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FOUNDATION FOR ANCIENT RESEARCH AND MORMON STUDIES

Robert L. Millet

Father Lehi: Laying the Foundation for the Lehite Dispensation

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Summary:

Robert Millet explains what Jerusalem was like in Lehi's time according to information in the book of Jeremiah and the Book of Mormon. He reviews the teachings of Lehi concerning the coming of a Messiah to counter the effects of the fall, the important place of the house of Israel in the Lord's scheme for this earth, the role of grace through Christ's redemption, and the future calling of Joseph Smith as a "choice seer."

Transcript
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Father Lehi

Laying the Foundation for the Lehite Dispensation

Robert L. Millet

I am happy to be with you to discuss the Book of Mormon and to approach a new study of the Book of Mormon, perhaps from a different angle. The Book of Mormon is not only great literature, but it happens to be a true, historical record. It is a book of scripture and because it is, it can be approached many ways. Some people enjoy reading it sequentially; some people enjoy studying it from a topical guide; some people enjoy reading a chapter and writing their own commentary. One of the more effective ways to study the Book of Mormon is to do a rapid reading of the Book of Mormon so as to see more clearly the recurring themes that seem to weave their way through like a refrain.

In this series we will undertake a sequential, topical approach, namely the Book of Mormon, its prophets, and their messages. We obviously cannot cover every prophet, or every prophet figure, or even every major personality in the Book of Mormon during this series. We will focus on those prophets whose sermons and writings receive serious treatment by writers and compilers. Each of those that present during this series will address themselves to certain issues, such as who this prophet was; what it was like to live in his day; when the prophet lived; what the conditions around him were like; what challenges the prophet may have faced; and what the people in his day were like. The presenters will address questions such as, What are some of the prophet's central messages? How does the treatment of the specific doctrines this prophet covers differ from the way those doctrines are taught elsewhere in the Book of Mormon? How do this prophet's prophetic oracles contribute to the undergirding and overarching purposes of the entire Book of Mormon? Those are some of the things that will be covered in this series.

We begin with the prophet Lehi. I have divided this section up into three parts—the prophet, his message, and his example. Let's begin with the question, Who was Lehi? If you will get your scriptures ready, let's see what we know. Let's begin with the idea that Lehi was a Jew. Lehi was a national, by his own son Nephi's definition. He was from the land of Israel. From the Nephite perspective, there are only two groups of people—Jews and Gentiles, that is, those who lived in the land of Israel

and those who did not. Within that former category of Jew, I suppose the Nephites would have included themselves, the Lehites.

It is interesting that we have to go to different sections, different chapters of the Book of Mormon to get the detail we want. Some people have thought it would be nice if all we needed to know about the Atonement was found in one chapter, or if all we wanted to know about the house of Israel was in one chapter, but that is not the way it is. To know something as simple as who Lehi was, what his background was, and what his lineage was, we are required to read beyond the first part of the Book of Mormon. For example, we learn early on that Lehi is of the tribe of Joseph, but later on, in Alma 10, we learn from Amulek that Lehi is of Manasseh.

When did Lehi live? Let's go to a verse we all know very well, 1 Nephi 1:4:

For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, (my father, Lehi, having dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days); and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed.

Give me a time period. What do you understand the time period to be? A rough date is 600 B.C. It also says there were "many prophets prophesying unto the people." Who would be some of Lehi's contemporary prophets? Jeremiah is definite one. Who else comes to mind? Probably Ezekiel, Zephaniah, and possibly Habakkuk. What were the conditions in which they were living in that day? This gets interesting. To really discuss the conditions, I want to go to the book of Jeremiah in the Old Testament. There are some things hinted at and implied in the Book of Mormon, but I want to turn to Jeremiah 23:1-2 particularly and read this as an indication of what it was like to live in Jerusalem in Lehi's day—600 B.C..

Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord.

Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord.

What is that describing? What is the problem? He is speaking of his sheep. What is the difficulty? False shepherds. Pastors that do not feed their flocks. We could read

in Ezekiel that not only don't they feed the flock, they *eat* the flock. There is one characterization.

Back to Jeremiah 5. This will play a significant role in understanding why Lehi had such a strict moral code. Let's read Jeremiah 5:7-9: "How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them there are no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses." What is the language? "Assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses." Continuing in verse 8: "They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife." What does the footnote indicate "fed horses" means? "Lusty stallions." Do you get a feeling about the day? Read on with verse 9: "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? "So we have a day described as the sheep wandering, the sheep going hungry because the pastors, or the shepherds, are not feeding the flock, and we are talking of a day of gross immorality. Understand?

That, for me, has great meaning because of what we read in Jacob 2, beginning with verse 30:

For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me [through a man having more wives than one], I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things.

For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem [tying back to what we just read in Jeremiah], yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands.

For they shall not lead away captive the daughters of my people because of their tenderness, save I shall visit them with a sore curse, even unto destruction; for they shall not commit whoredoms, like unto them of old, saith the Lord of Hosts.

And now behold, my brethren, ye know that these commandments were given to our father, Lehi; wherefore, ye have known them before. . . . (Jacob 2:30-31, 33-34)

So the Nephites bring with them a moral code revealed to Lehi before their departure. What was Lehi's standing before the Lord? Was he a member of the church? When was he converted? When was he called? It is difficult to tell exactly. The first chapter of Nephi seems to be his prophetic call. He experiences what is

known sometimes as the "throne theophany," where he is caught up unto the very throne of God and receives his mission and his commission.

I'd like to refer to a couple of statements from leaders of the Church to suggest some things about Lehi. To begin with, I am going to read a short statement from *The Teachings of Joseph Smith*. Think about what this says about Lehi. "Answer to the question, Was the Priesthood of Melchizedek taken away when Moses died? All Priesthood is Melchizedek, but there are different portions or degrees of it. That portion which brought Moses to speak with God face to face was taken away, but that which brought the ministry of angels remained. All the prophets had the Melchizedek Priesthood and were ordained by God himself."¹ If Lehi was a prophet, and he was, then we can assume some things about Lehi that we would know simply from what Joseph Smith teaches about what it takes to organize, set up, and run the kingdom of God. We would assume that Lehi had been baptized, that he had received the gift of the Holy Ghost, and that he had been ordained by someone having authority.

I will read this from President Joseph Fielding Smith and a quote from Bruce R. McConkie, which will set the stage for understanding that this is not just a man who roams in from no where and assumes some kind of prophetic mantle.

When the Lord took Moses out of Israel, he took the higher priesthood also and left Israel with the lesser priesthood which holds the keys to the temporal salvation of mankind. . . .

Therefore, in Israel, the common people, the people generally, did not exercise the functions of priesthood in its fulness, but were confined in their labors and ministrations very largely to the Aaronic Priesthood. The withdrawal of the higher priesthood was from the people as a body, but the Lord still left among them men holding the Melchizedek Priesthood, with power to officiate in all its ordinances, so far as he determined that these ordinances should be granted unto the people. Therefore Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Elijah, and others of the prophets [and we would certainly add Lehi] held the Melchizedek Priesthood, and their prophesying and their instructions to the people were directed by the Spirit of the Lord and made potent by

¹ *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1938), 180–1.

virtue of that priesthood which was not made manifest generally among the people of Israel during all these years.²

What I consider one of the great statements in our literature concerning that powers, rights, and doctrines were had from the beginning is the statement from Elder Bruce R. McConkie given to Church educators in August 1984: "The everlasting gospel, the eternal Priesthood, the identical ordinances of salvation and exaltation and never varying doctrines of salvation, the same church and kingdom, the keys of the kingdom, once we know these things by latter-day revelation, the door is open to an understanding of the fragmentary slivers of information in the Bible." Notice that by combining the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, we have at least one thousand passages that let us know what prevailed among the Lord's people in the Old World. Did they have the fulness of the everlasting gospel at all times? Yes. There was not a period of ten minutes from the time of Adam to the appearing of the Lord Jesus in the land Bountiful when the gospel, as we have it, in its fullness, was not on earth. Do not let the fact that the performances of the Mosaic law were administered by the Aaronic Priesthood confuse you on this matter. Where the Melchizedek Priesthood is, there is the fulness of the gospel, and all the prophets held the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Was there baptism in the days of ancient Israel? The answer is in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible and in the Book of Mormon. The record of the first six hundred years of Nephite history is simply a true and plain account of how things were in ancient Israel, from the days of Moses downward. Was there a church anciently, and if so, how was it organized and regulated? Answer: There was not so much as a twinkling of an eye during the whole so-called pre-Christian era when the church of Jesus Christ was not on the earth, organized basically the same way it now is. Melchizedek belonged to the church. Laban was a member. So was Lehi, long before he left Jerusalem.

What we know about Lehi for sure is that he taught the gospel. When he learned it and under what circumstances, it is hard to tell. Nor do we know how long he had been in the church or what prepared him for his ministry, or his prophetic call. All

² Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 3:84-5.

we know is what is in 1 Nephi 1. We know that Lehi teaches the gospel, that he teaches it well, that he teaches significant doctrines, as we will see in a moment. Another thing we can add before we turn to his message is that Lehi kept a record, the record we came to know as the book of Lehi. In the preface to the 1930 edition of the Book of Mormon, we read: "I would inform you that I [Joseph Smith] translated, by the gift and power of God, and caused to be written, one hundred and sixteen pages, which I took from the Book of Lehi, the which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon."

Notice that the first eight chapters in the Book of Mormon represent Nephi's abridgment of his father's experiences and teachings. Chapter 9 is a sort of transition chapter. In chapter 10, Nephi begins his own ministry, and he records those things. Early on, Nephi tells us he will abridge the record of his father. Even in chapter 10, Nephi still cannot leave his dad's experiences and teachings alone. He continues to teach some of the things that Lehi taught.

Let's turn to Lehi's message. He was a prophet, called of God, who had a commission and who held the Melchizedek Priesthood. What did he teach? Let's turn to 1 Nephi 1:12. We don't need to spend long on this. It's not a great doctrinal message, but a warning. He taught concerning the imminent destruction of Jerusalem.

And it came to pass that as he read, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord.

And he read, saying: Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations! Yea, and many things did my father read concerning Jerusalem—that it should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon.

And it came to pass that when my father had read and seen many great and marvelous things, he did exclaim many things unto the Lord; such as: Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!

And after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God; for his soul did rejoice, and his whole heart was filled, because of the things which he had seen, yea, which the Lord had shown unto him. (1 Nephi 1:12–15)

So, from what we read, what have we learned? Lehi had learned concerning the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Later, in 2 Nephi 1, Nephi indicates that Jerusalem had been destroyed. We also learned that the land Lehi's people would be led to would be a promised and a blessed land (the land of America).

The second message is of the coming of the Messiah and John the Baptist. I am going to pick up with 1 Nephi 1:18:

Therefore, I would that ye should know, that after the Lord had shown so many marvelous things unto my father, Lehi, yea, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, behold he went forth among the people, and began to prophesy and to declare unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard.

And it came to pass that the Jews did mock him because of the things which he testified of them; for he truly testified of their wickedness and their abominations; and he testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book, manifested plainly the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world.

And when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him; yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away. (1 Nephi 1:18–20)

It is a very interesting thing that the teaching of the Messiah throughout the Book of Mormon arouses great hostility. If we had the time, we could turn to Mosiah 7 and see that Abinadi lost his life for the same thing—the coming of the Messiah, which implies the need to repent.

We are going to 1 Nephi 10. As people have said before, there would be a challenge on our part to find a place where the Atonement is taught and the Fall is not taught with it. They are a package deal; they go together. So it is here in 1 Nephi 10:4–5:

Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world.

And he also spake concerning the prophets, how great a number had testified of these things, concerning this Messiah, of whom he had spoken, or this Redeemer of the world.

Later we will hear Jacob say something like this, that none of the prophets have spoken or written save they have testified concerning the coming of this Messiah.

Verse 6: "Wherefore, all mankind were in a lost or in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer."

You may recall that President Benson said, on more than one occasion, essentially that "just as a man does not really desire food until he is hungry, so he does not desire the salvation of Christ until he knows why he needs Christ. No one adequately and properly knows why he needs Christ until he understands and accepts the doctrine of the Fall and its effect upon all mankind."³ It is important that Nephi, quoting Lehi, should establish early in our story that the Atonement does not just fly into existence. It is brought into existence out of need. The Atonement has meaning only because there was a fall. Medication has no value until we know there is a malady or sickness. So, the Fall and the Atonement go hand in hand. Look at the language here. See how graphic it is. "A lost and fallen condition." These are words that will be used over and over in the Book of Mormon. What does "lost" imply? They don't know where they are going or where they are. Thus, when you view the Fall as creating a lost condition, the Savior takes on more of a role than simply a spiritual advisor or celestial cheerleader who stands on the sidelines and whispers encouragement. He becomes a person sent by the Father on a search-and-rescue mission, as it were, to save the lost and fallen. "To fall" implies "to come down." All mankind are in a lost and fallen state.

Let's look at another significant doctrine in chapter 10. Here Lehi begins to speak of the destiny of the house of Israel. Does someone have 1 Nephi 10:11-12:

And it came to pass after my father had spoken these words he spake unto my brethren concerning the gospel which should be preached among the Jews, and also concerning the dwindling of the Jews in unbelief. And after they had slain the Messiah, who should come, and after he had been slain he should rise from the dead, and should make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles.

Yea, even my father spake much concerning the Gentiles, and also concerning the house of Israel, that they should be compared like unto an olive-tree, whose branches should be broken off and should be scattered upon all the face of the earth.

Later in our story, by the time we get to chapter 15, there is a little discussion going on between Nephi and Laman and Lemuel. What are they debating? They are

³ *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 28.

debating what their father meant concerning the olive-tree and the branches. This is Nephi describing those teachings. Go ahead with verses 13–14, please.

Wherefore, he said it must needs be that we should be led with one accord into the land of promise, unto the fulfilling of the word of the Lord, that we should be scattered upon all the face of the earth.

And after the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again; or, in fine, after the Gentiles had received the fulness of the Gospel, the natural branches of the olive-tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer.

Here in verse 14 is one of the most important definitions, slipped in very subtly by Nephi, concerning the teachings of Lehi about what it means to be grafted. Eventually, we are going to read in the longest chapter of the Book of Mormon, the allegory of Zenos, about lots of grafting. But there is the definition—to be grafted is to come to the knowledge of the true Messiah. So, one of the things that we begin to see is that, from their perspective, the gathering of Israel is not simply a geographical phenomenon; it was also a spiritual phenomenon.

Let's finish with verse 15: "And after this manner of language did my father prophesy and speak unto my brethren, and also many more things which I do not write in this book; for I have written as many of them as were expedient for me in mine other book." What other book would that be? We are now reading from the small plates and he is telling us that there is some doctrine on the large plates as well, especially the doctrine of the destiny of Israel. Let's go to another doctrine. Who is speaking to whom in 2 Nephi 2? Lehi is speaking to Jacob. Is this going to impact Jacob? How would we study that? We can study Jacob's later teachings and see that he taught what his father taught. One of the messages in 2 Nephi 2 has to do with the salvation of men and women through the merits and mercy and grace of the Holy Messiah. It is a very important doctrine. Let's begin with 2 Nephi 2:2:

Nevertheless, Jacob, my first-born in the wilderness, thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain.

Wherefore, thy soul shall be blessed, and thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother, Nephi; and thy days shall be spent in the service of thy God. Wherefore, I know that thou art redeemed . . .

"I know that thou art redeemed," Lehi says. I suppose if we asked anyone in the Church, Why was Jacob redeemed? they could come up with many reasons, such as, he was a faithful son; he was obedient; he followed his older brother; he kept the commandments to the end; and he was a great prophet and leader himself. All those would be true, but that is not the reason Lehi gives. Lehi says, "I know that thou art redeemed, because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer." In other words, Jacob was bound for glory because of the goodness of Jesus. You might say, "Didn't Jacob have to do anything?" Of course he did. There was no question in his mind or Lehi's mind that salvation was through the mercy and merits and grace of the Messiah. Let's finish verse 3 and read verse 4:

I know that thou art redeemed, because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer; for thou has beheld that in the fulness of time he cometh to bring salvation unto men.

And thou hast beheld in thy youth his glory; wherefore, thou art blessed even as they unto whom he shall minister in the flesh; for the Spirit is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. And the way is prepared from the fall of man, and salvation is free.

"Free." What an interesting word. It's there, freely available. In other words, no amount of work on our part can win or qualify us for salvation. We only put ourselves in a position to be saved by coming unto the Messiah. Why? Because we are redeemed through his righteousness. It is the same language, I guess, that we get in Doctrine and Covenants 45:3 when the Savior says: "Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him."

So we have the Savior in an advocate role. In a sense, he is our defense attorney. The question is, How does he handle our defense? Very strangely. Verse 4: "Saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified." What a strange defense. That is like an attorney walking into the courtroom and saying, "I demand that my client be set free," and when asked on what grounds, answers, "because I am such an excellent attorney." Normally, we would hear such a thing and say that is absolutely irrelevant, but it is not irrelevant here. Christ pleads for us on the basis of his goodness and his righteousness. What is required of us? We find out in the next

verse, verse 5: "Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life."

Back in 2 Nephi 2:5, Lehi continues: "And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil." We know things by the power and light and Spirit of Jesus Christ that is given to all of us. "And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified." *Justified* means "pronounced innocent," "exonerated," "declared clean and right before God." The apostle Paul became famous for this idea, but Lehi taught it long before Paul did. There are a couple of ways that we might become justified, it seems. One way, the hypothetical way, would be never to make a mistake, to keep the law of God perfectly. And if we could do that, it might be said that we were justified by works or by law. The problem is obvious. No one would make it, save one. We would all make at least one mistake. Jesus alone would qualify for this type of justification.

So Lehi would appropriately say that "by the law no flesh is justified." The only other option would be justification by faith, meaning dependence upon one who did keep the law perfectly.

By the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever.

Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth.

Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered. (2 Nephi 2:5-7)

That is to say, the Atonement cannot take effect in individual lives unless people know they need it and unless they humble themselves to the point that they are feeling that contrite or crushed spirit, when they know they cannot make it alone.
Verse 8:

Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth [and here is the summary of it all], that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit.

There are many other things we could discuss in this chapter. For example, we could talk about Lehi's interesting philosophical discussion of the need for opposition in all things. Instead of opposition, let's turn in 2 Nephi 2:17 and read Lehi's discussion of the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement: "And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God."

Think for a minute. Lehi says, "According to that which I have read." Where did he read it? He could have seen it in vision, but presumably, we are talking about the brass plates. One of the interesting things I would like you to note, when you have a moment in your study, is the similarity of language between 2 Nephi 2 and 9 and Moses 2-6. I would suggest to you that one of the closest approximations we have to understanding or knowing what was on the brass plates is Joseph Smith's translation of the early chapters of Genesis. The description given there of the fall of Lucifer is very similar to Moses 4. The description of the Fall leading to a necessary atonement is very similar to what we have in Moses 6. There is, in my mind, a haunting and wonderful familiarity as I read the book of Moses, because the language is unmistakably similar to 2 Nephi. Okay, go ahead with verse 18:

And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind. Wherefore, he said unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies, wherefore he said: Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.

We could read about this if we simply turned to Moses 4 and read the account of the temptation in Eden. Go on to 2 Nephi 2:19-21:

And after Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit they were driven out of the garden of Eden, to till the earth.

And they have brought forth children; yea, even the family of all the earth.

And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became the state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men. [I'd like you to notice, in this last part of verse 21, the way we will link the Atonement and the Fall:] For he gave

commandment that all men must repent; for he showed unto all men that they were lost, because of the transgression of their parents.

Let's stop there. "Lost because of the transgression of their parents," it says. How do you reconcile that with the second article of faith? The second article of faith says that "men will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam's transgression." How do you reconcile those two ideas? It says not that they were punished, but that they were lost. So they can be found. All right, it is one thing to say that our view of the Fall is optimistic. It is another to say that we believe the Fall was a necessary event. It is one thing for us to say that there was no original sin entailed on the posterity of Adam and Eve. It is another to say that the Fall does not affect us. Of course it affects us. So we come to realize something about being lost, about the effects of the Fall, and about being found through the Atonement.

Going on down, 2 Nephi 2:22 talks about the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were in a condition, a state, presumably a terrestrial state—we would know it as a paradisaical state. They would have remained in that state if the Fall had not taken place. Verse 23 says: "They would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin."

I remember years ago when President Holland, while he was still president of BYU, asked a group of women at a women's conference why Adam and Eve would choose to leave the Garden of Eden. Life there is pretty nice. No weeds. No laundry. What's the typical day? Do you backstroke the lagoon and go to the banana plantation? Why leave? Well, two thoughts come to mind. First, they'd have no children; and second, knowledge and experience come from the Fall. Now we come to the verses that link the Atonement and the Fall better than any others:

But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.

Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. [We mustn't stop there.]

And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon. (2 Nephi 2:24–26)

During 2 Nephi 3, the very next chapter, who is speaking to whom? It is Lehi speaking to Joseph. As you are probably aware, this represents a condensed version of what we could find somewhere else, that is, the prophecies of Joseph of old, as contained in the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 50. Lehi draws upon a segment of that grander, larger, more extensive prophecy. Let's go to 2 Nephi 3:5-6:

Wherefore, Joseph truly saw our day. And he obtained a promise of the Lord, that out of the fruit of his loins the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel; not the Messiah, but a branch which was to be broken off, nevertheless, to be remembered in the covenants of the Lord that the Messiah should be made manifest unto them in the latter days, in the spirit of power, unto the bringing of them out of darkness unto light—yea, out of hidden darkness and out of captivity unto freedom.

For Joseph truly testified, saying: A seer shall the Lord my God raise up, who shall be a choice seer unto the fruit of my loins.

Let's stop there for a second. That's an interesting use of words. Joseph of Egypt calls Joseph Smith "seer." We are about to consider a great prophecy of Joseph Smith, the "seer," or the "choice seer." What is a *seer*? Obviously, it is someone who sees. But it is used in scripture to mean "one who foresees." In the days when Enoch was raised up, what is said of him? "A seer hath the Lord raised up unto his people" (Moses 6:36). Also of Enoch it is said that he saw things "not visible to the natural eye" (Moses 6:36). In the Doctrine and Covenants, people—prophets and leaders of the Church—are described as "watchm[e]n upon the tower" who "have seen the enemy while he was yet afar off" (D&C 101:54). Later in our story, we will have Limhi, speaking to Ammon, saying "a seer is greater than a prophet," and Ammon will say "a seer is a revelator and a prophet also" (Mosiah 8:15-16). Seership is a great gift, a great right and privilege. And Joseph of Egypt is now going to prophesy of one of the greatest seers:

Yea, Joseph truly said: Thus saith the Lord unto me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and he shall be esteemed highly among the fruit of thy loins. And unto him will I give commandment that he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins, his brethren, which shall be of great worth unto them, even to the bringing of them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers. (2 Nephi 3:7)

So, a choice seer will be raised up out of the loins of Joseph of old. And notice what the seer will do. He will do a great work. Specifically, his work will have to do with the covenants. Isn't it interesting what Nephi himself had seen in vision? And surely Lehi had seen the same thing. When the plain and precious truths were taken from the Bible, what else was taken? Many covenants of the Lord. Joseph Smith would have a significant role in restoring not only doctrine, but covenants of the Lord. Verse 8 reads: "And I will give unto him a commandment that he shall do none other work, save the work which I shall command him. And I will make him great in mine eyes; for he shall do my work."

Lehi, reiterating the words of Joseph of Egypt, goes on to compare Joseph Smith to Moses, saying, in essence, "He is like a Moses, but he is not Moses." In verse 12, the record says, "Wherefore, the fruit of thy loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write [we now have the Book of Mormon and the Bible]; and that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins, and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, shall grow together." That's an interesting phrase. In Ezekiel it says they "become one in thine hand" (Ezekiel 37:17). This phrase in 2 Nephi 3 is even more dynamic. They "grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins, and bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord."

And so, in the last days, because God hath raised up a choice seer, we will have independent but related records testifying important truths to confound false doctrines and lay down contentions, and so on. Notice, in verse 15, what else we learn about this person: "And his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father. And he shall be like unto me; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation." The gospel plan, including the Book of Mormon and the things that Joseph Smith will bring to pass, will be the means by which people can come unto the Lord..

Let's take a traditional approach to what verses 17 and 18 mean, and then I'd like to propose something a little less traditional.

And the Lord hath said: I will raise up a Moses; and I will give power unto him in a rod; and I will give judgment unto him in writing. Yet I will not loose his tongue, that he shall speak much, for I will not make him mighty in speaking. But I will write unto him my law, by the finger of mine own hand; and I will make a spokesman for him.

Who are we talking about here? Aaron. Aaron is not mentioned here, but in the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 50, he is mentioned by name as a spokesman for Moses. Now, we turn to the next verse, verse 18, for the choice seer of the latter days:

And the Lord said unto me also: I will raise up unto the fruit of thy loins; and I will make for him a spokesman. And I, behold, I will give unto him that he shall write the writing of the fruit of thy loins, unto the fruit of thy loins; and the spokesman of thy loins shall declare it.

Traditionally, what do you understand about that? Who is going to be raised up to speak for the choice seer in latter days? Who will be *his* spokesman? Once it was Oliver Cowdery, then it was Sidney Rigdon. I think that is traditionally the way we view that verse. Let me show a less traditional fulfillment of that prophecy by reading the verse again: "And the Lord said unto me also: I will raise up unto the fruit of thy loins [Mormon]; and I will make for him a spokesman [Joseph Smith]. And I, behold, I will give unto him [Mormon] that he shall write the writing of the fruit of thy loins, unto the fruit of thy loins; and the spokesman of thy loins shall declare it."

I had never conceived of that until I read Elder Bruce R. McConkie's *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*. On page 426 he gives that very unusual interpretation, which I think has real value, showing that prophecy can and will be fulfilled in more ways than one.⁴

Let's continue with verse 19: "And the words which he shall write shall be the words which are expedient in my wisdom should go forth unto the fruit of thy loins. And it shall be as if the fruit of thy loins had cried unto them from the dust; for I know their faith."

Okay, we'll stop there. I want to try to bring this to a close by suggesting that in Lehi we have a marvelous example in so many ways. Let me mention a few.

⁴Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 426.

Although he was a great man, he was human. He made mistakes. Perhaps there could be no better illustration of this than the broken bow incident in 1 Nephi 16. Nephi breaks his bow, and people begin to complain, including Lehi. It seems to me there is a great lesson to learn, not only from Lehi, who repents, but from Nephi. If ever there were a time when Nephi said to himself, "Well, the old man's lost it. I guess I'll just have to carry the group on my shoulders," this would have been the time. But Nephi does something wise. He goes to his father, seeks counsel, and asks Lehi to inquire of the Lord. Lehi does, and the Lord chews him out. It was not Nephi's job to correct Lehi. It was the Lord's job.

Don't you think it was a powerful lesson for Nephi to learn early in life that his father, as great as he was, could have times of murmuring, that no one is invulnerable to temptation and the possibility of falling, even a great human being? Nephi is an example of someone, like so many of the marvelous men and women in the Book of Mormon, who is faithful in the midst of great wickedness. Consider that Nephi and Lehi are living in a time of great difficulty for the church, in a day of apostasy. Here is a man whose priorities are in order. Recall that in 1 Nephi 8, as he has his dream, or vision, Lehi presses forward toward that tree, partakes of it, enjoys it, and what is his next thought? That his family might partake. Lehi was a preacher of righteousness. I want to turn to 1 Nephi 8:36. (It is unfortunate that in our day, the word *preach* gets bad press.)

And it came to pass after my father had spoken all the words of his dream or vision, which were many, he said unto us, because of these things which he saw in a vision, he exceedingly feared for Laman and Lemuel; yea, he feared lest they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord.

And he did exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and not cast them off; yea, my father did [and here's that word] preach unto them.

The other thing that comes to mind is the language in 2 Nephi 1:13–14. Notice the great preacher of righteousness.

O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe.

Awake! and arise from the dust, and hear the words of a trembling parent, whose limbs ye must soon lay down in the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveler can return; a few more days and I go the way of all the earth.

It occurred to me when I was reading this recently that here is a point where Lehi could have said, "I am going to die anyway. Let them do what they want to do." But in his closing hours, he is preaching. He's testifying; he's encouraging; he's beckoning; he's yearning for them to come back, to pull it all together. Notice the wonderful message of verse 15: "But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love." That we will follow the powerful example of the prophet Lehi is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.