

The True Points of My Doctrine

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Abstract: In a 1991 *BYU Studies* article, I identified and analyzed three core Book of Mormon passages in which the gospel or doctrine of Jesus Christ is defined. Each of these passages presents the gospel as a six-point formula or message about what men must do if they will be saved.

In the present article I go on to examine all other Book of Mormon references to the six elements in this formula. Faith is choosing to trust in Jesus Christ in all that one does. Repentance is turning away from the life of sin by making a covenant to obey the Lord and remember him always. Baptism in water is the public witnessing to the Father of that covenant. The baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost is a gift sent from the Father in fulfillment of his promise to all his children that if they will repent and be baptized, they will be filled with the Holy Ghost. It brings the remission of sins with its cleansing fires. The recipient of these great blessings must yet endure to the end in faith, hope, and charity.

While explaining the great vision that he and his father Lehi had experienced during their first camp in the wilderness, Nephi prophesied to his brothers that the time would arrive when their own descendants would come again “to the knowledge of their Redeemer and *the very points of his doctrine*, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved” (1 Nephi 15:14).

The Book of Mormon defines the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Taken together, three discourses (see 2 Nephi 31, 3 Nephi 11, and 3 Nephi 27) provide the reader with a clear concept of the gospel

The title phrase is found in 3 Nephi 21:6.





of Jesus Christ, as the Nephites understood it, in terms of a six-part formula, which was given on each occasion by Jesus Christ himself. Through the merits of the atonement of Jesus Christ, all mankind can be saved in the kingdom of God if they will individually believe in him, repent of their sinful ways, be baptized in water, receive the purifying baptism of the Holy Ghost, and endure to the end in faithfulness.¹

Although these three discourses constitute the clearest and fullest definitions of the gospel, they form only a small part of Book of Mormon statements on this subject. The same pattern appears among the teachings of all Book of Mormon prophets in the form of injunctions to the people to believe in Christ, to repent, to be baptized that they might be cleansed by reception of the Holy Ghost, and to endure to the end and be saved.

As in the definitional chapters, these many statements of the gospel contain instructive variations on terminology. For an audience familiar with the basic pattern in the three defining statements, the reference is perfectly clear. In this essay, I will examine the remainder of the text of the Book of Mormon to see what additional perspective and insights it may offer for our understanding of the basic points of doctrine—the elements of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Faith in Jesus Christ

In these Book of Mormon accounts, faith in Christ is described as an activity and is defined in terms of active verbs. The faithful *believe* in Christ, with *unshaken faith* in him. They *press forward* with a steadfastness in Christ, and *rely* “*wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save*” (2 Nephi 31:19). This call to faith at the end of Nephi’s writings forcibly reminds us of his thesis in the opening chapter: “I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, *because of their faith*, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20). Nephi represents faith as a

¹ For the original exposition of this Book of Mormon teaching, see Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets,” *BYU Studies* 31/3 (1991): 31–50. An expanded treatment will be featured in the forthcoming *The Everlasting Gospel: A Book of Mormon Perspective*.





relationship of trust between men—who in their weakness cannot deliver themselves from the evils of this world—and the Lord—who is wholly reliable and mighty to save those who will trust in him. Nephi emphasizes this understanding of faith in his poignant song or prayer to the Lord:

O Lord, I have *trusted* in thee, and I will *trust* in thee forever. I will not put my *trust* in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his *trust* in the arm of flesh. Yea, cursed is he that putteth his *trust* in man or maketh flesh his arm. (2 Nephi 4:34)

Nephi's characterization of faith as a relationship of trust on the part of fallible men toward a wholly reliable father in heaven is fully consistent with the terminology of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament. Following common Greek usage, New Testament writers principally used noun and verb forms of *pistis*, the word for trusting or believing. While belief and trust are generally combined, the Book of Mormon sometimes separates these concepts, showing the logical priority of knowing something and choosing to believe in its truth before trust can develop. As Samuel explained to the Nephites from the walls of Zarahemla, the Lamanites had been brought to a knowledge of the truth through Nephite missionary efforts and had come to believe the holy scriptures and prophecies, which had led them to faith on the Lord (see Helaman 15:7). Samuel suggests that we choose to believe something because of our knowledge of its truth. But we could just as well choose to harden our hearts and refuse to hear the word or believe in it, which would foreclose any risk that we might come to trust the Lord or have faith in him to deliver us.

Hebrew forms of *eme*® and other related terms also focus on trust and reliability, particularly the unreliability of human beings contrasted with the permanent or enduring reliability of God. The Book of Mormon exactly reflects these etymological origins of biblical terms for faith. As Mormon observes, “whosoever putteth his trust in him the same shall be lifted up at the last day” (Mosiah 23:22). Referring also to the example of Alma's church in the wilderness, his son Alma emphasized that “they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God” (Alma





5:13). And because they continued faithful to the end, “they were saved.”

Because faith in Jesus Christ is the act of trusting or relying on him, it flows from a decision or choice of the individual. Simply put, the believer chooses to trust in what he has come to know is true, in spite of the natural inclination and temptation to trust in the arm of flesh—the wealth, power, and glory of men. Because faith requires this choice of the intellect and will, Nephi and other Book of Mormon prophets speak of the process of “persuading” people to believe in Christ and repent. In fact, Nephi explains his own record-keeping activities in this context:

For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. (2 Nephi 25:23)

Just as Nephi had hoped, these records did become instrumental in bringing many of his brethren, the Lamanites,

to the knowledge of the truth, and to know of the wicked and abominable traditions of their fathers, and . . . to believe the holy scriptures, yea, the prophecies of the holy prophets, which are written, which leadeth them to faith on the Lord. (Helaman 15:7)

The decision to believe seems to have both an intellectual and a spiritual component. Knowledge of truth is emphasized consistently as a context in which people can make this decision. Teaching the Lamanites, Aaron began at the creation of Adam, using the scriptures to explain how man had fallen by disobeying the commandments of God and how God had prepared a plan of redemption through Christ: “And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance, and so forth” (Alma 22:14; cf. 22:12–13). As presented by the Nephite prophets, this “plan of salvation” or “great plan of happiness” provides the context for understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ and the reasons why men and women should believe and trust in him. Not only is he their creator, he is their redeemer, having provided a way by which they can be delivered from their sins.





But faith does not come automatically to all who hear this plan explained. A spiritual witness is given to men whereby they can know the truth. When the voice of the Spirit speaks to the persecutors of Nephi and Lehi in prison, Aminadab admonishes those individuals to “repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ” (Helaman 5:41). As Nephi testifies, this can also happen to people as they read the scriptures:

And I know that the Lord God will consecrate my prayers for the gain of my people. And the words which I have written in weakness will be made strong unto them; for it persuadeth them to do good; . . . and it speaketh of Jesus, and persuadeth them to believe in him. (2 Nephi 33:4)

While faith can grow and be strengthened in response to a series of private miracles (answers to prayer, spiritual manifestations of one kind or another, spiritual guidance, and direction received in the ordinary course of one’s life), external miracles have a more limited value in promoting belief. Samuel the Lamanite addresses this point as he prophesies to the Nephites of the miraculous events that will attend the birth and the subsequent death of Jesus Christ. As the angel explained to Samuel, the signs and wonders would be given “that there should be no cause for unbelief” (Helaman 14:28). External miracles and other evidences do not provide an adequate basis for belief, but they do undermine systems of unbelief. The honest in heart must recognize that unbelief is not consistent with all the facts. And so, men are free to believe or not, but if they choose not to believe, they cannot be saved, and their condemnation will flow from a righteous judgment. For the signs and wonders were given, and the worldview of unbelievers was visibly disproven for all who would be honest (see Helaman 14:29–31). To the extent men and women in this life receive internal miracles and spiritual witnesses of the truth, they are put in this same position (cf. Romans 1:20; D&C 88:82; 101:93).

Jacob cites the great knowledge of the truth the Lord has given his people as a reason for them to “lay aside [their] sins” (2 Nephi 10:20). Alma uses the same approach, saying, “And now, my brethren, seeing we know these things, and they are true, let us repent” (Alma 12:37). Mormon explains the success of the





first mission to the Lamanites in terms of the “success in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth,” which brought converts “before the altar of God, to call on his name and confess their sins before him” (Alma 17:4; cf. 21:17). In his reverse mission to the Nephites, Samuel the Lamanite makes the same connection, telling them that if they would “believe on his name,” they would “repent of all [their] sins” (Helaman 14:13). He then goes on to use the converted Lamanites as his proof:

Ye do know of yourselves, for ye have witnessed it, that as many of them as are brought to the knowledge of the truth, and to know of the wicked and abominable traditions of their fathers, and are led to believe the holy scriptures, yea the prophecies of the holy prophets, which are written, which leadeth them to faith on the Lord, and unto repentance, which faith and repentance bringeth a change of heart unto them . . . are firm and steadfast in the faith. (Helaman 15:7–8)

Nephi treats faith in Jesus Christ more as the foundation principle that makes it possible for the individual to respond to the gospel. Just as the gospel itself is only possibly true because of the plan of redemption and the atonement of Christ, so individuals can only act on the gospel message to the extent that they believe in Christ. As he explains to those who have accepted the gospel and received the Holy Ghost, “ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (2 Nephi 31:19). For it is only by knowledge of Christ and trusting in him that men can turn away from the arm of flesh and enter through the gate into his way:

For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.

And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son; and ye have received the Holy Ghost. (2 Nephi 31:17–18)





“The gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the son of God” (Helaman 3:28). So it is that the first fruits of faith are repentance and baptism as the convert to Christ turns from his sinful ways and covenants with the Father to obey his commandments and remember the name of Christ always. The gospel message tells the person who has just learned the truth of Christ how he can respond to receive God’s grace. If he will repent and covenant not to sin further, and then be baptized of water, he is promised that he will receive the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, which brings “a mighty change” of heart:

And according to [Alma’s] faith, there was a mighty change wrought in his heart.□□□ And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts. (Alma 5:12–13)

So, as Nephi puts it, people can only arrive at this point through faith. But this is not enough, for “unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved” (2 Nephi 31:16). And again, it is only by trusting in Christ that it is possible to endure to the end: “Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, . . . feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end” (2 Nephi 31:20). Here, *feasting on the word of Christ* is explained in terms of receiving the guidance of the Holy Ghost, which “will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3; cf. 32:2, 4–5). The requirement of faith (trusting or relying on the Lord) is never completed in the way that repentance and baptism are. It must become the permanent mode of one’s existence, or one will not be able to endure to the end. Thus faith undergirds the process of accepting and responding to the gospel message. Anyone who truly has faith in Christ will follow the other prescribed steps. If they do not have faith, following the steps will be of no value to them. Thus it makes sense to summarize the whole gospel in this characteristic aphorism: “Whosoever putteth his trust in [Christ] the same shall be lifted up at the last day” (Mosiah 23:22).





Repentance

Noun and verb forms of the word *repent* occur 313 times in the Book of Mormon, not including other terms such as *turn*, which are used in the same sense. This concept is fundamental to almost every division of the text, where it evokes the same basic meanings found in the Bible. The usual term in the Hebrew Bible is expressed by the root *WB (rarely *NHM), the basic meaning of which is “to turn.” The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* explains that Yahweh relates to men as companions in a journey that requires focused attention. Men tend to be distracted, to lose their vigilant sense of purpose, and to “turn away” from the Lord’s path. This general conception is wonderfully portrayed in Lehi’s dream of the iron rod leading men along the straight² and narrow path, out of darkness to the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 8). Modifying the same image of a journey, Mormon editorializes on the prosperity of the Nephite church in 43 B.C., using it to show how the man of Christ who lays hold upon the word of Christ will be led

in a straight and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery . . . And land their souls . . . at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out. (Helaman 3:29–30)

Thus Enoch “walked with God” (Genesis 5:22, 24). In turning away from the Lord’s walk or journey, men sin, and they can only “return” by repenting of their sins (see Amos 4:6–13; Hosea 5:15–6:5; Jeremiah 3:12–24). The Greek Septuagint preserves these meanings and expands them slightly by translating the verb from the root *WB as *epistrepho*, “to turn toward or be converted.” The New Testament uses another Greek term, *metanoia*, meaning “a change in one’s mind or feelings.” Turn-

² Because Oliver Cowdery used the same spelling for both *straight* and *strait*, readers of the Book of Mormon are forced to interpret from context in deciding which word fits best in the various passages where *strait* appears. Whenever *straight* appears in my discussion of the Book of Mormon, it is because I have interpreted the text’s *strait* to have that meaning, particularly in combination with narrow, which makes *strait* redundant; cf. 2 Nephi 9:41.





ing back to the Lord requires a change of mind and of heart, or a conversion.

King Limhi brings all these concepts together when he reminds his people of their great sins and their slaying of the prophet Abinadi as the reasons for their present afflictions at the hands of the Lamanites. He then invites them to accept the Lord's merciful offer of deliverance:

But if ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind, if ye do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure, deliver you out of bondage.
(Mosiah 7:33)

Limhi's language also emphasizes the radical character of the change required in repentance as one turns one's heart and mind from the alluring and varied ways of the world, with all their attractions for the human spirit, to the straight and narrow path of the Lord's commandments. This turning is a choice, an act of human agency. Confronted with the call to "lay hold upon the gospel of Christ" (Mormon 7:8), individuals have a very private choice to make. They can recognize honestly their own inadequacies and imperfections, indeed their sins and temptations, and seize on this great opportunity to let the merits of Christ deliver them from all these failings. Or they can deny their need for deliverance and refuse to believe, even though they may know the gospel is true. In so doing, they harden their hearts and stiffen their necks against the changes that would be required in heart and mind.

When men love their evil ways, it is not easy to turn away to a path of obedience to the Lord. Nephi reports the instructions of the Father and the Son through which he learned that this turning to follow the Son could not be accomplished unless one acts "with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins" (2 Nephi 31:13). The strictness of this new path is clear. An iron rod runs along it, leading directly to the tree of life. The path is called both "strait" (2 Nephi 33:9) and "narrow" (Jacob 6:11). The iron rod represents the words of Christ or the Holy Ghost which "will show unto you all things what ye should do" (2 Nephi 32:5). Instead of continuing a life of choosing whatever appeals to one's





fancy at the moment, the repentant convert to Christ commits to a life of obeying Christ's choices for him at every step of the way. The choice to repent is a choice to burn bridges in every direction in the decision to follow forever only one way, the one path that leads to eternal life.

It is the severity of this demand that requires the convert to Christ to "come down into the depths of humility" (3 Nephi 12:2) as a preparation for baptism. In Nephi's vision, Jesus himself gave this example, humbling himself before the Father, and witnessing that he would be obedient in keeping his commandments (see 2 Nephi 31:7). This same humility and willingness to obey was depicted in another image when Jesus taught the Nephites directly that they "must repent, and become as a little child" (3 Nephi 11:37; cf. 11:38) or come unto him "as a little child" (3 Nephi 9:22). Describing the general practice of the Nephite church centuries later, Moroni specified that none were baptized until they had "brought forth fruit meet that they were worthy of it," including demonstrating "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" and witnessing to the church that they had "truly repented of all their sins" and had taken upon them the name of Christ with a "determination to serve him to the end" (Moroni 6:1-3; cf. Alma 12:15; 13:13).

The liberties of the life of sin are only illusory when properly understood. For they in fact constitute captivity and death in the power of Satan. Jacob calls on his brothers to "turn away from [their] sins" and to "shake off the chains of him that would bind [them] fast" (2 Nephi 9:45). The straight and narrow path is the way of true liberation as it brings deliverance from the chains of Satan and from death, leading instead to eternal life. It is this perspective on the gospel of Christ that inspired Lehi's final teaching to his sons:

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.





And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit;

And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom. (2 Nephi 2:27–29)

The central requirement of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ for salvation was set in the premortal existence and applies to all men and women in all periods of time. For God 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” (1 Nephi 10:18). That is the central content of the everlasting covenant of the Father with all his children who come to this earth. The covenant of God with Israel is a type of the covenant he has made with all: “Thou also knowest concerning the covenants of the Lord unto the house of Israel; and thou also hast heard that whoso repenteth not must perish” (1 Nephi 14:5). The Gentiles will also be blessed and saved if they repent, “for the Lord God will fulfill his covenants which he has made unto his children” (2 Nephi 6:12).

So the commandment is to “all men that they must repent” (2 Nephi 9:23; cf. 9:24). And the willingness to repent is the essential condition of God’s covenant with men. Alma summarized the plan of redemption for Zeezrom, explaining that God called on men to repent and not harden their hearts, that he might have mercy on them (see Alma 12:34). It is an individual arrangement that is typified in the covenant of God with Israel. “For behold, . . . as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off; for the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son” (2 Nephi 30:2). This centrality of repentance in the gospel message is emphasized in the instructions given to missionaries and leaders of the Nephite church: to preach only repentance and faith in the Lord (see Mosiah 18:19–20; cf. 25:22; D&C 6:9; 11:9). It certainly got the attention of the Lamanite king who asked Aaron, “What is this that Ammon





said—If ye will repent ye shall be saved, and if ye will not repent, ye shall be cast off at the last day?” (Alma 22:6). Alma echoed this same message, forcefully saying that he would “declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth” (Alma 29:2; cf. 42:31).

Because repentance is such a demanding and essential element of God’s offer to men, it is represented as a narrow or strait gate. Nephi teaches his descendants that “the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism” (2 Nephi 31:17; cf. Jacob 6:11). And “none shall be found blameless before God . . . only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord” (Mosiah 3:21). For “except ye repent ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of heaven” (Alma 5:51).

While the necessity of confession as part of repentance was not emphasized by all the Book of Mormon prophets, it was clearly in place. Again, it is Alma the Elder who develops the idea at length. Alma teaches the members of the church to forgive all who confessed their sins (see Mosiah 26:29). Confession of sins and repentance of iniquity were necessary requirements for gaining and retaining membership in the church (see Mosiah 26:35–36). The apostate Nephites converted by Nephi and Lehi, sons of Helaman, confess their sins before being baptized unto repentance (see Helaman 5:17). Similarly, the wicked Nephites in Zarahemla who were converted by Samuel’s preaching seek out the prophet Nephi, confess their sins to him, and desire “that they might be baptized unto the Lord” (Helaman 16:1; cf. 16:5). When the sign of Jesus’ birth is given five years later, many of those who denied the prophecies are “brought to a knowledge of their error and . . . confess their faults” (3 Nephi 1:25). In his survey of key practices in the Nephite church, Moroni describes the process for disciplining members that fell into iniquity, specifying that “if they repented not, and confessed not, their names were blotted out, and they were not numbered among the people of Christ” (Moroni 6:7). This seems to be a policy that parallels the admission practice whereby new converts are baptized only after they have “witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins” (Moroni 6:2). Confession to the presiding authority, or even





possibly publicly to the church, is seen as convincing evidence of the sincerity of a person's turning from sin to the Lord.

All these references to repentance assume the basic notion that repentance means turning away from the worldly life to the way defined by Jesus Christ. Samuel is sent to warn the Nephites in Zarahemla that if they would "repent and return unto the Lord [their] God," the Lord would turn away his anger. "Blessed are they who will repent and turn unto me, but wo unto him that repenteth not," for the Lord's anger is still focused on him (Helaman 13:11; cf. 7:17; 11:4). Samuel's formulation balances the turning of the sinner to God with God's turning of his anger away. Similarly, Abinadi warns King Noah and his people that "except they repent and turn to the Lord their God," they will be brought into bondage (Mosiah 11:21; cf. 11:22–25; 7:22–23; 20:21–22). Alma calls upon his sons to "turn to the Lord with all [their] mind, might, and strength" and not to seek "after riches nor the vain things of this world" (Alma 39:13–14). The Savior echoes this wording when he instructs the Nephites not to cast sinners out of their synagogues in the hope that they yet might "return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart" (3 Nephi 18:32). And so he commands "all ye ends of the earth" (3 Nephi 27:20) to repent and come unto him. He specifically invites the Gentiles to turn from their "wicked ways" and to repent of their evil doings and come unto him (3 Nephi 30:2).

The ideas of "turning" and "coming unto me" point to the covenantal aspect of repentance as well. Not only must the repentant sinner cease sinning, he must make a positive commitment to the Savior to keep his commandments, to walk the straight and narrow path, as he comes unto Christ. This covenant to remember Christ always, to take the name of Christ upon himself, and to keep all of Christ's commandments, is part of this process of turning and coming—and therefore a crucial element of repentance. This is the covenant that is witnessed to God and all the world by the convert through the baptism of water. Alma articulates this plainly to the Nephites in Gideon when he invites them to "lay aside every sin" and "show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism" (Alma 7:15; cf. 2 Nephi 31:7, 13–14). It is in





this simple sense that those who repent “are the covenant people of the Lord” (2 Nephi 30:2).

Because repentance includes the covenant to obey the commandments of the Lord, it is tied closely to baptism in water as the public evidence or witness of that covenant. Thus baptism in water is the appropriate sequel to repentance. This is the sense of the puzzling phrase, introduced to Alma by the Lord in answer to his prayer about dealing with transgressors in the church and repeated on numerous later occasions by both Alma and Mormon, that people should be “baptized unto repentance” (Mosiah 26:22). This phrasing can be confusing when we expect repentance to precede baptism, and the preposition *unto* seems to indicate that baptism precedes repentance. But the Oxford English Dictionary, which gives the most complete historical analysis of the varieties of English usage, lists 29 distinguishable uses for this preposition. The one which corresponds with the Lord’s usage here would indicate that baptisms into the church should only occur in accordance, agreement, or correspondence with the prior repentance of the new member. Because the covenant witnessed in baptism is part of repentance, this relationship is signaled exactly by the phrase *baptized unto repentance*. And so, Alma asks his new converts, “what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments?” (Mosiah 18:10). On the other side of this same story, King Limhi and his people repented and “entered into a covenant with God . . . to serve him and keep his commandments” (Mosiah 21:32). Furthermore, “they were desirous to be baptized as a witness and a testimony that they were willing to serve God with all their hearts,” but had to wait as there was no one properly authorized to perform this ordinance in that place (Mosiah 21:35; cf. 21:34).

This close connection between repentance and baptism as covenant and witness of covenant respectively explains why repentance and baptism together are called “the gate by which ye should enter” (2 Nephi 31:17, cf. 31:9; 33:9). The Book of Mormon discussion also makes much clearer what is meant in the Savior’s New Testament references to the “strait gate” (Matthew 7:13; Luke 13:24). Our understanding of this characterization





comes from Nephi's late report of the dream shared by him and his father at their first camp in the wilderness. In his later writing, Nephi emphasized that the baptism of Christ occurred as an example to all men, showing them "the straitness [straightness] of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter" (2 Nephi 31:9). And even though Jesus was holy, he still provided a model for the full process. While he, being holy, could not repent of actual sins, he still "humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments" by baptism in water (2 Nephi 31:7; cf. 31:13).

Jesus' humbling of himself and covenanting with the Father, as if he were a sinner, prefigures his later suffering for the sins of mankind as if they were his own. In neither case was he actually guilty of sin. But in the first he showed us what we must do to avoid paying the penalty ourselves. In the second he showed us what the penalty would be if we failed to repent and receive the benefits of his atonement. In the most direct way possible, Jesus taught us by the deeds of his sinless earthly life what we must do to receive eternal life.

We can get further illumination on the subject of repentance by examining the Book of Mormon treatment of the opposed concepts—hardness of heart, blindness of mind, and stiffness of neck. These phrases all betoken the opposite of "a broken heart and a contrite spirit," which is the hallmark of a repentant person. While we must humble ourselves before God and confess our sins to repent effectively, most men will avoid this turning away from the sins they enjoy. So it is that the Book of Mormon prophets see two choices open to those who have been called to repentance. If they will not repent, they choose to "reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds" (Alma 13:4), and, like Korihor, they "resist the spirit of the truth" (Alma 30:46). Jacob urges his people to hear God's voice and not harden their hearts, "for why will ye die?" (Jacob 6:6). After his conversion, Amulek could explain the psychology of refusing to listen to the Lord's voice, for it explained his own earlier resistance:

I did harden my heart, for I was called many times
and I would not hear; therefore I knew concerning





these things, yet I would not know; therefore I went on rebelling against God, in the wickedness of my heart. (Alma 10:6)

Alma is amazed that the ancient Israelites had so hardened their hearts, disbelieving that they would not save themselves from the effects of the bites of poisonous serpents, when all they had to do was look (see Alma 33:20–21). He finds in this a precise analogy to his own people who were offended “because of the strictness of the word” (Alma 35:15), yet he never lost hope that his “stiffnecked brethren” who were “hardening their hearts in sin and iniquities” might yet be brought to a knowledge of their Redeemer (Alma 37:10). In explaining the prophecies of Zenos, Jacob urged his brethren to repent and come unto God with full purpose of heart and not harden their hearts, for “as many as will not harden their hearts shall be saved in the kingdom of God” (Jacob 6:4; cf. 6:5). People harden their hearts because of unbelief (Mosiah 26:1–3) or because their hearts are set on riches or other things incompatible with God’s commands (see Alma 17:14). But in all cases the effect is the same:

he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full.

And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell. (Alma 12:10–11)

The Book of Mormon writers use treatment of the poor as an indicator of attitude toward Christ. The first sign of apostasy among the Nephites is their being lifted up in pride and their persecuting the poor. Thus the turning away from Christ is reflected in a turning away from the poor in their need. And as converts turn to Christ in their abject need for forgiveness of sins, they can reflect the generosity and mercy they hope to receive from him





by turning to the poor with open hands. Nephi quotes Isaiah's judgment on those who "turn away the needy" (2 Nephi 20:2), taking advantage of the poor, the widows, and the orphans (see 2 Nephi 20:1–20). King Benjamin warns the believers to care for the beggar and not "turn him out to perish" (Mosiah 4:16). Mormon reports that when the Nephites allowed the Gadiantons to dominate their government, "they did trample under their feet and smite and rend and turn their backs upon the poor and the meek, and the humble followers of God" (Helaman 6:39). The refusal to turn to God is characterized by the turning away from fellow human beings in need.

Baptism of Water

Alma teaches Zeezrom and others at Ammonihah that God "has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance" (Alma 12:15, cf. 12:33; 13:13; 34:30). Mormon writes to his son Moroni that "the first fruits of repentance is baptism" (Moroni 8:25). We have seen that baptism is tightly linked to repentance because it serves as a public witness to the Father of the private, internal covenant the repentant sinner makes to turn from evil and keep all his commandments. Repentance is incomplete without baptism, and baptism is meaningless without repentance. Thus the person who has come to believe in Christ and trust in his power of deliverance must enter the strait gate of repentance and baptism, which starts him on the road to eternal life. The straitness or narrowness of the gate indicates that people must go through one at a time by an act of their own, and that only the prescribed acts or choices are adequate for this gate. It also shows that the gate leads precisely to the entrance to one path, not the myriad of paths that lead to other destinations. The path to eternal life has one starting place and hence needs only one narrow gate to admit those who will walk it. Rich and poor enter on the same terms, as unaccompanied pedestrians, leaving all burdens and possessions behind. They all walk with God or with the guidance of his Spirit (the iron rod) as long as they wish to progress to the tree of life and partake of its fruit.

So baptism is essential. Jacob affirmed that "the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel" (2 Nephi 9:24), commands "all men that





they must repent, and be baptized in his name, . . . or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 9:23). This may have been news to Lehi and Nephi when they were shown the baptism of Jesus in their vision at the first camp in the wilderness. The evidence would suggest that their fellow Jews in 600 B.C. did not share this understanding. But we have seen that Nephi made it standard for his people, and it continues through the practice of Alma and the Nephite church down to the time of Christ when it was vigorously reemphasized by the Savior himself in his visit to the Nephites. Describing the missionary successes just before the Savior’s visit, the record emphasizes that “there were none who were brought unto repentance who were not baptized with water” (3 Nephi 7:24). Moroni confirms its central role again in the closing chapters of the book (see Moroni 6:1–4). For a thousand years, the Nephite followers of Christ practiced a form of baptism by immersion that provided the model for Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and for the restoration wrought through them in our own times.

The Book of Mormon accounts make clear that baptism by water is the act wherein repentant converts to Jesus Christ can witness to the Father that they have repented and covenanted to keep his commandments. In explaining the baptism of Jesus he had seen in vision, Nephi says, “he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments” (2 Nephi 31:7). In his own voice, and quoting the Son, Nephi twice emphasizes his account of baptism as a witness to the Father both of a commitment to keep his commandments and a willingness to take the name of Christ upon oneself (see 2 Nephi 31:7, 13–14). At the waters of Mormon, Alma includes in the baptismal prayer itself the characterization of baptism “as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him [the Almighty God] until you are dead as to the mortal body” (Mosiah 18:13, cf. 18:10). After their conversion at the preaching of Ammon, the people of King Limhi desired “to be baptized as a witness and a testimony that they were willing to serve God with all their hearts” (Mosiah 21:35). Teaching the people of Gideon, the younger Alma uses the identical language and describes “going into the waters of baptism” as the means by which his converts can witness to their God





that they are “willing to repent” and to “enter into a covenant . . . to keep his commandments” (Alma 7:15). Immediately before the Savior’s visit to the Nephites, Nephi₃ described baptism not only as “a witness and a testimony before God,” but also “unto the people, that they had repented and received a remission of their sins” (3 Nephi 7:25). In teaching and personally administering the sacrament to the Nephites, Jesus told them it was to be given “to those who repent and are baptized in my name” as a witness “unto the Father that ye are willing to do that which I have commanded you” and “that ye do always remember me” (3 Nephi 18:10–11).

The necessity of repenting and leaving one’s sins is emphasized at the end of the Book of Mormon as Moroni warns his readers, “See that ye are not baptized unworthily” (Mormon 9:29). Describing the practice of the Nephite church, Moroni later explains that none were baptized, “save they brought forth fruit meet that they were worthy of it” (Moroni 6:1):

Neither did they receive any unto baptism save they came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins.

And none were received unto baptism save they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end. (Moroni 6:2–3)

Baptism of Fire and of the Holy Ghost

As with so much of our understanding of the gospel, the basic text on the Holy Ghost is to be found in Nephi’s first exposition of the gospel message. Nephi quotes the voice of the Son saying that the Father will “give the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 31:12) to all who are baptized in the name of Jesus. For just as “the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove” (2 Nephi 31:8) after his baptism, so all who repent and are baptized in the name of Christ will then “receive the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 31:13). But in the same sentence, Nephi also calls this gift from God “the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 31:13; also 31:14). The reference to fire indicates the miraculous





cleansing power of this gift as it brings “a remission of . . . sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 31:17), which “witnesses of the Father and the Son, unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye entered in by the way ye should receive” (2 Nephi 31:18).

This language is next echoed in the Book of Mormon in the words of the Savior himself at the time of his appearance to the Nephites. Speaking from the darkness that followed the great destructions, he told the survivors that “whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost,” just as he had done for the Lamanites at the time of their conversion (3 Nephi 9:20; cf. Ether 12:14). After presenting his gospel to the newly commissioned disciples, he tells them that the Father will “bear record” (3 Nephi 11:32, 35) of Jesus unto whoever believes in Christ by visiting him or her “with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 11:35). Turning to the multitude, he clarifies his meaning further: “After that ye are baptized with water, behold, I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 12:1). Then comes the fullest statement, pulling all these elements together:

Blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be baptized, for they shall be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins. (3 Nephi 12:2)

The dramatic fulfillment of that promise occurred early the next day as the twelve disciples met to teach the people what they had learned, and to baptize one another. After praying for the Holy Ghost, they were baptized:

And it came to pass when they were all baptized and had come up out of the water, the Holy Ghost did fall upon them, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

And behold, they were encircled about as if it were by fire; and it came down from heaven, and the multitude did witness it, and did bear record. (3 Nephi 19:13–14)





In his prayer, Jesus thanked the Father for giving “the Holy Ghost unto these whom I have chosen” and prayed further that the Father would “give the Holy Ghost unto all them that shall believe in their words” (3 Nephi 19:20–21).

In his final message to latter-day Lamanites, Mormon extends this same promise, that “if it so be that ye believe in Christ, and are baptized, first with water, then with fire and with the Holy Ghost,□□□ it shall be well with you in the day of judgment” (Mormon 7:10).

Another dramatic example of this reception of the Holy Ghost in purifying power is reported at the conclusion of King Benjamin’s sermon. Overcome by “the fear of the Lord” (Mosiah 4:1) and viewing their own sinful state, they cried:

O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.□□□□

And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come. (Mosiah 4:2–3; cf. 4:11–12)

As Benjamin’s people respond, recognizing the “mighty change” in their hearts wrought by “the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 5:2), they profess a willingness “to enter into a covenant with [their] God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things” (Mosiah 5:5). Benjamin then explains to them that because of this experience and their righteous covenant, they will be “called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters,” because they have been “spiritually begotten” of him and their “hearts are changed through faith on his name,” and they “are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters” (Mosiah 5:7).

Alma borrows Benjamin’s terminology to describe his own conversion experience. The confrontation of the wicked young Alma with the angel left Alma helpless and unconscious for over two days. As he revived, following the fasting and prayers of his





father and the other priests, he stood and announced that after repenting of his sins he had been redeemed and “born of the Spirit” (Mosiah 27:24). He then reported the Lord’s words to him in his coma, when he was told that all mankind “must be born again” or “born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters” (Mosiah 27:25). In his later preaching, Alma would call upon others to “repent and be born again” (Alma 5:49) and be baptized that they “may be washed from [their] sins” (Alma 7:14). When taken by itself, this passage has sometimes been read to indicate that baptism of water washes away sins, but the context of the language of spiritual rebirth indicates clearly that it is the Spirit or Holy Ghost that brings the remission of sins, a teaching consistent with those of Jesus and Nephi. In this same context, Alma also teaches that no man can be saved “except his garments are washed white, . . . purified, . . . cleansed from all stain, through the blood” of the prophesied Redeemer (Alma 5:21). Or, as he says of that ancient order of high priests, they

were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.

Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God. (Alma 13:11–12).

Alma consistently invokes this same language in later accounts of his dramatic youthful conversion to emphasize the fundamental importance of this spiritual experience by which he was born of God (see Alma 36:5, 23–24, 26; 38:6). The sons of Mosiah evidently used this language as well in their mission to the Lamanites, as their king responds to Aaron’s teaching by asking what he must do that he might be “born of God” and have “this wicked spirit rooted out of [his] breast, and receive [God’s] Spirit” and be “filled with joy” (Alma 22:15). Understood as a cleansing by the Spirit, all these passages conform to the Savior’s final teaching to the Nephite disciples that “whoso repenteth and is baptized in





my name shall be filled” (3 Nephi 27:16), and that all men are commanded to repent and come unto him and be baptized in his name, that they “may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost,” that they may “stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:20; cf. Moroni 6:4). Moroni ends the Book of Mormon on this note, pointing to the fact that it is this purification that produces the perfection God requires of men. He invites all men to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32):

And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:33)

The repeated Book of Mormon emphasis on the Holy Ghost’s cleansing function should not cause us to ignore the clear explanations of its continuing functions in the lives of the converted as they undertake the path that leads to eternal life and strive to endure to the end. Nephi identified the power of the Holy Ghost early on as “the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him” and the means by which one “might see, and hear, and know of these things,” speaking of the things Lehi had learned in his vision of the tree of life (1 Nephi 10:17). When Nephi was blessed to receive a version of that same vision, the Lamb told him of the last days and said, “Blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb” (1 Nephi 13:37). In his own prophecies of the last days, Nephi warned those who would embrace the precepts of men and deny “the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 28:26; cf. Jacob 6:8, Alma 9:21). The Holy Ghost is a gift of God given “unto the children of men, because of [Jesus]” (3 Nephi 28:11; cf. 3 Nephi 9:20; 19:20–22).

In addition to the cleansing power emphasized in the language of the Nephite prophets, the Holy Ghost brings knowledge of spiritual truths and enables men to speak with the tongue of an-





gels, who also speak by the power of the Holy Ghost (see 2 Nephi 32:2). And that which is spoken by the power of the Holy Ghost, whether by men or angels, is the word of Christ, which “will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3). Or in other words, as Nephi finally clarifies without metaphor, “if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:5).

This informative function of the gift of the Holy Ghost is essential for the guidance of the convert who has entered in the way through repentance and baptism and must now endure to the end in keeping the commandments. For while there are general commandments aplenty, to apply these successfully in the daily problems of life requires an omniscient perspective. The Holy Ghost, like the iron rod in Lehi’s dream, is the word of God or the words of Christ. And so it is that Nephi promises us that if we will “press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end,” we will “have eternal life,” and this by promise of the Father (2 Nephi 31:20). Not only does the Father purify us through the baptism of fire, but he provides us with a daily, personal guide to direct us through the challenges of our individual lives and to strengthen us with his power as we need it. But to enjoy the advantages of this marvelous gift, we must trust in him and follow him, and deny neither the Holy Ghost nor the power of God. For then it would be withdrawn—a gift that can leave as quickly and easily as it comes—and we would be left alone, on our own limited powers and understanding.

Enduring to the End in Faith, Hope, and Charity

At the first camp in the wilderness, Lehi was shown a vision that dramatized the unhappy fact that many who come unto Christ and taste the fruit of eternal life will fall away and be lost. Lehi saw many who entered into that narrow path and followed the iron rod to the tree of life. But after tasting the fruit, they looked around and saw others scoffing from the lofty heights of the great and spacious building. “They were ashamed, . . . and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost” (1 Nephi 8:28). The Book of Mormon prophets clearly believed that while being born of God is necessary for salvation, it is not sufficient. For, as Nephi





learned from the voice of the Father, “unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved” (2 Nephi 31:16). Similarly, the Savior taught the Nephites during his visit to Bountiful:

Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me,
and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him
that endureth to the end will I give eternal life.
(3 Nephi 15:9)

This necessity of continued faithfulness leads the Book of Mormon prophets consistently to cite enduring to the end as a separate and essential principle of the gospel. Jesus told Nephi that those who “seek to bring forth . . . Zion” will “be lifted up at the last day” and “saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb” only “if they endure to the end” (1 Nephi 13:37; cf. 22:31; 2 Nephi 9:24; 33:4; Alma 32:13, 15; 3 Nephi 27:6, 16–17).

The phraseology used to refer to this gospel principle does vary occasionally in ways that illuminate our understanding of its nature, but the basic notion of endurance is always clearly recognizable. Jacob urges his brothers to “enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until [they] shall obtain eternal life” (Jacob 6:11). Omni invites converts to “continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end” (Omni 1:26). King Benjamin’s sermon promises that those who keep the commandments of God and “hold out faithful to the end” will be received into heaven (Mosiah 2:41). So he urges his responsive subjects to “be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works,” that the Lord may seal them his, and that they “may have everlasting salvation and eternal life” (Mosiah 5:15). On the negative side, King Benjamin warns that even though they have entered in the way by a covenant with God and have experienced the mighty change of heart wrought by his spirit, if they fail to watch themselves, their thoughts, words, and deeds, “and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what [they] have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of [their] lives, [they] must perish” (Mosiah 4:30). In baptizing Helam, Alma includes in the ritual prayer the statement that the covenant witnessed through baptism includes serving God “until you are dead as to the mortal body” (Mosiah 18:13). Referring





back to these events, Alma the Younger affirms that his father's converts had remained "faithful until the end," and that consequently "they were saved" (Alma 5:13). Shortly thereafter, Alma describes this requirement quite simply—those who are baptized are to keep "the commandments of God from thenceforth," which, if they do, they will "have eternal life" (Alma 7:16). Teaching the plan of salvation to his own son Corianton, Alma later describes a convert's endurance to the end as desiring "righteousness until the end of his days" (Alma 41:6). Similarly, Moroni explains that the policy of the Nephite church is to baptize only those applicants who have "a determination to serve [Christ] to the end" (Moroni 6:3). This is consistent with the charge given to priests and teachers at the time of their ordinations, that they should "preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end" (Moroni 3:3). Writing to Moroni, Mormon tells his son how he prays continually to God the Father "that he, through his infinite goodness and grace, will keep [Moroni] through the endurance of faith on his name to the end" (Moroni 8:3). This way of putting things emphasizes both the faith required of the individual and his dependence on God's goodness and grace.

While most treatments of the notion of enduring to the end are brief and straightforward and assume the reader understands what is meant, others offer more substantive detail. In preparing his people for baptism at the Waters of Mormon, Alma describes the life of the covenant people to which they would be committing themselves. They must desire "to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people," and they must also be "willing to bear one another's burdens," even to "mourn with those that mourn," to "comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God" at all times and places, "even until death," that they might have eternal life (Mosiah 18:8–9). Moroni points out the role of Christ as both "the author and the finisher of their faith" (Moroni 6:4). Once new members were

received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep





them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ. (Moroni 6:4)

At the end of his writings, Moroni simply urges the members of the church to “do all things in worthiness” and “in the name of Jesus Christ, . . . and endure to the end.” Following this pattern, they will “in nowise be cast out” (Mormon 9:29).

Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, the Nephite prophets consistently present their teachings on faith, hope, and charity as one way of understanding the process of enduring to the end. Nephi again sets the pattern when he teaches us that after we have entered in that strait gate and have received the Holy Ghost and the remission of sins, we

must press forward with a steadfastness [faith] in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men [charity]. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. (2 Nephi 31:20)

Alma teaches his listeners in Gideon to see that they “have faith, hope, and charity” that they might “always abound in good works” (Alma 7:24). Later, he teaches the people of Ammonihah to live with faith, hope, and the love of God in their hearts:

But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering;

Having faith on the Lord; having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest. (Alma 13:28–29)

When calling the people to remembrance of the captivity of their fathers, Alma asks, “What grounds had they to hope of salvation?” (Alma 5:10). The answer he finds is the mighty change





wrought in their hearts, as a result of their faith. Because of the hope created by being thus born of God, they “put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end” (Alma 5:13). Ether also explained that the hope for a better world springs from faith, and anchors the souls of men, making “them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works” (Ether 12:4). When Moroni prays for the Gentiles, the Lord tells him that he will show them “that faith, hope and charity bringeth unto me—the fountain of all righteousness” (Ether 12:28). Moroni goes on to explain that God works with men “according to their faith” (Ether 12:29), and that to receive the inheritance or mansions prepared for them they must have hope and charity (see Ether 12:30–34).

And except ye have charity ye can in nowise be saved in the kingdom of God; neither can ye be saved in the kingdom of God if ye have not faith; neither can ye if ye have no hope. (Moroni 10:21)

This teaching is provided to Moroni most clearly in his father’s letter on infant baptism:

And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins;

And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God. (Moroni 8:25–26)

Mormon points to the enduring power of love as a key to continuing faith and hope in the face of daily temptations and trials.

Eternal Life

While the Book of Mormon writers offer little detail about the state of the righteous in the kingdom of God, they consistently





conclude their accounts of the gospel by referring to the salvation or eternal life with which God rewards the faithful after death. All who come unto Christ through repentance and baptism, and endure to the end in faithful living, will be saved in the kingdom of God. As Nephi states in an early gospel aphorism, “the fulness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved” (1 Nephi 6:4).

While Book of Mormon accounts of the nature of eternal life are much less detailed than the revelations given to Joseph Smith, the variety of language employed does give us some indication of what is in store for the faithful. In Nephi’s great vision of the ministry of Christ and the last days, the Lord tells Nephi that his faithful servants would “be lifted up at the last day” and “saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb” (1 Nephi 13:37; cf. 2 Nephi 9:23; Jacob 6:4). Those who do not accept the invitation to repent and believe and endure to the end will be damned or “cast off at the last day” (Alma 22:6; cf. 2 Nephi 9:24; 31:16; Mormon 9:23, 29; Ether 4:18). Benjamin says those who “hold out faithful to the end” will be “received into heaven” and will “dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness” (Mosiah 2:41). He also explains that God will bring them to heaven that they “may have everlasting salvation and eternal life” (Mosiah 5:15). The brother of Jared receives the promise from Jesus personally that in the Lord would “all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters” (Ether 3:14). Abinadi describes the believers as the seed of the Lord and “heirs of the kingdom of God” (Mosiah 15:11). Further, “they are the first resurrection” (Mosiah 15:22). Alma tends to emphasize how those who are born again will be “partakers of the fruit of the tree of life” (Alma 5:62) and will “inherit the kingdom of heaven” (Alma 7:14; cf. 9:12). In his teaching at Ammonihah, he describes this salvation four times as entering into the rest of God, which he has prepared for those who repent and obey his commandments (Alma 12:37; cf. 12:35; 13:13, 29). Again, later, he calls it “everlasting life” (Alma 32:41; 33:23). The “gate of heaven is open unto all” (Helaman 3:28) who will accept the gospel, and, as Helaman taught his sons, it will bring the power of the Redeemer





to bear “unto the salvation of their souls” (Helaman 5:11). In his visit to the Nephites, the Savior invokes almost all these standard formulations but also invokes the context of the final judgment more explicitly:

And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world. (3 Nephi 27:16)

And again,

Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day. (3 Nephi 27:20)

Mormon expands this same language on the lot of those who are “found guiltless before him at the judgment day,” for it is given unto them “to dwell in the presence of God in his kingdom” and “to sing ceaseless praises with the choirs above, unto the Father, and unto the Son, and unto the Holy Ghost . . . in a state of happiness which hath no end” (Mormon 7:7). Moroni appends his own appeal to all who might hear this call to believe that they might “be found spotless, pure, fair, and white, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day” (Mormon 9:6). He further reminds the Lord “that thou hast said that thou hast prepared a house for man, yea, even among the mansions of thy Father, in which man might have a more excellent hope; wherefore man must hope, or he cannot receive an inheritance in the place which thou hast prepared” (Ether 12:32). And, except men have charity, “they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father” (Ether 12:34). Here Moroni echoes his father’s epistle that explains how the saints who endure “by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come . . . shall dwell with God” (Moroni 8:26).





Conclusion

Three times in revelation, Joseph Smith was told that the Book of Mormon contains “the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (D&C 20:9; cf. 27:5; 42:12). The present study and its predecessor³ identify a clear and consistent textual tradition begun by Nephi and continued by all the Book of Mormon prophets down to Moroni. Drawing on clear statements of the gospel by Jesus Christ himself, Nephi and others taught the gospel as a six-point formula. In a decree from the beginning, the Father had promised salvation to all who would come to him through faith on his Son, repentance and baptism, receiving the remission of sins through the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, and by enduring in faith, hope, and charity to the end of mortal life. This central teaching gave coherence and foundation to all the teachings of the Book of Mormon prophets, focusing all religious hope and knowledge on the atonement of Christ, which makes the fulfillment of the Father’s promise possible.

³ See n. 1 above.

