

Seeing Eye to Eye: Nephi's and John's Intertwining Visions of the Tree of Life

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This study will discuss the remarkable interconnectedness of John's vision in the book of Revelation¹ and Nephi's vision in 1 Nephi 11–14 of the Book of Mormon. In order to understand the importance and value to Latter-day Saints of the consistent intertwining of these two prophetic visions, some background is necessary.

For Latter-day Saints, one of the valuable contributions of the restored gospel as taught by Joseph Smith is the overarching view that the same gospel found in the New Testament has been taught from the beginning of history and continues to be taught in the same way in modern times. In other words, Joseph Smith revealed that Old Testament prophets understood the same gospel truths that would later be taught by Christ and the apostles in New Testament times:

Some say the kingdom of God was not set up until the day of Pentecost. . . ; but I say, in the name of the Lord, that the kingdom of God was set up on the earth from the days of Adam to the present time.

Whenever there has been a righteous man on earth unto whom God revealed His word and gave power and authority to administer in His name, and where there is a priest of God—a minister who has power and authority from God to administer in the ordinances of the gospel and officiate in the priesthood of God, there is the kingdom of God. . . . Where there is a prophet, a priest, or a righteous man unto whom God gives His oracles, there is the kingdom of God.²

Many Latter-day Saints may not fully appreciate the foundational importance and uniqueness of this grand, panoramic view of God's dealings with mankind. Current (and by now long-standing and widely accepted) trends in biblical scholarship espouse a very different viewpoint, namely that the Old Testament religion (or religions) was something completely separate and different from the gospel revealed by Christ and his apostles.³ However, a Latter-day Saint understanding of biblical scripture provides a lens that allows one to see a greater, more overarching scriptural unity than is typically possible. Through this lens, the words of ancient prophets and the organization of Old Testament religion are not seen as inferior to the words of later apostles and teachers but instead are seen as sharing a matching, complementing message. Similarities in theme and symbol across time and space are not surprising but are instead expected. The prophets from the beginning and in all ages learned the same gospel from the same God, occasionally received similar visions although divided by thousands of miles or hundreds of years, and worked together over disparate times and places to provide an understanding of that gospel message for God's people. The teachings of the prophets unite in the scriptures to bear witness of each other and of the reality that it was indeed God who was speaking to his people in each time period. Since God has worked with prophets in a similar fashion from the beginning and has continued his work in New Testament times, then Latter-day Saints would expect that message to continue in other places (such as in the Americas, as recorded in the Book of Mormon) and in modern times as well.⁴

These complementing prophetic messages from the Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, and modern times fulfill a prophecy of Isaiah:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy

watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: *for they shall see eye to eye*, when the Lord shall bring again Zion. (Isaiah 52:7–8, emphasis added)

In other words, from a Latter-day Saint viewpoint, the restoration of the gospel allows all to see how the messages of prophets complement and complete each other and how these messages are intertwined, forming one great whole as if the prophets were “seeing each other” across time and space.

The most explicit reference to this intertwining of messages is found at the end of Nephi’s vision in 1 Nephi 11–14. Although Nephi had seen a vision explaining the future unfolding of God’s plan of salvation, he refrained from sharing the remainder of his vision and the final events leading up to and beyond the second coming of Christ. After Nephi had described much of the future destiny of his people, the restoration of Christ’s gospel, and the ideological battle that would occur between truth and error in the last days, he then provided the reason for not continuing his prophecy further:

And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld a man, and he was dressed in a white robe. And the angel said unto me: Behold one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Behold, he shall see and write the remainder of these things; yea, and also many things which have been. And he shall also write concerning the end of the world. Wherefore, the things which he shall write are just and true; . . . And behold, the things which this apostle of the Lamb shall write are many things which thou hast seen; and behold, the remainder shalt thou see. But the things which thou shalt see hereafter thou shalt not write; for the Lord God hath ordained the apostle of the Lamb of God that he should write them. And also others who have been, to them hath he shown all things, and they have written them; and they are sealed up to come forth in their purity, according to the truth which is in the Lamb, in the own due time of the Lord, unto the house of Israel. And I, Nephi, heard and bear record, that the name of the apostle of the Lamb was John, according to the word of the angel. And behold, I, Nephi, am forbidden that I should write the remainder of the things which I saw and heard; wherefore the things which I have written sufficeth me; and I have written but a small part of the things which I saw. (1 Nephi 14:18–28)

Intriguingly, Nephi literally saw in vision—or saw eye to eye with—the prophet/apostle whose vision would be connected to his own. Nephi’s message purposefully and explicitly points across time and space to another recording of a similar vision, effectively tying together the two times and the two spaces. In fact, since Nephi is speaking to modern-day readers, he effectively ties together three times and spaces to connect the past (John⁵ in his Old World setting), the present (Nephi in his New World setting), and the future (modern-day audiences, in their worldwide settings) into a great, unified whole.

The modern reader might wish that Nephi—with his simple, straightforward style of communication—had been permitted to complete the record of his vision, providing clarity to John’s challenging presentation in the book of Revelation. Perhaps the gap in Nephi’s own communication was designed to strengthen the importance of John’s revelation and to ensure that those who wished to understand the unfolding of God’s plan would be required to study both revelations and use them together. If John’s vision is understood, according to Doctrine and Covenants, section 77, as an overview of the history of the world’s temporal existence, then it would appear that John passed almost entirely over a crucial section of that history, what Latter-day Saints know as the latter days, the time period in which the gospel is restored. John did not omit the restoration entirely but painted it in very broad strokes, focusing instead almost completely on the “end of days,” the winding-up scenes of the violent clash between good and evil. Latter-day Saints have typically connected the vision of Revelation 14:6 to the restoration of the gospel (“I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them

that dwell on the earth”), but the intertwining of John’s and Nephi’s visions would explain why more of the important restoration events were not included in John’s vision. His vision was designed to complement and lead to Nephi’s vision. Each vision is incomplete without the other, and together they give a comprehensive and complete view of God’s plan for mankind in the last days.

A more detailed look at the themes and wording of John’s and Nephi’s revelations shows a satisfyingly deep interconnectedness between these two grand visions. Both help clarify and add power to the overarching message. The remainder of this study will analyze five areas of connection between the two visions, both in wording and in theme, and will take a deeper look at what that interconnectedness might reveal in a reading of both Revelation 21–22 and 1 Nephi 11–14. These areas will focus on (1) the use of the title *twelve apostles*, (2) the use of the title *Lamb*, (3) the angelic messenger, (4) the difference between the heavenly city and the worldly city, and (5) the waters, the road, and the tree of life. At times I will look at the entire vision of John in comparison to Nephi’s vision, but most often I will focus on the last two chapters of John’s revelation, which delineate his vision of the heavenly city and of the tree of life.

The use of the title *twelve apostles*

In the New Testament the term *apostle* (*apostolos* in Greek) and related terms are used ninety-five times and are found regularly throughout the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles. However, the phrase *twelve apostles* is much less common, appearing only four times in the New Testament. Three instances found in the Gospels describe the calling of the apostles by Christ, yet the Gospels appear to use those words less as a title than as a description of the number that were ordained. John, in Revelation 21:14, is the only author to use *twelve apostles* without referring to their original calling by Christ.

Why did John take pains to connect the number twelve with the apostles? The number twelve ties several symbols together in the concluding chapters of John’s vision. John uses the number twelve to overtly connect the apostles with the wall of the holy Jerusalem, with the twelve tribes of Israel, and with the angels who guard the gates of the city. Revelation 21:12–14 states that the holy Jerusalem

had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

A few verses later, John tells the reader that the city measured twelve thousand furlongs (12,000 *stadia*, which is roughly equivalent to 1,400 miles),⁶ with the proportions of the city forming an exact cube (see Revelation 21:16), and reminding the reader of the dimensions of the holy of holies. John then (see Revelation 21:17) gives the height (or possibly the width) of the wall surrounding the city as 144 cubits (probably a little over two hundred feet high, or wide). These measurement numbers (12,000 and 144) remind the reader of John’s previous description of the 144,000 servants of God—12,000 representatives from each of the twelve tribes (see Revelation 7:1–8).

Thus for John, the twelve apostles are connected to the twelve tribes of Israel, and both of these are connected to the angelic guards at the twelve gates. The foundations of the wall surrounding the city were marked with the names of the apostles. Symbolically, the apostles hold the weight of the structure, which (1) provides protection to those inside the city (if indeed protection is necessary in a celestial city), (2) defines the limits of the city or delineates where the sacred space of the city begins, and (3) prevents individuals from entering unless they pass properly through the gates. The angels serve similar purposes: they stand at the division between sacred and

profane space, ensure that the space inside the city remains holy by protecting it from impurities, and grant access to those who wish to be citizens of the city. The names of the twelve tribes are also inscribed on the gates, which grant or prevent access to the city. The gates provide a solemn reminder to those who approach of the divine authority that protects and sanctifies the heavenly Jerusalem. Lest the barrier and the guardians seem designed to unfairly exclude, John very clearly states toward the end of his revelation that the choice to be righteous or unjust, to be inside or outside the city, is up to the individual's agency; all may choose to accept or reject the requirements that must be followed to gain entrance to the city: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Revelation 22:14–15).

So the twelve apostles, the twelve angels, and the twelve tribes are all linked together, pointing inward, toward the greater blessings of the city. Indeed the traditional image of the pearly gates of heaven, with Saint Peter waiting to cast judgment and grant or deny access, comes directly from this description in Revelation. Deuteronomy 32:8 describes the house of Israel in the role of divider between the inside and outside: "When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel." These bounds sound somewhat similar to the boundaries of the wall surrounding the holy Jerusalem. However, the role of these judges is a supporting one, designed to grant access to the blessings and joy inside the city.

At the center of the city is found the tree of life, with twelve different fruits for the twelve tribes that enter therein. John takes care to mention time in his description of the tree, that the twelve fruits produce every month. Time is a surprising element to be found in the eternal city. Does John here intend to indicate that the destinies of the twelve apostles and of the twelve tribes of Israel (the leadership of God's Old and New Testament organizations) are to be bound together inextricably in the eternal cycles of time? These three elements—the apostles, the tribes, and the angels—certainly seem to be given a permanent abode in the holy city.⁷

In Nephi's vision, as in John's vision, the apostles are given the title of the *twelve apostles*, connecting the numerical image with the office. In fact, the Book of Mormon shows remarkable consistency in its use of the title *apostle*. When Nephi first sees the apostles in vision, he simply refers to "twelve others." Only after the angel has taught him the correct name for the twelve, *apostles*, does he begin to use that term, as 1 Nephi 11:34 illustrates: "For thus were the twelve called by the angel of the Lord." While it is impossible to know exactly what word the angel taught Nephi for the Greek word *apostle* (although the angel could simply have taught the Greek), it is clear that *apostle* was a completely new term for him. Along with the first instance, Nephi uses the title *twelve apostles* ten times during his vision, and he never names the apostles without the number twelve accompanying his description—except where he refers to John alone (three times).

After Nephi's use of the term *apostle*, taught him by his angelic guide, the word completely drops from Nephite usage through most of the rest of the Book of Mormon. Even Christ does not use the term when he visits the Nephites, simply referring to "the twelve." Thereafter, when Mormon refers to either the apostles or to the twelve disciples chosen by Christ in the Americas, he also refers to them simply as "the twelve whom Jesus chose." Indeed, the title *apostle* only shows up three more times in the Book of Mormon, all in Moroni's writings (see Mormon 9:18; Ether 12:41; Moroni 2:2). Why would this term have been used so freely by Nephi in his vision, then disappear for hundreds of years, only to show up once again in the writings of Moroni at the end of the Book of Mormon?⁸ Mormon could be understood as claiming that it was only after he had finished compiling the Book of Mormon that he found and read the small plates, which contain Nephi's vision and introduce the new word *apostle* into Nephi's language (see Words of Mormon 1:3). If this reading is correct, then the only prophet who would have

had the chance to read and be influenced by them, after he placed them with the rest of his compilation, would be his son Moroni (see Words of Mormon 1:5). Thus when the word *apostle* returns to Book of Mormon parlance, it does so with perfect timing.⁹

Does Nephi use the number twelve to connect multiple images together, as John did? As might be expected, 1 Nephi 12:7–9 establishes the connection between the twelve apostles and between another set of twelve disciples chosen to represent the Nephites (much as 12,000 representatives were chosen to represent each tribe of Israel in John’s vision). These two sets of twelve representatives (the apostles and the Nephite disciples) are then connected to the twelve tribes of Israel:

And I also saw and bear record that the Holy Ghost fell upon twelve others; and they were ordained of God, and chosen. And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the twelve disciples of the Lamb, who are chosen to minister unto thy seed. And he said unto me: Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb? Behold they are they who shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, the twelve ministers of thy seed shall be judged of them; for ye are of the house of Israel. And these twelve ministers whom thou beholdest shall judge thy seed. And, behold, they are righteous forever; for because of their faith in the Lamb of God their garments are made white in his blood. (1 Nephi 12:7–9)

In these verses not only does Nephi connect similar images with the number twelve, he also emphasizes the same role that John emphasized in his vision: the role of judge and gatekeeper. Additionally, John mentioned those who were outside the walls of the city, from which the gatekeepers had to protect those inside the city—“for without are dogs, and sorcerers,” and so forth. With even greater clarity, Nephi describes a real battle between the twelve apostles and those opposed to them in 1 Nephi 11:36:

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 exceedingly great. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The image of the twelve apostles as guardians and protectors of that which is holy links Nephi’s and John’s visions and strengthens the imagery employed in both.

The title Lamb

The only places in the New Testament where Jesus Christ is given the title *Lamb* are the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation. Both instances of the title in the Gospel of John appear in direct quotations of John the Baptist. As John the Apostle was originally a disciple of John the Baptist, it is likely that this title originated with the latter. In the book of Revelation, the title *Lamb* is used twenty-six times. Unsurprisingly, the Book of Mormon’s usage mirrors these proportions. While Nephi is not the only Book of Mormon prophet to use the title *Lamb*, he uses it, particularly in his vision, much more frequently than any other prophet. The first time the title shows up in the Book of Mormon is in 1 Nephi 10, when Nephi summarizes his father’s words regarding Jesus’s baptism (see 1 Nephi 10:10). Since it is not a direct quotation, it is unclear whether the title was really used by Lehi or whether Nephi simply used the title in summarizing his father’s teachings. However, it is interesting that the setting centers around Jesus’s baptism by John, who was the first to use the title in the New Testament.

After this single mention, Nephi uses the title fifty-six times over the course of the four chapters that compose his vision. He uses the title four additional times in his writings, all of them again connected to Jesus’s baptism by John the Baptist (see 2 Nephi 31:4–6; 33:14). The title is then used only nine more times in the entire Book of Mormon

—twice by Alma (7:14; 13:11), once by Amulek (Alma 34:36), once by Mormon (Helaman 6:5), and five times by Moroni (Mormon 9:2–3, 6; Ether 13:10–11). It is interesting to note again a possible influence of Nephi’s writings on Moroni. Still more striking is the fact that two of the times Moroni uses the title occur in his description of the New Jerusalem. More germane to this paper, however, is the overwhelming similarity of the number of attestations in Nephi’s and John’s visions.

A review of how John and Nephi use the title shows great variety. They both use the title so pervasively in their visions that it is almost interchangeable with the title *Christ*. However, two prevalent themes stand out in both records: (1) the cleansing blood of the Lamb and (2) the triumphant power of the Lamb to overcome evil (most often witnessed in battle scenes). Tying these themes back to Old Testament use of the lamb symbol may indicate why Nephi and John chose to emphasize the title so often. The two strongest Old Testament connections for the symbol of the lamb are the temple setting (in which ritual impurity is overcome through the sacrifice of the lamb), and the Passover meal (in which the children of Israel triumphed over the ultimate symbol of worldliness, Egypt, and the ultimate symbol of mortality, the death of the firstborn). John and Nephi seem to be drawing their readers back to the connection between temple rituals and ordinances, pointing toward the true Lamb whose blood can remove sin and who will triumph over all enemies.

The angelic messenger

While many prophetic visions occur on mountains, the scriptures describe the prophet being carried by God to an exceedingly high mountain in only four of these visions (those received by Moses, Ezekiel, John, and Nephi). All these visions feature a heavenly guide who interacts with the visionary, a consistent feature of apocalyptic literature. In Moses’s case, the guide is God himself. In the other cases, angelic guides walk the prophets through their visions, continually commanding the prophet to “look” or “behold.” In his Old Testament vision of the holy city and its temple, Ezekiel is commanded multiple times to look, hear, and then teach that which he has seen: “And the man said unto me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee; for to the intent that I might shew them unto thee art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel” (Ezekiel 40:4; see 44:5). The role of the angel who shows John the holy city is emphasized as well in Revelation 21:9–10: “And there came unto me one of the seven angels. . . saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem.” John later emphasizes not just that he saw things in his vision, but that the angel showed them to him; he overtly mentions his discussion with the angelic guide numerous times.

Nephi’s description of the angel’s guidance is even more marked. Nephi’s guide uses direct, forceful commands to lead the prophet to what he should see. Nephi is commanded to “look” with an intense, urgent emphasis on action thirteen different times in his short vision. At the end of the experience, he is commanded to record the vision. The reader is never allowed to forget the presence of the angelic guide, as Nephi provides direct quotations preceded by the speech indicator “and he said” or “and I said” thirty-nine times during his vision.

Why is the presence of the angelic guide so important to the prophets in these visions, particularly in the visions of Nephi and John? First, both visions feature the battle between good and evil, and the presence of the angel could serve as a reminder that God is in control of all things. Second, the presence of the angel might lend authority to the vision and authenticate it as emanating from God. Third, it might be assumed that since John has to pass by angels to enter the holy city Jerusalem, he may need an angelic guide to grant him entrance; similarly, Nephi may need a guide to be able to witness Christ as he does in 1 Nephi 11. Fourth, the angel may serve to remind the reader of the importance of the teacher-student relationship: as the angel tells Nephi to look, the reader is also drawn to the same vision by the prophet’s description. (Such commands encourage action, which can be rewarded

by new views and new revelations.) Finally, the angel consistently points the prophet away from himself toward the important message that the angel is delivering; thus the angel may exist in part to remind the reader that there is more to the scriptures than words on a page or images in the mind. The point of scriptural texts is to cause the reader to see beyond the text to that which truly is. If readers fail to do so, then the text or the vision has failed in its divine purpose.

The heavenly city and the worldly city

Both John's and Nephi's visions are strongly dualistic, another consistent characteristic of apocalyptic literature.¹⁰ Throughout John's vision, the battle between good and evil is portrayed by symbolic opposites: the lamb and the dragon; the wicked city Babylon and the holy city Jerusalem; the mother of harlots and the bride of the Lamb. These last two pairs of opposites may actually be equivalent, since the mother of all harlots is equated with the wicked city, while the bride is equated with the holy city. According to Revelation 17:5, "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth" was written on the former's forehead.¹¹ Interestingly, in this instance a name isn't inscribed on something permanent and glorious—as when the names of the tribes of Israel are written upon the gates, indicating the permanent status of Israel in Jerusalem. Instead, the name of the city is inscribed on the woman, who is mortal and changing, who will not last. The fate of Israel is tied up with the eternal destiny of the holy city, while the fate of the city Babylon is tied up with the infamy and doom of the mother of harlots. In opposition to the harlot, who represents the city Babylon, the angel promises John that he will show him the bride, the Lamb's wife—but when the angel carries him in the spirit to a high mountain, what he sees is the city of the New Jerusalem (see Revelation 21:9–10).

Why are women equated to cities in these passages? Are both women and cities symbolic of life at its most beautiful but also potentially at its worst? While cities can be the breeding ground for the worst of behaviors as they bring self-serving interests into close proximity, they can also be a perfect practicum for celestial, cooperative, unselfish, Zion-like living. For the prophet/apostle, perhaps a beautiful, pure bride symbolizes all that is most cherished and beautiful in life, including the power and strength of covenants with the Lord that have the ability to endure forever. On the opposite end of the spectrum, perhaps the mother of harlots symbolizes the worst and most ugly betrayals of those covenants and just how disconnected from joy and beauty mankind can become when worldly pleasures take precedence over covenants with God. Interestingly, both titles describe relationships in which procreative powers can and will be used. One of the women uses the powers indiscriminately and is destroyed for that abuse, while the other uses them within the boundaries of covenant marriage. Julie M. Smith's and Kevin Barney's papers in this collection both discuss the possibility that Lehi's tree of life, replaced by Mary in Nephi's vision, points to the divine feminine. Perhaps the mother of harlots could then represent the perversion of the true concept of this divine feminine, as seen in the apostate worship of fertility figures such as Asherah.

The images in Nephi's vision are just as strongly dualistic as those in John's, pitting the great and spacious building against the tree of life, the fountain of waters against the dirty river, the rod of iron against the mists of darkness, and most importantly, the church of God against the great and abominable church. Nephi even goes so far as to make all this dualism explicit: "Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth" (1 Nephi 14:10). These statements and images are so strong in Nephi's vision that I have heard some Latter-day Saint readers express concern about the uncompromising, unbending nature of the pronouncement that anyone who is not of the church of the Lamb is of the church of the devil. However, when viewed in its connection with the vision of John and other apocalyptic literature, this duality is not surprising.

Both visions lead up to the great battle at the end of days. Evil must be shown in its darkest hues to ensure that the saints will choose to be on the side that will ultimately win. Despite the chaos and intensity of the battle in both visions, God is clearly in charge, and good conquers evil. Thus Nephi proclaims in 1 Nephi 14:14–15:

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory. And it came to pass that I beheld that the wrath of God was poured out upon that great and abominable church.

The water, the way, and the tree of life

The similarities between Nephi's and John's visions are most striking in the central symbols of both visions. In John's vision, the road (or way), the tree, and the river run together and appear to be intimately connected: "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life" (Revelation 22:1–2). It is difficult to ascertain exactly how the tree, the river, and the street fit together here and where they are situated. All mesh together and seem to become almost one. Something similar happens as Nephi's vision combines three dominant symbols from Lehi's dream, all described in one verse in 1 Nephi 11:25: "And it came to pass that I beheld that the rod of iron, which my father had seen, was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; which waters are a representation of the love of God; and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God." The tree of life and the fountain of waters are clearly equated with each other, and both represent the love of God. This representation gains greater clarity with Nephi's interpretation that the iron rod, and the road or way that follows alongside it, is the "word of God" (1 Nephi 15:24). John's declaration that Christ is the Word (see John 1:1–14) and his claim that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16) reveal that the symbols of Christ and the love of God become just as tightly interwoven in Nephi's vision as in John's.

The urban setting of the heavenly Jerusalem is certainly not reminiscent of the rustic image of the Garden of Eden. However, the symbols of tree and water in the midst of an urban landscape, no matter how dazzling, soften the angular sharpness of the city and remind the reader that this city is welcoming, a place to be lived in. Real people can enter there, receive healing medicine, and bask in the light that Christ provides. The road, the tree, and the river center on God's throne in the city, showing the true focal point of the entire vision. Revelation 21–22 shows itself to be a fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision in which the river originates under the throne or ark of the covenant at the center of the temple. In Ezekiel's vision, trees grow along the river with medicine to heal the nations, just as in Revelation. The fruit of Nephi's tree of life is no less potent to heal all wounds as it grants the joy of the love of God.

All other interconnected symbols of Nephi's and John's visions have pointed inward to these consummate symbols. The apostles, the walls, the gates, the angels, the guide, and the very presence of the city all point to God and the Lamb found within. Just as Christ called himself "the Truth, the Way, and the Life," so do the pure river, the road, and the tree testify of the multifaceted, eternal nature of God.

Conclusion

This paper began by discussing the prophecy that the watchmen would "see eye to eye." That type of seeing and understanding is not limited just to the prophets but extends to all the disciples of Christ. It is not limited just to seeing and understanding each other but, moreover, extends to seeing and understanding God and Christ. All must see and be seen; all must seek to understand and be understood. All must seek to be one, as Christ taught in

the great Intercessory Prayer. In his contribution to this volume, Eric Huntsman writes of the unveiling of Christ, and Adam Miller has written elsewhere about the decentering effect of seeing even another human being.¹² When we simply imagine another being we can be full of confidence that we understand her or him. But when we see the other individual face to face, we are instead confronted with the disconcerting awareness that we are not just seeing, but that we are also being seen by someone with whom we are not completely one. As Christ is exposed to our eyes we must of necessity be exposed to his eyes—in an extremely personal, intimate encounter. In that moment of seeing another face-to-face, we realize that we are not at the center of the universe but that others also “see.” Alma’s prophetic iteration of the tree of life is even more personal. In this example, we must not only come face-to-face with the tree and partake of it as Lehi and Nephi did; we must also let it grow within us, and let it expose us from the inside out so that it can change us into holy “trees” as well. The sacrament, correctly taken, performs a similar function as an extremely personal encounter with Deity, with the bread and water of life, which we must take into ourselves to be transformed by it. This is the type of unveiling of Christ to which the revelations of John, Nephi, and other prophets lead us.

As Nephi sees Christ descend to the earth, he is humbled to learn just how much he still does not comprehend of the condescension of God. In John’s vision, the saints of God live in the glorious but ever so revealing and humbling light of the love of Christ for all eternity. This is the unity for which Christ prayed in John 17. This is the unity that requires a willingness to risk our own deeply cherished self-concept, to lose ourselves in charity that “seeketh not her own” (1 Corinthians 13:5) so as to find ourselves, become one with others, and become whole. This is the unity that must be practiced in the church community, among close friends, and within the family as we seek to see eye to eye. These two intertwining visions—Nephi giving way to John and John giving way to Nephi—teach the interconnectedness that must exist in the heavenly city as the disciples of Christ approach the tree of life and partake of its fruit.

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NOTES

1. For a brief discussion of John as author of the book of Revelation, see note 5.
2. “History of Joseph Smith,” *The Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star* 20/28 (July 10, 1858): 438.
3. See, for example, John Day, “Canaan, Religion of,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:831–37. It should be noted that the views represented in this paper are possible *only* through the lens of additional, modern revelation. Biblical commentators relying on only the biblical texts work without that lens and thus come to differing and valuable conclusions.

4. This paper works from the unifying witness of the Book of Mormon and focuses on unity between disparate texts. Although not the goal of this paper, understanding the differences between the texts, occasioned by the significantly different historical and cultural influences at the time of their production, also has significant importance if modern readers are to avoid the danger of incorrectly imposing their modern viewpoints on ancient texts.

5. In this paper I use Nephi's identification of the apostle John as the author of the book of Revelation, along with traditional identifications of the apostle John as author of the Gospel of John. For a discussion of the well-considered questions raised by modern biblical scholarship about the authorship of Revelation, the Gospel of John, and the Epistles of John, see Jeffrey L. Staley, "John," in *Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000). A lengthy presentation of the discussion is outside the purposes of this paper. Some Latter-day Saints aware of the scholarly discussion continue to support the position of the apostle John as author of the Gospel, the Epistles, and Revelation. Another position explored by other Latter-day Saints is to view the apostle John as the source of primary content that led to the final composition of these biblical books, but not as the final author of the books in their present form.

6. If the measurement of twelve thousand furlongs was intended to give the circumference of the city, then the city would be close to 350 miles on each side, making it almost twice the size of the state of Utah!

7. It may be helpful to mention some important connections between the symbols discussed here and the symbols found in other prophetic images in scriptures—to show that other prophets also saw eye to eye. Since the wall protects a city wherein is found the tree of life, part of the angels' duty is to keep or guard the way of that tree of life. These words come, of course, from the description of the role of the cherubim in Genesis 3:24. As discussed by Julie M. Smith in her contribution to this volume, the holy city is being compared to the paradisiacal Garden of Eden, complete with a river of water (as in Eden) and the presence of God. In addition, the cube-shaped measurements of the city remind the reader of the holy of holies of the tabernacle designed from God's instructions to Moses, a tabernacle that was also a perfect cube. And of course at the center of the holy of holies was the ark, or throne of God, which is also found at the center of the city. Within the ark of the tabernacle was the rod of Aaron, which God had caused to bloom, making it another symbolic tree of life. Cherubim were stitched on the veil of the tabernacle, keeping the way of the tree of life and of the throne of God inside. Thus the Garden of Eden is connected to the tabernacle, and both are connected to the holy city of Jerusalem.

John's vision does not just seem to be a potent reminder of the Garden of Eden but is also a connection to Ezekiel's vision of the temple in Ezekiel 40–47. In Ezekiel's vision, the prophet is also shown a heavenly city, but his vision places the temple at the center instead of God, as in John's vision. Rather than John's temple-less vision being a rejection of temple-centered religion, as some have suggested, close inspection seems to indicate that John affirmed the important symbols of the temple and of Ezekiel's vision. He understood that the temple pointed to the presence of God and that the literal fulfillment in John's vision of this symbolic temple perfectly fulfilled Ezekiel's vision instead of overturning it.

8. I am indebted to my colleague Jason Crandall for this insight. Grant Hardy has illustrated Moroni's consistent reliance upon the words of previous Book of Mormon prophets in his teachings. This tendency could account for his use of language from the small plates, whether they were lost in intervening years or not. See Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 250–59.

9. It may be significant that while Nephi, whose vision was connected to John's vision of the twelve apostles, consistently uses the word *apostle* in conjunction with the number twelve, Moroni never does so.

10. See Adela Yarbro Collins, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:280–81.

11. This quotation appears in full caps in the KJV Bible.

12. See Adam Miller, "Revelation 22:4–7," <http://revsem.blogspot.com/2009/07revelation-224-7.html>.