessings that our Heavenly Father would like to give to us.

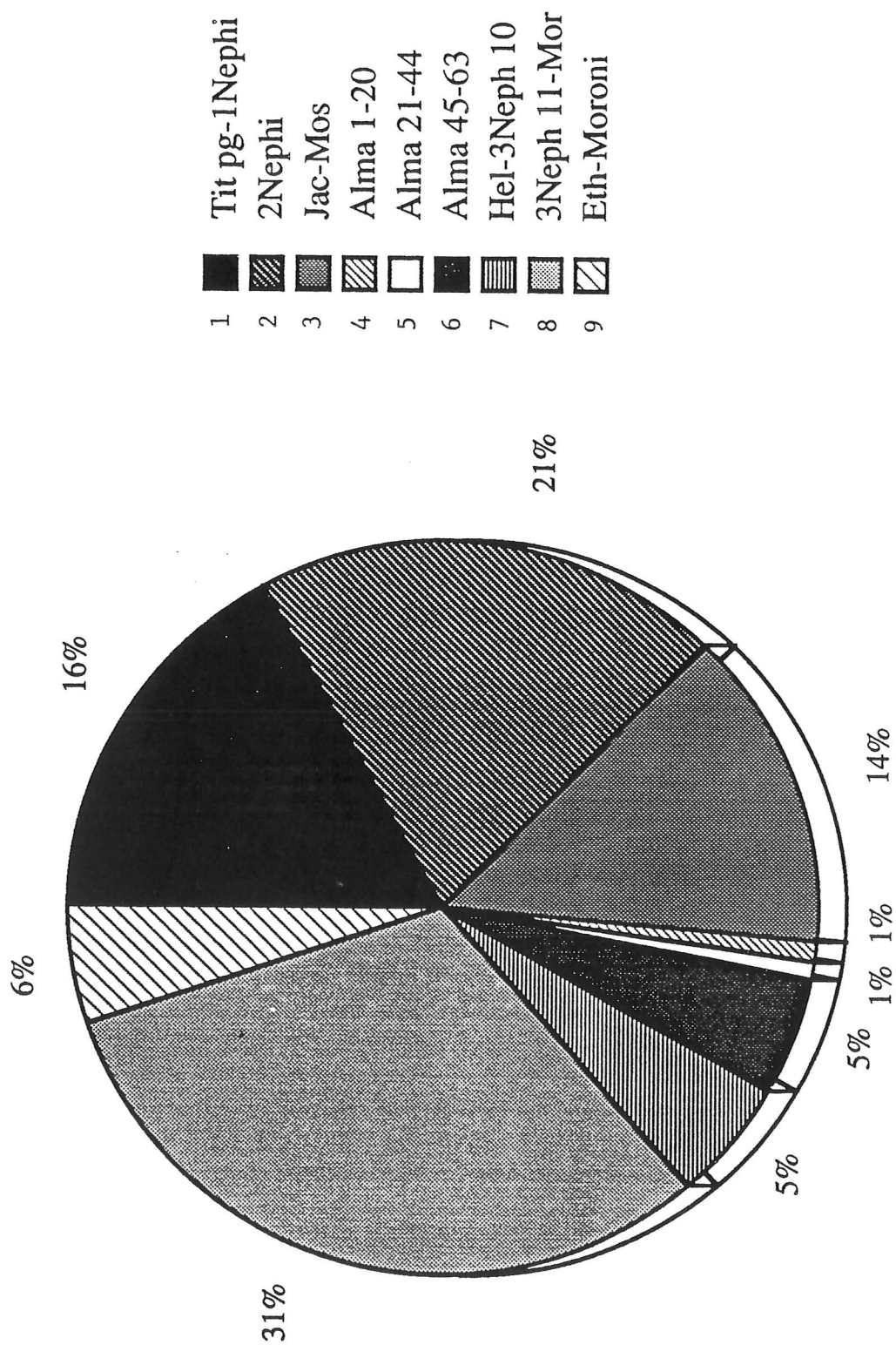
Covenants also give us measurements, or show us how far we are progressing on our personal path towards perfection. Perfection is a wholeness, a completeness of life and purpose and existence, and as we enter into and keep these covenants we begin to see how close we are coming to that wholeness, that completeness of our Heavenly Father. And finally, as we enter into a covenant relationship, as we keep these covenants, we develop patterns of righteousness that will carry us into and through the eternities. So this is an opportunity for us in little ways to make commitments with our Heavenly Father, so that as we obey them, then the greater opportunities will be opened up to us in the hereafter.

Now, again, as we talk about these covenant relationships between mortals and humans we find that there are over 150 covenant references in the Book of Mormon—about one every three pages. A little less than a third of them are horizontal, but 113 are these vertical covenant relationships between God and mortals. But they are not evenly distributed throughout the Book of Mormon. I took the Book of Mormon and tried to divide it into nine equally sized portions (see figure 2). Starting with 1 Nephi and coming on around to Moroni, you'll notice that some of these sections of the pie chart are very large, and some of them very small.

We could perhaps summarize this and say that of all the covenant relationships in the Book of Mormon, that is, these vertical covenant relationships, they tend to predominate in three books. It's easy to remember which three books they are, because they all have the same name with a different numerical prefix—First, Second, and Third—meaning 1, 2, and 3

Figure 2

"Covenant" Citations in the Book of Mormon



Nephi. Here's another way of illustrating that same chart (see figure 3). You'll notice that there are a lot of references in 1 and 2 Nephi and again a number of them when we get here in 3 Nephi. So, it's clear that Nephi, Jacob, the resurrected Savior, Mormon—these were the primary speakers, writers, authors of these particular portions of the Book of Mormon. They, in particular, had a lot to say about covenants.

In fact, if we take a look at the people who had the most to say about covenants (see figure 4) we see Nephi, particularly as recorded in 1 and 2 Nephi, and Mormon, who sometimes interjects all the way along through his translation, but particularly there in 3 Nephi and in parts of Mormon and Moroni we have other references there at the end, but you'll notice the longest bar by far is the Lord Himself. Most of those references from the Savior come as part of His resurrection ministry in 3 Nephi. So I think it might be appropriate for us to take some time and look at 3 Nephi and some of the covenant teachings of the Savior as recorded in 3 Nephi.

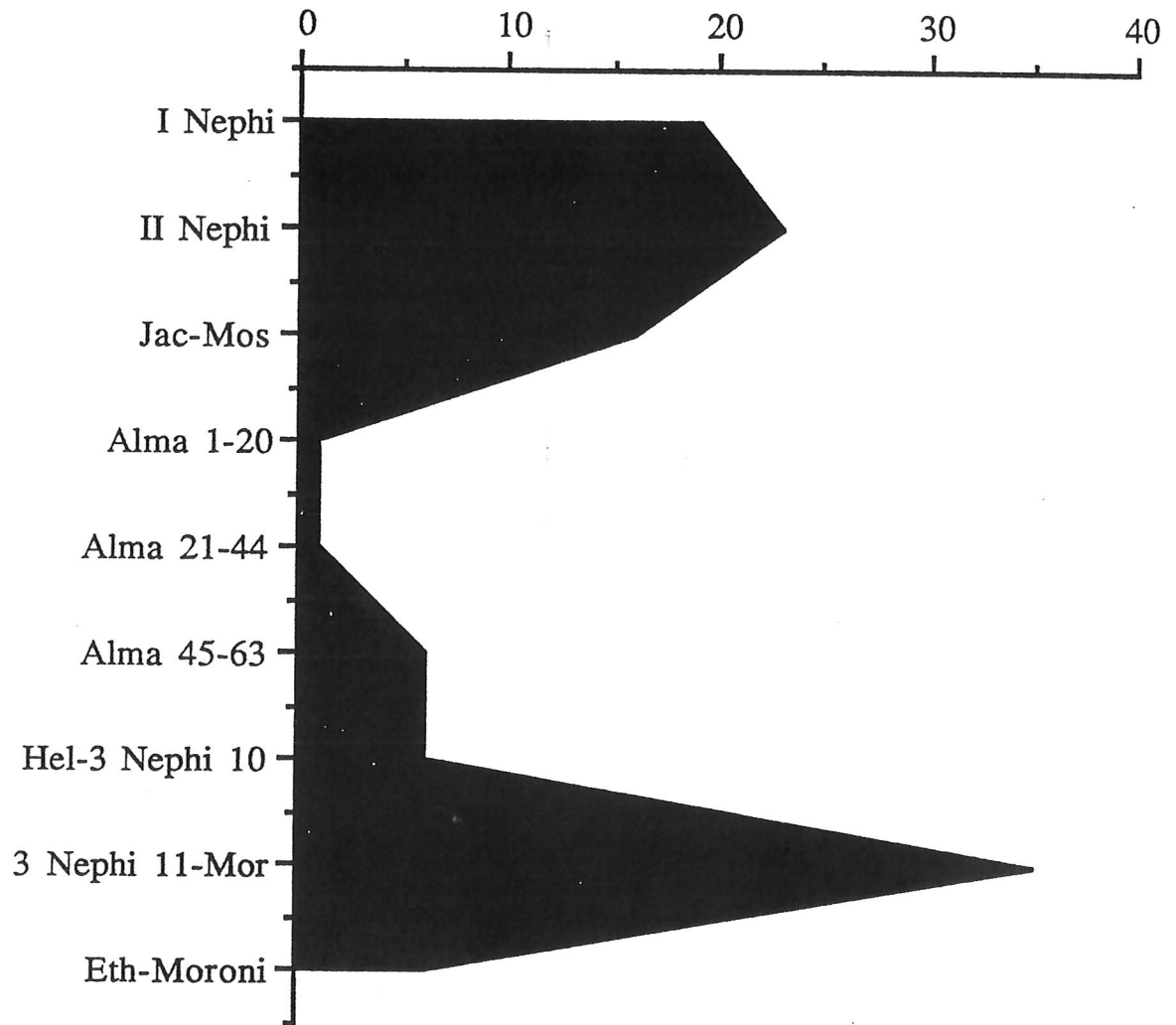
Let's pick it up in chapter 12. Chapters 12, 13, and 14 of 3 Nephi introduce some of the great teachings of the Savior, many of which He had given as part of his mortal ministry as recorded in the New Testament. In fact chapters 12, 13, and 14 are what we often call the Sermon on the Mount. Although here in the Book of Mormon setting, sometimes it's called the Sermon at the Temple. It's basically the same sermon as we find recorded in Matthew 5–7 with a few important differences and a number of not so important differences.

One of the most important differences is the context within which this sermon is placed that is lacking in the New Testament. Many New Testament scholars aren't really sure to whom the Savior is speaking as He gives this important Sermon on the Mount. On the one hand, there are multitudes that are following Him as He is preaching in the hillsides of the Galilee; on the other hand, He has this small group of select apostles and disciples that obviously He's teaching and grooming and preparing for an important work that lay ahead of them. So to whom is He talking in the Sermon on the Mount? Is it just Peter, James, and John and those select few that these expectations are asked of? Or is this any and everybody who might be listening in? Are they supposed to be adhering to these commandments and exhortations of the Sermon on the Mount?

In the New Testament, scholars argue one extreme or another or range in between. But in the Book of Mormon, we can put it into a more specific context. In fact, if you read verse 1 of chapter 12 it talks about how the Savior highlights some of these individuals He had called there with special authority, particularly authority to teach and to baptize. Starting in the middle of verse 1, addressing this general audience, He says, "Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from

Figure 3

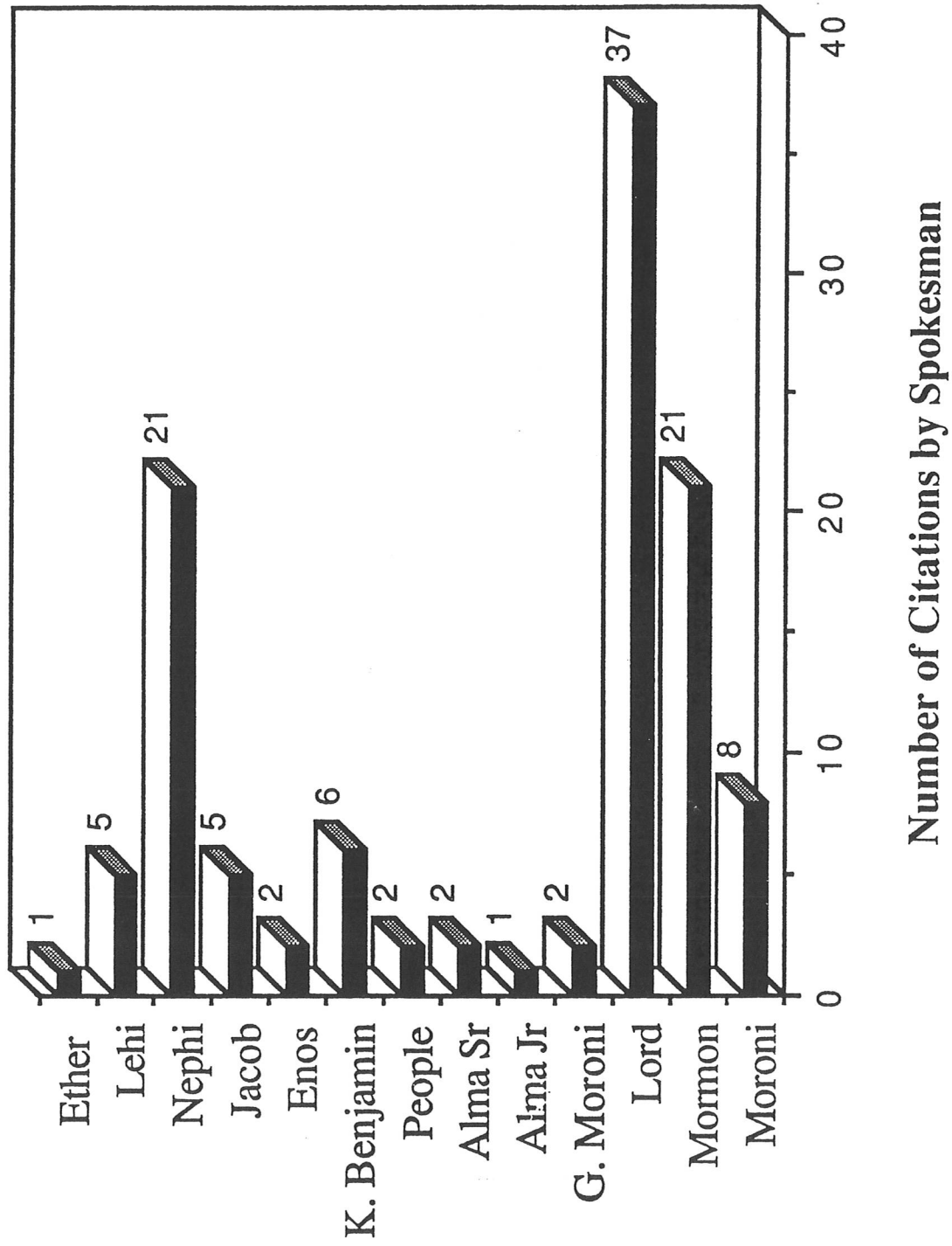
"Covenant" Citations in the Book of Mormon



Number of Citations by Section

Figure 4

"Covenant" Citations in the Book of Mormon



among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants; and unto them I have given power that they may baptize you with water; and after that ye are baptized with water, behold, I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost; therefore"—now He repeats it again—"blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized." So whom is He talking to? Those who heed the message and are willing to be baptized. So it's not just anybody. When He gave the Sermon on the Mount in the hills near the Sea of Galilee, it wasn't meant for some traveler on his way to Athens who sees this multitude on the hillside, goes up next to it, hears this man talking to them, and thinks, "Oh, this must be the Galilee branch of the local agricultural college talking about seeds and flowers and all these kinds of things." No, it wasn't just a storyteller. He wasn't going to be obligated to adhere to and understand and commit to what he had heard. But those who had believed and had been baptized, to them these exhortations and promises apply.

He emphasized that through the end of the verse into the second verse here in 3 Nephi 12, talking about not only those who would believe his words but those who would believe the words of the disciples of His who would take the word out to other people. In either case they needed to believe and be baptized and then to them would these promises of the Beatitudes, as they are called, to them would these promises apply, and later the exhortations to rise to a higher law, to live according to His spiritual law rather than to just continue the letter of the Mosaic law. That's the group then to whom this Sermon on the Mount applies. So it wasn't just these select few apostles and disciples and it wasn't just any and everybody, but those who had entered into a covenant relationship.

The Sermon on the Mount is, as one scholar puts it, the Christian constitution. It really is a constitution of Christianity. Any and all who claim to be Christians need to read very carefully this Sermon on the Mount and say, "Am I doing this? Am I fulfilling this?" Because these are the blessings and expectations the Savior Himself asks of those who have entered into the water of baptism and taken His name upon themselves. This is a very important covenant context of the Sermon on the Mount that, frankly, is not clear and precise in the New Testament and that sets the stage for our whole perspective of this important Sermon on the Mount. And the fact that it was given here as well as in the New Testament indicates that it is very, very important, that He would repeat it among both groups of Israelites. I have strong personal suspicion that when that record of the Ten Tribes comes forth, I think we'll find this same Sermon on the Mount in their record, that the resurrected Savior also gave them the same teachings, because again this is the basic foundation, minimal expectation, and some very important key blessings promised to those who are of covenant Israel. So that's important for us to realize and remember.

The Sermon on the Mount is given to a people who have already entered

into a covenant relationship. Now we don't have time to go into it verse by verse but it's a classic, I mean it's profound, it's beautiful. We need to study it often. I think it's very appropriate that we study it at least twice every four year cycle that we go through the Gospel Doctrine classes. We get it in the Book of Mormon, we get it in the New Testament, and so every other year we should be taking a careful look at this Sermon on the Mount. Next time you read through it, look at it and say, "All right, I claim to be a Christian; this applies to me—I've been baptized. What am I doing about it?" And I think you might see it from a new angle if you'll look at it from that covenant context.

Now, moving on to chapters 15 and 16 of 3 Nephi, this introduces a second sermon or discourse that the Savior gives, sometimes called the Law and the Covenant Discourse. It's basically chapters 15 and 16 of 3 Nephi. We don't find this in its entirety in the New Testament. Bits and pieces of it are scattered around, like in John 10 and elsewhere. This isn't a developed sermon that we find recorded in any of the New Testament accounts of the Savior's ministry. Part of the context of this Law and Covenant Discourse is that among these Israelites, the Nephites and Lamanites in the New World, there had been some disputation and uncertainty a few decades earlier when the signs of the Savior's birth in Bethlehem were given to the people in the New World. Remember how the prophet Samuel had prophesied this and told them there would be a day and a night and a day as a single day and a new star in the Heavens and so forth. Well, as those signs were given and recorded here in the Book of Mormon, there were some of these Nephites and Lamanites that thought, "Now that the sign of the Savior's birth is being given, He's now here upon the Earth. Now it's His time, we don't need to be living these old Mosaic laws anymore." But Nephi, their prophet, told them properly, "No, we still need to be living the Mosaic law until we're told otherwise." Well, here comes the Savior to them now as a resurrected being a little over 30 years later. He's going to teach them about some old things and some new things—old things like the Mosaic law, some new things of His own laws and covenants. He discusses some of these old things like the law of Moses that had passed away and that others must become new.

Let's pick it up here at verse 4 in chapter 15. This is the Savior speaking to this group here: "Behold, I say unto you that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses." Now how does the Savior know that the Mosaic law was fulfilled? Next verse: "Behold, I am he that gave the law." If there was anybody that ought to know if the law was fulfilled, it would be the Lawgiver! Well, he was the one who as a premortal member of the Godhead about 1300 years earlier had given this law to Moses, and then He, Himself, particularly through His atoning sacrifice both in Gethsemane and Golgotha through the power of His resurrection, and as the gates of Death and Hell were opened up, had fulfilled some of the promises and expectations of the law of Moses.

Let's read on here: "And I am he who covenanted with my people Israel." So He was the one who gave the law, but He was also the one who had entered into a covenant relationship with Israel. Now this had taken place a few centuries before the time of Moses, starting with Abraham and then carried on through his son Isaac and his son Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel when this covenant relationship with Israel had been established. Now let's read on here: "Therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfill the law; therefore it hath an end. Behold, I do not destroy the prophets"—or we would maybe say the words of the prophets or the prophecies—"for as many as have not been fulfilled in me, verily I say unto you, shall all be fulfilled."

We need to remember there were many important prophecies particularly dealing with His coming in power and glory, His establishing the millennial Messianic age, and these types of things. These prophetic promises had not yet been fulfilled. In fact, that was one of the reasons the Jews in Jerusalem had seen past this carpenter from Nazareth, because they were looking for this powerful warrior, this kingly figure to come. Well, He will come; He will fulfill those prophecies, but they hadn't yet been fulfilled at this time period in 3 Nephi. In fact, unless I've missed something, they haven't been fulfilled to this day. So there are still some important prophecies yet to be fulfilled.

Verse 7: "And because I said unto to you that old things have passed away, I do not destroy that which has been spoken concerning things which are to come." He's basically just repeating the same idea. "For behold"—this is a nice summation here in verse 8—"the covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me."

Now, let's use another overhead transparency here to try to illustrate this (see figure 5). The covenant was given first to Abraham around 2000–1900 B.C. It had a few promises around the time of Abraham. Remember, Abraham was promised that he'd have a numerous posterity, that he would have a land inheritance for that posterity, and that through his lineage all nations, yea even all families of the earth, would be blessed. Well not much of that happened during Abraham's lifetime. He and his wife Sarah had to wait many years before they had their first child. In the meantime, Abraham had a son Ishmael by his wife's handmaid Hagar, who was his second wife. And then after Sarah's death, Abraham married a third wife, Keturah, who bare him another six sons. So at Abraham's death, he only had eight sons. That's not a numerous posterity but at least that's a start; you've got to start somewhere. And that multitude of people have continued through the ages, until today there are probably hundreds of millions of people on the Earth who claim to be literal descendants of Abraham—the Jews, the Arabs, and others as well.

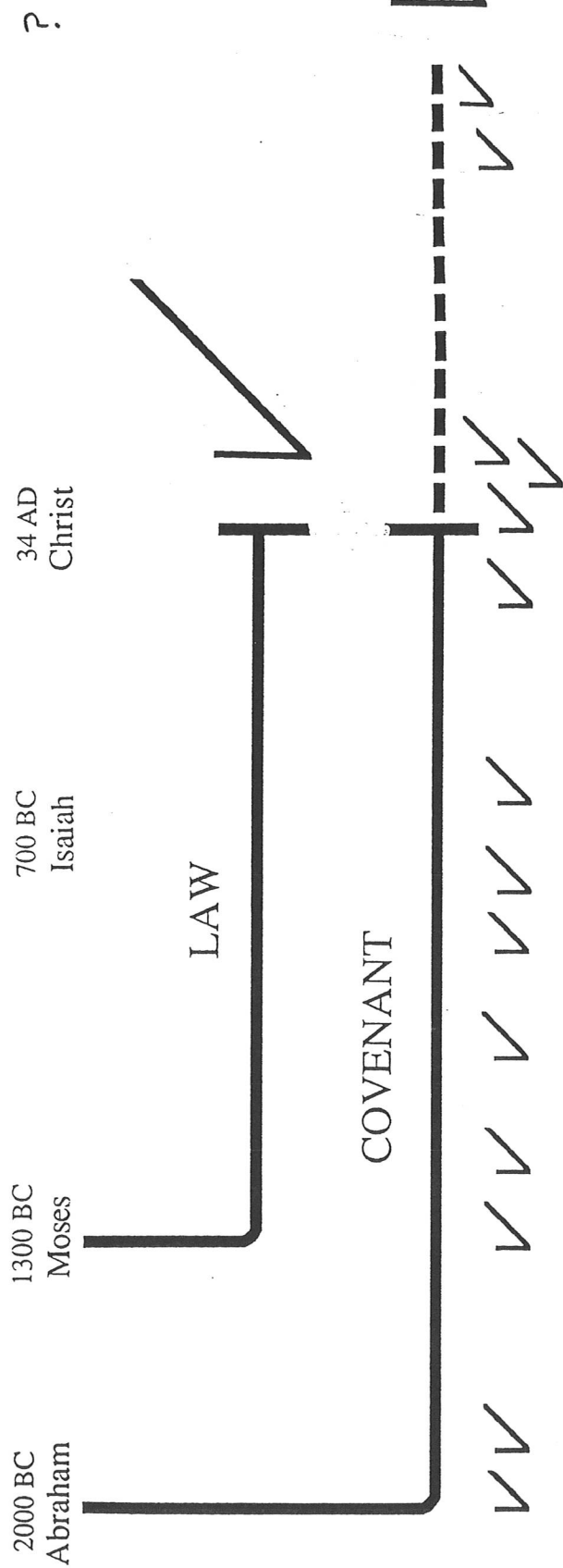


Figure 5

Now, concerning this land inheritance, he had to be very patient about that one as well. As far as we know, the only land that Abraham really owned or had control of at his death was a small grove of trees and a cave that was used as a family cemetery plot—not this large important land between Egypt and the Euphrates that was promised to him in the scriptures. Later on his posterity, as they multiplied, had gained control of that area and other areas of the Middle East and Africa as well. The third promise was that through his lineage all nations, even all families, of the earth would be blessed. Of course, this redemption provided by the Savior is the greatest blessing Abraham's posterity was given on the earth, the life and ministry of this fruit of his loins, Jesus of Nazareth. But the blessings of the gospel, the blessings of the scriptures, the prophets, temple word, ordinances, keys, priesthood—these are great blessings that Abraham's posterity was given on the earth. And these are part of the covenant promises of the Lord with Abraham. But some of the great advances of science are Arabic numbers, our alphabet which had its origins in the Middle East, much of our culture; our whole Western civilization is based upon things which have come through and have been developed and evolved through and improved upon by the posterity of Abraham through the ages. There are so many ways that this posterity of Abraham have been a blessing to the nations of the earth, to each of our families, even to each of us as human beings and children of God.

So these are part of the covenant promises and some of them had been fulfilled through the ages up through the time of the Savior, but he says that the covenant is not yet all fulfilled. There were yet other promises to be fulfilled, some in conjunction with his Second Coming, or his coming in power and glory, the promise to redeem the Earth and its inhabitants from its Telestial environment and all these other promises. So the covenant's promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have not yet all been fulfilled. But the law which was given to Moses, that he had fulfilled. There is an interesting pattern here. Do you recognize this? The first shall be last and the last shall be first. That is, that which was given the earliest will be fulfilled last. That which was given later was fulfilled first. It's a pattern we see quite often in the Lord's dealings with His children here upon the Earth. So maybe this little diagram here will help us understand and appreciate one of the central concepts of this Law and Covenant Discourse (see figure 5). He had given the law; He had fulfilled it by the time he appears here in 3 Nephi. He had also given the covenant, but the covenant was not yet all fulfilled. There were still yet important aspects of this covenant to be fulfilled.

Now what you'll want to do is take a careful look at chapter 15 and 16 on your own. Read through them. What are some of these covenant promises that are yet to be fulfilled? Among them are aspects of the gathering of Israel. And here he will borrow a little bit from John 10, where the Savior said he had other sheep which were not of his fold that must hear his voice, so there

could be one fold and one shepherd, do you remember that? And his listeners in the Old World thought He was talking about the gentiles when he said that. They did not understand that he was talking about other remnants of Israel. But he clarifies that here; in fact, He indicates He had yet other sheep that were not of this fold of America or of the lands wheretofore He had ministered, that is, Judaea and Galilee. There were also of the house of Israel that had to hear His voice so there could be one fold and one shepherd and so we assume here that he's probably talking about the Ten Tribes wherever a remnant of them were still assembled, that He would visit with them as part of the resurrection ministry, and it also will later talk about how they will bring forth a record or a witness or a testimony of the Savior. But ultimately, in order for these covenant promises of the Lord to Israel to be fulfilled, Israel has to come back together again, not just to hear the Master's voice and become part of His fold, but there needs to be a part of them to reassemble back into the lands of their inheritance. And there are certain profound promises, many of which are recorded by Isaiah, that have to be fulfilled as part of the fulfillment of the covenant.

And so, at the end of this little Law and Covenant Discourse, at the end of chapter 16, He says here in verse 17: "And then the words of the prophet Isaiah shall be fulfilled, which say," and He quotes what we now have as three verses at the end of chapter 52 of Isaiah, so He quotes the very end of chapter 52 of Isaiah. That passage of Isaiah, by the way, is the most quoted in the Book of Mormon. There are a number of figures in the Book of Mormon that will quote these verses and a few others there from chapter 52 of Isaiah. Then as we go into chapter 17 of 3 Nephi, there occurs something that, well, I'm sure you wouldn't relate to but probably have experienced at sometime or another or observed in others; he's talking to the people, they've been listening to him very attentively, He's just quoted a few verses from Isaiah, and then He says, "I perceive that you are weak, and ye cannot understand all my words which I am commanded of the Father to speak unto you at this time." I mean, they were with Him for who knows how long until he quotes Isaiah and then boom, He's lost them. They can't keep up with Him anymore. Now, I'm sure that doesn't happen to you, but there are times when we sometimes have to struggle to get through that 2 Nephi portion of the Book of Mormon where all those Isaiah passages are quoted, or if we have a goal to read the Old Testament. Boy, if it isn't Leviticus then it's Isaiah that ends up being the biggest stumbling block to plowing our way through some of these texts that seem to be quite laborious and heavy and symbolic and difficult for us, and so I think it's just very characteristic of human nature here that I guess He had just reached their mental, physical saturation point and they just couldn't keep up with Him anymore. So rather than force the issue, He commands them to go home to ponder about these things, to pray about them, and to come back tomorrow and He will teach them some more. So that ends this Law and Covenant Discourse. He's given two important sermons here: the Sermon on the Mount, as we have it recorded in Matthew,

and a Law and Covenant Discourse with bits and pieces of John and Isaiah and some of His explanation and interpretation and promises as a part of this Law and Covenant Discourse. And that day is finished.

The rest of chapter 17, all of 18, all of 19, and the first verses of chapter 20 of 3 Nephi tell us what He does before He leaves that day and as He comes back the next day. No discourses, no major teachings, but He is teaching by example the beautiful experiences that are recorded in these verses. Let's move now to chapter 20, verse 10, and let's pick up here with the third major sermon, the third and last major discourse of the Savior in 3 Nephi. This is called the Covenant People Discourse. It goes from chapter 20, verse 10, through chapter 23, verse 5. Let's read the first few verses of the introduction of this discourse. I'm here in 3 Nephi 20:10: "And it came to pass that when they had all given glory unto Jesus, He said unto them: Behold now I finish the commandment which the Father hath commanded me concerning this people, who are a remnant of the house of Israel. Ye remember that I spake unto you, and said that when the words of Isaiah should be fulfilled"—that's the last thing He had told them the day before, then will be fulfilled these words. I almost wonder if now, here He is the next day, He's got this group here, and says, "Now you remember I spake unto you and said that when the words of Isaiah should be fulfilled," and I think He saw a little bit of fear come into their eyes. And so He says, "Behold they are written, ye have them before you, therefore search them." In other words, "I'm not going to quote a lot of Isaiah to you here right now. You've got them, they're written down, therefore search them." Does He say the same thing to us today? Don't we have them? Aren't they written? We have them before us; therefore, in fact, that's how He's going to conclude this sermon at the end. The first verses of chapter 23: "Yea, a commandment I give unto you," He says, "search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah." So He's going to be quite emphatic about this. We've got them, we should be searching them, yea a commandment we have received from him to search the words of Isaiah. Why? Chapter 20, verse 12: "And verily, verily"—now with a double *verily*, this is His way of saying this is very very important—"and verily, verily, I say unto you, that when they shall be fulfilled"—*they* referring to what? The words of Isaiah—"when they shall be fulfilled then is the fulfilling of the covenant which the Father hath made unto his people, O house of Israel."

Now I wish that somewhere or another the Lord had sat one of His prophets down with a large manuscript and said, "I'd like to give you a list of, say, 200 absolutely essential prophecies of the last days in chronological sequence and I want you to record them and have many copies of it made so it can be circulated throughout all the children of man." Wouldn't that be nice! But it would be somewhat frustrating if we were able to identify the first prophecy on this list, where it would simply state, "And in the springtime of the year, in a frontier environment, the Father and the Son would appear unto a new, young prophet named after the name of his father." Now that

doesn't give us a date, doesn't give us a place, doesn't give us a specific name, but I think we could all fill in those information pieces, right? Spring of 1820, western New York, Joseph Smith, Jr.—and so would begin this list of 200 prophecies. It wouldn't have to be specific names, dates, or persons, but just enough information that we could say, "Oh yeah, that's this one, now it's this one, now it's that one." We might be discouraged to realize that over 170 years later we might not even be halfway through that list of 200 prophecies, and there might be some among us, nobody here, but some that we know in our neighborhood, that knowing this had taken 170 years and we had not even gotten halfway through it, they might be inclined to visit Lake Powell on the Sabbath more frequently because they know they've got plenty of time before the rest of these prophecies are fulfilled.

Now again, I'm sure that's none of you. Maybe that's why the Lord hasn't given us the list. Well, I think He has given us the list but not in any one place, not in any simple chronological sequence. I think what He's done is had them delivered on separate 3x5 cards and then he mixed them up and He's given a few of them to one prophet and had him record them, then he collected the cards back, mixed them up again, then given a number to another prophet, he's recorded, and so on. I mean, you go through the scriptures, they are all there, many of them repeated. But we have to go through and use our little weak computers up here and see if we can figure out which ones belong where and what sequence and try to sort them out.

There are important things that have to happen before these covenant promises with Israel will be fulfilled. And Heavenly Father is not going to give us a neat, clean, chronological list and He's not going to tell us the specific order in which they will be fulfilled. But this is as close as He's going to come that I've found right here in this verse. He says that when they shall be fulfilled, talking about the words of Isaiah, then is the fulfilling of the covenant which the Father hath made unto his people, O house of Israel. Moses and others may have brought Israel out of bondage, but Isaiah was the prophet who recorded the great promises of the covenant. So He's not going to give us the time or place, He's going to tell us where you can find the checklist. The most important checklist is in the words of Isaiah because when they are fulfilled, then the covenant is fulfilled. That's going to put a little bit of a guilt trip on us to study Isaiah, maybe, but there are some important insights there that will help us understand this covenant relationship and what has to happen so these covenant promises with Israel can be fulfilled.

Among the great promises, continuing on here in verse 13: "And then shall the remnants, which shall be scattered abroad on the face of the earth, be gathered in from the east and from the west and from the south and from the north; and they shall be brought to the knowledge of the Lord their God, who hath redeemed them." Then the Savior continues into this Covenant People

Discourse. He'll quote a little bit from Micah. Micah was a younger contemporary prophet of Isaiah. And then without telling them, He starts quoting from Isaiah, He kind of sneaks it in there. And before we know it, in this chapter 20 of 3 Nephi, He's quoted almost all of what we now have as chapter 52 of Isaiah. Remember the day before He had quoted just the last three verses of that chapter. Well here now, He just blends those same three verses plus most of the rest of chapter 52 of Isaiah. Without telling them that He's quoting Isaiah, or "thus saith Isaiah." And after He finishes those, at the end of what we have as chapter 20, verse 46, He summarizes what He has just told them, and we know it's important within the first two words of this verse. "Verily, verily"—in other words, very very important—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, all these things shall surely come"—He's just quoted here from chapter 52 of Isaiah—"even as the Father hath commanded me. Then shall this covenant which the Father hath covenanted with his people be fulfilled."

So here are two of those 113 references to *covenant* right here. In fact, there are more times when the word *covenant* will show up in this chapter 20 than any other chapter of the Book of Mormon. To only say it's the Covenant People Discourse, the word *covenant* just keeps jumping out at you. It would be nice if you could read it through sometime and have somebody ring a little bell every time you read the word *covenant* just to emphasize that. You might want to highlight that sometime with a special marker or something. This is where the essential covenant teachings of the Book of Mormon are located. Again, "Verily, verily, I say unto you all these things," of Isaiah, "shall surely come, even as the Father hath commanded me. Then shall this covenant which the Father hath covenanted with his people be fulfilled; and then shall Jerusalem be inhabited again with my people, and it shall be the land of their inheritance." Wow! I mean, now we're ready for the Millennium to begin. In fact, we may already be into it by the time this is fulfilled. Won't that be great when these covenant promises are fulfilled.

Well, many years ago I recognized there's a lot more to this Covenant People Discourse, these three chapters, well, basically chapters 20, 21, and 22, a lot more to these few pages of the Book of Mormon than I was getting out of it. Now I travel around quite a bit on "Know Your Religion" lectures series and Education Weeks. I'm leaving this afternoon to go up to Idaho for a few days and give a number of lectures. And I would Xerox these pages and carry them with me because I, unfortunately, quite often spend a lot of time in airport terminals and not the most pleasant motel rooms. I can't take a whole lot of books from my library with me. But I felt like these verses here had more to say than I was gleaning from them, and so I searched them, I studied them. To me they just seemed to be like a big complex 5,000 piece puzzle, but I didn't have the cover of the puzzle box with the picture on it, so I didn't know what I was looking for. I just knew that I had found it. I sensed there

was much, much, much more in both the form, that is the structure, but also the essential teachings of this sermon than what I was getting.

And then one Saturday afternoon, in some motel room down in California, all of a sudden the pieces of the puzzle started to come together. And it began particularly in verse 7 of the next chapter, chapter 21. "And when these things come to pass that thy seed shall begin to know these things—it shall be a sign unto them, that they may know that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people of the house of Israel." Now I had already recognized that the word *covenant* was an important, very essential word of this discourse. It shows up here in this verse 7. But that wasn't the word that keyed me off; it was about halfway through the verse. It says, "It shall be a sign unto them." And I thought, now wait a minute, I just read this. What is it a sign unto them, of what? "That they may know that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant." I thought, I just read this. Did I go to sleep at the wheel, here? Have you ever been doing that? You've been reading the scriptures and your mind wanders but your eyeball keeps going, and going, and going, and maybe it's a page or two before you realize? Then you have to backtrack. I thought, maybe I had done this. No, no. I was wide awake. No, I'm sure I just read this. How could I have reread the same verse again? I thought, well maybe it's not the same verse.

So I decided to backtrack a little bit. Let's go back to verse 1. "Verily I say unto you, I give unto you a sign." Oh, I had read that word earlier. A sign, of what? "That ye may know the time when these things shall be about to take place—that I shall gather in, from their long dispersion, my people, O house of Israel, and shall establish again among them my Zion." Now let's look at this again. Verse 1: "I give unto you a sign, that ye may know the time when these things shall be about to take place." So I circled the word "sign." "That ye may know the time when these things *shall be about* to take place." So I underlined the words "shall be about." Now, as I understand the English form here, something that is about to take place hasn't quite happened yet, but it sounds like it's just right around the corner—just about to take place but it's still future, we're still waiting for it. Remember that. Now, let's go over to verse 7. Find the word "sign" again; I circled it. A sign unto them, of what? That they may know that the "work of the Father *hath already commenced*." So I underlined those last three words, "hath already commenced." Now, that's a little bit of an awkward structure. We probably don't say that to anyone. Hath thou already commenced to do homework? Or, hath thou already commenced to clean up your room? We probably say, "Have you already begun?" But something that has already begun, or hath already commenced, that's in the past tense, right? Would you agree with me? Verse 1, I'll give unto you a sign that something is about to take place. Verse 7, this is the sign that the work "hath already commenced."

Somewhere between verse 1, future tense, and verse 7, past tense, we had to go through another time zone, because to go from the future to the past you have to go through what tense? The present. Now, where did I miss that? And where is this sign He's talking about here? So that I know? I thought, well maybe I better start again reading in verse 1 and read it sentence by sentence. Take a look at your passage there. See if you can find the period that ends the sentence beginning in verse 1. Keep looking. Did you find it yet? Oh, there it is at the end of verse 7. A column and a half of scripture, seven long verses. One single sentence. I never let my students write sentences this long in their papers they turn in, but I'm willing to let the Lord and His prophets punctuate it however they want to. Could you imagine the challenge an English teacher would have with diagramming this sentence on a blackboard, no not *a* blackboard. You'd probably need to have 5 or 6 blackboards. This is a very important, a very complicated sentence.

So let's read this sentence together. Just one sentence of scripture, one very long sentence of scripture. This after he's quoted from Isaiah, told them that when these words of Isaiah will be fulfilled then the covenant will be fulfilled. Verse 1, chapter 21, "And verily I say unto you, I give unto you a sign, that ye may know the time when these things shall be about to take place." What? "That I shall gather in, from their long dispersion, my people, O house of Israel, and shall establish again among them my Zion; And behold," verse 2, "this is the thing which I will give unto you for a sign"—oh, there's that word again, "sign"; that's the third time there; "for verily I say unto you that when these things which I declare unto you"—right now, I'm talking to you—"and which I shall declare unto you hereafter"—He's going to tell us some things later—"of myself and by the power of the Holy Ghost"—so we can learn from His words, we can also learn through the inspiration of the Spirit—"which shall be given unto you of the Father"—OK, what I'm going to tell you now, what I'm going to tell you later, what you receive from me, what you receive from the Holy Ghost—"as given unto you from the Father, *shall be made known unto the Gentiles that they*"—who would *they* be: the Gentiles—"may know concerning this people"—who is *this people*, who's he talking to: the Nephites, the Lamanites; so what, made known unto the Gentiles that they, the Gentiles, "may know concerning this people who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, and concerning this my people who shall be scattered by them;" I mean, look how the Gentiles scattered the Native Americans when they came into North and South America, verse three, important verse, how do you know that? First two words: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, when these things," as now going to be given to you here and later by me and the Holy Spirit, when these things of the Book of Mormon "shall be made known unto *them*"—who's the *them*? The Gentiles—"of the Father, and shall come forth of the Father, from *them unto you*;" now He's going to rest here just a little bit, "For it is wisdom in the Father that they," the Gentiles, "should be established in this land," which we call America, "and be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, that

these things," of the Book of Mormon, "might come forth from them unto a remnant of your seed, *that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel;*" there's your sign. These things are going to be given to the Gentiles. They will come from them unto a remnant of your seed *that the covenant promises of the Lord to Israel will be fulfilled.* "Therefore," verse 5, "when these works and the works which shall be wrought among you hereafter"—in other words there's still more of the Book of Mormon to come—"shall come forth from the Gentiles, unto your seed which shall dwindle in unbelief because of iniquity; For thus it behooveth the Father that it should come forth from the Gentiles, that he may show forth his power unto the Gentiles, for this cause that the Gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, that they may repent and come unto me and be baptized in my name and know of the true points of my doctrine, that they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel;" so He talks about your seed that's going to dwindle in unbelief; it's important that the Gentiles do it, that if they repent and accept the principles and ordinances of the gospel they can be numbered among the house of Israel. And then He summarizes it here in verse 7, "And when these things come to pass that thy seed shall begin to know these things"—you see, not just receive it, but begin to know these things of the Book of Mormon as brought to them by the Gentiles—"it shall be a sign unto them, that they may know that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel."

Now, let's see if we can't summarize the core, the essence of this sentence. This is the central core, without the explanations and the digression and the amplifications (see figure 6). Now, even just to confine it to the core is still one very long sentence. What a powerful one. What a profound one. How many times have we read through 3 Nephi and never realized here is something that the Savior gives. If this Covenant People Discourse could be located in some Ancient Near Eastern manuscript, biblical scholars would be ecstatic—important new teachings of the Savior! But we have it and I'm afraid we often just kind of skip over it, partially because not only is there chapter 52 of Isaiah here, but all of chapter 22 of 3 Nephi is chapter 54 of Isaiah. So within this three chapter discourse are two full chapters of Isaiah blended in there, plus a little bit of Micah. So we think, well, this is just a bunch of Old Testament teachings. Oh, but this is gleaning from the essential Old Testament teachings that would have application for Israel in the latter days with a sign so that we would know when the work hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which the Lord hath made 4,000 years ago, almost, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And it will be fulfilled when the record of the Book of Mormon will come forth from the Gentiles unto a remnant of the seed of this Book of Mormon community and they would begin to know these things.

Let me conclude with my testimony that I know that God lives, that the

CORE OF 3 NEPHI 21:1-7:

1. And verily I say unto you, I give unto you a sign, ...
2. And behold, this is the thing which I will give unto you for a sign--for verily I say unto you that when these things ... shall be made known unto the Gentiles ...;
3. Verily, verily, I say unto you, when these things shall be made known unto them of the Father, and shall come forth of the Father, from them unto you,
4. ... that these things might come forth from them unto a remnant of your seed, that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel;
5. Therefore, when these works ... shall come forth from the Gentiles, unto your seed ...; ...
7. And when these things come to pass that thy seed shall begin to know these things--it shall be a sign unto them, that they may know that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel.

Savior, Jesus of Nazareth, is His Only Begotten Son and the Father of our salvation from death and hell. He hath fulfilled the law and He is fulfilling the covenant through any and all who claim to be His and who act and work as His servants in the vineyard as members of His truly restored church. We are covenant Israel today. Our destiny is to help to bring to pass these promises which were given so long ago, elaborated upon by the Savior as part of His resurrection ministry in 3 Nephi. But much important work remains to be done. I hope and pray that we will study these passages carefully, that through them we will come to understand our role as a covenant people. That we will help ourselves, our families, our neighbors, our ward members, and our brothers and sisters throughout the world to become a part of covenant Israel. This is our opportunity. May it be our destiny, I pray in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.