

THE  
**WITNESS**

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*For not the hearers of the law  
are just before God,  
but the doers of the law  
shall be justified*

THE  
**WITNESS**

ISSUE 169/2020

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Cover Photo Aaron Friend  
Romans 2:13 (IV/KJV)

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# THE FALL THEREOF WAS EXCEEDING GREAT

Karen Bates and H. Alan Smith

Events described as a “great fall” are spoken of in four places in the Book of Mormon, though the language is a little different in each case. One of them is in a parable, one of them is an interpretation of a dream, one of them is in prophecy and the other is the description of an actual event that has happened.

In Jesus’ parable about foundations for building, “great is the fall” of the house built on the sand. In Nephi’s interpretation of Lehi’s dream, Nephi describes the fall of the great and spacious building as “exceeding great.” Nephi prophesies about the fall of the “great and abominable church” in several places in his writing. Finally, Mormon describes the destruction of the Nephites 400 years after the visit of Christ to the New World as great—“yea, great and marvelous is the destruction of my people.”

In each case—just like Humpty Dumpty—the fall was so great that there was no way the destruction spoken of could be put back together again. Each offers us some background for facing the tribulations of our day, and avoiding the same fate, if we will learn the lessons being taught. Let us look at each one of these instances in greater detail.

## PARABLE OF A SURE FOUNDATION

The parable of the need for sure foundations in our lives comes from 3 Nephi 6:36-37 (RCE) [3Nephi 14:24-25 LDS], as Jesus is sharing almost

word-for-word the parable as recorded in Matthew 7:24-26 (IV) [Matthew 7:24-26 KJV]. Jesus says our response to His word is like building a house.

A person who hears His teachings and puts them into practice in his life is like a wise man, who builds on a sure foundation of bedrock. As a builder himself, Jesus understood the importance of a solid foundation very well. When the rain comes, the floods rise up, and the winds of life blow mightily against the structure. People who have learned to live their lives for Christ will be able to withstand the tribulations.

On the other hand, people who hear the word, and feel it makes no difference how they live their lives are like people who build their house without securing it to a solid foundation. When the rain comes, the floods rise, the winds blow and beat upon the house, it crumbles in the face of adversity. **And great was the fall of it.**

Jesus refers to this parable again when He taught about having His Spirit to be with you by following His commandment to repent, be baptized and receive the Lord’s Supper. Then, you are built upon His rock, He told the people in Bountiful. (3 Nephi 8:43 RCE) [3 Nephi 18:12 LDS]

Both Paul and James summed up the meaning of this parable. Paul told the Romans: **For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.** (Romans 2:13 IV/KJV)



A WISE MAN BUILT  
HIS HOUSE UPON A ROCK

## VISION OF THE FALL

Lehi's vision contains another illustration of what can lead to our destruction (1 Nephi 2:48-83 RCE) [1 Nephi 8:9-33 LDS]. Following the rod of iron (word of God) to the tree of life, where we can partake of almost indescribable fruit (the pure love of Christ) is a wonderful blessing we are invited to seek, Nephi explains in his own experience with the things his father saw. (1 Nephi 3:46-127 RCE)



PRIDE OF THE WORLD

James was even more detailed in his explanation of the “engrafted word,” which is able to save our souls. **But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.** (James 1:22 IV/KJV) In other words, we deceive ourselves if we think there is safety in just knowing what Christ taught. Hearers look at themselves in a mirror, but walk away, forgetting what they saw, James tells us. Those who recognize changes need to be made and really look at what is being reflected back to them, then get to work trying to follow Christ's teachings, are blessed in the deed.

As recorded in 3 Nephi, even the gates of hell will not prevail against those who build upon the rock of Christ's doctrine.

And again I say unto you, Ye must repent, and be baptized in My name, and become as a little child, Or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God! 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 5:40-41 RCE)

[3 Nephi 11:38-39 LDS]

If we want to have a foundation that can withstand the adversity prophesied to be around us in the last days, we need to be putting the word of God into practice in our lives.

[1 Nephi 11:8-12:18 LDS] Many who didn't make the word of God part of their lives wandered away and were lost or drowned in the gulf that separates the wicked from the Saints of God. The end for those in the great and spacious building, too, was described dramatically.

And it came to pass that I saw and bear record that **the great and spacious building was the pride of the world.** And it fell; And the fall thereof was exceeding great. ...Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues and people that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (emphasis added)

(1 Nephi 3:93-95 RCE)

[1 Nephi 11:36 LDS]

In the vision, the people in the great and spacious building, dressed in their finery, mock those tasting of the fruit, pointing at them and scoffing. Some people became ashamed, even after getting a taste of the pure love of Christ, and wandered away. They somehow were more interested in what other people—who seemed to have the best the world could offer—thought of them, than where they could find eternal happiness.

Being prideful is one of Satan's most prevalent traps. In Proverbs 16:18 (IV/KJV) we read, **Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.** In several places in the Book of Mormon,

## NEPHI'S PROPHECY

the pride and vain imaginations of the world are characterized by works of filthiness and wickedness.

Alma's sermon speaks directly to those seen in the vision of the great and spacious building:

Can you be puffed up in the pride of your hearts? Will you still persist in the wearing of costly apparel and setting your hearts upon the vain things of the world, upon your riches? Will you persist in supposing that you are better than one

another? Will you persist in the persecutions of your brethren who humble themselves and walk after the holy order of God wherewith they have been brought into this church, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and they bring forth works which are meet for repentance? Will you persist in turning your backs upon the poor and the needy, and in withholding your substance from them? Finally, all you that will persist in your wickedness, I say to you that these are they who will be hewn down and cast into the fire except they speedily repent.

(Paraphrase)

(Alma 3:93-97 RCE)

[Alma 5:53-56 LDS]

Alma's words are an indictment of many—even those of us who claim to be followers of Christ. If we want to find blessing in our lives, we must avoid the traps that bound those in the great and spacious building, whose fall was great.

Nephi's experience with the angel that explained his father Lehi's dream offered much more about the coming of Christ and the events to the end of time. Mention is made here of a great and abominable church that will be destroyed in another great fall. While much time has been spent in the past trying to link this prophecy to one group or another, a better way may be to look at the description and evaluate where our own efforts to follow Christ lie.

Nephi first talks about the church in 1 Nephi 3:141-143 (RCE) [1 Nephi 13:6-8 LDS], where he describes the church, founded among the Gentiles, which would slay the saints of God, torture and bind them down and bring them into captivity. The devil was the founder of it. It would be focused on riches and worldly lusts.

By the spirit, he gives even more detail about this church in 2 Nephi 12 (RCE) [2 Nephi 12-30 LDS]. They will teach with their learning and deny the Holy Ghost. They will deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel.

They will declare that, for this day, God is not a God of

miracles.

They will justify sin and deny the consequences of it. They will teach vain doctrines, be puffed up in their hearts and seek to hide their dark works from the Lord. They will rob the poor because of fine sanctuaries and fine clothing. They will persecute the meek and the poor in heart because of their pride. They will revile against that which is good and pervert the right way of the Lord.

The result will be the destruction of those who have been led away if they do not repent, while the great and abominable church tumbles down.

BUT, BEHOLD, IF THE INHABITANTS OF THE EARTH  
SHALL REPENT OF THEIR WICKEDNESS AND ABOMINATIONS,  
THEY SHALL NOT BE DESTROYED, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS.  
BUT BEHOLD, THAT GREAT AND ABOMINABLE CHURCH, THE WHORE  
OF ALL THE EARTH, MUST TUMBLE TO THE EARTH; AND GREAT MUST  
BE THE FALL THEREOF. FOR THE KINGDOM OF THE DEVIL MUST SHAKE,  
AND THEY WHICH BELONG TO IT MUST BE STIRRED UP TO  
REPENTANCE, OR THE DEVIL WILL GRASP THEM  
WITH HIS EVERLASTING CHAINS, AND THEY WILL  
BE STIRRED UP TO ANGER AND PERISH.

(2 NEPHI 12:21-23 RCE)

[2 NEPHI 28:17-19 LDS]

Nephi was told by the angel that, in the day God's wrath was poured out on the abominable church, the work of the Father would commence to prepare the way for the fulfilling of His covenants. (1 Nephi 3:236-237 RCE) [1 Nephi 14-17 LDS]

If we are going to avoid being part of the great fall of the abominable church, we should look at our own efforts to be part of the church of Christ and make sure the wiles of the devil are not binding us down to destruction. We need to remember that to respond to a call to repent with anger is one of Satan's tools to keep us from the joy of Christ's kingdom.

### **THE DESTRUCTION OF THE NEPHITES**

In his record, Mormon records events where his whole people were destroyed—and modern-day archaeology is attesting to the fact that this type of destructive warfare was going on in that time frame. He records the events of the great fall of his people: **The Lamanites came again upon the Nephites to battle. And yet the Nephites repented not of the evil which they had done, but persisted in their wickedness continually.** (Mormon 2:12 RCE) [Mormon 4:10 LDS]

Mormon then writes about the complete destruction of the Nephites, who had fallen into unbelief and wickedness 400 years after the resurrected Christ appeared in the Americas.

AND BEHOLD, THE LAMANITES HAVE HUNTED  
MY PEOPLE THE NEPHITES DOWN FROM CITY TO CITY AND  
FROM PLACE TO PLACE, EVEN UNTIL THEY ARE NO MORE, AND  
GREAT HAS BEEN THEIR FALL, YEA, GREAT AND MARVELOUS IS THE  
DESTRUCTION OF MY PEOPLE THE NEPHITES;  
AND BEHOLD, IT IS THE HAND OF THE LORD  
WHICH HATH DONE IT.

(MORMON 4:8-9 RCE)

[MORMON 8:7-8 LDS]

But that was not the end of the battles because: **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.** (Mormon 4:10 RCE) [Mormon 8:8 LDS]

A recent National Geographic article by Tim Vernimmen called *Ancient Maya Practiced ‘Total War’ Well Before Climate Stress* notes it had been thought that during the 700-year-long Classic period from 250-950 AD, warfare was more or less ritualized, and all-out warfare had not been held until changes in climate limited resources. Perhaps the royal family might be kidnapped, or some symbolic structures torn down, but large-scale destruction and high numbers of civilian casualties were supposedly rare. Discoveries of whole cities that had been completely burned down—and written records claiming this kind of total destruction—now paint a picture more in keeping with Mormon’s account.

While we can mourn with Mormon the great fall of his people, we also have a warning given in Ether about our day and time.

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 BE COME,  
THAT YE MAY NOT BRING DOWN THE FULLNESS OF THE WRATH OF GOD  
UPON YOU AS THE INHABITANTS OF THE LAND HATH 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 WHICH IS JESUS CHRIST, WHO HATH BEEN  
MANIFESTED BY THE THINGS WHICH WE HAVE WRITTEN.  
(ETHER 1:34-35 RCE)  
[ETHER 2:12-13 LDS]

We too must respond to the call of Christ to serve him, or we have the warning that our fall could be great as well.

### **WHAT CAN WE LEARN?**

In each of the four references to a great fall, there was a way to prevent being part of the destruction. We can build our lives on the foundation of doing the word, not just hearing it, if we don’t want to be washed away. We can avoid the traps of pride and vain imaginings of the people in the great and spacious building of Lehi’s dream. We can be watchful in our church life that we focus on Christ’s teachings and allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives instead of denying its power. In the life of our nations, we need to serve the God of the land—Jesus Christ—to remain free from bondage and captivity.

The warnings of the Book of Mormon about great destruction make a difference in our lives—and the lives of those around us—if we will only heed them.

# BURNED CITIES

Marlin Guin

continues to reveal and support the claims of the Book of Mormon. There were times when barbaric and widespread warfare was waged by the Book of Mormon peoples.

We should also remember the Book of Mormon records events and conditions that would extend

past its chronological timeline. For example, when Mormon describes the condition of the people and the overall conflict throughout the whole land, it must surely carry forward for years and probably generations into the future. These things would not have all ended around 400 A.D., like turning off a faucet. Instead, they would continue long after Moroni recorded the final words of the record. We see clearly stated in Mormon 4 (RLDS) [Mormon 8-9 LDS] how these things would project into the future. Even after the Nephites were defeated, scattered, hunted and killed, we read how intense warfare continued and expanded among the Lamanite conquerors themselves. Archaeology is beginning to be more and more supportive of Mormon's account.

And behold also, 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. (Mormon 4:10 RLDS)  
[Mormon 8:8 LDS]

As an example, scientists recently shared some research on the subject of "burned cities." One source of this archaeological evidence is found in an article entitled: *A Burned City, and a New View of Warfare Among the Ancient Maya* by Nathaniel Scharping, published by Discover Magazine in August, 2019. It provides a clear archaeological



*M*ormon, a prophet general of the Nephite army, gives us a detailed description of methods used in warfare. His descriptions are clear and concise, causing a sense of sadness for the spiritual condition of the people and their barbaric nature, rooted in wickedness. One of the specific methods of warfare, recorded by Mormon, is the burning of cities. This tactic, although tragic, is commonly used by both conquering and retreating armies, even in modern times. Conquering armies sometimes burn cities, farms and fields to punish those who fought against them and failed. Retreating armies also burn cities, farms and fields to remove any possibility of providing benefit to the enemy, such as food and shelter. This tactic is often called a scorched-earth policy. Mormon records its use in his writings.

But it came to pass that whatsoever lands we had passed by, and the inhabitants thereof were not gathered in, were destroyed by the Lamanites, and their towns, and villages, and cities were burned with fire; and thus the three hundred and seventy and nine years passed away. (Mormon 2:31 RLDS)  
[Mormon 5:5 LDS]

For many years, archaeologists have described the Maya culture as one of peace, with very limited warfare among them. They quote long-standing interpretations of historical and archaeological evidence to support this position. Over time, archaeology



picture by describing both “what” was done and “how” it was done.

The Maya Classic Period, which stretched between roughly 300 and 900 A.D. is typically seen as a kind of golden age for the ancient Central American civilization. Populations boomed, supported by vast systems of terraced fields and canals that provided irrigation in the dry months. Art and science flourished, while city-states grew side-by-side, if not always harmoniously.

Warfare during this period was traditionally thought of as somewhat ritualistic in nature, far from the kind of raze and burn aggression that defined the next era of Maya society, when people started to abandon cities. During the Classic period, major city-states like Tikal and Caracol would embark on campaigns of annexation, but their conquests wouldn’t typically result in total destruction. The prevailing view is that this period was, overall, a more peaceful time for the Maya.

But scientists say this understanding of the Maya is still overly simplistic. And a new paper in *Nature Human Behaviour* is challenging prevailing notions of Maya warfare, revealing the Classic period to be

a time of greater strife than archaeologists thought.

## A CITY IN FLAMES

By pairing data from sediment cores with both written records from the Maya and archaeological evidence, a team of researchers says they’ve pieced together a tale of all-out warfare and near-complete destruction at a Maya city called Witzna.

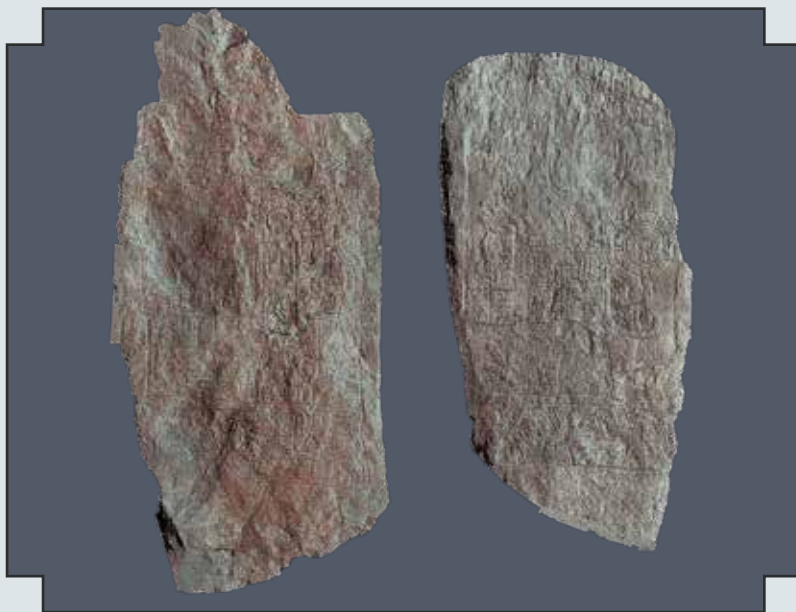
Located in the north-eastern corner of Guatemala, near Tikal, the city was small but thriving for hundreds of years during the Classic period. It held a commanding view atop a ridgeline, and featured temples and a palace complex where the local elite would have ruled from. But a dispute with a larger neighboring city led to a ruinous war that left the city broken and vacant, its temples burned and its people taken away or killed.

This discovery came as a surprise for the archaeologists studying the city. Scientists didn’t think such city-destroying wars happened during this period of Maya civilization. But the new evidence they found is overwhelming.

There’s the ash, to begin with. At the bottom of a nearby lake, scientists discovered a blanket of charcoal three centimeters thick — the remnants of a major fire. David Wahl, a U.S. Geological Survey expert in studying ancient climates, turned up the ash layer in a sediment core he drilled in Laguna Ek’Naab, located about a mile away from the city. He dated the ash to just around the end of the 7th century A.D.

“I’ve been taking cores from this lake in this area and elsewhere for 20 years and I’ve never seen anything like this,” he says. “Just massive chunks of charcoal, a huge deposit indicating a massive fire event.”

Other clues from the sediment record hinted at the ash layer’s provenance. Wahl also looks for things like pollen grains and signs of erosion in his sediment cores—clues that give away the presence of people in ancient landscapes. Right after the fire, those things vanished. “Following this fire



A digital reconstruction of two inscribed stones from the cities of Witzna and Naranja, one of which contains a phrase indicating that Witzna was burned. (Credit: Wahl et al./*Nature Human Behaviour*)

event, all of our indications of humans in the watershed ...essentially turn on a dime right at that same horizon and start to decrease dramatically,” he says.

Archaeological clues back this theory up as well. Excavations at Witzna, called Bahlam Jol by the Maya, show that the major structures at the site had all been burned. The team thinks it was the work of the nearby city of Naranjo, likely angry that Witzna had declared independence from them.

In Naranjo, archaeologists found a stela bearing both the name Bahlam Jol and the phrase “puluuy,” which in this context means “it burned.” The phrase has shown up elsewhere marking the destruction of cities, the researchers say, and it’s further evidence that Witzna was destroyed by Naranjo. There’s even a date for the city’s death, thanks to the extremely accurate calendars the Maya kept: May 21, 697 A.D.

## REEVALUATING WAR

Following the battle, which study co-author Francisco Estrada-Belli says likely involved large armies and a siege, the population of Witzna seems to have been absorbed into Naranjo. They may have been taken as slaves, a not-uncommon practice among the Maya.

The findings suggest that “total war,” or warfare that leaves cities and populations decimated, might have been more common among the Maya before their collapse than archaeologists thought. Other recent finds make a case for more structured warfare among the Maya as well. A fortress recently discovered near Tikal, the first of its kind found among the Maya, and a network of watchtowers throughout the Central American lowlands hint that large-scale warfare was a prevalent element of Maya society.

It counters one theory about their collapse during the 10th century. Archaeologists previously thought that the advent of more destructive warfare, likely brought on by

drought and other hardships, was a signature of their final days. It now appears that it may have been a part of Maya civilization all along.<sup>1</sup>

One of the common questions asked about the Book of Mormon is: “why does it include so many accounts of war, as it seems like an unnecessary waste of space, especially considering the difficulty of writing on plates?” Today, we are beginning to see the wisdom of including the warfare accounts. The Lord knew all aspects of the Book of Mormon



The sediment cores taken from a lake near Witzna. The cores contain a thick layer of ash around the end of the 7th century. (Credit: David Wahl)

would be challenged in our day. He also knew more and more evidence would come forth to further support the truth of its claims. Over time, the historical, scientific and archaeological arguments used by Book of Mormon critics are being found less and less tenable. This should be no surprise to Book of Mormon believers, since the Lord said He would continue to bring forth more light and truth. Here a little and there a little with line upon line and precept upon precept. This promise is not only true for an understanding of His word, but also for history, science, archaeology and all of His creation. Stay tuned for more to come!

1 <http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/d-brief/2019/08/05/maya-warfare-city-burned-witzna/#.XaPhTFVKiM8>

# Winter Retreat

## 2020

Ben & Rochelle Newell

Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. And now behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way, and there is none other way nor name given under heaven, whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen. (2 Nephi 13:29-32 RLDS) [2 Nephi 31:20-21 LDS]

We gathered at Odessa Hills Campground for the 2020 Book of Mormon Retreat under a beautiful blanket of snow. Thirty-eight young adults gathered together to fellowship, learn, and worship God. The theme was “Steadfast” with a theme scripture from 2 Nephi 13:29-32.

On Friday evening, the campers were split into six groups. Each group was given a bag of props to assist them in acting out Book of Mormon stories. We enjoyed reenactments of Samuel, the Lamanite, prophesying on the wall; Nephi and his brothers going back to get the plates from Laban; Nephi and his family preparing for their journey to the Promised Land; Ammon serving King Lamoni; Lehi and the Tree of Life vision; and the conversion of Alma the Younger.

The rest of the evening was spent singing at campfire and sharing in small prayer circles. Our pastor, Aaron Bailey, shared with us the Latin meaning of “retreat,” which means to pull back. He reminded us that retreat does not mean surrender, but to pull back and renew strength. He also

pointed out that Jesus, too, took time to draw apart. He encouraged the campers, while in their prayer circles, to take stock of their current provisions and petition God for reinforcements in their lives.

Saturday began with devotions brought by the retreat pastor. He showed the group two pneumatic hemispheres which he emptied of all air.

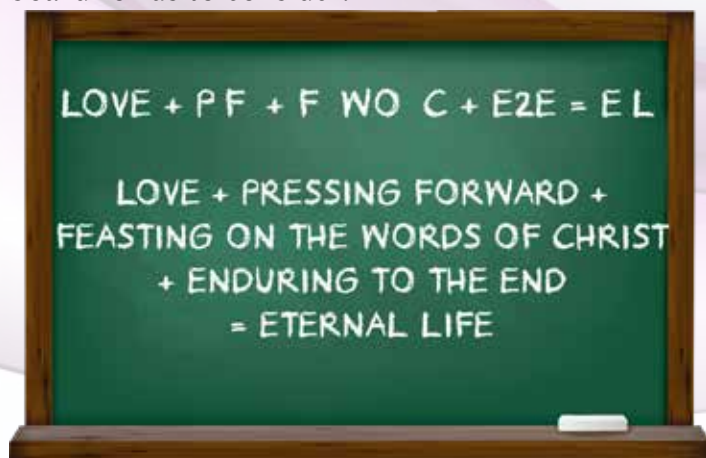
He asked several campers to try pulling them apart. When they could not, he shared with them that without Christ in our lives, the pressures from the outside world can crush us **because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.** (I John 4:4 IV/KJV) He reminded us that while our environment does affect us, it does not control us. Because we are made in God’s image, we have the capacity to *choose* our attitudes and how we respond to situations that come into our lives.

We then gathered for three classes. The first class was taught



by Cara Smith, a class about loving God and all men, 2 Nephi 13:29 (RLDS) [2 Nephi 31:20 LDS]. She encouraged us that we all can experience God's love here on earth. She challenged us to consider Jesus' counsel to love our enemies, even as He did. (Matthew 5:45-50 IV) [Matthew 5:43-48 KJV] She repeatedly reminded us love is not a feeling in our chests; it is bending down to wash another's feet. Love is action.

Our second class was taught by Elder Ben Gatrost who shared about pressing forward and feasting on the Word of God, 2 Nephi 13:30 (RLDS) [2 Nephi 31:20 LDS]. He put this equation on the board for us to consider:



He reminded us that pressing forward requires movement on our part.

The third class, taught by Elder Jay Johnson, was on the true doctrine of Christ, 2 Nephi 13:31-32 (RLDS) [2 Nephi 31:21 LDS] and focused on living our lives both spiritually and physically for Him. Jesus' life is the example for us to follow.

Saturday evening brought a mystery dinner that had everyone intrigued. We were informed that a murder had occurred and all those in attendance were suspects. Each participant at the table was assigned a character and character description. Each of the characters' names were disguised slightly from their originals: Mr. Enn (represents Nephi), Citizen Mult (represents the multitude gathered with the Judges), Judge Black (represents the Judges against Nephi and the blackness in their hearts), Custodian (represents the servant of the dead Chief Judge), Clerk Fife (represents the five men converted at the crime scene), and Sean Jones (Seantum). After three rounds of clues, each table group submitted their guess of who they thought was guilty. Only one table guessed correctly! The group was surprised

to find out that the clues they were sharing and the story being pieced together was straight out of Helaman in the Book of Mormon! Aaron and Ben shared with the campers that just as solving this mystery was exciting, so are the scriptures equally as exciting and alive.

We concluded the evening with a campfire and sharing service. Our pastor encouraged us to consider our priorities and what we fill our lives with. Many campers offered testimonies that uplifted and strengthened the group.

Sunday began with a worship service. Aaron Bailey presented several chemistry demonstrations that helped illustrate several important points about trials in our lives and expecting to be changed.

Overall, the group enjoyed a weekend of fellowship, singing, prayer, learning, and worship. While this was our first time directing the Book of Mormon Retreat, we are thankful to have been part of this retreat with an exceptional group of young adults.

*Naomi Alaniz*

About a year ago, I started to let people into my life who were not the best influences on me. Over time, I began to drift apart from God, and my life became very unhappy. It got to the point where I went "numb" to the spirit and, when I went to camps in the summer, I didn't feel a thing. I didn't know what was wrong with me, or why the camps that had once filled me up were suddenly so dull.

One day, while I was at a summer camp, I was in a class taught by Cara Smith. I didn't really absorb much of anything that week. However, she said one thing that stuck with me for months. She told us that if we don't have a desire in our hearts to grow closer to God, we need to first pray and ask Him for that desire. Eventually, it got to the point where I was so unhappy, I knew I needed to make some changes in my life. I started praying a lot, and God helped me to make some really hard decisions I probably wouldn't have been able to make on my own. Then, I started praying every day that God would help me have the desire to grow closer to Him. As time went by, I found myself having that desire and, within a few months, I started to be able to feel the Holy Spirit again, and I was able to start rebuilding my relationship with Him.

One Sunday, I was sitting in church when I saw the flyer for the Book of Mormon Retreat, and I thought to myself, “I really want to go to that.” This was kind of strange because I didn’t know if I would know anyone else going. After church, I told my friends about how I really wanted to go, and they told me to have fun, but they wouldn’t be going. Still, I really wanted to go, so I registered and went. It was definitely the right decision. The classes were all really good, and the whole retreat helped my relationship with God grow stronger. I am so thankful that I went to the Book of Mormon retreat, and I’m also thankful that God gives us so many chances to come back to Him.

struggled watching my teammates train and work out for our first meet. When it came time for that meet, I had to sit on the sidelines and watch and wonder where I would’ve placed. The following Monday, I didn’t really know where to begin studying but, for some reason, I decided on the Book of Mormon. I randomly picked the book of Mosiah. I read a chapter from Mosiah every day. From the very first day I began, I knew I was moving in the right direction. Within the first part of the chapter, I read Mosiah 1:11 (RLDS) [Mosiah 1:7 LDS]. It says, **Now, my sons, I would that ye should remember to search them [the scriptures] diligently, that ye may profit thereby;** When I read that verse, I immediately circled it, because it was exactly what I was trying to do. It gave me encouragement that I was moving in the right direction.

From there, my testimony grew. The second day I gained even more insight. On Tuesday, I read the second chapter. Halfway through it talked about how God will answer right prayers.

Now, if God, who has created you, on whom you are dependent for your lives, and for all that ye have and are, doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how had ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have, one to another?

(Mosiah 2:36, 44 RLDS) [Mosiah 4:21, 27 LDS]

I thought about running and the previous day’s chapter. I took in that verse and what it was saying. Before I kept reading, I prayed, “God, if it be your will, heal me of my mono so I can run. Please do it.” I left it at that and kept reading.

About ten verses later, I got the exact answer I needed. I couldn’t help but tear up, because God answered my prayer right then and there. The verse said, **And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he had strength,** and a cross-reference was written next to it from the D&C 3:1d that says, **Do not run faster, or labor more than you have strength and means provided...** and those are the exact words I needed. Currently I don’t have the strength to run. But I trust God is going to use it somehow for His good.



## Aly Burk

Within the past few weeks, I wanted to start studying again. I had lost focus and wanted to start fresh. A few weeks before moving back into the dorm, I found out I had mononucleosis. Because of that, I was unable to run. For weeks, I was constantly tired and dizzy. Most people who know me know running is one of the most important things in my life, probably higher than it should be. It is something I love to do and a way to connect with others.

As I went back to school the first week, I truly

## Packing for Zion

Rachel Mann

The holiday season is always a wonderful time for me. It's always a blessing to take a break from my schooling and spend quality time with my family. The week between Christmas and the New Year is always a busy one. Christmas Eve is spent with my mom's family in Woodbine, Iowa and the New Year is celebrated in Cleveland, Ohio with my dad's family. This year, I had an experience with the Lord that changed my perspective on those trips and my attitude about His kingdom.

As I was returning from Iowa and preparing to go to Ohio the next day, I was very focused on making sure everything was ready. I was counting out my clothing and getting everything situated in my suitcase when the Lord put a thought into my mind.

### Why are you not preparing for Zion the way you're preparing for this trip?

I stopped what I was doing and pondered the words the Lord had shared with me. All my life, I've known about Zion and that it will be here one day. After all this time, do I truly believe that Zion will be?

Last year, at an older youth event, we were challenged to make a list of five goals we wanted to accomplish within the next ten years. The first thing that popped into my head was graduating from college. After everyone was done with their lists, we talked about the significance of our choices. Many

of us listed things about starting careers, beginning families and getting closer to the Lord. After a bit of discussion, our teacher brought up the focal point of the activity, which was Zion.

I'm ashamed to say I hadn't thought about Zion being on earth within the next ten years before that moment.

### Why are you not preparing for Zion the way you're preparing for this trip?

We need to act like Zion will be, because **it will be**. Even though I don't know exactly when His kingdom will again be on this earth, I know Zion is just as real as my trip to Cleveland. We must be prepared so we are ready for its arrival. We know not the time of the Lord's coming, and that could very well be within the next ten years.

I'm so thankful to the Lord for the insight He has blessed me with throughout the year. Because of these experiences, I've been working to instill a change in my life. I've cleaned out a space in my closet dedicated to focused prayer time with Him. At least once a day, I need to go into that room and spend time talking with the Lord. Through His Holy Spirit, I have become more and more aware of the distractions that have been stealing time away from my life. He has made it clear to me there is always time for Him. We may be busy, but time can always be made for Him. The Lord is working all around us. We are called to be like Him and, therefore, we must continually be pressing onward in our work for Him.

### Are you packing your bags for Zion?



## Nicole Johnson



When I met my husband, Jay Johnson, I knew he was very active in his church. He shared with me he was a priest. Being Catholic, this was a very uncomfortable situation. We started discussing his faith and his belief in the Book of Mormon. I was not a student of the scriptures, nor was I aware of the RLDS church. I believed Jay was a member of a cult. I told him I did not believe in the Book of Mormon, and I did not believe he should either, as it was not of God. He asked if I had ever read the Book of Mormon and of course, I had not. He asked if I would be willing to read it and show him what was wrong with the book and how it was inconsistent with Christ's teachings. I agreed to do so. Again, I was not a student of the scriptures and was not able to debate them. I only agreed to the task because I believed, with the help of God, I could get Jay out the cult which upheld the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon I was reading had an introduction with some basic background information and ended with the promise found in Moroni, a promise available to all who read the Book of Mormon and desire to know the will of God.

Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam, even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts, 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 10:3-5 RLDS/LDS)

I thought of the Sadducees and Pharisees, who were uplifted in their own knowledge, could not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, and how they crucified Him and did not recognize truth. With the promise found in Moroni in mind, knowing God's continual desire for me to know His truth, but not wanting to be a victim of my own thoughts and bias, I humbled myself and prayed before I began reading. I prayed I would be open to any truth, even if it was something which went against my current beliefs, but also that I would not be deceived.

Not long into the first book of Nephi, I was overcome with emotion and began to cry. Jay asked why I was crying, and I explained I was not sure. I told him it was as if I could feel the kind and loving nature of Nephi. As I continued to read I felt myself getting drawn into the Book of Mormon. The thought came to me, "Man, the devil is good!" This caused me concern and I went to the Lord again asking for help, that I wouldn't be deceived, and would see the false teachings so I could share them with Jay. Yet the more I read, the more drawn to the book I became. I called on the Lord again asking why He was not helping me and why He was not working with me to expose this false doctrine. My resistance to the Book of Mormon was not only fading, but I was beginning to feel I might actually believe what I was reading.

In an effort to fight that feeling, I sternly and defiantly thought to myself, "This is ridiculous, we have a Bible we do not need another Bible!" It was in this moment I read 2 Nephi 12:53 (RLDS) [2 Nephi 29:6 LDS]: **Thou fool, that shall say, A bible, we have got a bible, and we need no more bible.** Instantly I felt convicted. My prayer changed to, "Lord, I believe this is your truth, if it is not help me to not be deceived." From that moment on, I read the Book of Mormon believing it was true. I never had an experience that the Book of Mormon was false. Instead, I found no fault with the Book of Mormon and believed it was truly of God. Nothing I read conflicted with a Christian lifestyle and belief system, but actually agreed with and supported Christ's teachings.

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This experience not only brought me to a belief in the Book of Mormon, but was actually the start of my personal relationship with God. Of course, I believed in God, I prayed, but I had never had a personal relationship with God. I had never experienced the emotions and guidance I had while reading the Book of Mormon and calling on God for guidance. This was the first time in my life I had experience God being involved in my life. Not only to be praised and worshiped, but a loving God who is available and desires to be actively involved in our lives. This experience not only gave me a testimony of the Book of Mormon, but more importantly showed me the importance of developing a personal relationship with the Lord.



### 2019 INTERNS' RENEWAL WEEKEND

