

# “THE THINGS WHICH I SAW WHILE I WAS CARRIED AWAY IN THE SPIRIT”

(1 NEPHI 12-14)

by Ted L. Gibbons

**QUOTE OF THE WEEK:** I bless you with increased understanding of the Book of Mormon. I promise you that from this moment forward, if [you] will daily sup from its pages and abide by its precepts, God will pour out upon each child of Zion and the Church a blessing hitherto unknown. (Pres. Ezra Taft Benson, *Ensign*, May 1986, p. 78)

**INTRODUCTION:** Can you feel Nephi’s heartache from the following verse?

O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people! For I, Nephi, have seen it, and it well nigh consumeth me before the presence of the Lord; but I must cry unto my God: Thy ways are just (2 Nephi 26:7).

In the visions of 1 Nephi 12 and 13, Nephi saw the future of the promised land. He saw the Nephites and the Lamanites and the Gentiles. Among other things, he saw that

. . . the seed of my brethren did contend against my seed, according to the word of the angel; and because of the pride of my seed, and the temptations of the devil, I beheld that the seed of my brethren did overpower the people of my seed (1 Nephi 12:19).

Can you imagine your own feelings if you were to discover by revelation that the descendants of your siblings would one day destroy your own posterity?

But Nephi never stumbles. His confidence that the ways of God are just is absolute. He continues on throughout his life doing what has to be done when it has to be done. The understanding of what will be done by the descendants of Laman and Lemuel never restrains him from loving them and preaching to them and encouraging them. I stand in awe at the power of this prophet, and his unfaltering willingness to do the right thing.

Nephi also saw us in our day. He saw the formation of the Great and Abominable church, and the triumph of the Kingdom of God in the last days.

**-1. NEPHI SEES THE FUTURE OF HIS DESCENDANTS AND HIS BROTHERS’ DESCENDANTS (1 Nephi 12)**

The vision of Nephi in these chapters is a tour conducted by the angel who began the instruction in 1 Nephi 11. Note as you read this chapter the things to which Nephi's attention is directed by this heavenly messenger, using the words ***look*** and/or ***behold***. Ask yourself why Nephi was instructed to focus on these things rather than the any others that might have been presented. Why did he include these accounts in this record. Speaking to his brother Jacob many years later, Nephi instructed him to write

. . . a few of the things which I considered to be most precious; that I should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people which are called the people of Nephi. . . .

And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these plates, and touch upon them as much as it were possible, for Christ's sake, and for the sake of our people (Jacob 1:2,4).

What is there about the accounts of 1 Nephi 12 that could be considered “most precious?” Do these verses include “the heads” (the most significant parts) of sacred preaching, great revelation, or prophesying? Why is this material in the book at all?

1. AND it came to pass that the angel said unto me: ***Look, and behold*** thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren. And I looked and beheld the land of promise; and I beheld multitudes of people, yea, even as it were in number as many as the sand of the sea (1 Nephi 12:1, ***emphasis added***) . In verses 1-7 Nephi sees the Land of Promise, multitudes of people, wars and rumors of war (and “great slaughters with the sword” 1 Nephi 12:2), many generations, the destructions at the crucifixion, the vapor of darkness, and the “Lamb of God descending out of heaven” (1 Nephi 12:6).
2. And I also saw and bear record that the Holy Ghost fell upon twelve others; and they were ordained of God, and chosen. And the angel spake unto me, saying: ***Behold*** the twelve disciples of the Lamb, who are chosen to minister unto thy seed (1 Nephi 12:7,8, ***emphasis added***). Nephi learns (and we learn) that “the twelve apostles of the Lamb . . . are they who shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel.” They will therefore judge “the twelve ministers of thy seed . . .” (1 Nephi 12:9) The twelve disciples of Nephi's seed will “judge thy seed [the seed of Nephi]” (1 Nephi 12:10)
3. And the angel said unto me: ***Look!*** And I looked, and beheld three generations pass away in righteousness; and their garments were white even like unto the

Lamb of God. And the angel said unto me: These are made white in the blood of the Lamb, because of their faith in him (1 Nephi 12:11, *emphasis added*). At this point Nephi saw the righteous interlude of 4<sup>th</sup> Nephi, wherein three generations and many of the fourth generation “are made white in the blood of the Lamb, because of their faith in him.” It is in this part of the Book of Mormon that we get the most powerful scriptural record available that it is possible for a society to live in perfect righteousness (1 Nephi 12:11).

4. And the angel said unto me: ***Behold*** thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren (1 Nephi 12:14, *emphasis added*). As Nephi records the final Nephite/Lamanite battles, notice the depiction of some of the symbols of Lehi’s dream. Why is the Lord showing him and us this explanation? What in our own day corresponds to these visions of Nephi? He saw people gathered together to war and called war the “fountain of filthy water which thy father saw . . .” (1 Nephi 12:16) How much filthy water is there in the world today? He saw the mists of darkness and temptations which blind eyes and harden hearts and lead the children of men into broad roads where “they perish and are lost.” (1 Nephi 12:17) If you watch your television this week, look for people whose eyes are blinded and whose hearts are hardened to the truths that you love so much. What kind of broad (forbidden, strange [1 Nephi 8:28,32]) roads do you see such people following? What evidence do you see of people inhabiting the great and spacious building? Is there any evidence of “pride” and “vain imaginations” visible around you? Look carefully at verse 18. How dangerous is it to allow ourselves to be led about by our pride and vain imaginations? For that matter, what are *vain imaginations*? Finally, Nephi sees the destruction of his people, and that afterward, the Lamanites “went forth in multitudes upon the face of the land.” (1 Nephi 12:20)
5. And the angel said unto me: ***Behold*** these shall dwindle in unbelief (1 Nephi 12:22). And Nephi watched the disintegration of the Lamanites until they reached the situation they were in when the Restoration began.

## **2. NEPHI SEES THE FORMATION OF A GREAT AND ABOMINABLE CHURCH, THE COLONIZATION OF THE AMERICAS, THE APOSTASY, AND THE RESTORATION OF THE GOSPEL (1 Nephi 13)**

In 1 Nephi 13 the vision of Nephi shifts its focus to the Gentiles of Europe and America, and the discovery and founding of the Americas. Among the first things he notices (he is again directed to “Look!” by the angel in 1 Nephi 13:1) is the “formation of a church which is most abominable above all other churches.” (1 Nephi 13:5) Bruce R. McConkie said,

The titles church of the devil and great and abominable church are used to identify all churches or organizations of whatever name or nature -- whether political, philosophical, educational, economic social, fraternal, civic, or religious -- which are designed to take men on a course that leads away from God and his laws and thus from salvation in the kingdom of God (Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, p.137).

But in this chapter Nephi saw the *formation* of a particular church—one that would in the time and place of this vision, accomplish certain significant things. As you read of this “church,” think about the answers to the following questions:

1. (13:5) How does this church treat the saints?
2. (13:6) Who is the founder of this organization?
3. (13:7,8) what are the desires of this organization? Can you see any similarities between this establishment and the building mentioned in 1 Nephi 8:27?
4. (13:9) Why do they destroy the saints and bring them into captivity?
5. (13:26) What does this church do to the scriptures?
6. (13:27) Why do they do this to the word of God?

The answers to these questions will help you understand why this church is called “most abominable.”

As Nephi sees the discovery and colonization of America, he tells us of a remarkable, divine involvement in this process. Note the following descriptions of the Lord’s part in the establishment of America:

- A. (13:11,14) He disperses the Lamanites
- B. (13:12) He inspires Columbus
- C. (13:13) He inspires other Gentiles
- D. (13:13) His Spirit helps the Gentiles prosper
- E. (13:16-19) God helps them win the Revolutionary War
- F. (13:30) They are lifted by the power of God above all other nations.

With regard to the inspiration attending Columbus, the following may be useful:

From my first youth onward I was a seaman and have so continued until this day . . . . The Lord was well disposed to my desire, and He bestowed upon me courage and understanding; knowledge of seafaring He gave me in abundance, of astrology as much as was needed, and of geometry and astronomy likewise. Further, he gave me joy and cunning in drawing maps and thereon cities, mountains, rivers, islands, and harbours, each one in its

place. I have seen and truly I have studied all books—cosmographies, histories, chronicles, and philosophies, and other arts, for which our Lord unlocked my mind, sent my upon the sea, and gave me fire for the deed. Those who heard of my emprise called it foolish, mocked me, and laughed. But who can doubt but that the Holy Ghost inspired me (Jacob Wasserman, *Columbus, Don Quixote of the Seas*, pp. 19-20, 46).

Orson Pratt spoke of an even more dramatic divine involvement in the journeys of Columbus:

In those early and perilous times, our men were few, and our resources limited. Poverty was among the most potent enemies we had to encounter; yet our arms were successful; and it may not be amiss to ask here, by whose power victory so often perched on our banner? It was by the agency of that same angel of God that appeared unto Joseph Smith, and revealed to him the history of the early inhabitants of this country, whose mounds, bones and remains of towns, cities and fortifications speak from the dust in the ears of the living with the voice of undeniable truth. This same angel presides over the destinies of America, and feels a lively interest in all our doings. He was in the camp of Washington; and, by an invisible hand, led on our fathers to conquest and victory; and all this to open and prepare the way for the Church and kingdom of God to be established on the western hemisphere, for the redemption of Israel and the salvation of the world.

This same angel was with Columbus, and gave him deep impressions, by dreams and by visions, respecting this New World. Trammelled by poverty and by an unpopular cause, yet his persevering and unyielding heart would not allow an obstacle in his way too great for him to overcome; and the angel of God helped him--was with him on the stormy deep, calmed and troubled elements, and guided his frail vessel to the desired haven. Under the guardianship of this same angel, or Prince of America, have the United States grown, increased, and flourished, like the sturdy oak by the rivers of water (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol.6, p.368, Orson Hyde, July 4, 1854).

Nephi's discussion of the history of the Bible is worth a close look. Note that when the Bible came from the Jews ("from the mouth of a Jew"--1 Nephi 13:24), it contained the fulness of the gospel. It went forth "from the Jews in purity (1 Nephi 13:25). It was "after" (1 Nephi 13:26) these things went forth from the apostles to the Gentiles that the records fell into the hands of the great and abominable church. From the Bible they removed "many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away." (1 Nephi 13:26) Since Satan is the founder of this church (1

Nephi 13:6), the removal of these things is not a great surprise. These things were removed in order to “pervert the right ways of the Lord” and to “blind the eyes and harden the hearts” of those who might otherwise accept the truth. How successful was this effort? We are told that

because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book, which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God--because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them (1 Nephi 13:29).

A later verse (13:32) tells us that the Gentiles were in “awful state of blindness . . . because of the plain and most precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back by that abominable church, whose formation thou hast seen.”

The efforts of the great and abominable church to destroy the converting power of the bible caused (1) many to stumble, (2) Satan to have great power, and (3) the Gentiles to be in an awful state of blindness.

Some historical records tell us of the very process of which we are speaking. Consider the implications of the following quotes:

1. The translation of the Septuagint from Hebrew to Greek illustrates the problems that have attended translations ever since. Aside from the sorry state of the text due to scholastic incompetence, there was a far more serious problem, namely, the theological bias of the translators. This caused them to change the meaning or paraphrase texts that were either unclear or embarrassing to them. Concrete terms in Hebrew came out as abstract terms in Greek. Expressions about God deemed by the Greek translators to be crude or offensive because they described Deity as the Holy Man that he is, rather than the immanent spirit they supposed him to be -- were changed or toned down or deleted entirely. Passages setting forth the so-called anthropomorphic nature of Deity were simply assumed by the translators to be false and were translated, paraphrased, and changed accordingly. . . .

As long as inspired men are the keepers of holy writ; as long as prophets and apostles are present to identify and perfect the scriptures by revelation; as long as scriptural translations (as in the instance of the Book of Mormon) are made by the gift and power of God -- all will be well with the written word. But when the gospel sun sets and apostate darkness shrouds the minds of men, the scriptural word is in jeopardy (Bruce R. McConkie, A

*New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p.403).

2. In a very old text, Peter is reported as saying in a letter to James regarding the use of his own writings in the church: "They think they are able to interpret my own words better than I can, telling their hearers that they are conveying my very thoughts to them, while the fact is that such things never entered my mind. If they take such outrageous liberties while I am alive, what will they do after I am gone!" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, Vol.3, Ch.4, p.28)
3. The fact that there are three Synoptic Gospels instead of one poses the greatest riddle of New Testament criticism: Why are there three, and why do they differ? The very "multiplicity of the Gospels" is adequate evidence that someone has been manipulating the records.

Some experts think they have a pretty good idea of the sort of people responsible. They were people who had received the gospel from the apostles, but immediately after the passing of the apostles proceeded to make basic alterations, deliberately disregarding some of the most important teachings. They were not the old Jewish-Christian communities, but various local churches of gentile composition, into whose hands the record came at an early time (in the 70's and 80's A.D.), and by whom the alterations--especially deletions--were made. The changes consisted in new interpretations of the scriptures, not in corruptions of the text, and in substantial omissions (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, Vol.7, Ch.2, p.26 - p.27).

Of course the scholars have made a determined and laudable effort to restore the Bible to its pristine condition, using texts from as long ago as 325 A.D. But by then it was too late, because it was "after these plain and precious things were taken away [that the Bible went forth to all the nations of the Gentiles.]" (1 Nephi 13:29) Robert J. Matthews wrote,

As we read the words of the angel [in I Nephi 13], we discover that the world has never had a complete Bible, for it was massively, even cataclysmically, corrupted before it was distributed [Robert J. Matthews, "The Book of Mormon as a Co-Witness with the Bible and as a Guide to Biblical Criticism," LDS Church Educational System Symposium on the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), p. 57]

The only mistakes the newer translations can correct are those made since 325 A.D. when Constantine ordered 50 copies of the Bible made and sent to all the major Roman cities.

If you apply these descriptions of the corruption of the sacred text to the image of the iron rod, you can begin to understand why Satan has great power and why Gentiles stumble and are blinded. Who would want to trust their eternal destiny to a rod from which large chunks were missing—a rod weakened by rust and corruption?

Nephi learned, however, that the Lord had a solution for this corruption of the text before it ever took place. Nephi was promised: “Neither will the Lord God suffer that the Gentiles shall forever remain in that awful state of blindness . . .” (1 Nephi 13:32) What would he do to counteract the effects of the crippling damage done by this Satanic organization?

. . . after the Gentiles do stumble exceedingly, because of the most plain and precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back by that abominable church, which is the mother of harlots, saith the Lamb--I will be merciful unto the Gentiles in that day, insomuch that I will bring forth unto them, in mine own power, much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious, saith the Lamb.

For, behold, saith the Lamb: I will manifest myself unto thy seed, that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious; and after thy seed shall be destroyed, and dwindle in unbelief, and also the seed of thy brethren, behold, these things shall be hid up, to come forth unto the Gentiles, by the gift and power of the Lamb (1 Nephi 13:34,35).

Part of the restitution of these “plain and precious things” would come through the Book of Mormon. Other parts would be restored in another way.

I beheld *other books*, which came forth by the power of the Lamb, from the Gentiles unto them, unto the convincing of the Gentiles and the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the Jews who were scattered upon all the face of the earth, that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true (1 Nephi 13:39, *emphasis added*).

The verse above and the one following it suggest an interesting and often overlooked purpose of the Book of Mormon and the other two books of scripture that have come forth with the restoration. “*These last records . . . shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them.*” (1 Nephi 13:40)



### **3. NEPHI SEES THE BLESSING PROMISED TO THE FAITHFUL; HE ALSO SEES THE DESTRUCTION OF THE GREAT AND ABOMINABLE CHURCH (1 Nephi 14)**

In the Book of Mormon, a Jew seems to be anyone from the land of Judah. Everyone else is a Gentile. Understanding these terms will help with the study of 1 Nephi 14.

In 1 Nephi 13 the great and abominable church was a specific organization in a specific time and place. But following the restoration, we are told that there are only two churches, and everybody belongs to one or the other:

Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth (1 Nephi 14:10).

If the Gentiles will hearken when the Lord manifests himself unto them in word and in power, he promises to take away the stumbling blocks mentioned in 1 Nephi 13:29,34 (1 Nephi 14:1). The *word* referred to here is of course the word we are studying—The Book of Mormon, and the words of living prophets. The power is that which comes from the word of God (see 1 Nephi 15:24; Alma 31:5; Hel 3:29)

To have these blessings the Gentiles must repent. “Thou hast beheld that if the Gentiles repent it shall be well with them . . .” (1 Nephi 14:5) If they refuse to repent, a different fate awaits: “thou also hast heard that whoso repenteth not must perish. Therefore, wo be unto the Gentiles if it so be that they harden their hearts against the Lamb of God (1 Nephi 14:5,6).

How powerful is the great and abominable church at the time period referred to in 1 Nephi 14?

. . . she sat upon many waters; and she had dominion over all the earth, among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people (1 Nephi 14:11).

How powerful is the Church of the Lamb?

And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few, because of the wickedness and abominations of the whore who sat upon many waters; nevertheless, I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the

earth; and their dominions upon the face of the earth were small, because of the wickedness of the great whore whom I saw (1 Nephi 14:12).

What project does “the great mother of abominations” undertake?

And it came to pass that I beheld that 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 14:12).

Since the numbers in this battle are so unequal, how will the saints survive?

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory (1 Nephi 14:14).

What are the people of the covenant armed with? How would you go about arming yourself with righteousness so that you could partake of the “power of God in great glory”?

I remember a sergeant with whom I served in the Army. He had been in Viet Nam for two tours of duty, and, like all good soldiers, loved to tell his stories to people who would hold still long enough to listen. I heard him say this on one occasion. “The US Army SOP (Standard Operations and Procedures) required a soldier going into combat to carry with him a basic load—a certain amount of ammo, a couple of grenades, some smoke, perhaps a flare or two, etc. But,” he said in absolute seriousness, “I always took a *double* basic load!”

Sergeant Longrace [I changed his name] did not want to take a chance of exhausting his supply of ammunition during a battle when his life and the lives of comrades were on the line. This seems to be a wonderful idea. What a tragedy it would be if we found ourselves in a battle when the only weapon available to us was our righteousness, and we had an insufficient supply. We must not hope for *just enough righteousness* to get by. I saw a bumper sticker once. The caption read, “How much sin can I get away with and still go to heaven?” I have a fear about that attitude. We need a *double basic load* of righteousness for the battles ahead.

## CONCLUSION

We all have neighbors who are stumbling, and who are in that awful state of blindness,

and over whom Satan has power. They are the modern victims of a plague of worldliness caused by the damage done to the Bible. But this is a plague for which we have the cure. And our Father will surely hold us responsible for those with whom we come in contact if we make no attempt to offer them the divine remedy for the malady from which they suffer.

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