

The Church of the Lamb of God

Casey Paul Griffiths

As one who gloried in plainness (see 2 Nephi 33:6), Nephi loved to paint his revelations in black and white, using contrasts to teach principles. This view of things was also favored by the Lord and his messengers, who in the final portion of Nephi's vision presented him with a stark contrast: "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" (1 Nephi 14:10). Thus far, almost all modern commentary on this portion of the vision has sought to discover the identity of the church of the devil. This is a worthy pursuit, because prophets have stressed that one of the main purposes of the Book of Mormon is to expose the enemies of Christ.¹ Just as instructive, however, can be an examination of the brief but powerful glimpse Nephi gives us of the role of the church of the Lamb in the latter days. Understanding Nephi's vision of this church can help readers understand the role and place of the followers of Christ in the tumultuous

Casey Paul Griffiths is a teacher at Jordan Seminary in Sandy, Utah.

events of the last days and provide them with a hope that the righteous, with the Lord's help, will eventually overcome the power of the adversary.

The Church of the Lamb of God

The phrase "church of the Lamb of God" never appears in the Book of Mormon outside of 1 Nephi 14. The phrase does not appear in any other book of scripture. While details are scattered throughout Nephi's vision, the main body of his description of the church of the Lamb of God is contained mainly in three verses:

And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few, because of the wickedness and abominations of the whore who sat upon many waters; nevertheless, I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth; and their dominions upon the face of the earth were small, because of the wickedness of the great whore whom I saw.

And it came to pass that I beheld that the great mother of abominations did gather together multitudes upon the face of all the earth, among all the nations of the Gentiles, to fight against the Lamb of God.

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. (1 Nephi 14:12–14)

These brief words offer a remarkable vision of the organization of God's followers during the end times.

Before diving into Nephi's description of the church of the Lamb of God, however, some fundamental questions must be asked. Is his description literal or figurative? Depending on which lens we choose to examine the passage, different interpretations may emerge. For example, Stephen E. Robinson, in his exposition on the great and abominable church of Nephi's vision, notes that the vision often shifts from a *historical* explanation of the events to a *typological* exposition on the battles between good and evil in the last days.²

Saying that the vision is *historical* in nature means that Nephi was describing actual future events. There can be no doubt as to the historical nature

of Nephi's vision. Prophecy is sometimes referred to as history in reverse, and Nephi describes in clear detail the flow of history from his time into our own. Several events such as the ministry of the Savior in the Old and New Worlds, the destruction of the Nephites, and the discovery and settlement of America are clear examples of historical events that Nephi saw.

Typology, on the other hand, refers to the symbolic principles of the vision. When Nephi's writings are examined through this lens, the vision becomes involved in themes and becomes a work of apocalyptic literature, similar to the book of Revelation. Instead of trying to identify the exact identity of every person, place, or organization in the vision, the reader is asked to instead see the grand themes of the plan of salvation. This kind of scriptural writing is meant to remind us of the struggles between good and evil that have happened throughout the earth's existence. Describing how this kind of literature functions, Robinson wrote: "Apocalyptic literature is dualistic. Since it deals with types, everything boils down to opposing principles: love and hate, good and evil, light and dark. There are no gray areas in apocalyptic writing."³

Nephi's vision can be read both ways. In one sense, it is an extraordinary description of the key historical events that lead to the Restoration of the gospel and the Second Coming of the Savior. In another sense, it is a profound exposition of how the forces of good and evil operate among the peoples of the earth. Examining Nephi's prophecy of the church of the Lamb of God through these two lenses provides some interesting insights into the accuracy and meaning of Nephi's prophecy. Accordingly, we shall consider first the historical implications of the vision, then what the typological implications may be.

Historical Context

In a strictly historical sense, the church of the Lamb of God referred to in Nephi's vision is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Multiple prophets and apostles have identified the modern Church as such. President George Albert Smith stated, "This is our Father's work. This is the Church of the Lamb of God."⁴ Presenting the Latter-day Saints as the only true Church of God, however, has sometimes led to acrimony from members of other faiths. In a world largely content with the attitude of "God doesn't care which church you go to on Sunday as long as you show up," the declaration of the

existence of one true church sometimes gives the impression that Latter-day Saints assume an air of superiority over devoted members of other faiths. Yet the doctrine of one true church is an area where the Saints can give little ground, since the Savior himself declared it to be “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30).

President Boyd K. Packer summarized the importance of this doctrine when he taught, “Good conduct without the ordinances of the gospel will neither redeem nor exalt mankind; covenants and the ordinances are essential. We are required to teach the doctrines, even the unpopular ones. Yield on this doctrine, and you cannot justify the Restoration. The doctrine is true; it is logical. The opposite is not. . . . We did not invent the doctrine of the only true church. It came from the Lord. Whatever perception others have of us, however presumptuous we appear to be, whatever criticism is directed to us, we must teach it to all who will listen.”⁵ Similarly, Nephi’s declaration that “there are save two churches only” (1 Nephi 14:10), the church of the Lamb and the church of the devil, may not be too popular with other faiths, but it is, as President Packer stated, both logical and true.

Before Church members become too convinced that they are superior, however, it should be noted that the next part of that statement was “with which I, the Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually.” Individual acceptance of truth can be measured only on an individual basis, but there can be no doubt that the only church that fully conforms to the doctrines and practices which Christ set forth in ancient and modern revelation is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

With this in mind, Nephi’s vision of the church of the Lamb of God paints an illustrative picture of what the members of the true Church may expect in the last days. Among the most illuminating points of the vision are the following:

- ♦ The Church’s numbers were few and its dominions small (see 1 Nephi 14:12).
- ♦ The Church’s members were scattered upon all the face of the earth (see 1 Nephi 14:12, 14).
- ♦ Nephi saw the power of the Lamb descend upon the Saints of the Church and beheld that they were armed with righteousness and the power of God in great glory (see 1 Nephi 14:14).

These few phrases together give a marvelous description of the place and function of the Church in the last days. Further, modern Church history shows the accuracy of this description. Consider each point separately:

Its numbers were few. In recent years much attention has been devoted to the rapid growth of the Church. Among the most famous predictions of Mormon growth was Rodney Stark's 1984 study entitled "The Rise of a New World Faith."⁶ Stark predicted an astonishing growth rate for the Church over the next century. His low estimate was that there would be 64 million Latter-day Saints by 2080, and his high estimate predicted that there would be 267 million members by that time!⁷ Stark's prediction was met with both applause and derision. Some called his projections unrealistic; yet when Stark compared his study with the actual growth of the Church in 2003, he noted that Church growth had exceeded his high estimate. Stark concluded, "Granted, there are seventy-seven more years to go. But, so far, so good."⁸

While Church growth statistics are a remarkable testament to the power and vitality of Mormonism as well as the Lord's prophecy that the little stone of Daniel's vision would "roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth" (D&C 65:2), Nephi's vision brings our heads down out of the clouds a little bit. By noting that Church members were "few" and that the dominions of the Church were "small," Nephi puts the role of the Church into proper perspective. Even if Stark's most optimistic predictions are fulfilled, the members of the Church will remain a tiny minority among the people of the earth. To illustrate, if Stark's high estimate is met, there will be 267,452,000 members by 2080. At the same time, the earth's total population is projected to have grown to over 8.5 billion by then, which means that the Saints would still only make up just over 3 percent of the world's total population.⁹

Nephi's words become even more poignant when it is recognized that the majority of the Saints are, with some exceptions, minority members where they live. In Utah, Church members may be 68 percent of the total population, but in the eastern United States Church members are on average less than 1 percent of the total population and are usually one out of several hundred. In a European country, Church members are usually less than one in a thousand, and in a place like India, where the Church is still in its infancy, the percentage of Church members in the total population is less than .0006, or one in several hundred thousand!¹⁰ When the number of less-active members is brought into account, congregations may be even smaller. These statistics

are not cited to be pessimistic, but to show just how rare and exceptional it is to find an active, faithful Latter-day Saint among the people of the world anywhere.

Given the tumultuous trends of the last century, it may be difficult for anyone who is not a prophet to make any kinds of predictions about the future growth of the Church. What Nephi's vision tells us more about is the role that the Saints will play in the last days. One Latter-day Saint scholar has noted that even if Church membership increased overnight to a billion members, Church membership would still only be one person in every six, a status that would still match Nephi's wording of "few."¹¹ President Joseph Fielding Smith captured the spirit of Nephi's description when he noted, "While it may be said . . . that we are but handful in comparison with . . . the world, yet we may be compared with the leaven of which the Savior spoke, which will eventually leaven [or lift] the whole world."¹²

Nephi also gave an explicit reason why the members the church of the Lamb were few: "because of the wickedness and abominations of the whore who sat upon many waters." From a prophetic view, obstacles to Church growth come directly from the followers of the adversary. Demographic trends and issues with the public perceptions of the Saints are only symptoms of a larger battle raging for the souls of men. According to Nephi, the Church should never look to be the largest or most powerful organization, at least in worldly measures. Nephi informed us that the Saints would always be the underdogs until the coming of the Savior.

Scattered upon all the face of the earth. Nephi's assertion that the Saints of the church of the Lamb would be scattered upon all the face of the earth is even more remarkable when looked at through a historical lens. Just over half a century ago, Mormonism could still be considered a regional faith based largely in the Intermountain West. In the latter half of the twentieth century, Church membership grew explosively outside of the West and in many regions of the world. In 1955 only 11 percent of the Church's population resided outside the United States. That figure had increased to 21 percent by 1977, and to 51 percent by 1999.¹³ As of 2009, roughly 56 percent of the members of the Church lived outside the United States, a remarkable feat by any measure.¹⁴ Presently the frontiers of Mormonism have spread beyond the borders of the United States and into all nations. In our time, the histories of the Saints in cities such as Tokyo, Johannesburg, Santiago, and Warsaw are

taking their places alongside the histories of the Saints in Palmyra, Kirtland, and Nauvoo.¹⁵ Nephi's vision fits alongside Joseph Smith's prophecy that "this Church will fill North and South America, it will fill the world."¹⁶ The calling of General Authorities and spread of the priesthood worldwide are fulfillments of the Savior's words that "every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue, and his own language, through those who are ordained unto this power, by the administration of the Comforter, shed forth upon them for the revelation of Jesus Christ" (D&C 90:11).

While the international growth of the Church is remarkable, there are still frontiers to conquer. Over 44 percent of the membership of the Church is in the United States, and over 85 percent of the membership of the Church is in the Western Hemisphere.¹⁷ Some regions have no access to the message of the gospel at all. There is still much work to do before the restored gospel has, in Joseph Smith's words, "penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear."¹⁸

They were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory. The last of the three items might be the most difficult to find any tangible measures for. There are positive signs that point toward an increase in righteousness among the members of the Church in all nations. One positive sign of the increase in the righteousness of the Saints is the rise in the number of stakes in the Church. As an ecclesiastical unit of the Church, a stake can be formed only when a certain number of priesthood holders and faithful members are present, fulfilling callings, and carrying out duties. In 1955 there were 224 stakes, with only one outside of the United States or Canada.¹⁹ As of 2009 there were 2,818 stakes, 1,380 of which were outside of the United States,²⁰ an astounding figure that indicates a strengthening corps of priesthood and auxiliary leaders who are moving forward the work of the Church.

Another indication of increased righteousness may be found in the dramatic increase in temple construction during the last half of the twentieth century. In the first century of the Restoration, seven temples were built. Now, eighty years into the second century, over one hundred and twenty-six more temples have been constructed. In fulfillment of Nephi's prophecy of the Saints being scattered upon all the face of the earth, over sixty of these temples have been built in international areas.²¹ The increase in the number of temples brings an immeasurable increase in the power of Christ on the earth. President George Q. Cannon taught, "Every foundation stone that is laid for

a temple, and every temple completed according to the order of the Lord has revealed for His Holy Priesthood, lessens the power of Satan on the earth and increases the power of God and Godliness.”²² In addition, there are more members meeting the standards for temple worthiness, and the privilege of temple attendance helps Saints to develop greater spiritual strength. Part of the promise given in the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple, given by Joseph Smith, promised that the Lord’s servants would leave the temple “armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory round about them” (D&C 109:22).

Despite the wonderful growth of the Church, we must at the same time recognize that the real strength of the Church comes in more intangible measures. President Packer warned: “We have done very well at distributing the *authority* of the priesthood. We have priesthood authority planted nearly everywhere. We have quorums of elders and high priests worldwide. But distributing the *authority* of the priesthood has raced, I think, ahead of distributing the *power* of the priesthood. The priesthood does not have the strength that it should have and will not have until the *power* of the priesthood is firmly fixed in the families as it should be.”²³ President Packer reminds us that the *number* of priesthood holders, temples, members, and other factors, does not necessarily tell us if we have received the *power* which Nephi prophesied the Church would receive.

While statistical figures can provide a measurable way of verifying the accuracy of Nephi’s prophecy, the real strength of the church of the Lamb is measured in personal testimonies and lives changed. President Gordon B. Hinckley recalled meeting a naval officer from Asia who had joined the Church. The officer came from a non-Christian home and had converted during his training in the United States. When President Hinckley inquired about what would happen to the officer when he returned home, the officer replied: “My family will be disappointed. I suppose they will cast me out. They will regard me as dead. As for my future and my career, all opportunity may be foreclosed against me.” When President Hinckley asked why the officer was willing to pay such a price to join the Church, the officer’s eyes grew teary and he replied, “It’s true, isn’t it?”²⁴ This same story, told a thousand times over about different people in the varied cultures and nations of the world, speaks of the righteousness Nephi saw the Saints armed with.

Typological Context

While Nephi's vision presents a compelling view of the Church when looked at historically, there is also value in examining Nephi's description as a typology. For example, it is clear from Nephi's descriptions in 1 Nephi 13 and 14 that no single historical organization quite fits the profile of the great and abominable church. The church of the devil is a type, designed to represent the work of the adversary among all people, nations, and societies in the world. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, "The church of the devil is every evil and worldly organization on earth. It is all of the systems, both Christian and non-Christian, that have perverted the pure and perfect gospel: it is all of the governments and powers that have run counter to divine will. . . . It is the man of sin speaking in churches, orating in legislative halls, and commanding the armies of men."²⁵ Taken typologically, the church of the devil is a powerful symbol for the influence of evil in all its manifestations.

What, then, are typological implications for the church of the Lamb of God? If we apply Elder McConkie's logic in both directions, the pavilion under which the church of the Lamb resides must be enlarged to include "every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ" (Moroni 7:16). Membership in the church of the Lamb in this context expands beyond denominational lines to include all who genuinely strive to do good according to the light they have been given. The Savior expressed this idea in the Doctrine and Covenants when he proclaimed, "This is Zion—the pure in heart; therefore, let Zion rejoice, while all the wicked shall mourn" (D&C 97:21).

This interpretation should not be taken to contradict the statements shared earlier which identified the church of the Lamb with the Latter-day Saints. An important contribution the revelations of the Restoration make to Christian theology is the authoritative declaration that all people are judged by two standards: "according to their works, [and] according to the desire of their hearts" (D&C 137:9). This allows us to recognize righteous individuals outside of our own faith who will stand in opposition to the work of the church of the devil. By this standard there are members of all faiths who may reside within the church of the Lamb of God, and there may be people on the rolls of the Latter-day Saints who reside in the church of the devil. By this standard, membership in the church of the Lamb is based on the desires of your heart, not just on which church you attend.²⁶

Looking at the church of the Lamb in this context does not diminish the importance of the role of the restored Church in any sense. In some ways, it may increase the importance of the role the Church plays in the last days. The scriptures testify that the restored Church will act as a shield to protect the righteous of all creeds as violence and wickedness increase in the earth. As the trials that precede the Lord's coming become more severe, many people who choose to abstain from the violence will look to the Saints for refuge. The Savior revealed that in that day "*every man* that will not take his sword against his neighbor must needs flee unto Zion for safety. And there shall be gathered unto it out of every nation under heaven; and it shall be the only people that shall not be at war one with another" (D&C 45:68–69; emphasis added).²⁷ The Prophet Joseph Smith warned, "The time is soon coming, when no man will have any peace but in Zion and her stakes."²⁸

While the typological viewpoint might allow us to feel better about our friends of other faiths, it also raises some disturbing implications, since we still have to deal with Nephi's revelation that the church of the Lamb will be small and scattered but armed with righteousness. Saying that the righteous in the last days will be small is unsettling because most of us want to feel that generally most people are good and seek to do right. This may not be the case in the days just before the Savior's coming.

Just before describing the final struggles between the two churches, the Savior prophesied of a "great and a marvelous work among the children of men; a work which shall be everlasting, either on the one hand or on the other—either to the convincing of them unto peace and life eternal, or unto the deliverance of them to the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds unto their being brought down into captivity, and also into destruction, both temporally and spiritually" (1 Nephi 14:7). Other prophets have testified that the gray area between the righteous and the wicked will continue to recede until there is none left. A proclamation issued in 1845 by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles prophesied of this outcome: "As this work progresses in its onward course, and becomes more and more an object of political and religious interest and excitement, no king, ruler, or subject, no community or individual, will stand *neutral*. All will at length be influenced by one spirit or the other; and will take sides either for or against the kingdom of God, and the fulfillment of the prophets, in the great restoration and return of his long dispersed covenant people."²⁹

Though the 1845 proclamation speaks in stark terms of the division before the end times, it also proclaims that righteous individuals of other faiths will play a role in the triumph of the church of the Lamb, continuing, “Some will act the part of the venerable Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, or the noble Cyrus; and will aid and bless the people of God; or like Ruth, the Moabitess. . . . You will, therefore, either be led by the good Spirit to cast in your lot, and to take a lively interest with the Saints of the Most High, and the covenant people of the Lord, or on the other hand, you will become their inveterate enemy, and oppose them by every means in your power.”³⁰ A typological view of the church of the Lamb allows us to include the modern day Cyruses who will stand with the Saints in defense of righteousness. Scripture paints dark days for the Saints as the end draws near, but it does not leave them without allies in their struggles.

The Triumph of the Lamb

Both historically and typologically, Nephi’s vision depicts the members of the church of the Lamb of God as a relatively small band, besieged by the church of the devil on all sides. Although the vision presents the righteous with a realistic picture of the difficulties they will face in the last days, it is also meant to present a light at the end of the tunnel. While the Saints of the church of the Lamb and the covenant people of the Lord are arming themselves with righteousness, their enemies will begin to tear themselves apart from the inside. Nephi described the beginning of “wars and rumors of wars among all the nations which belonged to the mother of abominations,” and his angelic guide informed him that “the wrath of God is poured out upon the mother of harlots” (1 Nephi 14:16–17). While the dismemberment of the church of the devil will wreak havoc among the nations, it may also open doors for the gospel to spread as well. The messenger informed Nephi that at the time that the wrath of God is poured out upon the great and abominable church, “the work of the Father shall commence, in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants, which he hath made to his people who are of the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 14:17).

This passage may have several different meanings. During his ministry on the American continent, the Savior that taught when his words spoken among the Nephites (meaning the Book of Mormon) would come forth among the Gentiles, it would be the sign that the great work of the Father had begun (see 3 Nephi 21:1–4). If we take the commencement of the “work of the Father”

to be all the events surrounding the Restoration, beginning with the religious forerunners to Joseph Smith and the early laborers of the gospel, we may take heart in knowing that the seeds of the fall of Babylon were laid long ago and continue to grow as we draw nearer to the Second Coming. There can be no doubt that the number of wars and their severity has increased exponentially since the Church has been restored to the earth. However, the wars in and of themselves have opened doors for the gospel to spread among the nations. The most rapid increase in Church membership came in the decades following the world wars of the first half of the twentieth century. Those tragic events, taken in a millennial context, may be a manifestation of the Lord's promise that "with the sword and by bloodshed the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn" (D&C 87:6). While war is a tragedy, it also drives men to Christ. C. S. Lewis wryly commented that one of Satan's best weapons, contented worldliness, is rendered useless during these times because "in wartime not even a human can believe that he is going to live forever."³¹ While the church of the devil exists to oppose the church of the Lamb, the Lord has a way of using tragedy to bring us to repentance and into the fold of God.

Another interpretation of what is meant by the commencement of the Father's work is found in a discourse the Savior gave during his ministry among the Nephites. The Savior prophesied of the building of the New Jerusalem, a millennial event. After this had come to pass, the Savior foretold that "then shall the work of the Father *commence* at that day, even when this gospel shall be preached among the remnant of this people, . . . yea, even the tribes which have been lost, which the Father hath led away out of Jerusalem" (3 Nephi 21: 26; emphasis added). The Savior continues, "Yea, the work shall *commence* among all the dispersed of my people, with the Father to prepare the way whereby they may come unto me, that they may call upon the Father in my name. Yea, and then shall the work *commence*, with the Father among all nations in preparing the way whereby his people may be gathered home to the land of their inheritance" (3 Nephi 21:27–28; emphasis added).

Why does the Savior say that the work will commence *after* an event which has yet to occur, namely the building of the New Jerusalem? After all, hasn't the gospel been on earth in its fullness since the days of Joseph Smith? What the Savior is saying in no way diminishes the work of Church members in our day, but it may indicate that the labors of the Saints prior to the building of the New Jerusalem will only act as a prologue to the work to

be performed in the great millennial day. In the last days, the Lord promised that “righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood” (Moses 7:62), a rising tide finally reaching its peak in the Millennium. At that time the members of the restored Church of Jesus Christ will finally join with the pure in heart of all faiths who stood by their side during the last days in embracing the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote, “The gospel will be taught far more intensely and with greater power during the millennium, *until all the inhabitants of the earth shall embrace it.*”³² President Brigham Young prophesied of this great millennial day when he declared, “To accomplish this work there will have to be not only one temple but thousands of them, and thousands and tens of thousands of men and women will go into those temples and officiate for people who have lived as far back as the Lord shall reveal.”³³ Continuing on this theme, Elder McConkie wrote, “We expect to see the day when temples will dot the earth, each one a house of the Lord; each one built in the mountains of the Lord; each one a sacred sanctuary to which Israel and the Gentiles shall gather to receive the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Perhaps they will number in the hundreds, or even in the thousands, before the Lord returns.”³⁴

Nephi’s Vision and the Followers of the Lamb

Looked at from any angle, Nephi’s vision of the church of the Lamb of God assures us that Satan will seek desperately to destroy or hinder the followers of God in the last days. We still live in a troubled world where the devil holds sway. The Saints and their allies have faced intolerance, violence, and opposition in the past and will again in the future. Elder McConkie wrote, “Our persecutions and difficulties have scarcely begun. We saw mobbing and murders and martyrdom as the foundations of the work were laid in the United States. These same things, with greater intensity, shall yet fall upon the faithful in all nations.”³⁵ Along with the spiritual triumphs, we may anticipate that the persecutions and trials that followed the Saints in America will be repeated in Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe, and everywhere the Church grows and spreads. The gulf between the righteous and the wicked will continue to widen. However, in spite of the dark days ahead, the scriptures assure us of better things to come.

Nephi’s vision of the church of the Lamb ended rather abruptly. He was assured that the church of the devil would meet its demise and that the

church of the Lamb would take part in the commencement of the Father's work, but the things that came after these events were not shown. Instead, his guide showed him that the Apostle John would write the remainder of the vision. But his glimpse of future events was enough to sustain Nephi. Later in his life, Nephi would write of the millennial time after the work of the Father had commenced and the church of the Lamb had triumphed over its foes. Whether he had seen it in another vision, or had extrapolated from what he had previously been told, Nephi assured us of a future day when, "because of the righteousness of his [the Lord's] people, Satan has no power; wherefore, he cannot be loosed for the space of many years; for he hath no power over the hearts of the people, for they dwell in righteousness, and the Holy One of Israel reigneth" (1 Nephi 22:26).

In our day Nephi's vision of the church of the Lamb reminds us that though the righteous may be facing an overwhelming flood of wickedness, there is no need to fear. The faithful may be few and scattered, but the power of the Lord is with them. We can rest assured that the church of the Lamb, "armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory" (1 Nephi 14:14), will eventually triumph over all of its foes. Nephi reminds us that no matter how dark our times may become, there is a sure hand protecting the faithful and guiding them to safety. Viewed as a historical prophecy, Nephi provides us with a healthy reminder that though the Church may be relatively small, it will play a critical role in the salvation of men in the last days. Viewed as typology, Nephi reminds us that strength lies not in numbers but in purity. Both views speak to the truth taught by another Book of Mormon prophet, "that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise. And the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise" (Alma 37:6).

Notes

1. Ezra Taft Benson, "The Book of Mormon Is the Word of God," *Ensign*, January 1988, 3.
2. Stephen E. Robinson, "Warring against the Saints of God," *Ensign*, January 1988, 34.
3. Robinson, "Warring against the Saints of God," 37.
4. George Albert Smith, in Conference Report, October 1949, 9.

5. Boyd K. Packer, "The Only True Church," *Ensign*, October 1985, 82.
6. Rodney Stark, "The Rise of a New World Faith," *Review of Religious Research* 26, no. 1 (September 1984): 18–27.
7. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Mormonism*, ed. Reid L. Neilson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 22.
8. Stark, *Rise of Mormonism*, 146. The 2010 *Church Almanac* cites Church membership as of January 1, 2009, to be 13,508, 509, which places actual membership in the middle of Stark's estimates for where Church membership would be in 2010, with a high estimate of 15,564,000 and a low estimate of 10,190,000. 2010 *Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2010).
9. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population to 2300: Proceedings of the United Nations Expert Meeting on World Population in 2300* (New York: United Nations, 2004), 4, <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/longrange2/WorldPop2300final>.
10. All statistics taken from the 2010 *Church Almanac*. To offer a few examples, Church membership in New York State is .4 percent of the total population, or 1 in 257. In a Western European country like Germany, membership is .05%, or 1 in 2,193. In India, Church membership is .0006, or 1 in 153,918.
11. Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Answers: Straightforward Answers to Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 119–20.
12. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, October 1968, 123, quoted in Boyd K. Packer, "The Power of the Priesthood," *Ensign*, May 2010, 7.
13. Victor L. Ludlow, "The Internationalization of the Church," in *Out of Obscurity: The LDS Church in the Twentieth Century* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 2000.
14. This figure was calculated by statistics taken from the *Deseret News 2010 Church Almanac*, 4–5.
15. Reid L. Neilson, "A Recommissioning of Latter-day Saint Historians," in *Global Mormonism*, ed. Reid L. Neilson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2008), xi–xv.
16. Wilford Woodruff, *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, ed. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 38–39.
17. Calculated from statistics in *Deseret News 2010 Church Almanac*, 4–5.
18. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1976), 4:540.
19. Ludlow, *Out of Obscurity*, 216–17.
20. *Deseret News 2010 Church Almanac*, 4, 185.
21. From information taken from <http://lds.org/church/temples/around-the-world/list?lang=eng>.
22. George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, ed. Jerreld L. Newquist (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 111.
23. Boyd K. Packer, "The Power of the Priesthood," *Ensign*, May 2010, 6.
24. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The True Strength of the Church," *Ensign*, July 1973, 48.
25. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennium Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 54–55. Elder McConkie's views regarding the identity of the church of the devil have long been a lively topic of discussion. Several

accounts of controversy on this topic may be found in Joseph Fielding McConkie, *The Bruce R. McConkie Story: Reflections of a Son* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book, 2003), 182–94; and Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 49–52, 122. Elder McConkie's views here are taken from his latest writings and, I believe, represent the most accurate account of his views on the subject.

26. Robinson, "Warring against the Saints of God," 37.

27. Doctrine and Covenants 45:68 designates these people as being among the wicked. In speaking of members of other faiths on the earth during the Millennium, Joseph Smith taught, "There will be wicked men on the earth during the thousand years." *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp., Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 268–69. President Joseph Fielding Smith interpreted the Prophet's use of *wicked* in the context of D&C 84:49–53 as referring to those who have not received the ordinances. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 3:63–64. I would assume that the use of *wicked* in section 45 is also used in this sense, at least in terms of those who refuse to commit violence.

28. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 161.

29. James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 1:257.

30. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 1:257.

31. C. S. Lewis, *The Joyful Christian* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 148–49.

32. Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:64; emphasis in original.

33. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1856), 3:372.

34. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, 1982), 277.

35. McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, 55.