

--Rough Draft and Incomplete--

*LEHI'S DREAM:
The Indispensable Foundation
of the Book of Mormon*

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For many, the Book of Mormon may seem like a mere collection of stories edited from the records of the Nephites by Mormon for his latter-day readers. To them, Mormon is simply recounting in chronological order the rise and fall of the Nephite nation. Yet, Mormon's masterful work is far more than this. A careful study of the book will reveal that Mormon had a well established agenda. At least in part, his objective seems to include the following. From the outset of the book to its conclusion, Mormon makes it clear that while in mortality men are "free to choose liberty and eternal life" or "captivity and death" (2 Nephi 2:27). No where is this more clearly shown than in Lehi's dream.

Lehi's Dream

Sometime after Lehi and his family left Jerusalem and while camping in a valley they called Lemuel, Lehi "dreamed a dream" which caused a great deal of controversy among the family members. In the dream, the duel between liberty/eternal life and captivity/destruction is graphically portrayed in allegorical style. Lehi saw "a large and spacious field" in which he "beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy" (1 Nephi 8:9-11). Upon eating the fruit, he was filled "with exceedingly great joy." He then turned to look for his family that they also might come and eat (1 Nephi 8:12). As he began to search, he discovered a "river of water" flowing near the tree. He found his wife, Sariah, and two of his sons, Sam and Nephi, standing at the head of the river "as if they knew not whither they should go" (1 Nephi 8:11-14). Having successfully persuaded them to come and eat of the fruit, he then looked for and found Laman and Lemuel, his other two sons. However, they would not come to the tree (1 Nephi 8:9-18).

After this Lehi saw a "rod of iron" and "strait and narrow path" that "extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree" (1 Nephi 8:19-20). Beyond the path he saw "numberless concourses of people" many of whom "were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree." After entering the path "there arose a mist of darkness" which covered the path. Those "who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost" (1 Nephi 8:21-23). Then Lehi saw "others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron." However, when the mist of darkness obscured their vision, they clung "to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree" (1 Nephi 8:24).

This must have given Lehi great satisfaction. If it did it was short lived for while he watched those who had been faithful, “they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed” (1 Nephi 8:25). Alarmed, Lehi turned to see what was the cause of this sudden change. He saw “on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building.” The ominous structure hovered “in the air, high above the earth.” Those in the building were “both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine.” While pointing their fingers, they ridiculed and mocked those who were eating the fruit of the tree causing them to wander “into forbidden paths and were lost” (1 Nephi 8:26-28).

Lehi saw many others who came forward and “caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree.” Although they too were mocked by those in the great and spacious building, they did not heed the persecution but happily ate of the fruit (1 Nephi 8:30,33). Lehi also saw many others who were “feeling their way towards that great and spacious building.” In so doing, “many were drowned in the depths of the fountain; and many were lost from his view, wandering in strange roads” (1 Nephi 8:31-32).

A few additional insights can be gleaned from Nephi’s comments about the dream. We are told that the great and spacious building which hovered in the air “fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great” (1 Nephi 11:36). Nephi also informs us that the river of water was “filthy” (1 Nephi 12:16; 15:27) and flowed through a “great and terrible gulf” (1 Nephi 12:18; 15:28). Finally, there was a “fountain of living waters” which flowed from or near the base of the tree (1 Nephi 11:25).

From the dream, Lehi must have been able to see that everything the Lord established had its opposite. The tree which brought eternal life to all who endured in partaking of the fruit was opposed by the great and spacious building which brought destruction to all who dwelt therein. The living waters which brought the sweetness of life was opposed by the river of filthy water which brought the depths of hell. The rod of iron and the strait and narrow path which led those who entered therein to the tree was opposed by the mist of darkness which caused those who let go of the rod to wander off the path to their destruction.

Lehi’s Dream as the Stage and Backdrop of the Book of Mormon

Many aspects of the dream (including Nephi’s interpretation in 1 Nephi 11-15) can be found scattered throughout the Book of Mormon. For instance, in Alma 5:34,62, reference to the tree, fruit and living waters is made by Alma while speaking to the saints in Zarahemla. Also, Alma clearly has the tree and fruit in mind when he talked to the apostate people of Zoram in Alma 32:27-43; 33:1,23. Reference to the strait and narrow path can be found in 2 Nephi 31:18-20; 33:9, Jacob 6:11; Helaman 3:29; 3 Nephi 14:13,14; 27:33; 3 Nephi 14:13-14. The river of filthy waters is behind 2 Nephi 1:13; 2:29; 28:21-23 Alma 5:57; 7:21; 11:37; 26:20; 40:26 Helaman 3:27-30; 5:12; 8:25; 3 Nephi 20:41. The great and spacious building is referred to in 1 Nephi 22:12-17; 2 Nephi 6:12; 10:15,16; 3 Nephi 27:11. These are but a

few examples.

The frequent references to the various aspects of Lehi's dream throughout the Book of Mormon seem to indicate that the premise of the dream is fundamental to the theology of the Book of Mormon. If the Book of Mormon was a dramatic play, Lehi's dream may be thought of as the stage and backdrop. The whole of the Book of Mormon presents real life examples of the allegorical representation found in the dream. Mormon shows in *every* book of the Book of Mormon that mankind can either hold to the rod and follow the strait and narrow path that leads to liberty and eternal life or they can follow the ways of the world which lead to captivity and destruction. Consider the following examples from 1 Nephi, the Book of Mosiah, and the Book of Alma.

Nephi's Vision

The vision given to Nephi (1 Nephi 11-14) is an outgrowth of Lehi's dream and an obvious correlative parallel. After relating the dream to his family, Lehi told them many other things by way of preaching and prophesying (1 Nephi 8:38). However, he never gave the family an interpretation of the dream. The family had to find that out for themselves. While some of the family were "disputing one with another concerning the things which (Lehi) had spoken" (1 Nephi 15:2), Nephi turned to the Lord to learn the meaning of the dream. Because of Nephi's desire and belief as well as his ability to ponder, the Lord granted Nephi a vision in which he saw the things his father had seen and learned the interpretation thereof. This vision along with Nephi's discussion of the dream with his brothers in 1 Nephi 15 is the basis for the interpretation of Lehi's dream.

In the vision, Nephi saw the tree of life. Through a process of discovery learning, he found that the tree symbolized the love of God expressed through the atonement of Christ which came by the shedding of his blood and makes possible eternal life (1 Nephi 11:1-23). With Lehi's dream as the backdrop, Nephi saw that the strait and narrow path was the establishment of the kingdom of God including the ordinances of salvation. He saw that the rod of iron was the word of God revealed through Christ to his prophets and apostles (1 Nephi 11:24-25). This kingdom was first established by Christ, himself, during his mortal ministry (1 Nephi 11:24-31).

As the vision progressed, Nephi saw that everyone who was not part of the kingdom of Christ were gathered together in "a large and spacious building, like unto the building which (Lehi) saw" in order to "fight against the apostles of the Lamb" and thus destroy the means by which the word of God or revelation comes (1 Nephi 11:34-35). Surprisingly, Nephi notes that the "house of Israel" had gathered in the building with the "multitude of the earth" (1 Nephi 11:35). Nephi learned that the great and spacious building represented "the world, and the wisdom thereof" (1 Nephi 11:35), "the pride of the world" (1 Nephi 11:36), and the "vain imaginations" of the men (1 Nephi 12:18).

Nephi does not tell us the outcome of this "fight." Perhaps he assumed we would understand that the apostles, except for John, were all killed. Nephi's point centers on what

happens to those who “fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” He saw that the building “fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great.” Upon seeing this, Nephi is told: “Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (1 Nephi 11:36). In other words, those who fight against the word of God as revealed through his prophets will find themselves in open rebellion against God and will eventually be destroyed even as the house of Israel who found themselves destroyed with the rest of the multitude in the great and spacious building.

In the next portion of the vision, Nephi saw the Savior visit his seed in the promised land after his crucifixion and establish his kingdom, the strait and narrow path and the rod of iron, among them (1 Nephi 12:1-12). After four generations of righteousness, he saw his seed and the seed of his brothers were “gathered together to battle” (1 Nephi 12:13-15). At this point, Nephi learned that the river represented both the “depths of hell” and the “justice of the Eternal God” (1 Nephi 12:16,18; 15:26-36). It created a “great and terrible gulf” between God and those in the building. He also learned that the mists of darkness “are the temptations of the devil, which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men” (1 Nephi 12:17). Then Nephi understood that his seed had become vulnerable to destruction because they had been blinded by temptation and pride (1 Nephi 12:19). They were utterly destroyed by the seed of Nephi’s brothers.

Next, Nephi saw the formation of a church which was “most abominable above all other churches” among the nations of the gentiles. This church exhibited all the characteristics of the great and spacious building: it sought for wealth, the honors of men, and to destroy the kingdom of God (1 Nephi 13:1-9). However, in addition to warring against the saints of God and killing the living oracles who spoke the word of God, the great and abominable church succeeded in a clandestine effort which would deceive millions. “Many plain and precious things,” including doctrines and covenants, were taken from both the gospel of the Lamb and the Bible causing “an exceedingly great many (to) stumble” (1 Nephi 13:20-29). In so doing, the path and rod of iron that led to the tree had been destroyed and a false path and rod which appeared to lead to the tree but in fact led to the great and spacious building remained. How deceptive! Mankind would think they were on the right path when in actuality they were being led to trappings of the great and spacious building.

The vision concluded with a view of the restoration of those “most plain and precious parts” by Joseph Smith in the last days (1 Nephi 13:30-42). With the restoration of the gospel, the rod of iron was restored and corrected and the path to the tree was once again established. However, the great and spacious building continued to flourish. Nephi saw that both the church of the Lamb and the great and abominable church (or the church of the devil) grew in size and breadth until both covered the earth. However, the church of the Lamb had fewer numbers “because of the wickedness” of the church of the devil (1 Nephi 14:9-12).

At this point the established pattern once again repeated itself, “the great mother of abominations did gather together multitudes upon the face of all the earth, among all the nations of the Gentiles, to fight against the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 14:13). As that happened, the “power of the Lamb of God,” descended upon the church to protect the saints. Then the

“wrath of God was poured out upon the great and abominable church” to destroy the great and spacious building (1 Nephi 14:14-17). Commenting on this, Nephi states: “the blood of the great and abominable church . . . shall turn upon their own heads; for they shall war among themselves, and the sword of their own hands shall fall upon their own heads . . . yea, that great and abominable church, shall tumble to the dust and great shall be the fall of it” (1 Nephi 22:13-14).

In his panoramic visions, Nephi saw the history of the world from his day to ours being played out on the stage of Lehi’s dream. Through real life drama he came to understand the meaning of the dream. He also came to know why his father “exceedingly feared for Laman and Lemuel” (1 Nephi 8:36) and others who are rebellious for he saw the destruction that will eventually follow such rebellion. Nevertheless, he also came to know the happiness that comes to those who remain obedient to the word of God. Hence, Nephi ends his first book with this reminder: “Wherefore, if ye shall be obedient to the commandments, and endure to the end, ye shall be saved at the last day. And thus it is. Amen” (1 Nephi 22:31).

The Book of Mosiah: A Tale of Two Cities

The Book of Mosiah presents a fascinating example from the history of the Nephites of the difference between the happiness and freedom which results from partaking of tree of life and the bondage and destruction that follows those who are caught up into the great and spacious building. It illustrates ways people stray from the path and shows how it is possible to return to the strait and narrow. Most importantly, the Book of Mosiah teaches how eternal life is made possible and what man must do to inherit it. All this is done by contrasting the kings and people of two contemporary Nephite cities. The kings were Benjamin and Noah. The cities were Zarahemla and Nephi.

To understand the theology of the Book of Mosiah it should be recalled how there came to be two Nephite civil centers. After the death of Lehi, Nephi was warned by God to “flee into the wilderness” away from his brothers who were plotting against him. Taking with him “those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God” Nephi journeyed deep into the wilderness and there he and his people built a city they called Nephi (2 Nephi 5:4-8). The next several centuries were filled with war and turmoil between the Nephites and Lamanites until the Lord warned the Nephite King Mosiah to “flee out of the land of Nephi.” He took with him “as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord.” The word of God, like the rod of iron, led them “through the wilderness” until they came upon a city called Zarahemla. The people of Mosiah and the people of Zarahemla “did unite together” (Omni 1:12-19).

After Mosiah’s death, his son Benjamin reigned as king over Zarahemla. During his days, a group of Nephites led by a man named Zeniff decided to return back to the city of Nephi because “they were desirous to possess the land of their inheritance” (Omni 1:27-30). In the light of the Lord’s warning to flee Nephi, the appropriateness of their decision is very questionable. Eventually, many of them were killed and the rest were brought into bondage (Mosiah 19-24).

The stage set by Lehi's dream is the perfect setting for the Book of Mosiah. Like Lehi, King Benjamin stands at the end of his life and partakes of the fruit of his unselfish labor of service. The people of the land of Zarahemla are on the strait and narrow, steadfastly holding to the rod of the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses. Zeniff and the Nephites who left Zarahemla to return to the land of Nephi are reminiscent of those who have wandered into "forbidden paths" and were lost. Noah and the people of the land of Nephi are illustrative of those in the great and spacious building. The river of filthy water is well represented by the wilderness that separated the land of Nephi from the land of Zarahemla. Consider some of the following scenes from the drama of the Book of Mosiah.

The Book of Mosiah begins three years before the death of King Benjamin. He is the epitome of a faithful servant of the Lord who has endured valiantly to the end of the strait and narrow path. Those he governed were "a diligent people in keeping the commandments of the Lord" (Mosiah 1:11). Their righteousness consisted of regular compliance to the rigors of the law of Moses. Yet, King Benjamin knew that salvation consisted in more than mere obedience to the commandments given by Moses. He wanted his people to know as well.

Before he died, King Benjamin summoned his people to the temple that he might teach them concerning the true nature of salvation (Mosiah 1-6). This event is a marvelous example of how the word of God leads man to taste the fruit of the atonement which came because of the love of God. King Benjamin knew that man is dependent upon the atonement of Jesus Christ for salvation (Mosiah 3:11-17). He also knew that the atonement is granted to those who because of deep humility exercise faith and repent of their sins with a broken heart and a contrite spirit (Mosiah 3:12,18,21). His teachings on that occasion were designed to bring his people to a depth of humility that would bring about this "mighty change" in their hearts and thus taste of the love of God.

In the first of three orations, King Benjamin taught of man's utter dependence upon God. Without God man is nothing, even lower than the dust of the earth. He taught that everything that man has comes from God even the air he breaths and the food he eats (Mosiah 2:11-28). He then carried his point one step further: man's salvation is also dependent upon God! Though man alone is responsible for his transgression and withdrawal from the path (Mosiah 2:36,37), he alone cannot save himself. His salvation is dependent upon the coming of Jesus Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.

Reverently, King Benjamin told his people of the coming of Christ and the horror of his sacrificial suffering for the "wickedness and abominations of his people" (Mosiah 3:5-10). He then revealed that the law of Moses could not save them for it was simply a myriad of "signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows" of the sacrifice of Christ (Mosiah 3:14-15). Only through the atonement of Jesus Christ could man be saved. Men initiate the atonement into their lives when they "humble themselves and become as little children" and exercise "repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent" (Mosiah 3:18-21).

When King Benjamin ended the first oration "which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord," he looked upon his people. The desired outcome had been achieved. The word of God given to him by the angel had humbled his people for they had "fallen to the

earth” and “had viewed themselves in in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth” (Mosiah 4:1,2). In a unified voice, they plead to God: “O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins.” Their petition was granted. They received “a remission of their sins” and “were filled with joy” (Mosiah 4:3,11).

King Benjamin’s people had traversed the path to the tree of life and had tasted the sweetness of the fruit. This prompted Benjamin’s second oration (Mosiah 4:4-30). His concern now was with his people’s steadfastness. They must never let go of the fruit. To them he said, now that “ye have known of (God’s) goodness and have tasted of his love . . . which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith.” If they should do this they would “always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of (their) sins” (Mosiah 4:11-12). King Benjamin concluded the oration by defining the Christlike life of one who is saved by the atonement and the various ways he may commit sin and thus forfeit the love of God (Mosiah 4:13-30).

In response to this oration, King Benjamin’s people declared in “one voice” that they believed all his words. There had been a “mighty change” in their hearts and they were “willing to enter into a covenant” with God “to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments . . . all the remainder of (their) days” (Mosiah 5:1-5). In a final oration, King Benjamin declared that his people had become the sons and daughters of Christ and that under that “head (they) are made free” (Mosiah 5:7,8) In a final plea, he said: “I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life” (Mosiah 5:15).

The Book of Mosiah provides a second witness of the truths taught by King Benjamin. It comes through the ministry of Abinadi to the people of Nephi who lived under the rule of King Noah, a contemporary of King Benjamin (Mosiah 11-17). Interestingly enough, the messages of King Benjamin and Abinadi were not only delivered close to the same time but taught many of the same truths. Both taught that salvation does not come by the law of Moses but through the atonement of Christ (Mosiah 3:14,15; 12:31-13:35). Both taught of the coming of the Messiah, his life and suffering in behalf of mankind (Mosiah 3:5-10; 13:34-15:9). Both taught that Christ’s blood atones for the sins of mankind (Mosiah 3:11-13; 15:7-11). Both taught that little children would be saved under the atonement (Mosiah 3:16,18,21; 15:25). Both taught that Christ’s atonement is granted on conditions of repentance (Mosiah 3:12,21; 16:12,13). Finally, both taught of the judgment and eternal damnation that follows for those who do not repent (Mosiah 3:24-27; 16:1-11).

The spiritual receptiveness of the audience to whom Abinadi spoke was profoundly different than the one addressed by King Benjamin. They had not only strayed from the path

but were deeply involved in activities that typify the great and spacious building. A list of their sins is cataloged in Mosiah 11:1-19. This account makes it clear that King Noah is responsible for inciting his people to an unsavory state. A comparison of Mosiah chapter's two and eleven reveals that King Noah unwittingly dictated his kingdom in the opposite manner of King Benjamin. The effects of his rule produced a dramatically different outcome.

Whereas King Benjamin led his people to freedom from physical and spiritual destruction (Words of Mormon 1:12-18; Mosiah 5:8), King Noah drove his people head on into catastrophe. They were brought into bondage under the hands of the Lamanites and Noah was incinerated by a group of his own people (Mosiah 19). Though Noah's son, Limhi, who, unlike his father, was "a just man" (Mosiah 19:17) had become their king they still could not break the grip of bondage that held them tight. They were now paying the price of their disobedience. They had scorned the first message of Abinadi in which he told them that if they did not repent they would "be brought into bondage" (Mosiah 11:21-25). And they knew it (Mosiah 20:21)!

Three times, Limhi's people tried on their own power to break the stranglehold of captivity without success (Mosiah 21:1-12). Limhi had even sent a small party of men "to search for the land of Zarahemla; but they could not find it." Instead they found a destroyed people and supposed it was Zarahemla (Mosiah 21:25-26). They finally realized that freedom was not in their own power. They had strayed from the path and had fallen into the "awful gulf" of filthy water which separates "the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God" (1 Nephi 15:28). They then knew that they must heed Abinadi's second message: "except they repent (God) will utterly destroy them from off the face of the earth" (Mosiah 12:8).

In the Book of Helaman, Mormon tells us that only through Jesus Christ is it possible for man to traverse the river of filthy water and arrive at the tree of life. Says he, "Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name. Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide assunder all the cunning and snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked-- and land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven" (Helaman 3:27-29). Like the people of King Benjamin, Limhi and his people "did humble themselves even to the dust . . . even in the depths of humility." They "did cry mightily to God" that "he would deliver them out of their afflictions" (Mosiah 21:14). Unlike, the people of King Benjamin, "the Lord was slow to hear their cry because of their iniquities" (Mosiah 21:15). However, because of the Lord's great mercy, he eventually responded to their pleas and provided a way for escape. First, he eased the burden of their bondage (Mosiah 21:15-22). Then he brought a group of men from Zarahemla, who like missionaries, assisted Limhi and his people to escape the Lamanite bondage and return to the freedom of Zarahemla (Mosiah 22).

The stories of people of King Benjamin and King Noah are not the only stories in the Book of Mosiah that illustrate the incidents of Lehi's dream. From the stories of Zeniff and Alma the younger we learn how one can stray from the strait and narrow path. It was Zeniff's overzealousness that distracted his eye from the tree and led him and his group into the deception of the Lamanites which eventually led to their captivity (Mosiah 7:21; 9:3-16). Rebellion led Alma the younger and his four friends, the sons of Mosiah, from off the course into the trappings of the great and spacious building (Mosiah 26:1-6; 27:8). The conversion stories of Alma the elder and his son Alma the younger illustrate the rebirth process taught by King Benjamin. Note how both exercise humility, faith in Christ's atonement, and repentance because of the word of God (Mosiah 17-18; 27:8-31). All these stories make the Book of Mosiah a magnificent book for illustrating the contrasts in Lehi's dream and teach of how one attains eternal life.

The Book of Alma

The Book of Alma is a study on the battle between righteousness and wickedness; between liberty and tyranny; between eternal life and everlasting destruction. Whereas the Book of Mosiah exemplifies the contrasts between the tree of life and the great and spacious building, the Book of Alma vividly portrays the war that rages between the two. The strait and narrow path and those progressing to the tree, represented by the Nephite church and its people, is the primary target of the Satanic forces housed in the great and spacious building.

The first battle is found in the opening chapter of the book. It came at a time when there was great change in the land. The government had been modified from a monarchy to a network of judges chosen "by the voice of the people" (Mosiah 29:25). Alma the younger became the first chief judge of the land. He was also called as the high priest and head of the church replacing his deceased father (Mosiah 29:42). With everything in order "there was continual peace through the land" (Mosiah 29:43). The peace was soon shattered!

The initial blow was delivered by a man named Nehor. He established a religious order based on his own teachings mixed with scripture. He taught that the right to exercise the priesthood should be open to all and that priests need not work but should be supported by the people (Alma 1:3). He believed in God and taught that since God had created all men he would also "redeem all men," for "in the end, all men should have eternal life" (Alma 1:4). Consequently, there was no need for repentance (Alma 15:15; 21:6).

Nehor not only taught heresy but endeavored to enforce it by the sword (Alma 1:8-9). He killed "a man who belonged to the church of God" because he opposed Nehor's apostate teachings. Nehor was taken by the people to be judged by Alma. After pleading his cause, he was found guilty of murder and "suffered an ignominious death" (Alma 1:10-15). However, we are plaintively told that "this did not put an end to the spreading of priestcraft through the land" (Alma 1:16). The war had just begun!

Nehor had been very persuasive in his teachings for "many who loved the vain things of the world" had joined themselves to the order he established (Alma 1:16). His church is variously referred to as "the profession of Nehor" (Alma 14:18; 15:15; 16:11), "the order of

Nehor” (Alma 24:29), and “the order of the Nehors” (Alma 21:4,28). Alma tells us, however, that the order of Nehor was plainly a priestcraft (Alma 1:12). Nephi tells us, priestcrafts “are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion” (2 Nephi 26:29). True to this definition the followers of Nehor continued “preaching false doctrines; and this they did for the sake of riches and honor” (Alma 1:16).

Nehor’s followers soon began to exhibit all the characteristics of those in the great and spacious building. They were lifted up in the pride of their hearts wearing “very costly apparel” (Alma 1:6,32). They also began to actively persecute the members of the church (Alma 1:19,20,32). Their biting ridicule was effective. We are told that “the hearts of many were hardened . . . and also many withdrew themselves” from the church thus forfeiting the fruit of the tree of life (Alma 1:24). Nevertheless, we are told that like those in Lehi’s dream who faithfully remained at the tree there were many of the church of God who “were steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of God” (Alma 1:25). In direct contrast to the order of Nehor, Mormon describes those of the church as being humble. No one considered himself better than anyone else. The priests labored for their own support. Everyone shared “their substance, every man according to that which he had.” We are specifically told that they “did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely” (Alma 1:26-27).

Nehorism continued to spread both by name and by influence throughout the land of the Nephites. Some areas, such as the city of Ammonihah, made a wholesale adoption of the Nehoric order. Other areas like Zarahemla bought into the beliefs and practices of the order yet remained members of the church of God by name.

With the spread of Nehorism came a growing unrest among the Nephites. In the fifth year of Alma’s reign as chief judge, a group of Nehoric followers made an attempt to return the government back to a monarchy with their leader, Amlici, as king. However, “the voice of the people came against Amlici, that he was not made king over the people” (Alma 2:7). Undaunted, Amlici led his followers in an armed revolt which ended in the death of thousands (Alma 2-3).

Mormon uses this story to make an important point which is pertinent to this study. In the process of the revolution, the Amlicites joined forces with the Lamanites, the archetype of the great and spacious building. Being in league with the Lamanites they “marked themselves with red in their foreheads after the manner of the Lamanites” (Alma 3:4). Thus they had branded themselves as part of the great and spacious building and in so doing had brought upon themselves the curse of that building. Of this Mormon says: “Now I would that ye should see that they brought upon themselves the curse; and even so doth every man that is cursed bring upon himself his own condemnation” (Alma 3:19).

Mormon’s point is clear! If man follows the ways of the world depicted by the great and spacious building he will be cursed with the curse of that building, even destruction. But death, in and of itself, is not the tragedy! Both the wicked and righteous die. Nevertheless, for Mormon the destruction of the physical body typifies the eternal condemnation that follows in the life hereafter. Lehi warned his sons against this cursing in these words: “Arise from the

dust, my sons, . . . that ye may not come down into captivity; That ye may not be cursed with a sore cursing; and also, that ye may not incur the displeasure of a just God upon you, unto the destruction, yea, the eternal destruction of both soul and body” (2 Nephi 1:21,22). Obviously, the way to avoid this destruction is to stay on the path to the tree.

In the Book of Alma, the strait and narrow path and the tree of life are represented by the church of God which is also designated as “the holy order of God” (Alma 4:20; 5:44,54; 6:1; 7:22; 8:4; 13:6; 43:2; 49:30). Entrance into this order was based upon faith and repentance. Alma says “concerning the holy order, or this high priesthood, there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish” (Alma 13:10). Those of this order who remained faithful to the end were “sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.” Having been sanctified they became worthy to enter “into the rest of the Lord their God” (Alma 13:11-12), the Book of Mormon antitype of eternal destruction (Jacob 1:7; Enos 1:27; Alma 12:34-37; 13:6.12-16,29; 16:17; 34:41; 35:34; 40:12; 57:36; 60:13; 3 Nephi 27:19; 28:3; Moroni 7:3; 9:6,25; 10:34).

The scriptural phrase, “the rest of the Lord,” seems to have reference to both a *state of being* and a *place of being*. Indeed, the phrase is indicative of the process one passes through to achieve exaltation with God. First man must develop the state of being before he can inherit a place of being. When a person enters into the strait and narrow path through repentance and baptism he enters into a state of spiritual rest (Matthew 11:28-30). If he remains faithful, he will eventually arrive at the tree, the symbol of the Lord’s physical rest. Of this Mormon wrote, “Wherefore, I would speak unto you that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, and that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord, from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven” (Moroni 7:3).