



THE WITNESS

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION BY THE BOOK OF MORMON FOUNDATION
Number 138 ■ Summer 2011

*But before the great day of the Lord shall come,
Jacob shall flourish in the wilderness;
and the Lamanites
shall blossom
as the rose.*

The Book of Mormon

★ The Book of Mormon has a date with destiny. It has potentials no other book has or even remotely approached as it moves into the future.

The Book of Mormon is now rolling on, rolling on into the future with a momentum that no hand can deter; that no power can slow, as it rolls on into a grand opening, a grand burst into the full limelight of world recognition.

The grand finale of the Restoration Movement is now beckoning us on. **WHAT A DAY TO BE ALIVE.** *Roy Weldon, The Witness Spring 1991*

★ Through the pages of the Book of Mormon we get to see, firsthand, the powerful revelation of the divinity of Jesus Christ and God's marvelous plan of salvation. We not only gain insight into God's dealing with mankind in the past, but we also catch a glimpse of what is possible in our lives today. Surely, the hope and promise of our day can find its roots in the ancient truths contained in The Book of Mormon. *Rich Rowland, President, The Book of Mormon Foundation*

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; And if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost; and by the power of the Holy Ghost, ye may know the truth of all things.

(Moroni 10:4-5 RLDS) [Moroni 10:4-5 LDS]

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A contribution to The Book of Mormon Foundation is tax deductible. Financial statements are available upon request.

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Published quarterly by
The Book of Mormon Foundation

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Cover photo courtesy of Dale Godfrey
 (Doctrine and Covenants 49:5a RLDS)
 [Doctrine and Covenants 49:24 LDS]

THE Heart OF A King

by Gary Whiting



There are Christians who quickly discount the testimony and usefulness of the scriptures of the restored gospel. Anything beyond the Bible is tossed aside and derided. In so doing, they miss the beauty and depth of understanding which is possible when the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants are used to enrich each other's testimony of Jesus Christ.

I discovered an example of the Book of Mormon and Bible working together to increase our understanding of God's word while I was in Honduras preparing for a sermon. It was a new insight for me, and I pray that you will be blessed in the reading of it.

A Parable

Jesus was in Galilee (northern Israel) near the large freshwater lake called the Sea of Galilee. Jesus spent a lot of time in this area, and it was a favorite place for Him to teach the gospel. It is a beautiful area, with fruitful fields, the lake and gently sloping hillsides. On one of these hillsides, at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount.

It had been a particularly busy Sabbath day for the Master. He had healed a man's crippled hand with just a word. Another man was freed from an evil spirit. The religious leaders hounded Jesus and accused Him of blasphemy and sin for these acts of kindness and mercy on the Sabbath day. After He had broken free of the Pharisees and scribes, His mother and brothers had come to the door of the home where he was teaching and asked to see Him. We do not know if He broke away to see them or not, but He implied that their visit was an interruption in the work He was called to do.

Later that day, Jesus walked to the shore by the lake to teach about the kingdom of God through a series of parables (see Matthew 13). The first parable given by the Master was about a man who was planting seeds in his fields.

The process for sowing seed was very familiar to the crowd listening to Jesus. Seed was hand cast, being

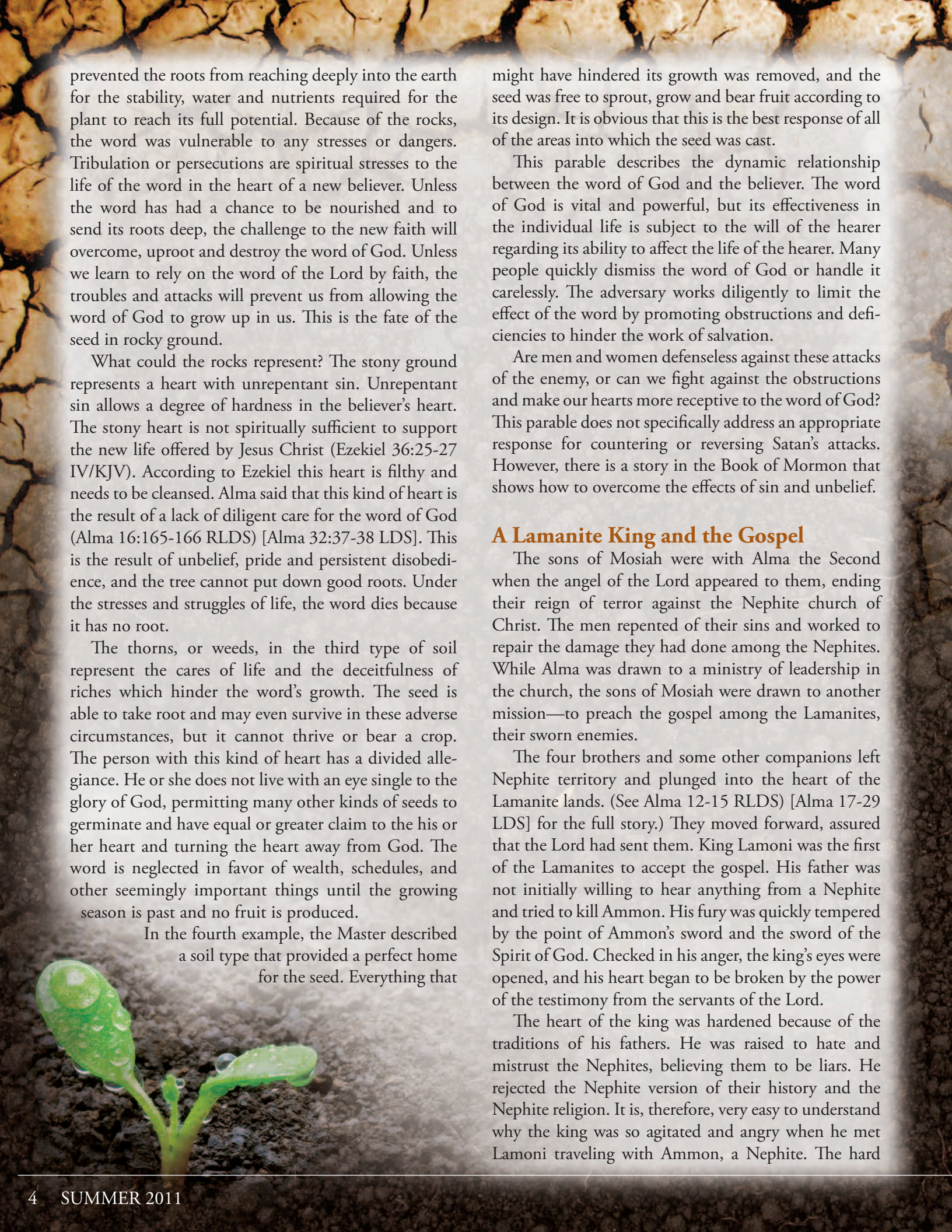
drawn from a basket or bag. This farmer was interested in covering every possible piece of ground that could grow a crop and, thus, was not careful where He sowed the seed. Some of it landed in the pathway, some in rocky ground, some in ground full of weeds, and some in good soil.

When the disciples quizzed Him about the meaning of the parable, Jesus explained that He was really talking about the spiritual hearts of men and women. The seed is the word of God and the different kinds of soil reveal how people respond to the message of the gospel.

The ground in the path was compacted and hard because it was walked upon by many feet. This ground resisted the seed and, because it was exposed, the birds ate it for food before it could take root. Jesus explained that the hard, resistant soil was in the likeness of hearts that do not allow the word of God to easily enter in and grow up in them. These are hearts deceived by the lies of Satan, false religions, unrepentant sins, rebellious living and traditions of men. When the word of God comes to them, the evil one quickly moves in with lies to prevent the word from taking root in that life.

The rest of the seed found soil in which the seed sprouted and plants began to grow. Initially, the plants in the last three examples all looked good. The rocky soil, the thorn-infested soil and the good soil all had two things in common. The first (and they share this with the soil of the path) is that the seed was good. Given a proper reception and sufficient care, the seed would always produce the desired crop. The second thing shared by the last three examples is that they all had soil capable of receiving the seed and beginning the process of producing a crop. The seed sprouted and began to grow in each case.

The seed was able to sprout in the rocky soil, but could not mature because the soil was too shallow. The rocks



prevented the roots from reaching deeply into the earth for the stability, water and nutrients required for the plant to reach its full potential. Because of the rocks, the word was vulnerable to any stresses or dangers. Tribulation or persecutions are spiritual stresses to the life of the word in the heart of a new believer. Unless the word has had a chance to be nourished and to send its roots deep, the challenge to the new faith will overcome, uproot and destroy the word of God. Unless we learn to rely on the word of the Lord by faith, the troubles and attacks will prevent us from allowing the word of God to grow up in us. This is the fate of the seed in rocky ground.

What could the rocks represent? The stony ground represents a heart with unrepentant sin. Unrepentant sin allows a degree of hardness in the believer's heart. The stony heart is not spiritually sufficient to support the new life offered by Jesus Christ (Ezekiel 36:25-27 IV/KJV). According to Ezekiel this heart is filthy and needs to be cleansed. Alma said that this kind of heart is the result of a lack of diligent care for the word of God (Alma 16:165-166 RLDS) [Alma 32:37-38 LDS]. This is the result of unbelief, pride and persistent disobedience, and the tree cannot put down good roots. Under the stresses and struggles of life, the word dies because it has no root.

The thorns, or weeds, in the third type of soil represent the cares of life and the deceitfulness of riches which hinder the word's growth. The seed is able to take root and may even survive in these adverse circumstances, but it cannot thrive or bear a crop. The person with this kind of heart has a divided allegiance. He or she does not live with an eye single to the glory of God, permitting many other kinds of seeds to germinate and have equal or greater claim to the his or her heart and turning the heart away from God. The word is neglected in favor of wealth, schedules, and other seemingly important things until the growing season is past and no fruit is produced.

In the fourth example, the Master described a soil type that provided a perfect home for the seed. Everything that

might have hindered its growth was removed, and the seed was free to sprout, grow and bear fruit according to its design. It is obvious that this is the best response of all of the areas into which the seed was cast.

This parable describes the dynamic relationship between the word of God and the believer. The word of God is vital and powerful, but its effectiveness in the individual life is subject to the will of the hearer regarding its ability to affect the life of the hearer. Many people quickly dismiss the word of God or handle it carelessly. The adversary works diligently to limit the effect of the word by promoting obstructions and deficiencies to hinder the work of salvation.

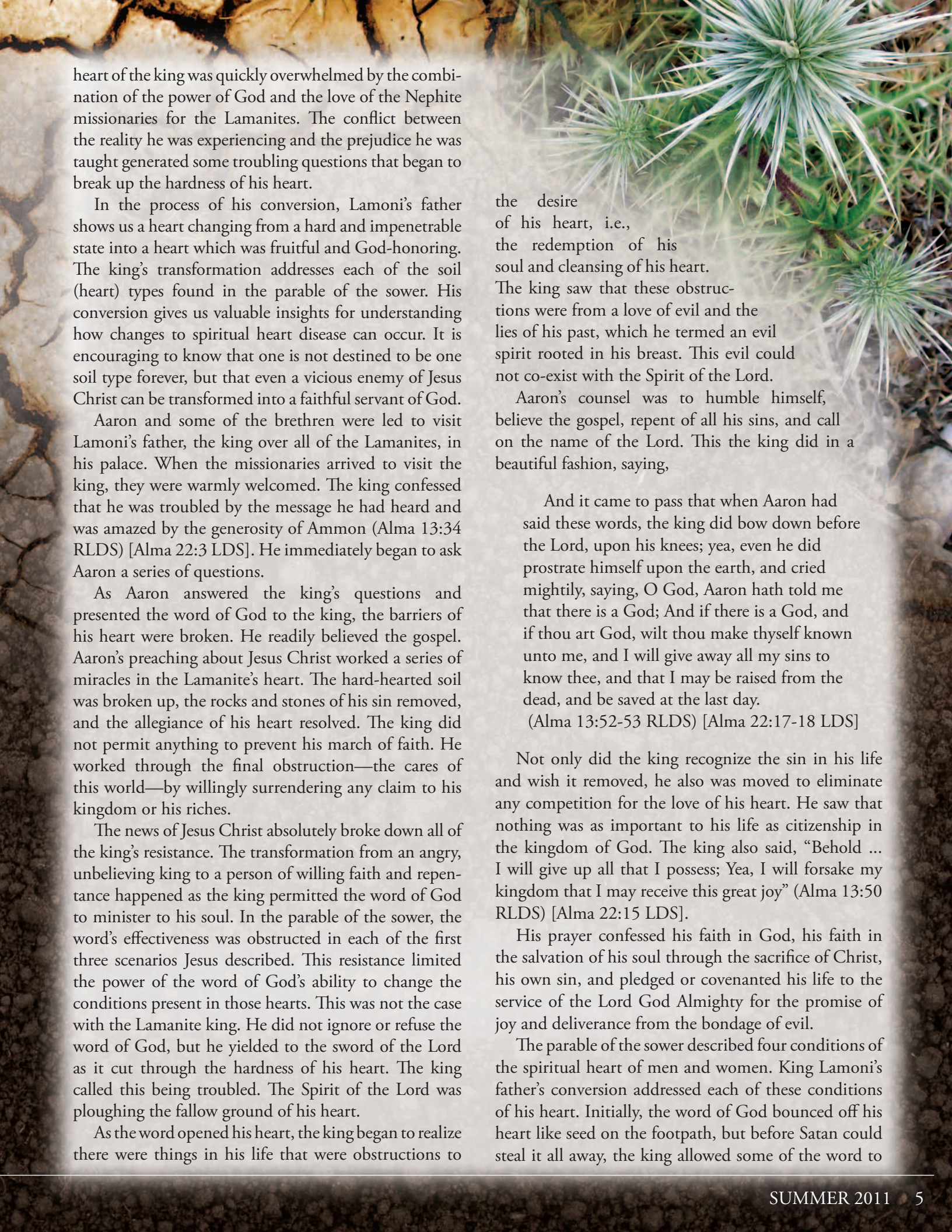
Are men and women defenseless against these attacks of the enemy, or can we fight against the obstructions and make our hearts more receptive to the word of God? This parable does not specifically address an appropriate response for countering or reversing Satan's attacks. However, there is a story in the Book of Mormon that shows how to overcome the effects of sin and unbelief.

A Lamanite King and the Gospel

The sons of Mosiah were with Alma the Second when the angel of the Lord appeared to them, ending their reign of terror against the Nephite church of Christ. The men repented of their sins and worked to repair the damage they had done among the Nephites. While Alma was drawn to a ministry of leadership in the church, the sons of Mosiah were drawn to another mission—to preach the gospel among the Lamanites, their sworn enemies.

The four brothers and some other companions left Nephite territory and plunged into the heart of the Lamanite lands. (See Alma 12-15 RLDS) [Alma 17-29 LDS] for the full story.) They moved forward, assured that the Lord had sent them. King Lamoni was the first of the Lamanites to accept the gospel. His father was not initially willing to hear anything from a Nephite and tried to kill Ammon. His fury was quickly tempered by the point of Ammon's sword and the sword of the Spirit of God. Checked in his anger, the king's eyes were opened, and his heart began to be broken by the power of the testimony from the servants of the Lord.

The heart of the king was hardened because of the traditions of his fathers. He was raised to hate and mistrust the Nephites, believing them to be liars. He rejected the Nephite version of their history and the Nephite religion. It is, therefore, very easy to understand why the king was so agitated and angry when he met Lamoni traveling with Ammon, a Nephite. The hard



heart of the king was quickly overwhelmed by the combination of the power of God and the love of the Nephtie missionaries for the Lamanites. The conflict between the reality he was experiencing and the prejudice he was taught generated some troubling questions that began to break up the hardness of his heart.

In the process of his conversion, Lamoni's father shows us a heart changing from a hard and impenetrable state into a heart which was fruitful and God-honoring. The king's transformation addresses each of the soil (heart) types found in the parable of the sower. His conversion gives us valuable insights for understanding how changes to spiritual heart disease can occur. It is encouraging to know that one is not destined to be one soil type forever, but that even a vicious enemy of Jesus Christ can be transformed into a faithful servant of God.

Aaron and some of the brethren were led to visit Lamoni's father, the king over all of the Lamanites, in his palace. When the missionaries arrived to visit the king, they were warmly welcomed. The king confessed that he was troubled by the message he had heard and was amazed by the generosity of Ammon (Alma 13:34 RLDS) [Alma 22:3 LDS]. He immediately began to ask Aaron a series of questions.

As Aaron answered the king's questions and presented the word of God to the king, the barriers of his heart were broken. He readily believed the gospel. Aaron's preaching about Jesus Christ worked a series of miracles in the Lamanite's heart. The hard-hearted soil was broken up, the rocks and stones of his sin removed, and the allegiance of his heart resolved. The king did not permit anything to prevent his march of faith. He worked through the final obstruction—the cares of this world—by willingly surrendering any claim to his kingdom or his riches.

The news of Jesus Christ absolutely broke down all of the king's resistance. The transformation from an angry, unbelieving king to a person of willing faith and repentance happened as the king permitted the word of God to minister to his soul. In the parable of the sower, the word's effectiveness was obstructed in each of the first three scenarios Jesus described. This resistance limited the power of the word of God's ability to change the conditions present in those hearts. This was not the case with the Lamanite king. He did not ignore or refuse the word of God, but he yielded to the sword of the Lord as it cut through the hardness of his heart. The king called this being troubled. The Spirit of the Lord was ploughing the fallow ground of his heart.

As the word opened his heart, the king began to realize there were things in his life that were obstructions to

the desire
of his heart, i.e.,
the redemption of his
soul and cleansing of his heart.
The king saw that these obstructions were from a love of evil and the lies of his past, which he termed an evil spirit rooted in his breast. This evil could not co-exist with the Spirit of the Lord.

Aaron's counsel was to humble himself, believe the gospel, repent of all his sins, and call on the name of the Lord. This the king did in a beautiful fashion, saying,

And it came to pass that when Aaron had said these words, the king did bow down before the Lord, upon his knees; yea, even he did prostrate himself upon the earth, and cried mightily, saying, O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; And if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day.

(Alma 13:52-53 RLDS) [Alma 22:17-18 LDS]

Not only did the king recognize the sin in his life and wish it removed, he also was moved to eliminate any competition for the love of his heart. He saw that nothing was as important to his life as citizenship in the kingdom of God. The king also said, "Behold ... I will give up all that I possess; Yea, I will forsake my kingdom that I may receive this great joy" (Alma 13:50 RLDS) [Alma 22:15 LDS].

His prayer confessed his faith in God, his faith in the salvation of his soul through the sacrifice of Christ, his own sin, and pledged or covenanted his life to the service of the Lord God Almighty for the promise of joy and deliverance from the bondage of evil.

The parable of the sower described four conditions of the spiritual heart of men and women. King Lamoni's father's conversion addressed each of these conditions of his heart. Initially, the word of God bounced off his heart like seed on the footpath, but before Satan could steal it all away, the king allowed some of the word to

work its way into his heart. The love of the missionary Nephites and the miraculous power of the Spirit caused this initial change in the king's heart. Ammon and Aaron and the rest had prayed and fasted for the Lamanites to receive the word. Their prayers gave the Lord the means to prepare the way for the word to enter into the king's heart. God's Spirit generated questions and conflicts that challenged the king's preconceptions and permitted little cracks to appear in his heart. Some of the word penetrated into the heart of the king and, once the word got in, it got to work. His troubled soul led to asking questions. This kind of questioning is very fruitful because it helps break up the hard ground.

As more of the word entered his heart, the king began to notice that there was corruption in his heart. He was coming to the light (John 3:21 IV/KJV) and he was being convicted of sin. The inner man was sick and his cure was to repent of his sins. "I will give away all my sins to know thee ..." (Alma 13:53 RLDS) [Alma 22:18 LDS]. He was cleaning out the rocks and permitting the word to sprout and grow up in his heart, but still he felt he lacked something. What was left that would hinder his gaining eternal life and the blessings of salvation?

The king saw that he had to be all for Jesus Christ or he would remain frustrated in his hope. He sacrificed everything he owned to the Lord because his hope and desire for what Jesus offered was greater than anything of this world. It is written that the king said, "I will give up all that I possess; yea, I will forsake my kingdom that I may receive this great joy" (Alma 13:50 RLDS) [Alma 22:15 LDS].

The king's heart sorely needed a powerful work of God. Generations of lies and hatred and years of sin had thoroughly corrupted him. God acted in a powerful, miraculous way to accelerate his repentance and recovery. The king's faith and need caused a flood of the Holy Spirit to come upon him and overloaded his physical frame. After his recovery, he led thousands of his people to Jesus Christ through his personal testimony and by assisting the Nephite missionaries in telling the story of Jesus.

Summary

Some people may seem to be totally hardened to the gospel, but that fact did not keep Jesus from including them in the hearts that must be seeded with the gospel. Some of the seed may get in by means and circumstances that God prepared beforehand. Loving kindness and serving ministry from those bearing the word may help break up the hardness in others.

I believe most people, and I am including believers, are a mix of soil types. There are parts of our heart with differing

sensitivities to the word of God. Some believers and Saints have yet to give their whole heart to Jesus. Their contribution to the kingdom of God is limited by unrepentant sin and divided allegiances. They are still incapable of serving God with an eye single to the glory of God.

Why is it that we refuse to allow the word of God to penetrate and grow up in us? Where have we left the stones and rocks of sin that hinder the work of God's word? What are the things that compete for the affection, worship and service that we ought to be giving to the Lord alone? When our hearts are fully broken and made thoroughly clean, we are then most able to bear fruit for the Master.

I am fascinated to see in the Lamanite king's life how the word was able to lead him from one stage of spiritual growth into the next. How many of us ask the Lord to perform the cleaning and restoring for which the Lamanite king asked? Now that this process has been made known to you, how many of us will start asking these questions and working with Jesus to be clean and righteous, abounding in good works for the sake of the Master?

It is important to point out the cooperation of prayer, revelation, and obedience in the life of God's servants. The sons of Mosiah were given an errand by the Lord to bring the gospel to the Lamanites. They had the blessing of the Lord to go. This means that the Lord was already at work preparing for the success of their mission. The missionaries also prepared themselves by prayer, fasting and scripture study under the leading of the Spirit of God. When prepared missionaries are led to a people by the Lord, and those servants of the Lord are prepared, marvelous wonders can occur.

The Restoration scriptures complement one another. This testimony shows one example of how the Book of Mormon augments and strengthens the testimony of the Bible. Perhaps you will find other examples like this to help us see how these records really are one in the hand of the Lord.



Nephi's Garden and Chief Market John L. Sorenson

*"which was by the highway which led to the chief market,
which was in the city of Zarahemla"* (Helaman 7:10 LDS) [Helaman 3:10-11 RLDS]

Helaman 7:10 clearly states that Nephi had a "garden" and that it was near the highway that led to the "chief market" in the city of Zarahemla. Such ideas have seemed incompatible with what was known about ancient American life. Recent discoveries about Mesoamerican urban settlements, however, have now made these features seem highly reasonable.

The text says that Nephi "was upon a tower, which was in the garden of Nephi, which was by the highway which led to the chief market, which was in the city of Zarahemla." The "tower" might easily refer to pyramidal mounds, some built and used by families and lineage leaders for religious ceremonies, and which were referred to by the Spanish conquerors as "towers."¹ Highways too are now well known in Mesoamerica during Book of Mormon times.² But what evidence is there of gardens and chief markets in ancient Mesoamerican cities?

Gardens. For decades the prevailing view was that cities with high-density populations did not exist at all in Mesoamerica. In the last twenty years, however, intensive work at places like Teotihuacan and Monte Alban have demonstrated unquestionably that cities in the modern sense were indeed known during the Book of Mormon times.³

Indeed, in at least some of those cities, garden areas were cultivated immediately adjacent to single habitation complexes. At the archaeological site of El Tajín near the coast of the Gulf of Mexico east of Mexico City are the remains of a city that occupied at least five square kilometers at its maximum period, probably between A.D. 600-900. At that time, the houses of its middle-class

people were surrounded by gardens and fruit trees.⁴ Likewise, the famous city of Tula, north of the capital of Mexico, was even larger, up to fourteen square kilometers around A.D. 1000-1100, and gardened houselots were common there too.⁵

Chief Markets. No one knowledgeable of pre-Columbian Mexico has had any doubt that markets were found in all sizeable settlements. Cortez and his fellows were amazed by the market in Tlatelolco in the Valley of Mexico, by its diversity of goods, and by the complexity of its organization. Yet until recently, only little attention has been given to the fact that a number of these cities had *multiple markets*.

The evidence, however, seems quite clear. Blanton and Kowalewski, for example, have noted that Monte Alban had both a chief market and subsidiary ones.⁶ For Teotihuacan, Rene Millon identifies one location as "the principal marketplace" and suggests that other markets existed for special products, such as kitchen wares.⁷ George Cowgill, the other leading expert on Teotihuacan, concurs.⁸ The Krotzers point out the same phenomenon at El Tajín.⁹ Meanwhile Edward Calnek's reexamination of documentary evidence on the organization of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, has established that each major sector of the city had its own market, in addition to the giant central one.¹⁰ Apparently Zarahemla was no different.

These things once seemed problematic in the book of Helaman's casual description of Nephi's neighborhood. They turn out instead to have substance beyond what was known only a few years ago.

Based on research by John L. Sorenson, April 1985.

1. Albert Idell, ed., *The Bernal Diaz Chronicles* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1956), 151, 173-74.

2. John L. Sorenson, "Digging into the Book of Mormon: Our Changing Understanding of Ancient America and Its Scripture, Part 2," *Ensign* 14 (October 1984): 18-19.

3. See Rene Millon, "Teotihuacan: City, State, and Civilization," and Richard Blanton and Stephen A. Kowalewski, "Monte Alban and After in the Valley of Oaxaca," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians, Supplement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 1:208 and 94-116, respectively.

4. See Paula H. and G. R. Krotzer, "The Life Style of El Tajín," *American Antiquity* 38 (April 1973): 199, 204.

5. See Richard Diehl, "Tula," in Robert C. West, ed., *Natural Environment and Early Cultures*, vol. 1 of *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 1:277-95.

6. See Richard Blanton and Stephen Kowaleski, "Monte Alban and After in the Valley of Oaxaca," 106.

7. Rene Millon, "Teotihuacan: City, State, and Civilization," 225, 229.

8. See George Cowgill, "Rulership and the Ciudadela," in Richard M. Leventhal and Alan L. Kolata, eds., *Civilization in the Ancient Americas* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 342.

9. Paula H. and G. R. Krotzer, "The Life Style of El Tajín," 199-205.

10. See Edward Calnek's "The Internal Structure of Cities in America: The Case of Tenochtitlan," *The International Congress of Americanists* 40 (1972): 41-60.

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The Lesson of the Willow Tree

By Marla Kroesen

I am an avid gardener. Words cannot describe what being out among God's creation does for me. I don't think you can garden and not find yourself in prayer and praise when you are there.

Nephi, the son of Helaman, obviously could relate. He even had a tower to view his garden, and he went there to pour out his heart in prayer;

“O that I could have had my days in the days when my father Nephi first came out of the Land of Jerusalem! That I could have joyed with him in the Promised Land! Then were his people easy to be entreated, firm to keep the commandments of God and slow to be led to do iniquity;

And they were quick to hearken unto the words of the Lord; Yea, if my days could have been in those days, then would my soul have had joy in the righteousness of my brethren.

But behold, I am consigned that these are my days, and that my soul shall be filled with sorrow because of this, the wickedness of my brethren.”

And behold, now it came to pass that it was upon a tower which was in the garden of Nephi, which was by the highway which led to the chief market which was in the city of Zarahemla -

Therefore, Nephi had bowed himself upon the tower which was in his garden, which tower was also near unto the garden gate which led by the highway-
(Helaman 3:6-11 RLDS) [Helaman 7:6-10 LDS]

I have a tower in which I might view my garden—my grandchildren call it the tree house! The few times I have climbed up there at their behest and was able to survey my landscape with broader scope, I can see why Nephi would have a tower in his garden.

Gardening takes plenty of work, but one thing I have found is that while I labor God is teaching me. One day, in the dark hours before dawn, I had been in prayer preparing to write a song God laid on my heart. I believe that walking closer with Him before attacking my day's list of chores in the garden opened the door for Him to speak to me.

On this particular morning, I headed out early while the day was still somewhat cool—as cool as it can be when it's mid-June and the water hangs thick in the air. I had plans to get rid of some errant weeds I'd spied the night before. Sometimes, though, I have issues with being side-tracked. As I first went to feed the goldfish in our water garden, I saw the curly willow covering my smoke tree.

For weeks, I had thought that I, or one of the men in my family whose arm I could twist, should get out our really tall ladder, chop off some of those branches and free that poor thing. For some reason, I just decided then and there, having now been definitely side-tracked, that I was hauling out the heavy wood ladder from the shed and climbing up there to give that tree a hair cut. Now, I love this tree and, in the past, have balked at having it trimmed up. The grandkids like to play in it, and it's quite enchanting there beneath the long twisting greenery. I was thinking about this as, one by one, the branches fell around the feet of the ladder.

As I worked, I felt God whispering to me in a gardening parable: This tree is like something we hang onto in our own lives. We kind of *like* this *tree*. We really don't want to change it. We might think, “It's not such a big deal. It's not really a bad thing.” It could be TV or any one of our many other devices technology has given us. It could be sports or novels. It could be just worrying about what we look like. Maybe it's something we know deep down is a sin. Maybe it's an addiction. Or, it may not *be* a bad thing. It might be a hobby or a job. It may be an emotional *tree*, such as a sorrow that consumes us, or an offense we can't let go or forgive. It can take many different forms. Whatever it is, and we all have them, it is keeping us from being all that

we can be, and until we begin to *really* look at it, and start trimming, we don't even realize the impact it's having on the entirety of who we are.

The branches fell away and opened up a hole to the sky and freed the poor smoke tree to reach for the sun once more. Unfortunately, the slender tree had begun to grow crooked and bent because it couldn't find the light it needed. And there beside it, suffering as well was a flowering crab, long forgotten in the tangle of greenery.

Wow. All this time this one *thing* in our lives has been inhibiting other parts of us.

I was just looking at the willow day after day and ignoring the smoke tree and the small crabapple, both beautiful as well, but I couldn't see them anymore.

Once again I heard His voice. It's like the gifts God gives us, ones He wants us to use for Him. We are so consumed with other things in our lives though, or bound by the sins that hold on to us and hold us back, that those gifts are not developed where He can use them as He longs to.

I climbed down the ladder, intending to clean up the mess I'd made—while trying to clean up the mess this *tree* had made. God continued teaching me as thoughts fell one after another into my mind. Sometimes it *isn't* pretty thinning out the big things in our lives. It can be work, and change doesn't always happen fast.

I was thinking I was done, of course. Oh wait! As I gathered up the branches to be pitched, I realized that the redbud on the other side of the willow was all bound up as well. I moved the 50 lb. ladder and climbed up there once again to do some more trimming. As I freed another tree, I found having gotten rid of some of this overgrown monstrosity, I had also created places for the sun to find its way down

to the floor beneath to all the other plants and flowers waiting there for its light. I had not even thought about that benefit when I started on this. Then I realized there was a 12-foot rose of sharon almost completely hidden from view just beside the redbud. Move the ladder again, climb back up, and weed out more limbs to uncover the beauty of yet another tree.

In gardening daily, you'd think I would have noticed and been more aware of all this and not let it get out of hand, but I was so used to the way things were that I no longer saw what it was doing, or what it was hiding.

And so it is with us. When we free ourselves of those things that hamper our growth toward God and His kingdom, we begin to find one gift after another. We begin to develop those that God might use them for His purposes. As we draw closer to God, we realize there are other parts of our lives that need changed. The more in tune with God we become, the more we understand what He is asking of us. I have heard it said that the closer we draw unto God, the further away He is. This is so true because we begin to understand what really matters to God, who He is, and how far we actually are. That's okay, because how can we ever grow spiritually if we don't begin the process? How will those gifts ever be uncovered and those truths ever revealed? When we are sitting still, comfortable with the way our lives are, we generally think we're doing okay. It's after we begin to live our lives on a higher plane that we find we really weren't doing so great.

I once went to the sand dunes in southern Colorado with a group of youth from church. As we approached and began our ascent, some of the boys decided they were going to "go to the top!" Any of you who have been to sand dunes probably know what happened. When they reached the peak, or what they *thought* was the peak, they found there was another beyond that they hadn't realized was there, and then another, and more after that. They really didn't have a clear idea of where they were in relationship to "the top" until they began their journey. Nephi's tower might have assisted in their endeavor. A view from a higher place can be enlightening.

And if men come unto Me, I will show unto them their weakness; I give unto men weakness that they may be humble, And My grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before Me; For if they humble themselves before Me and have faith in Me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.

(Ether 5:27-28 RLDS)

[Ether 12:26-27 LDS]

I thought my yard was just fine the way it was with my pretty tree, but when I started trimming it up, I began to realize that, by giving it more importance, and letting it go



unchecked, I had hindered the growth and beauty of other parts of my yard. If we are content with sitting where we are, we will never grow or become the servants God wants us to be.

Each and every one of us has gifts and talents, many yet undiscovered, hidden behind our willow trees. In Matthew 25:15-29 (IV/KJV) is the parable of the talents. Most of us know this story:

“unto one He gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his general ability... He that received the five talents went and traded with the same; (traded with the same - he used those talents he'd been given) and gained other five talents. And likewise he who received two talents, he also gained other two. (I like how it says “other”. They gained other talents) But he who had received one went and digged in the earth and hid his lord's money.”

In this story, Jesus used money to make his analogy. What a great way to make His point. Talents are riches. He didn't say they gained *another* five talents, as in five more of the same coin. He said they gained *other* five talents. I like to think He said it that way to emphasize His point.

You probably remember the rest of the story. When the Lord came back, He told the two who had traded with their talents and gained others, *“Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”* But, back to the guy who started with the one talent. I'm not going to say the guy who *had* one talent—because, in actuality, he could have had more. That man told the Lord, *“I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth; and lo, here is thy talent; take it from me as thou hast from thine other servants, for it is thine.”* They are His, aren't they? The Lord had some pretty hard words for this guy. He called him a wicked and slothful servant. Webster's defines slothful as spiritually apathetic and, according to Webster, apathetic means uninterested, unfeeling and indifferent.

And the end of the story... the Lord said, *“I will take, therefore, the talent from you, and give it unto him who hath ten talents. For unto every one who hath obtained other talents, shall be given and he shall have in abundance. But from him that hath not obtained other talents, shall be taken away even that which he hath received. And his lord shall say unto the servants, Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* Ouch.

As we continue on in this passage of scripture, this is what he had to say about the faithful servants: *“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”* And here is a list of some of those talents.... *“for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me.”* And of course they wanted to know when did they do those things for him? And we know the answer He gave them: *“inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”*

There are so many things we can do that are actually talents. I think sometimes we look around at others who have talents we admire and think we have no talents, or that ours are not as good or as important. Satan is just giving us the shovel to start digging to bury them when we think that way.

There was an elderly woman who attended our congregation. For years, she was dependent on others. She needed help financially, taking care of her home, and to bring her to church. She felt she was a burden to us. I heard her say quite a few times that she was sorry, because she didn't contribute anything. This was always met with adamant denial, because we didn't see her that way at all. This woman was a prayer warrior. She was a rock to her family. She didn't see these as talents, but they were, and we all benefited from them.

I know someone who was told in their patriarchal blessing that they had “the talent to bring hope, encouragement and cheer.” Did you realize these were talents?

My husband had an experience, at a time when he was struggling. After church one Sunday, an older man came up and gave him a hug, which he found he really needed. As this man wrapped his arms around him, my husband heard the still small voice of the Holy Spirit saying, “This is a gift. This man has the gift of comfort.”

My husband is told in his patriarchal blessing that he has the “understanding and gifts of aesthetic values, a gift that allows him to appreciate more fully the good things of the earth,” and he does have a deep connection to God's creation and its beauty. If you can't guess—he's a gardener as well. I actually find it a little weird sometimes how connected he is. He is so affected by weather! He can tell you what year was hot or dry or rainy.



I can barely remember when my grandchildren were born, much less how cold it was the year my 30-year-old son was born! Who would have thought this was a talent! He also has the talent of a sense of humor—and yes, I believe that's a gift.

My grandmother was born and raised Amish. She had dreams and visions even when she was a child. They led her to this gospel as a young woman. Her oldest daughter is my mother. God gave my grandmother a dream about her. In this dream, God showed her all the talents my mother had. They were in what grandma described as a jewelry chest, and the jewels were talents. As my mom would take one out, another would appear, and then another, until it just opened up with so many jewels/talents that they poured out. I will attest that this came true. I think my mother is an amazing woman.

“For unto every one who hath obtained other talents, shall be given and he shall have in abundance.”

In my mother's patriarchal blessing, she is told, “her greatest joy will be in service to others.”

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

One of her many talents is letter writing. A young man she once wrote to later told her that this letter probably saved his life. Did you realize this was a talent?

I know some of you send cards. I have a good friend who tragically lost a young son, and she told me one of the women in our congregation sent her a card every week for at least a year. Incredible. This meant so much to my friend. I've always admired people who are so good at that. Maybe only you and God, and the lucky people who receive your cards will ever know that is one of your talents. After you send that note, you may never know what the benefit was to that person, or the impact you may have had on others' lives—until Christ is reaching out his hand to you and saying, *“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you...”*

There are many people who think they have no talents. That is impossible. God created you to be you. He made you as you are. If you think you got the short end of the stick or were absent when they were passed out, think again. You are limiting God if you believe that. There are so many talents that we are not acknowledging as a God-given gift. It's so easy to look on those whose talents are of an outwardly recognizable nature, and not think beyond to those that are not as easily visible, but are just as important.

I Corinthians 12:12, 15-18 (IV/KJV) speaks of the body of Christ. *“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all members of that one body, being many, are one body;... If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”*

You have gifts and talents you may not even realize you have. God is waiting for you to discover those treasures and use them to help build his kingdom. What are they hiding behind?? What trees do you need to trim? What are you spending yourself and your time on?


“Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (3 Nephi 5:110-112 RLDS) [3 Nephi 13:19-21 LDS]
Matthew 6:19-21 (IV/KJV)

Where is your treasure? What are you placing the most value on in your life? Are we putting God and building His kingdom first? In Luke 9:57-59 (IV/KJV), we read about Christ calling men to come and follow him *“And it came to pass, as they were in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee withersoever thou goest.”*

We think we feel that way, don't we?

But what happened? They had things they felt they needed to do first. One wanted to go bury his father. *“And another also said, Lord I will follow thee; but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”*





Are we looking back? If we're putting other things, ANY other thing first, by giving it greater priority in our lives, we are looking back, because we're hanging on to them.

I trimmed up branches on my willow tree and created places for light to pierce through and shine on other beautiful plants so they could grow and develop. In my own life, I've had greater light with each thing I removed that was keeping out the Sun. The Son of God. And I'm still working on it. The more light we let in, the more we see the darkened corners.

No man when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they who come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye; therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore is full of light having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle lighteneth a room and doth give the light in all the room.” Luke 11:34-37 (IV/KJV)

My husband is a general superintendent for a heavy contractor in concrete construction. He drives around checking on jobs all over the area. One of the locations was in front of a bar. While on this job, he had to go in to talk to the owners about the work they were doing in front of their establishment. He said when he walked in the door, he had to come to a complete stop, and because he was in such darkness he literally could see nothing. His eyes had to begin to adjust before he could walk any further. He found the people he needed to talk to and, when he was done with the conversation and turned to leave, it occurred to him that the room no longer seemed dark to him at all. It seemed perfectly light. He had gotten so used to the darkness that it felt normal. He didn't recognize any longer that he was in darkness.

Are we sitting in darkness and don't even realize it? Are our eyes single to the glory of God? Is our whole body full of light? *“Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness.”*

What branches need trimmed in your life so you will let in the light of your heavenly Father? Trim those branches off that tree—let the Son in, and you'll realize and find those gifts and talents, those jewels. Let the facets shine as they catch the light.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the light of this people; a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Behold, do men light a candle and put it under a bushel? Nay, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light to all that are in the house. Therefore, let your light so shine before this people, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (3 Nephi 5:61-63 RLDS) [3 Nephi 12:12-16 LDS] Matthew 5:16-18 (IV/KJV)

I believe with all my heart that God wants us to get this point. He longs for us to move past where we are now and to do our part in building His kingdom.

“Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this.” Esther 4:14 (IV/KJV) Yes, you. It's going to take all of us. We are the body of Christ. We are hands and feet and eyes and ears. We each have a purpose. We all have gifts and talents. Let's get our clippers out and start trimming those trees!

And again, I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ and lay hold upon every good gift and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing! And awake! Arise from the dust, O Jerusalem! Yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion! And strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, That the covenants of the Eternal God which He hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled. Yea, come unto Christ and be perfected in Him and deny yourselves of all ungodliness, And if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness and love God with all your might, mind and strength, Then is His grace sufficient for you, that by His grace ye may be perfect in Christ.” (Moroni 10: 27-27 RLDS) [Moroni 10:30 LDS]

No Disputations By Marlin Guin

The Book of Mormon makes a unique claim concerning the written word of God. Nephi, in his prophetic vision (1 Nephi 3 RLDS) [1 Nephi 10-14 LDS], saw the day when many plain and precious truths would be removed from the Bible through centuries of translation, duplication and interpretation. This journey, following the life of Christ, ultimately led to the apostasy of the church as it engaged in the practice of many strange and diverse doctrines.

The Book of Mormon claims to have restored these plain and simple truths through a great and marvelous work. In so doing, it generated intense opposition and even hostility from those who believe the Bible is the only source of written scripture. This opposition and hostility has manifested itself through the history of the Restoration in many ways, up to and including violence. Even today, varying degrees of opposition are found for the same reasons seen over the past 180 years. Christ's prophecy that many would reject the Book of Mormon has been fulfilled. In 3 Nephi 7:34 (RLDS) [3 Nephi 16:10 LDS] we read: "At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall **reject the fullness of my gospel.**"

Why has this claim by the Book of Mormon created such confrontation? To answer the question, we should study the full account in 1 Nephi 3:171-192 (RLDS) [1 Nephi 13:28-40 LDS], but only quote a few selected verses for now:

Wherefore, thou seest that after the book (Bible) hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church that there are many **plain and precious things taken away from the book**, which is the book of the Lamb of God; And after these **plain and precious things were taken away**, it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles: Thou seest because of the many **plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book**, which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God; Because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceeding great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them; ... And the angel spake unto me, saying, **These last records** (Book of Mormon) which thou hast seen among the Gentiles shall **establish the truth of the first** (Bible), 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 3:171-175, 192 RLDS) [1 Nephi 13:28-29, 13:40 LDS] (emphasis added)

The reasons seem obvious as to why this prophetic declaration was not warmly received by those following traditional ways. These ways had spanned centuries of time and were passed from one church to another as the original church fragmented into hundreds of different denominations.

For our study, we will examine some of these plain and precious things emphasized during the ministry of Jesus Christ in the Americas and recorded by the Book of Mormon prophets. Hopefully, we will see how plain and simple they are to understand, as the Savior declares there should be no disputations among us concerning these things.

The word "disputation(s)" and the phrase "there shall be no disputations among you" provide a powerful reference to the subjects of this article. Jesus used these specific words and phrases to expound upon six important subjects so further interpretation of their meaning would be unnecessary. Moroni also used the same word for a seventh subject discussed later. Our focus will only be on those specific subjects found in the Book of Mormon associated with the removing of disputations concerning them. Let's begin with the words of Christ:

(1) Power to Baptize

And the Lord said unto him, I give unto you **power that ye shall baptize** this people, when I am again ascended into heaven. And again the Lord called others, and said unto them likewise; and he gave unto them **power to baptize.** (3 Nephi 5:21-22 RLDS) [3 Nephi 11:21-22 LDS] (emphasis added)

Jesus Christ gives the power to baptize. Thus we see why Jesus sought out John the Baptist for His own baptism instead of the leaders of the church in that day. John received the power to baptize from God. The Scribes and Pharisees received their authority some other way. This is the same authority that Jesus bestowed upon the Apostles and restored to the earth in the latter days.

(2) Prayer for Baptism by Water

And he said unto them, On this wise shall ye baptize; and there shall be **no disputations** among you. Verily I say unto you, that whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them: Behold, ye shall go





down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them. And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying: Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. (3 Nephi 5:23-25 RLDS) [3 Nephi 11:22-24 LDS] (emphasis added)

The words of this prayer were given as a precise commandment. We should listen intently when the Savior gives this kind of instruction saying: “these are the words which ye shall say.”

(3) Manner for Baptism by Water

And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water. And after this manner shall ye baptize in my name, for behold, verily I say unto you, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one. And according as I have commanded you, thus shall ye baptize. (3 Nephi 5:26-28 RLDS) [3 Nephi 11:26-28 LDS]

The word *immerse* leaves no doubt as to the manner of baptism. To take them down into the water and bring them forth again out of the water accurately describes the expectations of the Lord. To show us the way, Jesus provided the perfect example of this principle with His own baptism. He went down into the water and went up straightway out of the water (Matthew 3:44-45 IV) [Matthew 3:16 KJV]. It's important to remember the life of Christ is the perfect example of the fullness of the gospel.

(4) The Sacrament

And if it so be that he repenteth, and is baptized in my name, then shall ye receive him, and shall minister unto him of my flesh and blood; But if he repent not, he shall not be numbered among my people, that he may not destroy my people, for behold I know my sheep, and they are numbered; And I give you these commandments, because of the **disputations** which have been among you. And blessed are ye if ye have **no disputations** among you. (3 Nephi 8:62-63, 67-68 RLDS) [3 Nephi 18:30-31, 18:34 LDS]

The Lord speaks directly against serving the bread and wine to those who are not baptized according to His commandments. This act of willful disobedience is commonly called open communion. The full account of this commandment is given in 3 Nephi 8:62-68 (RLDS) [3 Nephi 18:30-34 LDS]. There should be no disputations among us concerning this ministry.

(5) Name of the Church Founded Upon the Gospel

And they said unto him, Lord, we will that thou wouldst tell us the name whereby we shall call this church; for there are **disputations** among the people concerning this matter. And the Lord said unto them, Verily, verily I say unto you, Why is it that the people should murmur and dispute because of this thing? Therefore, whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name; therefore ye shall call the church in my name; and ye shall call upon the Father in my name, that he will bless the church for my sake; and how be it my church, save it be called in my name? **And if it so be that the church is built upon my gospel, then will the Father shew forth his own works in it;** But if it be not built upon my gospel, and is built upon the works of men, or upon the works of the devil, verily I say unto you, They have joy in their works for a season, and by and by the end cometh, and they are hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence there is no return; (3 Nephi 12:16-17, 19, 22-23 RLDS) [3 Nephi 27:3-4, 7, 10-11 LDS]

The full account of this teaching is given in 3 Nephi 12:16-24. The early Restoration church was first called the Church of Christ. Some churches today have a name that includes the name of Christ, and many others do not.

What, then, makes them different, and how will the true church be known? One important consideration, according to Christ, is the church must be built upon the gospel. Only then will Christ show forth His works in it with divine revelation, the power of the Holy Ghost, gifts of the Spirit, fruits of the Spirit, and others. Conversely, any church founded upon itself will sooner or later fail because of the emphasis placed upon the church.

Since the church is to be founded upon the gospel, it becomes important to understand the answer to this question: What is the gospel? For me, some of the most powerful phrases found in the scriptures are when Christ says: “this is my gospel” or “this is my doctrine.” It establishes



both divine ownership and inspired content of the message. It also causes us to focus, with a deeper consideration, upon the words being expressed. In the New Testament of the Book of Mormon, Jesus called His doctrine or gospel the plain and simple principles of salvation.

Jesus defined His doctrine immediately after giving instructions for the baptismal prayer and the manner for baptism of water. The full account is found in 3 Nephi 5:29-49 (RLDS) [3 Nephi 11:28 LDS], but we only quote some selected bookend verses:

(6) **This is My Doctrine, or This is My Gospel**

And there shall be **no disputations** among you, as there hath hitherto been; neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there hath hitherto been; Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger one against another; but **this is my doctrine**, that such things should be done away. Behold, verily, verily I say unto you, I will declare unto you my doctrine. And **this is my doctrine**, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; Verily, verily I say unto you, that **this is my doctrine**; and I bear record of it from the Father; and whoso believeth in me, believeth in the Father also; Verily, verily I say unto you, that this is my doctrine; and whoso buildeth upon this, buildeth upon my rock; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. (3 Nephi 5:29, 31-32, 36,41 RLDS) [3 Nephi 11:28, 30-31, 35, 39 LDS] (emphasis added)

Jesus defined His gospel immediately after giving instructions on the name of His church. The full account is found in 3 Nephi 12:25-35 (RLDS) [3 Nephi 27:13-21 LDS] but we only quote some selected bookend verses:

Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and **this is the gospel** which I have given unto you, that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me;

Verily, verily I say unto you, **This is my gospel**; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do, that shall ye also do; (3 Nephi 12:25, 34 RLDS) [3 Nephi 27:13, 21 LDS] (emphasis added)

The use of bookend scriptures is a clear and direct way for Jesus to describe His doctrine and gospel. In so doing, He first states the subject of His teaching and then ends it with a reference to the same subject, to make sure we understand. It's important that we study the scriptures between the bookend scriptures listed so we can fully understand all of the plain and simple principles of His doctrine and gospel. There are to be no disputations among us concerning the points of His doctrine and gospel.

Moroni also uses the word "disputation(s)" to expound on the seventh subject previously mentioned. The baptism of little children is an abomination before the Lord. He is again, telling us there should be no disputations among us concerning this practice. The full account is found in 3 Nephi 8:4-30 (RLDS) [3 Nephi 17:4-18:3 LDS] but we quote some selected verses:

(7) **Baptism of Children.**

And now my son I speak unto you concerning that which grieveth me exceedingly; for it grieveth me that there should **disputations** rise among you. For if I have learned the truth, there have been **disputations** among you concerning the baptism of your little children.

And now my son, I desire that ye should labor diligently, that this gross error should be removed from among you; for, for this intent I have written this epistle. (Moroni 8:4-6 RLDS) [Moroni 8:4-6 LDS] (emphasis added)

After all these scriptures, it seems that no person who truly believes the Book of Mormon to be the word of God should disagree on the basic principles discussed. They are plain and simple and have been restored for this purpose.

What should we look for as evidence of people who truly believe these plain and simple things? The results should be powerfully profound and represent His church that is built upon His gospel. The Book of Mormon describes it this way:

And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there **were no contentions and disputations among them**, and every man did deal justly one with another; (4 Nephi 1:3 RLDS) [4 Nephi 1:2 LDS] (emphasis added)

I believe these same principles were taught to the original apostles. God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and no respecter of persons. Jesus Christ would never withhold such important spiritual principles from the mission of the early church. I can imagine a picture of Christ calling forth the apostles and giving them power to baptize. I see Him sitting at the edge of the Sea of Galilee, instructing them on the baptismal prayer and the manner for baptism by water. I see Him holding the children and explaining why little children have no need of baptism. I see Him sitting at the table, speaking to them about serving the sacrament to His sheep and the establishment of His church founded upon the gospel. I see Jesus sitting on the hillside and teaching them plain and simple principles concerning "this is my doctrine" and "this is my gospel." I can also see Him, telling them that there should be no disputations among them concerning these things. I love the way the Book of Mormon speaks the truth with divine clarity and further explanation. Let there never be disputations among us concerning these plain and precious things.

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