Lesson 3
1 Nephi 8–11; 12:16–18; 15

To keep the study materials for this lesson within a usable limit, I have focused on chapter 11, referring to other chapters in the context of that one.

1 Nephi 11

Verse 1: Compare the personage who responds to Nephi’s desire with the one who responded to Lehi (1 Nephi 1:5–6). Are they the same being?

How does Nephi’s desire to know what his father had seen (see 1 Nephi 10:17), presumably a desire expressed in prayer, differ from his prayer in 1 Nephi 2:16?

Three things seem to precipitate Nephi’s vision: he wants to know what his father has seen, he believes that God can reveal that to him, and he is pondering in his heart. The word ponder originally meant “to weigh,” and based on that meaning it came to mean “to weigh something mentally.” What meanings does the word heart have in the scriptures? What does it mean to weigh something in your heart? What might Nephi have been weighing in his heart?

Why does this vision occur on a high mountain? How is Nephi’s experience like that of others? Is there any significance to that parallel?
**Verses 2–7:** The Spirit already knows the answers to the questions that he asks Nephi in verses 2–4, so why does he ask? Having asked Nephi what he wants and what he believes, the Spirit then praises God before proceeding with the revelation (verse 6). Why?

The word *hosanna* means “save, please” or “save now.” Why does the Spirit’s address to Nephi, a praise of God, begin with *hosanna*? Does the fact that the second clause begins with *for*, meaning “because,” help us understand the cry of *hosanna*?

According to the Spirit, what will explain why Nephi will see the vision he wants to see?

**Verse 7:** The Spirit tells Nephi that he will see the tree that his father saw. Then he will see and bear record of the Son of God descending from heaven. And he begins the verse by telling Nephi that this combination of things will be a sign. A sign of what?

The Spirit uses the word *witness* to mean “see” in this verse rather than to mean “testify” or “bear record.” Why does he use the word *witness* rather than the word *see*?

**Verses 8–10:** Before Lehi saw the tree, he went through a dark and dreary space and a large and spacious field (1 Nephi 8:7–9). Why do you think those things are omitted from Nephi’s experience?

Is it significant that Nephi says the tree he saw was *like* the tree his father saw (verse 8)? What tree does Nephi see? What justifies your answer?
Why is beauty a representation of good and godliness? Is there a connection between truth, goodness, and beauty?

How does Nephi know that the tree is precious (verse 9)?

**Verse 10:** Here the Spirit asks the same question that he asked in verse 2. Why? Is there some sense in which this is the beginning of a second vision? If so, can you explain the connection of the two visions?

**Verse 11:** What has Nephi seen so far? When he asks for “the interpretation thereof,” what does he want to have explained for him? As you read the interpretation, compare it to what Lehi says about the tree (1 Nephi 8:11–12).

Nephi identifies the Spirit as the Spirit of the Lord. Does that phrase refer to the Holy Ghost or to the Son?

Why does Nephi tell us that he spoke with the Spirit as one person speaks with another? How is that relevant to this particular story?

How does the vision that follows correlate with Lehi’s vision, and if what follows is an interpretation of the beautiful tree, what does that tell us about Lehi’s vision?

**Verses 12–15:** Do you see any significance in the repetition of look in verses 8 and 12?

As you read these verses and those that follow, keep in mind that they are the answer to the question “What does the tree mean?” Ask yourself how this vision answers that question. How does this interpretation fit into Lehi’s vision? Why doesn’t Lehi’s vision include this interpretation?
What do you make of the fact that verses 13 and 15 describe the virgin in the same language used in verses 8–9 to describe the tree?

In the Old Testament, the prophets frequently have to deal with people who worship the goddess Asherah, whose symbol is a pole or tree. In Canaanite religion, Asherah was the queen of heaven, the consort of El, and the mother of the gods. Does Nephi’s vision help us understand better why the Israelites might have found Canaanite religion so easy to adopt? One LDS author has argued that the asherah was legitimately part of preexilic Hebrew worship and that Nephi’s vision reflects that fact: Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=9&num=2&id=223.

An angel appears before Nephi (verse 14) and continues the pattern of asking Nephi questions about his beliefs and, now, what he has seen. What is the point of that pattern?

**Verses 16–18:** As used here, the word *condescension* means “a voluntary stoop or descent from one’s rightful position.” Why does the angel ask Nephi about the condescension of God rather than about something else? It is relatively easy to see what condescension has to do with the part of the vision that is about to come, but does it have anything to do with what Nephi has already seen?

How is Nephi’s answer, “I know that he loveth his children,” an answer to the angel’s question (verse 17)?

Why does Nephi add, “I do not know the meaning of all things”? Since no human being does, that is a strange thing to say.
How is verse 18 related to the question of verse 16?

**Verses 19–24:** There is a kind of empty spot in the vision here: the virgin is carried away and then, after a while, re-appears, and as far as we know Nephi sees nothing in the interim (verse 19). Why do you think the vision might have been given in that way? Why not proceed directly to the part of the vision that we see in verse 20?

Having shown Nephi the birth of Jesus, the angel asks (verse 21) whether Nephi now understands the meaning of the tree. How is the birth of Christ the interpretation of or explanation of the tree?

Having seen the birth, Nephi says that the tree is the love of God (verse 22). How does he get that from what he has seen? What does it mean that the love of God “sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men”? (Compare Romans 5:5.)

In verse 8 Nephi saw that the tree was the most beautiful thing and the most white, in other words, the brightest thing. In verse 9 he saw that it was most precious. Now Nephi sees that it is most desirable (verse 22), and the angel says that it is the most joyous thing to the soul (verse 23). How are these things connected to each other? What does “joyous to the soul” mean? Does it mean the same as “joyous for the soul”?

How is verse 24 related to the verses that precede it? For example, does it explain what the angel says in verse 23?

**Verse 25:** How do the fountain of living waters and the tree of life both symbolize the love of God?
Why do you think that Nephi doesn’t mention the contrasting river of filthy water in this part of his account, though he seems to have seen it? (Compare 1 Nephi 8:13; 15:26–29.)

Do you think that Nephi saw, as Lehi did, his family in his vision? (Compare 1 Nephi 8:14–18.) If so, why doesn’t he mention them? If not, why not?

**Verse 26:** Why are the vision of Christ’s birth (verses 17–23) and the vision of his life (verses 27–34) both preceded by the angel describing them to Nephi as “the condescension of God”? In other words, why does verse 26 repeat verse 16?

**Verse 27:** Is there any particular reason that the name “Lamb of God” is used in this context?

**Verses 28–29:** Notice that the chronological order of the elements of the vision doesn’t correspond to the historical order. What does that tell us about visions? About historical order?

Why might there be a break in the vision at this point, with a kind of end to the vision, followed by a new beginning in verse 30?

**Verse 30:** When did the event of this verse occur?

**Verse 31:** Why does the vision include this relatively lengthy description of the physical and psychological healings that Jesus did? How were they important to his mission of salvation?

**Verses 32–33:** Why does Nephi see a vision of the crucifixion of Jesus, but not of his resurrection?
Verses 34–36: Verse 35 tells us that the building is the wisdom of the world. If we compare that to 1 Nephi 8:26–27, we see that the world with its wisdom engages in derision of those who are outside. What does that mean? 1 Nephi 12:18 says that the building is human vain imaginations and pride. How do those three versions of the building fit with one another?

How do we participate in the “wisdom” of the world?

Why does the angel describe the occupants of the building as the house of Israel (verse 35)? Don’t the events to which this corresponds occur after the loss of the ten tribes?

What does “pride of the world” mean here (verse 36)?

All three of these verses speak of those who fight against the apostles. What fight are they speaking of? Why is it a fight against the apostles rather than against God?