

BoM 03: 1 Nephi 8–11, 15: Vision of Tree of Life

Monte F. Shelley

‘Though argument does not create conviction, lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish.’ (Austin Farrer) We can and should be articulate believers. (Elder Maxwell, *But for a Small Moment*, 56)

1. Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon

- a. **And it came to pass** (אָהָרָא or אָהָרָא = *vayehi*)
- b. **Many “ands”** (אָ) and repeated pronouns (e.g., his)
And it came to pass that he departed into the wilderness. **And** he left **his** house, **and** the land of **his** inheritance, **and his** gold, **and his** silver, **and his** precious things, **and** took nothing with him, save it were **his** family, **and** provisions, **and** tents, **and** departed into the wilderness. (1 Ne 2:4)
- c. I *dreamed a dream* (not: I dreamed), *build buildings*
- d. *plates of brass* (not: brass plates), *rod of iron* (not: iron rod)
- e. *sword of Laban* (not: Laban’s sword)
- f. *sixty and five* (not: sixty five)
- g. *with patience* (not: patiently), *with gladness*
- h. *precious above* (not: more precious than)
- i. *by the mouth of* (not: by)
- j. **No punctuation marks** in Original Manuscript or Hebrew
“And i beheld a river of water and it ran along and it was near the tree of which i was partaking the fruit and i looked to behold from whence it came and i saw the head thereof a little way of and at the head thereof i beheld your Mother sariah and Sam and nephi and they stood as if they knew not wether they should go and it came to pass that ...” (Original Manuscript of 1 Ne 8:13–14)
- k. **Chiasmus**: related words on each line ^A (1 Ne 8:10–12)
^A I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable
^B to make one happy.
^C And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof;
^D and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted.
^D Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen.
^C And as I partook of the fruit thereof
^B it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy;
^A wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit.

2. Purpose: Teach Truth or Wisdom?

“*Truth is knowledge* of things as they *are*, and as they *were*, and as they *are to come*” (D&C 93:24)

Joseph: “If any person needed *wisdom* from God, I did; for *how to act* I did not know, (JS—H 1:12)

Wisdom: (1) capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct; *soundness of judgment in the choice of means and ends*. (SOED=Shorter Oxford English Dictionary)

Marion G. Romney: The way to magnify your calling and to be one is “to learn the will of the Lord and then to do it.”

“Teach me all that I should do” (“I am a child of God”)

“A man would get nearer to God by abiding by [Book of Mormon] *precepts*, than by any other book” (Preface)

“He that *keepeth his commandments* receiveth *truth* and *light*, until he ... *knoweth all things*.” (D&C 93:28)

Why didn’t Mormon read through the plates and write a lesson manual with chapters on faith, prayer, geography with maps, creation, the fall, nature of God, signs of the second coming? If the Lord’s purpose were to teach “truth,” a manual would have been better. But if his purpose is to teach “wisdom” (how to act”), he would use stories to help us:

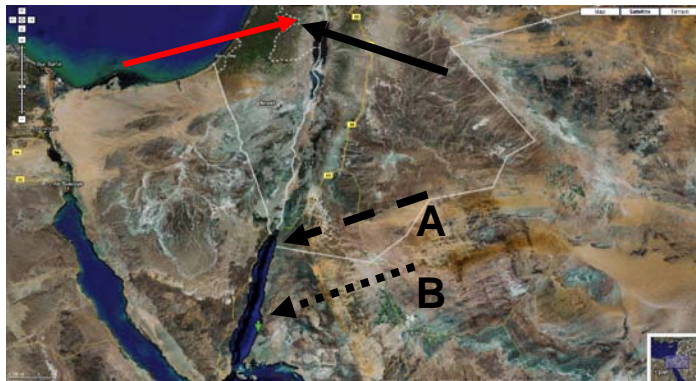
- a. See how people learn God’s will and respond.
- b. See how people view/perceive situations, how they respond, and consequences.
- c. See patterns through REPETITION (e.g., pride cycle). We have many repeated lessons on faith, obedience, repentance, and prayer as we read instead of just one during a year.
- d. Understand covenants, and to invite and entice us to make and keep covenants.

When truth is revealed, the Lord’s purpose is usually to help us be wise or know how to act.

3. From Jerusalem to the Valley of Lemuel

When Lehi prophesied that Jerusalem would be destroyed, the Jews became angry and sought to kill him. “The Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness.” Leaving his house, land, wealth behind, he “came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea.” (See solid black line below)

The name of the mountains in northwest Arabia, the *Hejaz*, meant the “borders.” In the Semitic language, the words for *mountain* and *borders* share a common derivation. That is, the Hebrew word *gebul* means *border*. *Gebul* cognates with Arabic *jabal* (*jebel*, *djebel*), which means *mountain*. [Note: “But the Hebrew word is used of non-mountainous areas as well, though its origin may have been in reference to mountain barriers.”] (Potter & Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 3)



After traveling 3 more days “in the borders... nearer the Red Sea” they set up camp in a valley by the side of a river of water. “The valley was in the borders near the mouth” of the Red Sea. Lehi “built an altar of stones” and made an offering and gave thanks. He named the firm valley Lemuel and the “continually running” river, Laman.

Wadi Tayyib al-Ism is about 75 miles south. (See dashed line A above and pictures below of the likely valley and river.)

Hugh Nibley: “The expression ‘river of water’ is used only for small local streams.” (*Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 256)

It was a custom of travelers to name places (e.g., valley of Lemuel) and features (e.g., river of Laman). There were multiple names for same place given by different people. It was NOT like the modern “star registry” where only one name could be given.



Pictures: Potter & Wellington, www.jefflindsay.com/BMEvidences.shtml

Laman and Lemuel did not want to be there and “murmur[ed] because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them. Neither did they believe that Jerusalem ... could be destroyed.” Lehi spoke with power “until their frames did shake ... [and] they did as he commanded them.” Nephi did not rebel because he prayed and the Lord softened his heart that he believed his father’s words.

Lehi “dreamed a dream” and was commanded to have his sons return to Jerusalem for the “plates of brass”. Laman and Lemuel murmured. Nephi said he would do it because the Lord would prepare a way.

Hebraism: dreamed a dream, plates of brass (bronze c. 1755)

The trip back to Jerusalem was about 250 miles (Provo to St. George) and 10 days.

After Laban took their wealth and tried to kill them, Laman got angry and hit Nephi with a rod. An angel came and asked why do you smite your younger brother with a rod?

When we told our kids the story, we said: Don’t hit your brother!

Laman murmured about trying again. That night, Nephi said “I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do.” He found Laban drunk on the ground. The spirit told Nephi to kill Laban. After more explanation and pondering, Nephi killed Laban, dressed up as Laban, retrieved the plates of brass, and returned with Zoram to Lehi. Lehi again offered sacrifice and thanks to God.

Nibley: Two Arab students were whispering. One said, “Why did he wait so long to cut off his head? That doesn’t ring true—any Arab would have done it like that....” (TBM 1:100)

“The Lord commanded” Lehi to have his sons “again return unto the land of Jerusalem, and bring” Ishmael’s family. Laman obeyed without murmuring. On their way back to Lehi, they rebelled, bound Nephi with cords, and planned to leave him in the desert to be killed by animals.

Nibley: Common desert practice. You won’t kill a person; that’s murder. (TBM 1: 169)

Nephi prayed and the bands were loosed.

When my Dad threatened to tie me in bed one night, I said, “I’ll just break the ropes like Nephi. Then, what will you do?” He spanked me and left the room to laugh.

They were angry until a daughter of Ishmael and her mother pleaded with them.

Nibley: If a mother or daughter ... pleads, you are under obligation. (TBM 1:169)

Being sorrowful, they did bow down before Nephi and ask forgiveness. Nephi forgave them.

Nibley, 170: “Bowing down was an act of apology and not of submission.”

When they returned, Lehi offered sacrifice again.

Nibley: “Every time they come back they offer the sacrifice of the return.” [according to LAW OF MOSES] (TBM 1:170)

Nephi obeyed each commandment willingly either immediately or after prayer. Laman murmurs and after strong persuasion, obeys grudgingly because he left his heart in Jerusalem. How will we respond to the commandments of the Lord?

In the MTC, some missionaries were like Nephi. Others, like Laman, obeyed with their bodies but their hearts were at home with friends. They were constantly murmuring about companions, food, teachers, etc.

4. Lehi’s Vision of the Tree of Life (1 Nephi 8)

8¹ We had gathered together ... seeds ... of grain ... [and] of fruit.

Trip well planned and prepared for

2 ... While my father tarried in the wilderness he ... [said]: I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision. ... 4 And ... methought I saw in my dream, a dark and dreary wilderness. 5 And ... I saw a man ... dressed in a white robe; and he came and stood before me. 6 ... He spake unto me, and bade me follow him. 7 ... As I followed him I beheld myself that I was in a dark and dreary waste. 8 And after I had traveled for the space of many hours in darkness, I began to pray unto the Lord that he would have mercy on me, according to the multitude of his tender mercies. 9 ... After I had prayed ... I beheld a large and spacious field. 10 ...

Very few people had written copies of scriptures. Scriptures were written to be heard not read. It is interesting to listen to CD or MP3 recordings of the scriptures.

Chiasmus was commonly used to help listeners hear ideas in one order to the central idea, and then repeated in reverse order.

A I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable

B to make one happy.

11 C And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof;

D and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted.

D Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen.

12 C And as I partook of the fruit thereof

B it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy;

A wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit.

“Enoch described [fruit] as perfumed, with fruit like grapes (1 Enoch 32:5), and a text discovered in Egypt in 1945 described the tree as beautiful, fiery, and with fruit like white grapes.” (Barker, *Worlds of Joseph*, 76).

Fountain of living waters (11:25) by the Tree of Life

OED *fountain*= spring of water issuing from the earth; also, the head-spring or source of a river.

Living water = moving water

13 And as I cast my eyes round about, that perhaps I might discover my family also, I beheld a river of [filthy (12:16)] water; and it ran along, and it was near the tree of which I was partaking the fruit. 14 And I looked ... and I saw the head thereof a little way off; and at the head thereof I beheld your mother Sariah, and Sam, and Nephi; and they stood as if they knew not whither they should go. [Hebraism#10: many ands→in handout from OM]

¹⁵ And ... I ... [said] with a loud voice that they should come unto me, and partake of the fruit, which was desirable above all other fruit. ¹⁶ And ... they did come unto me and partake of the fruit also. ¹⁷ ... I was desirous that Laman and Lemuel should come and partake of the fruit also. ... ¹⁸ But they would not come unto me and partake of the fruit. ¹⁹ And I beheld a rod of iron, and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood. ²⁰ And I also beheld a strait and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron, even to the tree by which I stood;

In the Original Manuscript, the scribe wrote *strait* each time, in the 1830 edition, all of these were changed to *straight*. Now about 50% are spelled each way.

and it also led by the head of the fountain, unto a large and spacious field, as if it had been a world. ²¹ And I saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree by which I stood. ²² And ... they did come forth, and commence in the path which led to the tree.

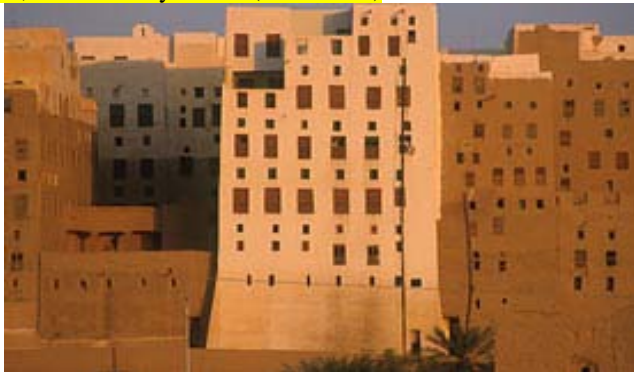
“Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life” (3 Ne 27:33)

Gate is repentance, baptism, Holy Ghost and then you are “in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life” (2 Ne 31:18) In the path → he is talking to or about members

Arabian Setting for Lehi’s Dream (BMRC 515) [show picture]

a. **Strange Building:** Wealth of South Arabia was well known. Queen of Sheba; Nibley (TBM 1:178): City folk mock villagers, and tent dwellers.

Skyscraper buildings in Yemen from 8th century BC to present. (S. Kent Brown) **Nibley:** Windows don’t begin until at least 20 or 30 feet above the ground. This is for safety, so they can’t be raided. But they are high in the air, and at night, if it is lit, that’s what you see. (TBM 1:177)



Shibam (Hadramaut), the “desert Manhattan”

b. **Traveled in darkness:** Night travel is preferred in desert.

c. **Mist:** Heavy mists and fog at times blanket the coasts of Arabia during monsoon season.

d. **Forbidden paths:** desert areas where unwary become lost.

e. **Gulf:** deep canyons (wadis)

f. **River of filthy water:** after rain, dry wadis fill with muddy water and debris

g. **Rod of Iron:** Liahona (rod of iron) guided them to Bountiful. Not straight path. If they ignored it, they had problems. Lehi did not notice rod of iron until after partaking and inviting family; he followed a man.

h. **Tree of Life:** In Bountiful, fruit trees (fig, dates)

5. Nephi’s Vision: Interpretation and Examples (1 Ne 11–15)

Tree of Life = Love of God

Mary and the birth of Christ (11:13–22)

Fruit of the Tree = eternal life

4 generations of righteousness (12:10–12)

Strait and narrow path = path to tree of life

Understand, make, and keep covenants (13; 14)

Rod of iron = word of God

Son of God teaching and healing (11:24–25)

Apostles preaching (11:34)

Great and spacious building= pride/wisdom of world

Persecution of Christ and apostles (11:26–36)

Great and abominable church (13:1–9, 20–29)

Church of the devil (14:10).

Fountain/river of Filthy Water = Hell and its depths

Wickedness and war (12:13–15)

Mist of Darkness = temptations of the devil

Apostasy, wickedness, war (12:19–23; 13:1–9, 20–29)

Terrible Gulf = justice of God

Separates wicked from tree and saints. (12:18; 15:28)

Destruction of wicked before Millennium (14:18–28)

In chap 11, Nephi desired to see what Lehi had seen and to know the interpretation of the dream. In Nephi’s vision, the Spirit spoke to Nephi as a man speaks with another. After seeing the beautiful and white tree, he saw a beautiful and white virgin.

SOED *white*: (7) fig. Morally or spiritually pure or stainless; spotless, innocent OE.

For example, white hats and black hats.

[The Spirit asked Nephi,] ¹⁶ Knowest thou the condescension of God? ¹⁷ And I said ...: I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things.

When asked why good people suffer and die young, Neal A. Maxwell, who at the time had leukemia, responded, “I do not know the meaning of all things. ... But I do know God loves us and is keenly aware of our trials and difficulties in this life. ... Sometimes when the Lord is actually lifting us up, we may feel He is letting us down.” (Gibbs, 1–3)

In TV-English, *condescension* means a condescending or patronizing attitude.

Condescension = con+descend → go down with (SOED)

“I marvel that He would descend from His throne divine, To rescue a soul so rebellious and proud as mine.”

Nephi then saw the birth of Jesus and realized that the tree of life represents the love of God; and the rod of iron was the word of God that led to the tree and the fountain of living waters.

Nephi beheld the condescension of God as he saw Christ descend to earth and live among men. Nephi saw his birth, baptism, life, teachings, healings, and crucifixion.

As Laman had refused to come to the tree and partake of the fruit, the people of the world mocked, rejected, and crucified Christ. Nephi then saw the fall of the great and spacious building which represented the pride of the world. The fall of the building represented the destruction of those who fought against the 12 apostles.

In chap 12, Nephi saw “*the land of promise; the righteousness, iniquity, and downfall of its inhabitants; the coming of the Lamb of God among them*”. He learned: (a) the river of filthy water represented the depths of hell, (b) the mists of darkness are the temptations of the devil, and (c) a “great and terrible gulf” of

justice of God separated the “wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God” (15:28).

In chap 13 and 14, Nephi saw the great apostasy with the loss of covenants, and the later restoration of the gospel and covenants of the Lord. The church of the devil fights against the church of God and is eventually destroyed.

6. Two Ways: Death or Life

Alone in Dark and Dreary Wilderness	
Large and Spacious Field	
Gate to Way of Death	Gate to Way of Life
Heed temptation (mists) Blind eyes, Harden heart	Faith, Repentance Baptism, Holy Ghost
Church of the Devil	Church of the Lamb
Broad path	Strait and Narrow Path
Eat, drink, be merry Mock, despise, persecute	Seek and do God’s will (rod), covenants, commandments
Consequences	Blessings
Depths of Hell (river) Captivity of Devil Cast out of presence of God	Eternal Life (fruit) Love of God (tree) Redeemed by Christ

What did the 4 groups of people do in the vision?

1. LOST IN MIST (TEMPTATIONS)

²³ There arose ... an exceedingly great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost.

2. ATE FRUIT BUT ASHAMED

²⁴ Others ... caught hold ... of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron. ... ²⁵ After they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed. ²⁶ ... On the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building; and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth. ²⁷ And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine; and they were ... mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who ... were partaking of the fruit. ²⁸ And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost. ...

3. IRON ROD AND STAYED

³⁰ He saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth ... and partook of the fruit of the tree.

4. WENT TO BUILDING

³¹ And he also saw other multitudes feeling [OM: *pressing*] their way towards that great and spacious building. ³² ... Many were drowned ... and many were ... wandering in strange roads. ³³ And great was the multitude that did enter into that strange building ... [and began to] point the finger of scorn at me and those that were partaking of the fruit also; but we heeded them not.

SOED *heed*: to care for, concern oneself about; to give attention to; to regard

Nephi saw a “great and a terrible gulf” “which separated the wicked from the tree of life.” (1 Ne 12:18; 15:28)

7. Four groups in the Parable of the Sower (Mt 13:4–8)

How do the 4 groups in Lehi’s vision compare with the 4 groups in this parable?

⁴ ... some seeds fell by *the way side*, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

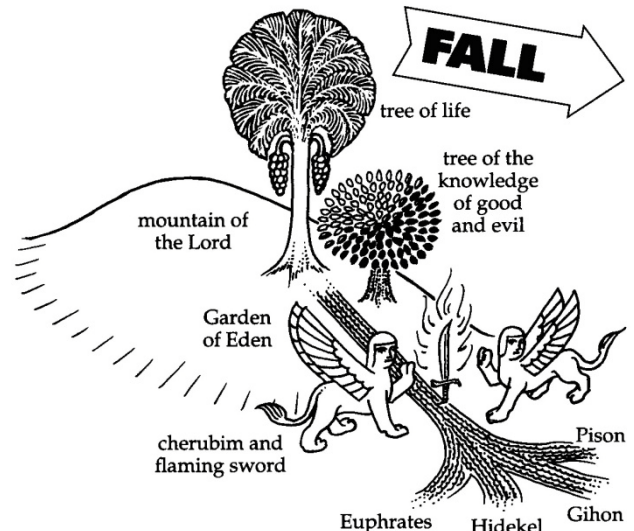
⁵ Some fell upon *stony places*, where they had not much earth: ... And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

⁷ And some fell *among thorns*; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

⁸ But other fell into *good ground*, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

8. Garden of Eden and Temple Symbolism

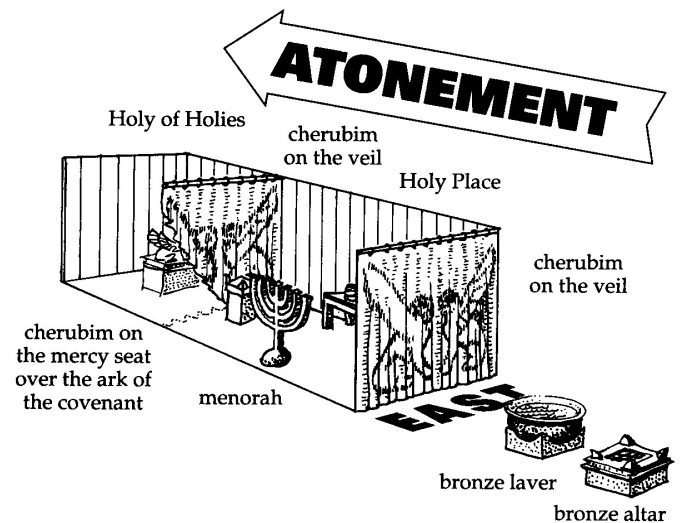
The Garden of Eden temple was on the mountain of the Lord.



Rivers run downhill → the Tree of Life was on higher ground.

After leaving the garden, Adam and Eve entered a dark and dreary world.

Nibley: The temple mountain has been flattened.... Before then it was really quite steep where the temple was built in the time of David.... The sacred way that went up to the temple was steep and narrow and went zigzag up the side.... It was slippery [when wet] and it was on rock.... So there was a railing [of iron].... They had to cling to the iron rod to get up to the temple so they wouldn’t slip and fall on the rocks. (TBM 1:174)



(Donald W. Parry, *Temples of the Ancient World*, 134–135)

The way back: In the tabernacle and temple, the high priest (1) obeyed the law of sacrifice at the bronze altar outside which represented death in the celestial world, (2) washed in the bronze laver (baptism, washings), (3) passed by the cherubim on the first curtain, and (4) entered the terrestrial world with (a) a gold candlestick (menorah) representing the Tree of Life, (b) a gold table with bread and wine (e.g., sacrament), and (c) a gold altar of incense before the veil where smoke rising represented prayers rising to heaven (e.g., prayer circle). Only a high priest could enter the Holy of Holies where the gold Ark of the Covenant was surrounded by cherubim and represented the throne and presence of God (celestial world). In the ark were symbols of the Lord's tender mercies: tablets of the law (word of God or iron rod revealed to prophet), Aaron's staff (priesthood order), and manna (bread of life that saved Israel in the wilderness).

God reveals truth that leads to wisdom: Truth about the future coming of Christ was revealed to help Lehi, Nephi, and us to be wise (know how to act by choosing good goals and means). After sharing the dream and its interpretation, Lehi and Nephi invited Laman and Lemuel to cling to the rod by keeping the commandments that they might come to the tree of life and partake of its fruit.

Inquiring of the Lord and Revelations (1 Nephi)

After Nephi's vision, he returned to the tent and found Laman and Lemuel arguing because they could not understand what Lehi had told them.

15⁸ And I said unto them: Have ye inquired of the Lord?⁹ And they said ...: We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us.¹⁰ Behold, I said ...: How is it that ye do not keep the commandments of the Lord? How is it that ye will perish, because of the hardness of your hearts?¹¹ Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said?—If ye will *not harden your hearts*, and *ask me in faith, believing* that ye shall receive, with diligence in *keeping my commandments*, surely these things shall be made known unto you.

For many years, I was more interested in knowing what a prophet learned by revelation than in how he received the revelation! Now, I look for clues about how prophets inquired of the Lord so that I may ask and receive too.

1⁵ My father, Lehi, as he went forth prayed ... with all his heart, in behalf of his people.⁶ ... There came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard much; ...⁷ ... he returned to his own house ... cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit ... he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open,

8² I [Lehi] have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision.

Scriptures include accounts of God communicating via dreams (Jacob dream of ladder to heaven; Beth-el, house of God, gate of heaven Gn 28:12; Joseph dreamed a dream Gn 37:5)

Dream= see, hear, touch, feel. Nightmares → awake sweating
Day-dream

Is the movie screen in the mind's eye or in front of them?

HOW TO BE WISE (RECEIVE REVELATION)

10¹⁷ After I, Nephi, having heard [or read] all the words of my father, concerning the things which he saw in a vision, and also the things which he spoke by the power of the Holy Ghost, which power he received by faith on the Son of God—and the Son of God was the Messiah who should come—I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well in times of old as in the time that

he should manifest himself unto the children of men.¹⁸ For he is the same yesterday, to-day, and *forever*; and the way is prepared for all men from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him.¹⁹ For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round.

Major BofM message: Like Nephi, we can receive personal revelations that are “expedient” for us to fulfill our missions. There are many examples and clues to help us know how to receive revelations.

Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you;

Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name it shall he given unto you, that is expedient for you (DC 88:63-4).

“If there is not a sufficiency written to make the case clear to the minds of the council, the president may inquire and obtain the mind of the Lord by revelation.” (D&C 102:23)

11¹ After I had desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat pondering in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain, which I never had before seen.

Nephi spoke with “the Spirit of the Lord... as a man speaketh with another” (11:11). Nephi saw what Lehi had seen, asked and answered questions, and saw Christ's future birth, baptism, ministry, death, resurrection, and visit to his descendants 400 years before their destruction.

9. Pondering: a Path to Revelation

Nephi: As I sat pondering *in mine heart* I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord (1 Ne 11:1)

He was not on his knees with his eyes closed praying.

Joseph: While we *meditated* upon these things, the Lord touched the *eyes of our understandings* and they were opened, and the glory of the Lord shone round about. (D&C 76:19)

Marion G. Romney: *Pondering* is, in my feeling, a form of prayer. (“Magnifying One's Calling in the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, Jul 1973, 89)

Holy Ghost Reveals to Mind and Heart

“I will tell you in your *mind* and in your *heart*, by the *Holy Ghost*, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now, behold, this is the *spirit of revelation*.” (D&C 8:2-3)

“The power of the Holy Ghost *carrieth it unto the hearts* of the children of men.” (2 Nephi 33:1)

“The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost,... shall teach you all things, and *bring all things to your remembrance*, whatsoever I have said unto you.” (Jn 14:26)

M. Russell Ballard to new mission presidents in the MTC:
Get the scriptures into the missionaries so the spirit can bring it to their remembrance.

“You must *study it out in your mind*; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall *feel that it is right*.⁹ But if it be not right you shall have *no such feelings*, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong...” (D&C 9:8-9)

Oliver was trying to translate the written word to his language. We do this each time we read the scriptures. Without closing our eyes or kneeling down, we can ask questions like, what

does this mean, what else could it mean, and how does it apply. Sometimes we will feel promptings to look in a dictionary or elsewhere in the scriptures.

We often use feelings to make decisions like choosing food from a menu. We “feel it is right” when we finally remember a name, but we have “no such feelings” as we consider other names.

Examples of pondering, feeling, remembering

Joseph F. Smith: “I sat in my room *pondering* over the scriptures; ² And *reflecting* upon the great atoning sacrifice... ⁵ While I was thus engaged, *my mind reverted to the writings* of the apostle Peter, ⁶ ... and as I *read* I was greatly impressed,... ¹¹ As I *pondered* over these things which are *written*, the *eyes of my understanding were opened*, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me, and I *saw* the hosts of the dead. ... ²⁵ I *marveled*, ... ²⁸ And I *wondered* at the words of Peter... ²⁹ And as I *wondered*, my *eyes were opened*, and my *understanding quickened*.” (D&C 138:1–29)

Years before the First Vision, what was Joseph pondering or studying out in his mind?

As he investigated churches, he pondered or asked questions about their teachings, ministers, and practices. He pondered the questions: “which was right” and “which should I join.”

How did feelings guide him in what to do and not to do?

He did not feel the teachings, actions, and practices matched the scriptures. Instead of feeling one was right, he had “no such feelings” and feelings of confusion or uncertainty about what to do. Each time these feelings were revelations to keep looking.

What did the Holy Ghost carry to his heart?

As he pondered, he read James 1:5 and had a strong feeling or revelation that he should pray and ask God.

What did the Holy Ghost bring to his remembrance?

Afterwards he continued to reflect or ponder on the scripture and the feeling before deciding to obey his prompting or revelation to pray. Many promptings, feelings, or revelations preceded, prepared him for, and led up to the First Vision.

¹⁰ I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it? ¹¹ ... I was one day reading [James 1:5], ... If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. ¹² Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know. ... ¹³ At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. (JS—H 1:10–13)

10. A Purpose of the Scriptures

Bruce R. McConkie: I sometimes think that one of the best-kept secrets of the kingdom is that the *scriptures open the door* to the receipt of *revelation* (*Doctrines of the Restoration*, 243).

Dallin H. Oaks: A scripture is not limited to *what it meant when it was written* but may also include *what that scripture means to a reader today*. Even more, scripture reading may also lead to current revelation on *whatever else the Lord wishes to communicate to the reader at that time*. ... By this means, we obtain access to what our Heavenly Father would have us *know*

and do in our personal lives today. That is one reason Latter-day Saints believe in *daily* scripture reading. (*Ensign*, Jan. 1995, 7-9)

Dallin H. Oaks: As a result of [continuing revelation], when we read a scripture, we do not just ask ourselves, ‘What does it mean?’ We ask ourselves, ‘What does it mean to me at this time and this circumstance?’ (BYU Devotional, 1995)

Ezra Taft Benson: The Book of Mormon ... was *written for our day*. ... We should constantly ask ourselves, ‘Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?’ (*Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 6).

¹¹⁸ And as all have not faith, *seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom*... out of the best books... by study and also by faith. (D&C 88:118; 109:7 [Kirtland temple dedication])

Conclusion

Pondering implies asking questions & considering answers

1. Liken scriptures unto self

Substitute your name

Dallin H. Oaks: As a result of [continuing revelation], when we read a scripture, we do not just ask ourselves, ‘What does it mean?’ We ask ourselves, ‘What does it mean to me at this time and this circumstance?’ (BYU Devotional, 1995)

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2. Ask wisdom questions

What should I do today and how?

I am more likely to get answers to wisdom questions, than unrelated truth questions.

“As all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom... out of the best books... by study and also by faith. (D&C 88:118; 109:7 [Kirtland temple dedication])

3. How are keywords or phrases used by the same person and others?

Search with LDS View or other scripture programs

4. Question/concern, prayer, open to random page

5. Writing, Remembering, Gratitude for answers

Personal Examples

Temple symbolism of Lehi’s vision (1 Ne 1:6-14)

⁶ As he prayed unto the Lord, there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard much; ... ⁸ And being thus overcome with the *Spirit*, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God. ⁹ And ... he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day. ¹⁰ And he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament. ¹¹ And they came down and went forth upon the face of the earth; and the first came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a book, and bade him that he should read. ¹² ... As he read, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord. ¹³ ... My father read concerning Jerusalem—that it should be destroyed, and ... many should perish

by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon.¹⁴ ... When my father had read and seen many great and marvelous things, he did exclaim many things unto the Lord; such as: Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth;

When [AS, each time] ye shall read these things... remember how merciful the Lord hath been... and ponder it in your hearts. And when [AS] ye shall receive these things,... ask God... and he will manifest the truth of it... by the power of the Holy Ghost. (Moro 10:3-4)

The Holy Ghost has brought to my remembrance the many times he had "carried things to my heart" as I was reading.

An angel told Lehi to read and showed him things related to his mission. An angel also told Laman to stop hitting his brother.

How do I know the difference between what I remember and what the Holy Ghost brings to my remembrance? If the memory invites and entices me to do good, to love God, and to love and serve neighbor, it is inspired of God (Moro 7:13).

Multimedia Prayer/Pondering: Some have suggested that prayer is like a phone call allowing us to talk and listen to God. In our day we can use Skype or other methods to communicate with images and words. Prayer is like skyping with God. He can show and tell us things as He did with Nephi, and we can do the same as we see in our mind's eye movies of what we remember, and create movies of what we desire in our imagination. Einstein often thought in images not words. He did thought experiments by creating movies in his mind. Likewise, we can review mental movies of what we remember or imagine as we think or ask God in prayer. God can see what we see in our mind and hear what we say in our mind or out loud. I have learned that adding mental movies to my pondering and prayers helps me remember and relive specific experiences that I am grateful for. It also helps be more specific in what I desire. I have also learned that the Holy Ghost can help me remember and revise these movies. As I review and relive these movies, the feelings of gratitude and desire are much stronger than if I had used only words.

What does it mean to "keep his commandments which he has given me" (Moro 4:3)? After learning about seeking truth or wisdom, I began studying words used in covenants and commandments *as contained in the scriptures*. I used the computer to look up all references to 'keep commandments' and 'commandments given.' I found the following:

While Nephi was hesitating to kill Laban, he realized that "they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save they should have the law."

(After returning with the plates of brass) "I and my father had kept the commandments wherewith the Lord had commanded us." (1 Ne 5:20)

(After marriages) "my father had fulfilled all the commandments of the Lord which had been given unto him." (1 Ne 16:8)

After the resurrection, Jesus "through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles" (Acts 1:2)

Included general commandments (Law of Moses) and personal commandments (leave, brass plates,...) that come to me directly through the spirit.

As I have studied covenant and commandment words as contained in the scriptures, my understanding has increased. This is like

taking the fruit from the tree of life and studying it. Partaking of the fruit involves living according to my new understanding and my promptings. Like Lehi, "as I partook of the fruit... it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy" (1 Ne 8:12)

Like priesthood leaders, the Book of Mormon helps or invites us to understand, make, and keep covenants. May we cling to the rod of iron by seeking to know and do the will of the Lord according to our own daily promptings of the Holy Spirit.

I know the Book of Mormon is true in my *mind* because of the many evidences I have noticed, and in my *heart* because *as* I read it in the Lord's way, I am filled with the spirit of the Lord. The word of God in the Book of Mormon is like a seed that when planted and nourished grows and bears fruit. As I nourish the plan, it enlarges my soul, enlightens my understanding, and is delicious to me.

I know the scriptures are the doorway to personal revelations, because I have received many that have helped me know how to act or what to do as I have experienced the challenges of life. I have been grateful for the Lord's tender mercies in my life.

NOTE: The yellow shading shows what is NOT on the handout that I use in class. The handout makes it possible to share information while only briefly referring to it in class. The handout and any other supplements for the lesson are at www.sviewp.com.

Sources:

- BMRC = Dennis L. Largey, *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*.
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- OM = Original Manuscript
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- Baja = www.achoiceiland.com

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- Sorenson = John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*.
- *Reexploring* = John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, <http://mi.byu.edu>
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- Tved-Heb = John Tvedtnes, "The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon," chapter 8 in *Rediscovering*; <http://mi.byu.edu>

Other sources

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- KJV King James Version of the Bible.
- NIV = New International Version of the Bible
- TPIS = *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*
- SOED = Shorter Oxford English Dictionary
- OED = Oxford English Dictionary
- BDB = *Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
- Bauer = Walter Bauer, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*
- EJ = *Encyclopedia Judaica*
- Rona = Daniel Rona, www.israelrevealed.com/comp-sup-r.htm
- MM = Meridian Magazine, Gospel Doctrine, www.ldsmag.com
- beardall2000.com/gospdoct.shtml; www.gospeldoctrine.com