
THE

WITNESS

A Quarterly Publication of



The Book of Mormon Foundation

Remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation, the rock upon which ye are built, which is a **Sure Foundation, a foundation whereon if men build, they can not fall.**

ISSUE 168 / 2019

THE
WITNESS

ISSUE 168/2019

*Next year
in Zion*

We, at The Book of Mormon Foundation (BMF), pause to reflect on the successes and challenges of the passing year and look to the future with hope. It seems impossible to think about the future without first recognizing the amazing contributions of the past. BMF traces its roots back to 1968 and the

founding of the Foundation for Research on Ancient America (FRAA). Along the way, we have been blessed by the contributions of many Latter Day Saints, such as Charles Hield, Roy Weldon, Thelona Stevens and, more recently, Shirley Heater. Today, the Foundation continues to publish *The Witness* and teach classes in congregational and reunion settings. We also sponsor the Book of Mormon Internship program and an annual Book of Mormon Day for Kids. Through all the years, the central purpose of BMF has always remained the same to share the message of the Book of Mormon and its testimony of Jesus Christ with the world. We look forward to seeing where the Lord will lead us in the new year.

As I consider the turning of the year, I am reminded that the very last words of the traditional Jewish Passover Seder are “next year in Jerusalem.” As the final moment in the Seder, it’s emotionally significant, and it finishes the Seder’s journey from a reminder of the suffering of the past (and present) to hopes for wholeness and freedom for all in the future. Prior to 1948, saying “next year in Jerusalem” was just a wish for Jews because there was no such thing as a Jewish Jerusalem. Though many, perhaps, thought it might never come to pass, the Jewish Jerusalem is a reality today. Likewise, we also proclaim the wishes of the Saints, spanning many generations, will be accomplished. In that same spirit may we *press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and all men.* (2nd Nephi 13:29 RLDS)
[2 Nephi 31:20 LDS] Next year in Zion!



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Cover Photo Courtesy Sue Manning
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THE Book OF Mormon
FOUNDATION

The Book of Mormon Foundation is a non-profit corporation composed of individuals who desire to promote The Book of Mormon and its witness of Jesus Christ.

Through research, publications, seminars and related projects, members of The Book of Mormon Foundation seek to assist in bringing forth the light contained in the Book of Mormon.

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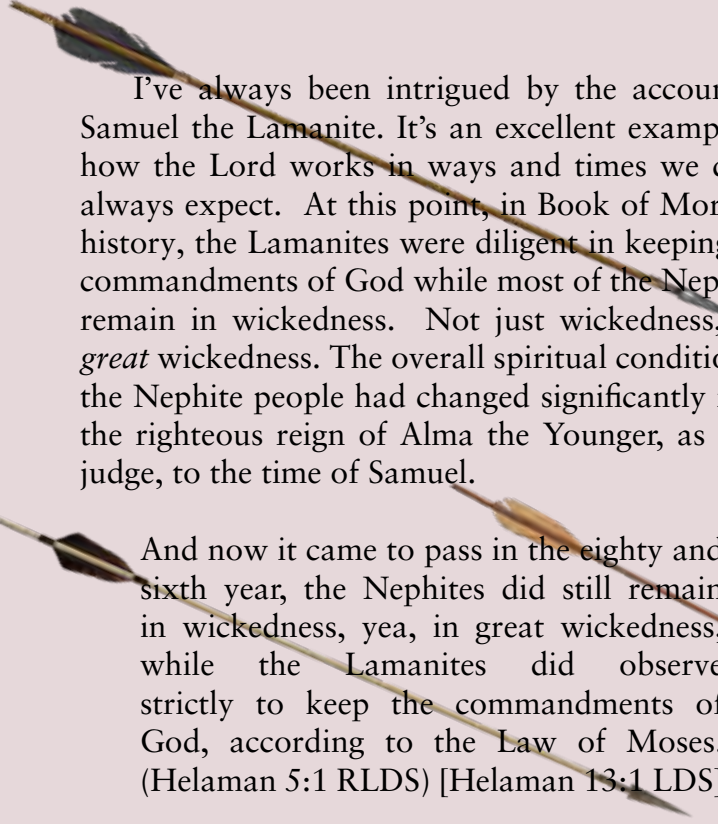
During the 86th year of the reign of Judges, the Lord called a Lamanite prophet, named Samuel, to leave his own land and go to the Nephite land of Zarahemla. He would preach to the people in the cities of the land, but particularly the great city Zarahemla. The scriptures don't actually define what time of the year he came among the Nephites, but they tell us he came *in that year*. We don't want to diminish the importance of timing in Samuel's appearance since he proclaimed prophecies that were specific and time-sensitive. One example, is the coming of the Messiah. In fact, the lives of true believers depended on the exactness of his prophecy coming to pass, as the order was given to kill them should the sign of Christ's coming not be fulfilled that very night.

And it came to pass that in this year, there was one Samuel, a Lamanite, came into the land of Zarahemla, and began to preach unto the people. (Helaman 5:2 RLDS) [Helaman 13:2 LDS]

And behold, he said unto them, Behold, I give unto you a sign: for five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name. (Helaman 5:55 RLDS) [Helaman 14:2 LDS]

To help understand the timeline and give us a point of reference, the reign of Judges began with Alma the Younger. His father, Alma, who restored the church at the waters of Mormon, and King Mosiah had both died, thus beginning the reign of Judges. Samuel was called in the 86th year from the time judges were appointed throughout all the land to rule over the people, and Alma the Younger was appointed as the first chief judge.

And it came to pass that they did appoint judges to rule over them, or to judge them according to the law; and this they did throughout all the land. And it came to pass that Alma was appointed to be the chief judge; he being also the high priest; his father having conferred the office upon him, and had given him the charge concerning all the affairs of the church. And now it came to pass that Alma did walk in the ways of the Lord, and he did keep his commandments, and he did judge righteous judgments; and there was continual peace through the land; And thus commenced the reign of the judges throughout all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who were called the Nephites: And Alma was the first and chief judge. (Mosiah 13:62-65 RLDS) [Mosiah 29:41-44 LDS]



I've always been intrigued by the account of Samuel the Lamanite. It's an excellent example of how the Lord works in ways and times we don't always expect. At this point, in Book of Mormon history, the Lamanites were diligent in keeping the commandments of God while most of the Nephites remain in wickedness. Not just wickedness, but *great* wickedness. The overall spiritual condition of the Nephite people had changed significantly from the righteous reign of Alma the Younger, as chief judge, to the time of Samuel.

And now it came to pass in the eighty and sixth year, the Nephites did still remain in wickedness, yea, in great wickedness, while the Lamanites did observe strictly to keep the commandments of God, according to the Law of Moses. (Helaman 5:1 RLDS) [Helaman 13:1 LDS]

Samuel came into the land of Zarahemla and preached among the cities. Ultimately, he went to the great city of Zarahemla. It was the seat of Nephite government that had degenerated over time into rebellion against God. The spiritual evolution

of Zarahemla, with the majority rejecting God, reminds me of the history surrounding Washington D.C. and our own nation.

We should keep in mind there were still some righteous people living in the city Zarahemla during the time of Samuel, plus the cities and regions around about, which is why the Lord spared them from greater judgements. Likewise, perhaps this is the same reason God has thus far held back some of the greater judgements concerning our iniquities today.

Yea, wo unto this great city of Zarahemla; for behold it is because of those who are righteous, that it is saved; (Helaman 5:15 RLDS) [Helaman 13:12 LDS]

In Samuel's day, common wickedness was the condition of the people, as the Lord moved to restore all those who would hearken unto His voice. The calling of Samuel the prophet is another way the Lord speaks, as He holds nothing back to recover His people. His love and mercy abounds!

Samuel was called from among the Lamanites, so it was no surprise that many Nephites, certainly those in leadership positions, considered the Lamanites the least likely people from which a prophet of God would come. How could a Lamanite come among us, the Nephites, a righteous and chosen people of the Lord, to declare repentance and judgement to us? Their self-righteous views reflected those of the Zoramites found in Alma 16 (RLDS) [Alma 30-35 LDS]. They somehow did not know, understand or accept how God sometimes moves in mysterious ways, apart from our own understanding. They were locked into their own views and positions of correctness.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9 IV/KJV)

The message from Samuel was plain and simple. It was placed on his heart by God. It was a message of repentance, judgement and choosing life or death. He prophesied of the coming of the Messiah and revealed the signs and wonders surrounding Christ's birth and death. Great details were revealed to the people concerning all these prophecies. He explained what would happen to the people if they chose life in Christ and what would happen if they chose death and judgement. He prophesied of the great signs and wonders they would see at Christ's birth and death. All of these admonitions and prophecies, and even more, were given in plain and simple words.

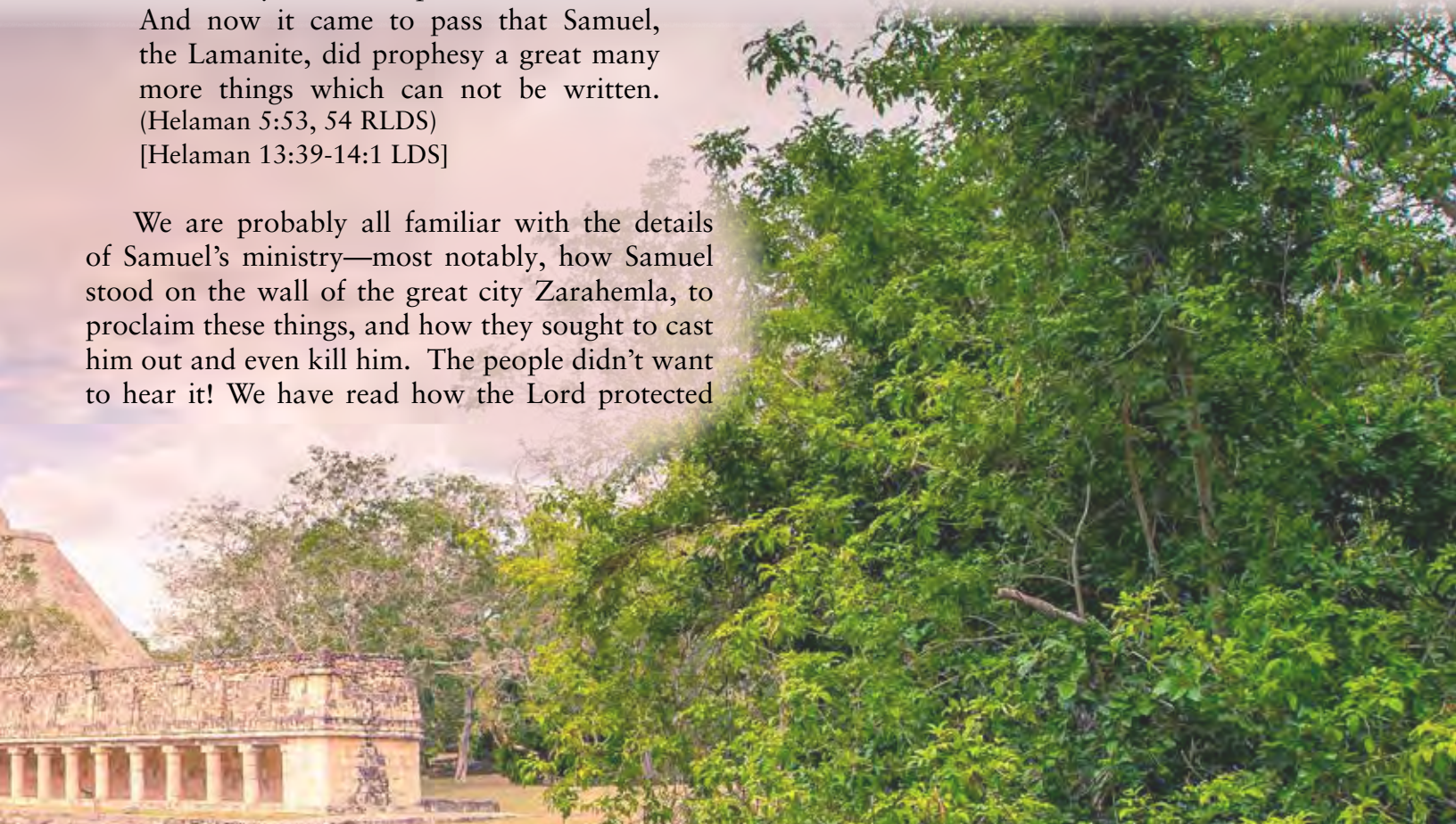
O ye people of the land, that ye would hear my words. And I pray that the anger of the Lord be turned away from you, and that ye would repent and be saved. And now it came to pass that Samuel, the Lamanite, did prophesy a great many more things which can not be written. (Helaman 5:53, 54 RLDS)
[Helaman 13:39-14:1 LDS]

We are probably all familiar with the details of Samuel's ministry—most notably, how Samuel stood on the wall of the great city Zarahemla, to proclaim these things, and how they sought to cast him out and even kill him. The people didn't want to hear it! We have read how the Lord protected

Samuel and allowed him to complete his mission. I love the visual image created by the scriptures, describing the end of his ministry among the Nephites.

And as they went forth to lay their hands on him, behold, he did cast himself down from the wall, and did flee out of their lands, yea, even unto his own country, and began to preach and to prophesy among his own people. And behold, he was never heard of more among the Nephites; and thus were the affairs of the people. And thus ended the eighty and sixth year of the reign of the Judges over the people of Nephi. (Helaman 5:119-121 RLDS)
[Helaman 16:7-9 LDS]

Samuel's ministry was completed by the end of the 86th year of the reign of Judges, the same year it began. He sought no recognition, fame, fortune or acknowledgement. As a true prophet of God, he simply completed his mission and went home to finish out his life in service. My human side says Samuel must have been glad to



go home and minister among his own people. Who would be disappointed to never return again to the land where people tried to kill you?

Samuel was a parallel prophet with John the Baptist, except in different parts of the world. Just like John's calling, Samuel served as a forerunner of Christ and a voice crying to prepare the way of the Lord. His mission was among the tribe of Manasseh, from the seed of Joseph.

With this brief overview of Samuel's ministry, I now want to focus more fully on the response of the people to his message. Specifically, I want to expound on their response after he came down from the wall and went home. Knowing their responses will remind us of important things to consider for our own life journey.

Some of the people repented and sought Nephi out so they could be baptized. This was the response Samuel was hoping to accomplish. It's the response the Lord desires from all who hear the message of the prophets. However, in this case, the responses of most people were not righteous. Let's call these unrighteous spiritual responses: *the fruits of a hard heart*.

And thus ended, also, the eighty and seventh year of the reign of the Judges, the more part of the people remaining in their pride and wickedness, and the lesser part walking more circumspectly before God. And these were the conditions, also, in the eighty and eighth year of the reign of the Judges. And there was but little alteration in the affairs of the people, save it were the people began to be more hardened in iniquity, and do more and more of that which was contrary to the commandments of God, in the eighty and ninth year of the reign of the Judges. Nevertheless, the people began to harden their hearts, all save it were the most believing part of them, both of the Nephites, and also of the Lamanites, (Helaman 5:122-124, 127 RLDS)
[Helaman 16:10-12, 15 LDS]

There was a spiritual *hardening* of the people to the ministry of Samuel. Specifically, there was a *hardening of their hearts*. Notice how it says only the *most believing* people did not harden their

hearts, both Nephites and Lamanites. For this article, I want to ensure we understand the spiritual principle of a *hard heart*.

What does it mean to have a *hard heart*? The word *hard* or *harden* carries the connotation of being unwilling to receive, absorb and accept the testimony of the Spirit of God. It means to be unwilling to receive revelation from God, which testifies that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. It describes those who have chosen a life that is spiritually impenetrable, unteachable, rejecting anything outside of their own opinion, unchanging and rooted in personal pride. To be *hardened in iniquity* or have a *hardened heart* separates us from the renewing of our mind and the empowered process of our own spiritual transformation. In other words, it prevents us from personal change, called repentance, that's in harmony with God's will for me.

And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God is. (Romans 12:2 IV/KJV)

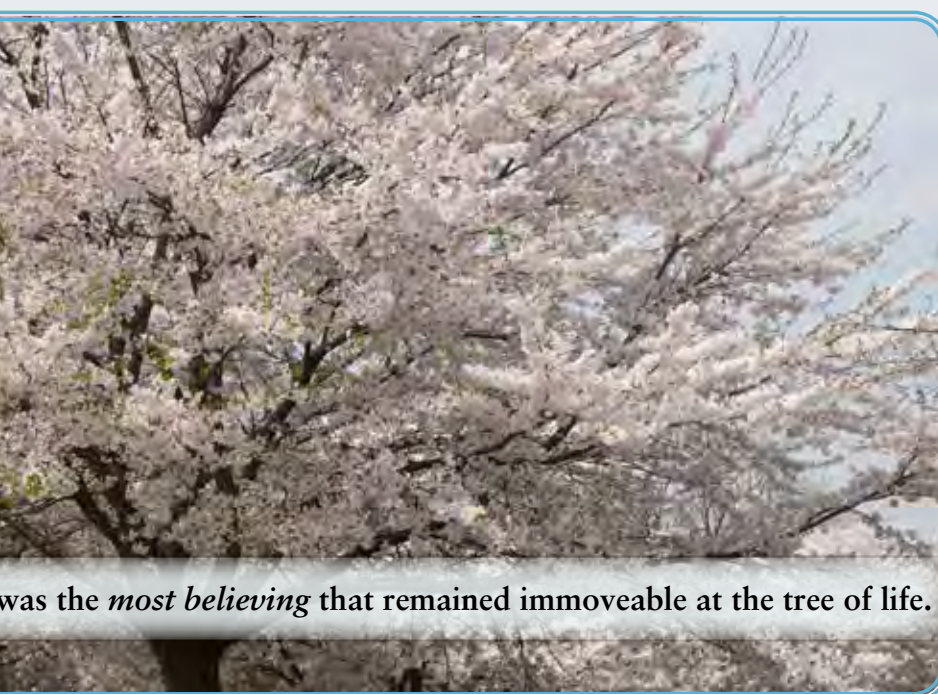
And also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually. (Mosiah 3:3 RLDS) [Mosiah 5:2 LDS]

And according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart. (Alma 3:23 RLDS) [Alma 5:12 LDS]

And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts; and they humbled themselves, and put their trust in the true and living God. (Alma 3:25 RLDS) [Alma 5:13 LDS]

Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts? (Alma 3:29 RLDS)
[Alma 5:14 LDS]





was the *most believing* that remained immoveable at the tree of life.

What does it mean to be *most believing*? Only the *most believing* truly repented in response to the words of Samuel. This question is personally relevant, since probably everyone reading this article considers ourselves to be a *believer*. Another scriptural account of *most believing* is found in Lehi's vision, along with Nephi's, account of the same. We remember that even the believers who held on to the rod of iron and made it to the tree of life were not exempt from the pride of the world. The social pressure coming from those standing in the great and spacious building, representing the pride of the world, pointing their fingers, laughing, mocking and scoffing, was too much even for some of the believers, who were already standing at the tree of life. Consequently, they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost. It was the *most believing* that remained true, steadfast and immoveable at the tree of life. Nephi later describes *most believing* in a different way with the same meaning. He recorded the doctrine of Christ and instructed us that, after we enter the gate, we then press forward with *unshaken faith in Him* and with a *steadfastness in Christ*. (2 Nephi 13:28-29 RLDS) [2 Nephi 31:19-20 LDS] Helaman also describes being *most believing* to his sons, as a sure foundation. All scriptural accounts concerning *most believing*, use different words and images, but have the same meaning.

And now my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation, that when

the devil shall send forth his mighty winds; yea, his shafts in the whirlwind; Yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you, to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build, they can not fall. (Helaman 2:74-75 RLDS) [Helaman 5:12 LDS]

What are some of the fruits of a *hard heart*? What do we look for to guard against it? In his account of Samuel the Lamanite, Helaman records some important details on some of the fruits we should look for to recognize a *hard heart*. There are many more, but these few verses specifically identify some we have all probably seen. Knowing and recognizing them is the first step to removing them from our lives.

After Samuel went back home, the prophesied signs and wonders began to be fulfilled in the 90th year of the reign of Judges. The people's response, after actually seeing these signs and wonders, isn't what many would expect. It says the people *harden their hearts* and began to bear the fruits of a *hard heart*. Some of the fruits mentioned are:



It's impossible to change our spiritual course toward God, when we rely solely on ourselves. Without God's transforming power, we often find ourselves getting worse before getting better, even with the best of intentions.

A *hard heart* tells us we don't need to change or we don't need God's help to change. Notice how a *hard heart* causes complacency and greater rebellion.

And there was but little alteration in the affairs of the people, save it were the people began to be **more hardened** in iniquity, and do more and **more of that which was contrary to the commandments of God**, in the eighty and ninth year of the reign of the Judges. (Helaman 5:124 RLDS) [Helaman 16:12 LDS] (emphasis added)



How many times have we thought our own intelligence and strength would take care of everything in life? After all, who needs someone telling us what to do? This is one of the greatest forms of pride and has destroyed unrepentant individuals and nations.

Nevertheless, the people began to **harden their hearts**, all save it were the most **believing** part of them, both of the Nephites, and also of the Lamanites, and began to **depend upon their own strength, and upon their own wisdom**, (Helaman 5:127 RLDS) [Helaman 16:15 LDS] (emphasis added)



When we are unteachable and think we know everything, we make life a guessing game based on odds and our own life experiences. Life becomes a game of chance. The unbelievers said Samuel was just *lucky* at *guessing* the future. Jesus refutes the guessing

game and says: *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

(John 14:6 IV/KJV)

Some things they may have guessed right, among so many; but behold, we know that all these great and marvelous works can not come to pass, of which has been spoken. (Helaman 5:128 RLDS) [Helaman 16:16 LDS] (emphasis added)



Human reasoning, without receiving the revelation of God, most often causes contentious and unfruitful debate, resulting in endless discussion and inaccurate conclusions. This fruit is very much associated with the fruit of guessing. Contention is usually the end result of such activity because

everyone *knows* they are always right. No doubt about it!

And they began to **reason** and to **contend** among themselves, saying, that it is **not reasonable** that such a being as a Christ shall come; (Helaman 5:129 RLDS) [Helaman 16:17 LDS] (emphasis added)



We often hear people say: *show me a sign*, and I will believe. If you don't *show me a sign* then it can't be true, because I deserve to be convinced the way I want to be convinced. This same attitude is demonstrated in Alma 16

(RLDS) [Alma 30-35 LDS], as the antichrist Korihor challenged Alma about the existence of God.

If so, and he be the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, as it has been spoken, why will he not **shew himself unto us**, as well as unto them who shall be at Jerusalem? Yea, why will he not **shew himself in this land**, as well as in the land of Jerusalem? (Helaman 5:130-131 RLDS) [Helaman 16:18-19 LDS] (emphasis added)

And now Korihor said unto Alma, If thou wilt **shew me a sign**, that I may be **convinced** that there is a God, yea, shew unto me that he hath power, and then will I be **convinced of the truth** of thy words. (Alma 16:52 RLDS)

[Alma 30:43 LDS] (emphasis added)

The Pharisees also, with the Sadducees, came, and tempting Jesus, desired him that he **would show them a sign** from heaven. A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the Prophet Jonas. (Matthew 16:1, 4 IV/KJV) (emphasis added)



Traditions can be either good or bad. People with a *hard heart* usually use traditions to win an argument and will not hesitate calling good traditions bad and bad traditions good. Win at all costs! We should be ever mindful

how our perception of traditions carries powerful influence. Understanding this power brings an admonition to those elevating traditions to the highest level of importance and meaning. The end result, over time, opens the door to perceive traditions as doctrine.

But behold, we know that this is a **wicked tradition**, which has been **handed down unto us** by our fathers, to **cause us that we should believe** in some great and marvelous thing which should come to pass, but not among

us, but in a land which is far distant, a land which we know not; (Helaman 5:132 RLDS) [Helaman 16:20 LDS] (emphasis added)



The modern word we hear, used to describe a total lack of trust, is *agenda*. I can't count the number of times we've heard someone say: *they have an agenda*. It doesn't seem to matter if it's actually true or not in the minds of those without trust. We hear it in church, politics and just about everywhere. One could make the point about there being times where a lack of trust is justified. However, a *hard heart* means there is a total lack of trust all the time, with everyone having different views than our own in every situation.

Therefore they can **keep us in ignorance**, for **we can not witness with our own eyes** that they are true. And they will, by the cunning and the mysterious arts of the evil one, work some great mystery, which we can not understand, which will **keep us down to be servants** to their words, and also servants unto them, for we depend upon them to teach us the word; And thus will **they keep us in ignorance**, if we will yield ourselves unto them all the days of our lives. (Helaman 5:133-135 RLDS) [Helaman 16:20 LDS] (emphasis added)



People sometimes just make vain and foolish things up, as it fits the needs of the situation. Those who are *hard-hearted* will always do this intentionally, just to be right. This is because of their open rebellion against God. Some might make the point how people sometimes do this unintentionally. The scriptures make it clear that *hard-hearted* people intentionally bear this spiritual fruit in order to deceive and win.

And many more things did the people **imagine up in their hearts**, which were **foolish and vain**; (Helaman 5:136 RLDS) [Helaman 16:22 LDS] (emphasis added)

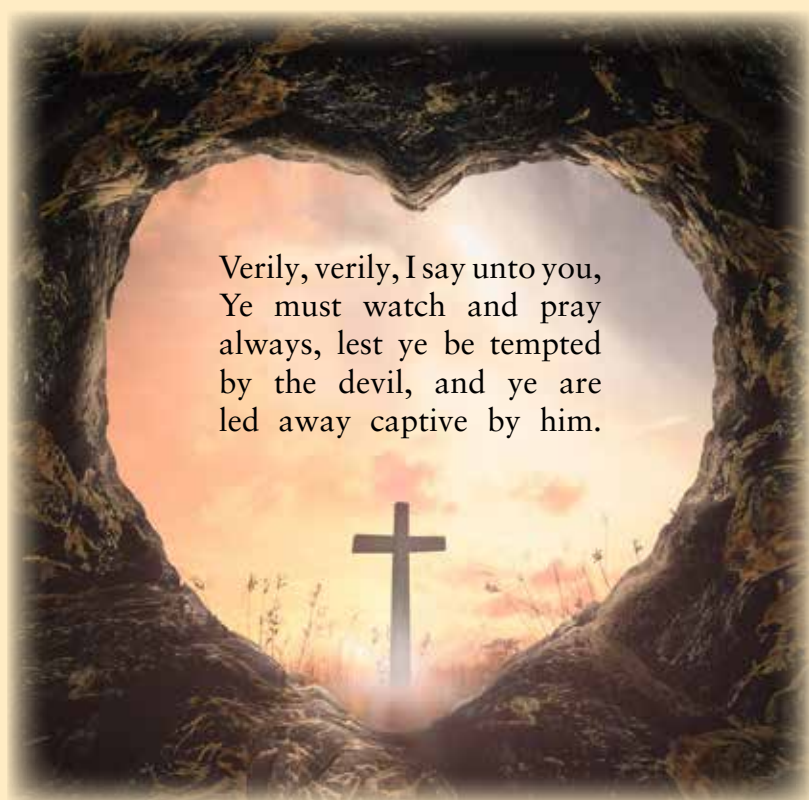
O the **vainness**, and the frailties, and the **foolishness** of men! When they are learned, they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves;

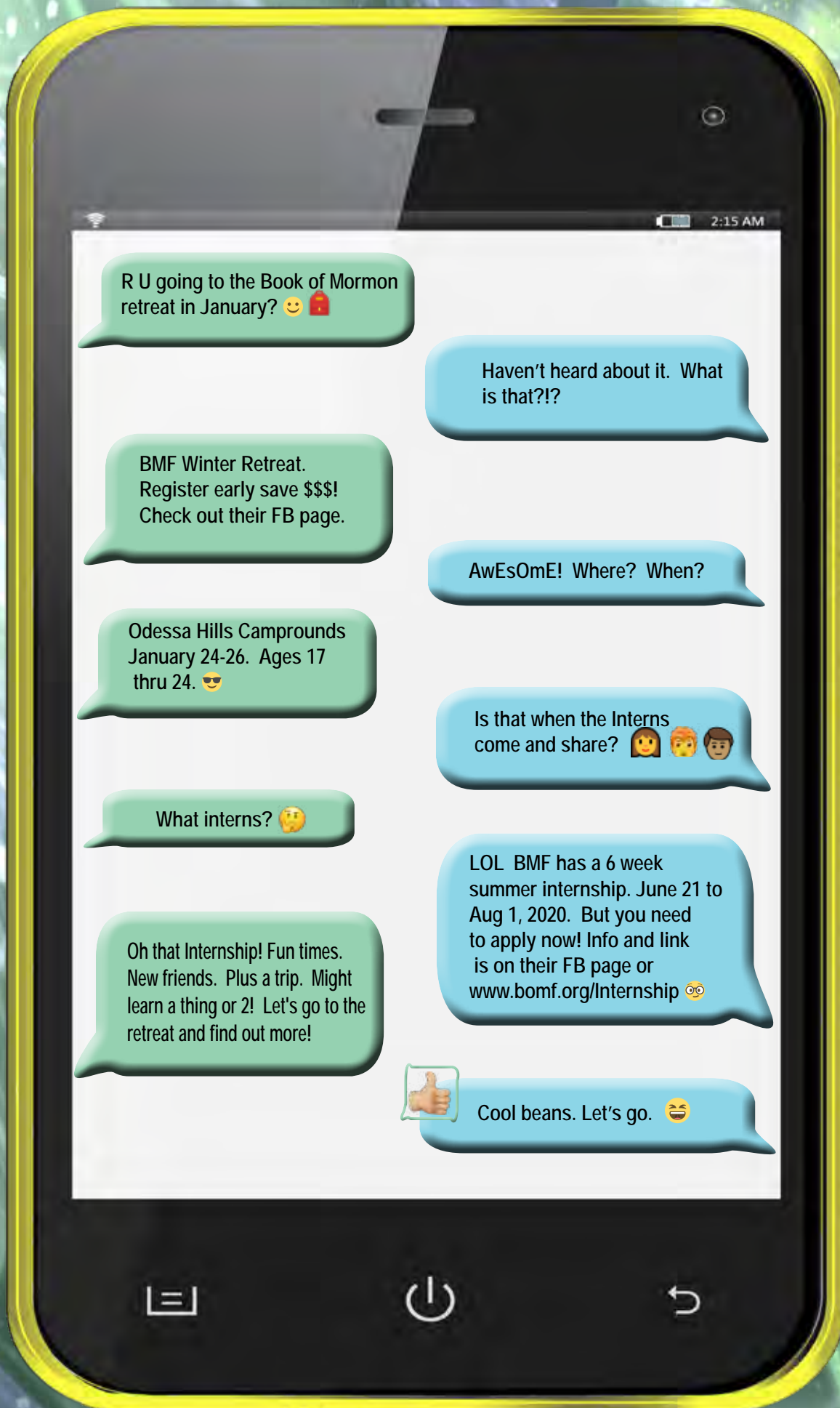
Wherefore, their **wisdom is foolishness**, and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. (2 Nephi 6:58-60 RLDS) [2 Nephi 9:28 LDS] (emphasis added)

We have briefly considered some of the fruits of a *hard heart*. They are spiritual responses that are easily observed. The effects of their existence in our personal life, church and nation are devastating. This is one reason it's so important to understand the ministry of Samuel and the subsequent responses from the people. The first step to repentance is the spiritual discernment enabling us to identify the fruits of a *hard heart* and realize how it all applies to us.

Today, in many ways, we find the same circumstances surrounding our personal lives, church and nation, as in the days of Samuel. The prophetic voice of God is active in the world, declaring the coming of the Lord. The prophetic signs and wonders for this last dispensation are being fulfilled. They will eventually, in God's time, be fulfilled more fully.

In the Restoration, there is much yet to be done—more than we currently comprehend. We have been admonished to prepare for the coming of the Lord, which also means to be actively engaged in the covenants and prophecies yet to be fulfilled. Great things are coming upon the earth! We have been given commandments concerning our response to that call. In so doing, we want to be found among the *most believing* of the people. This admonition of the Lord remains ever true and the same:





R U going to the Book of Mormon retreat in January? 😊🏠

Haven't heard about it. What is that?!?

BMF Winter Retreat.
Register early save \$\$\$!
Check out their FB page.

AwEsOmE! Where? When?

Odessa Hills Campgrounds
January 24-26. Ages 17
thru 24. 😎

Is that when the Interns
come and share? 🧑🧑🧑

What interns? 🤔

LOL BMF has a 6 week
summer internship. June 21 to
Aug 1, 2020. But you need
to apply now! Info and link
is on their FB page or
www.bomf.org/Internship 🧐

Oh that Internship! Fun times.
New friends. Plus a trip. Might
learn a thing or 2! Let's go to the
retreat and find out more!



Cool beans. Let's go. 😁



As Those Before Us

by Dale Godfrey

A land of great blessings and great curses.

Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided cannot stand, but falleth.

(Luke 11:18 IV) [Luke 11:17 KJV]

We know, throughout history, there are many peoples who have dwelt in their lands for thousands of years without self-annihilation. They were not necessarily righteous people, and most were invaded or fought civil wars yet they continued to exist. The Book of Mormon gives accounts of two great nations on this land of promise whose fate was far different. Why is it that both of these nations essentially committed suicide? The difference between these two nations and many other nations of the world may not be so much the people, as the land in which they lived. There is something unique about the land of the Book of Mormon peoples. It's a land of great blessings and great curses.

The Jaredites, the first of the two great nations to possess this land, left behind a record which makes it clear that, from the beginning, they had knowledge of the uniqueness of this land and the promises which accompanied it. They knew of the importance of the covenants which are upon this promised land as they related to themselves. They also understood those same covenants applied to all succeeding inhabitants, including the Gentiles, the third great nation to possess this land of promise.

And he [God] had sworn in his wrath unto the Brother of Jared, that **whoso should possess this land of promise**, from that

time henceforth and forever, should serve **him, the true and only God**, or they should be swept off when the fullness of his wrath should come upon them. And now we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise, and whatsoever nation shall possess it, shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fullness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fullness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity; for behold, **this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God, or shall be swept off**; for it is the everlasting decree of God. And it is not until the fullness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off. **And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God, that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fullness come, that ye may not bring down the fullness of the wrath of God upon you, as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done.** Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it, shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ who hath been manifested by the things which we have written. (Ether 1:30-35 RLDS) [Ether 2:8-12 LDS] (emphasis added)

And thus the Lord did pour out his blessings upon this land, which was choice above all other lands; and he commanded that whoso should possess the land, should possess it unto the Lord, or they should be destroyed when they were ripened in iniquity; for upon such, saith the Lord, I will pour out the fullness of my wrath. (Ether 4:22 RLDS) [Ether 9:20 LDS]

Wherefore the Lord would have that all men should serve him, who dwell upon the face thereof; and that it was the place of the New Jerusalem, which should come down out of heaven, and the holy sanctuary of the Lord. (Ether 6:3 RLDS) [Ether 13:3 LDS]

And never could be a people more blessed than were they, and more prospered by the hand of the Lord. And they were in a land that was choice above all lands, for the Lord had spoken it.

Great promises are made to the people who inhabit this land, which is *choice above all other lands*. However, great curses also attend the inhabitants of this land who fail to serve the God of the land. The Jaredite account is full of examples of the blessings God bestowed on the people when they walked in righteousness before God. It's also full of accounts of curses which befell the people when they walked far from God and failed to keep His commandments. None of the accounts is more heart-rending than the account of the final destruction of the nation. They had been a great nation. God declared *there shall be none greater than the nation which I will raise up unto me of thy seed, upon all the face of the earth*. (Ether 1:20 RLDS) [Ether 1:43 LDS] We learn that eventually *the country*

was divided; and there were two kingdoms, the kingdom of Shule and the kingdom of Cohor, the son of Noah. (Ether 3:58 RLDS) [Ether 7:20 LDS] Following this division, there came a period of palace intrigues, political assassinations and wars. There were even later periods of relative righteousness in which the people were richly blessed. (Ether 4:18-30 RLDS) [Ether 9:16-26 LDS] Eventually, the people returned to their old ways *and there began again to be an exceeding great wickedness upon the face of the land, and Heth began to embrace the secret plans again of old, to destroy his father*. Yet again, the Lord sent prophets, famines and poisonous serpents among them, and eventually they repented. The writer says that *never could be a people more blessed than were they, and more prospered by the hand of the Lord. And they were in a land that was choice above all lands, for the Lord had spoken it*. (Ether 4:78-79 RLDS) [Ether 10:28 LDS] Yet again, the people returned to their wicked ways, and there was no recovering them this time. Thus we arrive at the account of their final destruction.

Now the loss of men, women and children, on both sides, was so great that Shiz commanded his people that they should not pursue the armies of Coriantumr; wherefore they returned to their camp. He saw that there had been slain by the sword already nearly two millions of his people, and he began to sorrow in his heart; yea, there had been slain two millions of mighty men, and also their wives and their children. Wherefore they were for the space of four years, gathering together the people, that they might get all who were upon the face of the land, and that they might receive all the strength which it was possible that they could receive. And it came to pass that when they were all gathered together, every one to the army which he would, with their wives, and their children; both men, women and children being armed with weapons of war, having shields, and breastplates, and head-plates, and being clothed after the manner of war, they did march forth one against another,

to battle; and they fought all that day, and conquered not. And it came to pass that when they had all fallen by the sword, save it were Coriantumr and Shiz, behold, Shiz had fainted with the loss of blood. And it came to pass that when Coriantumr had leaned upon his sword, that he rested a little, he smote off the head of Shiz. (Ether 6:71, 73, 86-87, 103-104 RLDS) [Ether 14:31, 15:2, 14-15, 29-30 LDS]

Only two members of this once great nation remained—Coriantumr and the prophet Ether, who wrote the record of his people. Imagine the horror of a war in which women and children are clad in armor, given weapons, and sent forth to battle against the mighty men of the opposing army. The Jaredite nation fell because the wickedness and hardness of the hearts of the people caused their division and undying hatred.

In the midst of the final conflict, Coriantumr remembered the words of warning from Ether, and he begun to repent of the evil which he had done. He wrote an epistle to Shiz offering up all of the kingdom to him in exchange for the lives of his people. Shiz rejected that offer, and we are told *the people repented not of their iniquity; and the people of Coriantumr were stirred up to anger against the people of Shiz; And the people of Shiz were stirred up to anger against the people of Coriantumr; wherefore the people of Shiz did give battle unto the people of Coriantumr.* (Ether 6:77-78 RLDS) [Ether 15:6 LDS] The people's disobedience of God's commandments resulted in their division and intense hatred for one another, which doomed them. These peoples who had once been a mighty nation, living in righteousness, peace and harmony, now had such hatred for and anger toward one another that the only solution they would accept was the total annihilation of their enemies. This wickedness and hatred and the resulting division among the people ultimately caused the annihilation of them all, save it be Coriantumr and Ether.

The second people divinely brought to this Promised Land were led by a man named Lehi. Lehi's people recognized they were in a promised and choice land. Lehi told his people *notwithstanding*

our afflictions, we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; A land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children for ever; (2 Nephi 1:6-8 RLDS) [2 Nephi 1:5 LDS] Lehi also delivered a prophetic warning, speaking of their descendants; *If the day shall come that they will reject the Holy One of Israel, the true Messiah, their Redeemer and their God, behold, the judgments of him that is just, shall rest upon them;* (2 Nephi 1:23 RLDS) [2 Nephi 1:10 LDS] Despite his admonitions to his children and their descendants, Lehi feared for what was to come.

My heart hath been weighed down with sorrow from time to time; for I have feared, lest for the hardness of your hearts, the Lord your God should come out in the fullness of his wrath upon you, that ye be cut off and destroyed for ever; Or that a cursing should come upon you for the space of many generations; and ye are visited by sword, and by famine, and are hated, and are led according to the will and captivity of the devil. (2 Nephi 1:31-32 RLDS) [2 Nephi 1:17-18 LDS]

In fact, both of Lehi's fears came to pass. Those people calling themselves Nephites were cut off and destroyed forever, and those calling themselves Lamanites were, for the space of many generations, visited by sword, famine and hatred.

Perhaps because his spiritual experiences caused him to have great concern for the spiritual condition of his elder sons, Laman and Lemuel and their descendants, the Lamanites, Lehi left a special blessing upon their children shortly before his death. Speaking to Laman, he said:

Wherefore, because of my blessing, the Lord God will not suffer that ye shall perish; wherefore, **he will be merciful unto you, and unto your seed for ever** and he told Lemuel: Behold, I leave unto you the same blessing which I left unto the sons and daughters of

Laman; wherefore, **thou shall not utterly be destroyed; but in the end thy seed shall be blessed.** (2 Nephi 3:13, 16 RLDS)
[2 Nephi 4:7, 9 LDS] (emphasis added)

God also promised the Nephites that a remnant of their descendants would be preserved and ultimately become a righteous branch of the house of Israel.

Thus, this second nation was not to be totally destroyed from the promised land. They were not to suffer the same fate as its former inhabitants, the Jaredites. Despite the ultimate wickedness and destruction of the people known as Nephites, those who remained, the Lamanites (actually a combination of the Nephites and Lamanites), were promised they would eventually return to their Lord and Savior and be the beneficiaries of the covenants made to their forefathers. Therefore, unlike the Jaredites, the people of Lehi were not totally annihilated. Notwithstanding this fact, the consequences of their iniquity were dire.

The contentions among Lehi's people began soon after their departure from Jerusalem. Those contentions continued to grow, until God ultimately commanded Nephi to take those who would go with him and flee from the midst of their brethren into the wilderness. Thus began a period of nearly 600 years of division among Lehi's descendants marked by many wars, atrocities and much hatred. There would not be a reuniting and reconciling of all of the people until after the coming of Christ among them.

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; And they had all things common among them, therefore they were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift. (4 Nephi 1:3-4 RLDS)
[4 Nephi 1:2-3 LDS]

And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; And surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God: There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God; (4 Nephi 1:17-20 RLDS)
[4 Nephi 1:15-17 LDS]

This condition continued until the 201st year after the birth of Christ, when pride entered into their midst, and separation and contention began once again. By the 231st year, there were once again Nephites and Lamanites and various other "ites" among the people. By the time the 300th year had passed *both the people of Nephi and the Lamanites had become exceeding wicked one like unto another.* (4 Nephi 1:53 RLDS) [4 Nephi 1:45 LDS]

Ultimately, the Nephite nation was destroyed, just as the Jaredites had been. Just as the account of the final destruction of the Jaredite nation was heart-rending, so also was Mormon's lament for his slain people.

And my soul was rent with anguish, because of the slain of my people,





What path are the people of this nation on now?

and I cried, O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you! Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But behold, ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss. O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen! But behold, ye are gone, and my sorrows can not bring your return; (Mormon 3:18-21 RLDS)

[Mormon 6:17-20 LDS]

Speaking of this great destruction of his people, Moroni declares: *And behold, it is the hand of the Lord which hath done it.* (Mormon 4:9 RLDS)

[Mormon 8:8 LDS]

The Lamanites are at war one with another; and the whole face of this land is one continual round of murder and bloodshed; and no one knoweth the end of the war. And now behold, I say no more concerning them, for there are none, save it be the Lamanites and robbers, that do exist upon the face of the land; (Mormon 4:10-11 RLDS)

[Mormon 8:8-9 LDS]

Nephi had prophesied what would befall the remaining people after this great calamity. He told of the Gentiles who would arrive and bring

them down low in the dust, almost to the point of extermination.

What have we learned thus far from the accounts of these first two peoples God brought to this promised land?

- God brings who He will to this promised land as a blessing to them.
- This promised land has both blessings and curses attached to it.
- Those people who are righteous and obedient to the commandments of God are blessed with prosperity, love and unity.

- Those people who fail to heed the commandments of God and devolve into wickedness and disobedience are cursed with the judgments of God, anger, hatred, division, conflict and, ultimately, destruction.

This brings us to the third great nation which should inhabit this promised land, the nation of the Gentiles. Just as with the proceeding nations, the Lord will bless the Gentiles upon the promised land.

But behold, this land, saith God, shall be a land of thine inheritance; and the Gentiles shall be blessed upon the land. And this land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles: and there shall be no kings upon the land, who shall raise up unto the Gentiles. And I will fortify this land against all other nations; (2 Nephi 7:16-19 RLDS)
[2 Nephi 10:9-12 LDS]

Nephi gives a beautiful description of the beginnings of this great Gentile nation:

And it came to pass that I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles upon the land of promise; And I beheld the wrath of God that it was upon the seed of my brethren; and they were scattered before the Gentiles, and were smitten. And I

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beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon the Gentiles; that they did prosper, and obtain the land for their inheritance; and I beheld that they were white, and exceeding fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain. And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles who had gone forth out of captivity did humble themselves before the Lord, and the power of the Lord was with them; And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that they did prosper in the land; (1 Nephi 3:149-152, 156 RLDS)
[1 Nephi 13:14-16, 20 LDS]

The question we must ask ourselves today is: what path are the people of this nation on now? Are

we, as the Jaredites and Nephites before us in their times of prosperity and peace, a righteous nation observing and obedient to the commandments of God, filled with prosperity, peace, harmony, unity and love? Are we like the Jaredites and Nephites in those times when they balanced on the edge of annihilation, subject to the curse which rests upon the wicked in this land, a nation filled with anger, hatred, violence and disobedience to the commandments of God? I could list a litany of evidence suggesting we are not that righteous nation, but I will let each of you make your own assessment of this nation and our spiritual condition.

Are we a nation facing prosperity and peace, or a nation facing division, hatred and potential annihilation? I leave you with that same admonition that Nephi gave to his brethren:

Arise from the dust, my sons, and be men, and be determined in one mind, and in one heart united in all things, 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. Awake, my sons: put on the armor of righteousness. Shake off the chains with which ye are bound, and come forth out of obscurity, and arise from the dust. (2 Nephi 1:36-39 RLDS)
[2 Nephi 1:22-23 LDS]

Arise from the dust.