

**Alma's 400-Year Prophecy, Alma's
Conversion Account and Mormon's 400-
Year History:
Shadows and Chiasmus**

Ted S. Meikle

© Ted S. Meikle 1998, 2004
10900 38th Avenue North
Plymouth, Minnesota 55441
(612)545-1380
Ted@Meikle.org

Abstract:

Near the end of the ministry of Alma the Younger, he shared with his son Helaman his personal conversion experience, masterfully using the literary form of chiasmus (Alma 36). That same year Alma shared with Helaman a prophecy that until then he had been unable to tell anyone: 400 years after Christ, the Nephites would dwindle in unbelief and become extinct. Although Alma was not able to share with others the 400-year prophecy, it appears that in his conversion account he foreshadowed the 400-year history of those Nephites he saw.

Mormon, the great Nephite historian who led the Nephite people in their waning years, seems to have recognized the parallel between Alma's conversion account and the history Mormon was writing. His history tracks in a remarkable way important elements of Alma's conversion account. Most remarkably, at that crucial point in the history where the Nephites and Lamanites hear Christ's voice pierce the three-day darkness, at a point that parallels the chiastic center of Alma's personal conversion account, Christ speaks to his people chiastically.

The Setting

It was nearly five hundred years before the destruction of the Nephites and about 73 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. Seventeen full years had passed since Alma, the son of Alma, had been appointed the first Judge over the Nephites (Alma 35:12). About eight years had passed since he gave up that position to devote his full time to reestablish the church, as its high priest (Alma 4:20).

Alma recently had returned from a dangerous mission preaching to the apostate Zoramites, where he had converted many of the common people. This had angered the Zoramite leaders, and they cast the converts out of their land. The converts fled to the Ammonites (who themselves were refugees from the Lamanites). The Ammonites received the converts and gave them food, clothing and land. The Nephites gave them protection. The angry Zoramites demanded that the Ammonites cast out the converts. The Ammonites refused. The Zoramites responded by joining with the Lamanites and preparing for war (Alma 35:1-12).

In the beginning of the eighteenth year, the Zoramites and Lamanites attacked (Alma 43:4). Alma grieved because of the iniquity, the wars, and the bloodsheds. He had devoted eight years declaring the word in every city and yet the hearts of the people hardened (Alma 35:14-15).

The Counsel

Alma's grief prompted him to give special charges to his sons. "Now Alma, being grieved . . . therefore, he caused that his sons should be gathered together, that he might give unto them every one his charge, separately, concerning the things pertaining unto righteousness" (Alma 35:16).

To his son Helaman, Alma told of his conversion from enemy of the church into a great follower of Jesus Christ (Alma 36). His account is perhaps the greatest example ever written of the chiasmic literary form.¹ Alma tells about the most intimate of

¹ I assume the reader is familiar with the chiasmic structure used in Alma 36. Jeff Lindsay has an excellent discussion of chiasmus in the Book

experiences, of his individual sin, sorrow, suffering, acceptance of Christ, receipt of forgiveness of sins, joy, and sharing this joy with others. His account is a description of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, on an intensely personal level.

After blessing his sons, Alma went out with them to preach the gospel to his people one last time (Alma 43:1-2). But it was not a time for peaceful preaching. General Moroni requested that Alma ask the Lord where the Nephites should send their armies. Alma did so, and received the word of the Lord (Alma 43:23-24). Moroni listened, and his armies defeated the Lamanites (Alma 43:25-44:23), thus preserving “their homes, and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, their rites of worship and their church” (Alma 43:45).

The Prophecy

It was still in the eighteenth year that the battle was won (Alma 44:24). In the beginning of the nineteenth year (Alma 45:2, 20) Alma departed out of the land, never to be seen again (Alma 45:18-19). His son Helaman reports that shortly before Alma left, he shared one last, great prophecy with his son—a prophecy about the future destruction of the Nephites.

First, Alma interviewed Helaman, asking whether he believed Alma’s words about the sacred records, whether he believed in Jesus Christ, and whether he would keep the commandments. To each query Helaman answered yes (Alma 45:2-7).

of Mormon at <http://www.jefflindsay.com/chiasmus.shtml>.

John Welch has written a number of articles on this topic. See John W. Welch, “A Masterpiece: Alma 36,” ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1991) 114-131; John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 10, no. 1 (1969 Autumn) 69-84, reprinted in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982) 33-52. A number of other articles exploring chiasmus are available through the Foundation for Ancient Research & Mormon Studies, P.O. Box 7113, University Station, Provo, Utah 84602.

8 Then Alma said unto him: Blessed art thou; and the Lord shall prosper thee in this land.

9 But behold, I have somewhat to prophesy unto thee; but what I prophesy unto thee ye shall not make known; yea, what I prophesy unto thee shall not be made known, even until the prophecy is fulfilled; therefore write the words which I shall say.

10 And these are the words: Behold, I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, according to the spirit of revelation which is in me, in four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them, shall dwindle in unbelief.

11 Yea, and then shall they see wars and pestilences, yea, famines and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct—

* * *

(Alma 45:8-15).

Alma, in this intimate moment, shared with his son a prophetic burden that until then he had been unable to share with anyone. Having devoted his life to saving his people from spiritual and physical destruction, Alma knew that four hundred years after Christ, they spiritually would dwindle and physically be destroyed.

The Foreshadowing

Perhaps, however, Alma had already prophesied to his son of the history of those final 400 years, not openly, but in the language of types and shadows. On the personal level, Alma's masterpiece account of his own conversion, related to his son in Alma 36, is an amazingly structured, carefully constructed account of Alma's most sacred and intimate experience.

Yet on another level, Alma's account parallels in a remarkable way the history of those final 400 years as written by Mormon, the prophet, soldier and historian of the last Nephite generation. Alma may have had the 400-year prophecy on his mind when he prepared his conversion account. He presented both at a time he was troubled with the great Lamanite attack

that threatened to destroy his people. It was this very grief over his peoples' iniquity and the resulting wars that prompted Alma to relate his conversion account to his son (Alma 35:15-16).

Alma's conversion account foreshadows the coming of Christ to his people, and the history surrounding that visit. Conversely, the 400-year history typifies the relationship between repentance, atonement and forgiveness taught in Alma 36.

The prophetic link is subtle, yet convincing. Perhaps the most immediately obvious parallel is this: Alma spent three days in torment before he remembered his Savior and had his pain replaced with joy. The Nephites and Lamanites also suffered three days in darkness and torment before the words of Christ rescued them, replacing their pain with joy.

The catalyst for Alma 36 was Alma's grief over the near destruction of his people in the Lamanite attack. Alma makes apparent in Alma 36 that he has more than his personal conversion in mind. He starts his account reminding his son of the maxim that was linked repeatedly with the physical and political well-being of Lehi's descendants: "inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land" (Alma 36:1). He continues with another admonition that again seems to fit better in an account of his people than an account simply about personal salvation: "I would that ye should do as I have done, in remembering the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was [God]" (Alma 36:2).

The Shadows Reflected

About 385 years after the coming of Christ (Mormon 6:5), Mormon knew he was presiding over the people whose destruction Alma had foreseen. As Mormon studied and edited Alma's writings, perhaps he also saw in Alma's personal conversion account a pattern of the spiritual history of the Nephite people during the 400 years.

Mormon appears to have written his history to parallel key elements in Alma 36, in recognition of the prophetic foreshadowing in Alma's conversion account. Mormon's history

consistently tracks important elements of Alma's conversion account. Most remarkably, at that crucial point in the history where the Nephites and Lamanites hear Christ's voice pierce the three-day darkness, at a point that parallels the chiasmic center of Alma's personal conversion account, Christ speaks to his people chiasmatically.

Mormon's history of the 400 years after Christ is now found beginning at 3 Nephi 1:1 and ending at Mormon 7:10. This article highlights the parallels between Alma 36 and this history.

The book of 3 Nephi begins in the 600th year after Lehi left Jerusalem.² In this year, the prophecies of Christ's birth began to be fulfilled (3 Nephi 1:4), and the parallel between Alma's conversion story and Mormon's history begins:³

In Alma 36, Alma begins his blessing to his son urging him to listen to his *words*. Similarly, Mormon begins his abridgment of the history of the final 400 years of the Nephite history with a contrast between those who believed the *words* of the prophets and those who did not:

Alma 36:1

3 Nephi 1:5-21

1 My son, **give ear to my *words***; . . .

5 But there were **some who began to say that the time was past for *the words* to be fulfilled, which were spoken by Samuel, the Lamanite.**

² Mormon knew that this year marked the fulfillment of Lehi's great prophecy that Christ would come 600 years after Lehi left Jerusalem. Mormon knew also that the year marked the commencement of the 400 years prophesied by Alma.

³ I do not suggest that every element in Mormon's history corresponds with an element in Alma 36, for it does not. Moroni was an historian and would not be expected to so severely compromise his ability to tell the history. However, he could without compromise weave the elements and order of Alma 36 into his history.

All the suggested correlations are not of the same strength. Many, taken alone, would prove nothing. But taken together, the consistency of correlations found that match the order of items in Alma 36 is impressive.

6 And they began to rejoice over their brethren, saying: Behold the time is past, and **the words of Samuel** are not fulfilled; therefore, your joy and your faith concerning this thing hath been vain.

7 And it came to pass that they did make a great uproar throughout the land; and the people who believed began to be very sorrowful, lest by any means **those things which had been spoken** might not come to pass.

The believers watched “for that day and that night and that day which should be as one day as if there were no night.” The unbelievers set a deadline. If the great sign of Christ’s birth did not occur by then, they would put to death those who believed (3 Nephi 1:9). Nephi, the prophet, sorrowing at this wickedness, cried mightily to his God, “and behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying:”

13 Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world, **to show unto the world that I will fulfill all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets.**

* * *

15 And it came to pass that *the words which came unto Nephi were fulfilled, according as they had been spoken*; for behold, at the going down of the sun there was no darkness; and the people began to be astonished because there was no darkness when the night came.

16 And there were **many, who had not believed *the words of the prophets***, who fell to the earth and became as if they were dead, for **they knew that the great plan of destruction which they had laid for those who believed in the *words of the prophets* had been frustrated**; for the sign which had been given was already at hand.

* * *

19. .and they knew that it was the day that the Lord should be born.

...

20 And it had come to pass, yea, all things, every whit, **according to the *words of the prophets***.

21 And it came to pass also that a new star did appear, **according to the word**.

The theme, both in Alma 36 and in 3 Nephi, now changes to obedience and peace, disobedience and contention.

Alma 36:1**3 Nephi 1:22-2:19**

. . . for I swear unto you, **that inasmuch as ye keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land.**

Satan immediately set to work, “**but notwithstanding these lyings and deceivings the more part of the people did believe, and were converted unto the Lord.**” Nephi and others went among the people, “baptizing unto repentance, in the which **there was a great remission of sins. And thus the people began again to have *peace in the land***” (3 Nephi 1:22-23). “And there were **no contentions,**” except for some who believed that the law of Moses already was fulfilled; but they quickly were corrected (3 Nephi 1:24-25).

But disobedience soon surfaced. The Gadianton robbers infested the land and both Nephites and Lamanites began to dissent away to the robbers’ strongholds in the mountains (3 Nephi 1:27-30).

3 And it came to pass that **the people began to wax strong in wickedness and abominations;** and they did not believe that there should be any more signs or wonders given; and **Satan did go about, leading away the hearts of the people, tempting them and causing them that they should do great wickedness in the land** (3 Nephi 2:3).

Wars followed the iniquity. The Gadianton robbers “did slay so many of the people, and did lay waste so many cities, and did spread so much death and carnage throughout the land, that it became expedient that all the people, both the Nephites and the Lamanites, should take up arms against them” (3 Nephi 2:11).

13 And it came to pass that **before this thirteenth year had passed away the Nephites were threatened with utter destruction because of this war, which had become exceedingly sore** (3 Nephi 2:11-13).

In the 14th year “the people of Nephi did gain some advantage of the robbers” (3 Nephi 2:17). However, Nephite wickedness prevailed and the robbers regained advantage:

18 . . . **Because of the wickedness** of the people of Nephi, and their many contentions and dissensions, the Gadianton robbers did gain many advantages over them.

19 And. . .the sword of destruction did hang over them, inso-much that **they were about to be smitten down by it, and this because of their iniquity** (3 Nephi 2:18-19).

Now a new theme is introduced. Again, although Alma is reciting his personal experience of conversion, he urges his son to remember a very national theme: that his fathers were in *bondage* and *captivity* and that *none but God could deliver them*. In Mormon's account, the people, on the verge of destruction, are forced to abandon their lands and gather into one group where they ultimately are *placed under siege*. Their leader makes it clear that *only God can deliver them*.

Alma 36:2**3 Nephi 3:1-4:30**

Lachoneus, the Nephite governor, received a letter from Giddianhi, leader of the robbers. Giddianhi made an offer: if the Nephites would yield their cities, lands and possessions, and unite with the robbers, they would be spared (3 Nephi 3:1-10).

Lachoneus was "a just man, and could not be frightened by the demands and threatenings of a robber". He ordered that the Nephites gather for protection, and "he did cause that his people should cry unto the Lord for strength against the time that the robbers should come down against them" (3 Nephi 3:12).

13 Yea, he sent a proclamation among all the people, that they should **gather** together their women, and their children, their flocks and their herds, and all their substance, save it were their land, **unto one place**.

14 And he caused that **fortifications** should be built round about

2 I would that ye should do as I have done, in remembering **the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage...**

. . . and **none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;**

them, and the strength thereof should be exceedingly great. And he caused that **armies**, both of the Nephites and of the Lamanites, or of all them who were numbered among the Nephites, **should be placed as guards round about to watch them, and to guard them from the robbers day and night.**

15 Yea, he said unto them: **As the Lord liveth, except ye repent of all your iniquities, and cry unto the Lord, ye will in no wise be delivered out of the hands of those Gadianton robbers** (3 Nephi 3:15).

The Nephites wanted to go into the mountains and wilderness and destroy the robbers in their own lands (3 Nephi 3:20),

21 But Gidgiddoni saith unto them: **The Lord forbid; for if we should go up against them the Lord would deliver us into their hands;** therefore we will prepare ourselves in the center of our lands, and we will gather all our armies together, and we will not go against them, **but we will wait till they shall come against us; therefore as the Lord liveth, if we do this he will deliver them into our hands.**

* * *

25 And they did fortify them-

selves against their enemies; and they did dwell in one land, and in one body, and they did fear the words which had been spoken by Lachoneus, insomuch that they did repent of all their sins; **and they did put up their prayers unto the Lord their God, that he would deliver them in the time that their enemies should come down against them to battle.**

26 And they were exceedingly sorrowful because of their enemies . . . (3 Nephi 3:25-26).

The robbers took possession of the abandoned Nephite lands, but could not survive, “for the Nephites had left their lands desolate, and had gathered their flocks and their herds and all their substance, and they were in one body” (3 Nephi 4:1-4). The Nephites had gathered seven years of provisions, hoping to outlast the robbers in their self-imposed bondage (3 Nephi 4:4).

The robbers had no choice but to attack, and attack they did, “dyed in blood” and “great and terrible in appearance” (3 Nephi 3:5-7).

8 And it came to pass that the armies of the Nephites, when they saw the appearance of the army of Giddianhi, had all fallen to the earth, and **did lift their cries to the Lord their God, that he**

. . . and he surely **did deliver them in**

their afflictions.

would spare them and deliver them out of the hands of their enemies.

9 And it came to pass that when the armies of Giddianhi saw this they began to shout with a loud voice, because of their joy, for they had supposed that the Nephites had fallen with fear because of the terror of their armies.

10 But in this thing they were disappointed, for **the Nephites did not fear them; but they did fear their God and did supplicate him for protection; therefore, when the armies of Giddianhi did rush upon them they were prepared to meet them; yea, in the strength of the Lord they did receive them.**

“Great and terrible was the battle” and “great and terrible was the slaughter,” but “behold, **the Nephites did beat them.**” Giddianhi, the robber leader, was killed, and “the armies of the Nephites did return again to their place of security” (3 Nephi 4:11-15).

The nineteenth year ended; the twentieth passed; in the twenty-first, the robbers tried another tactic: “they came up on all sides to lay siege round about the people of Nephi. . . .” (3 Nephi 4:16-17). But the robbers ran out of food before the Nephites did, and the Nephites kept piercing

the siege and destroying robber armies (3 Nephi 4:18-21). Finally the robbers decided to flee to the land northward, but the Nephites learned of the plan, cut them off and destroyed the robber armies (3 Nephi 4:22-27).

The people captured and hanged the robber leader upon a tree, and rejoiced and acknowledged God's deliverance:

29 May the Lord preserve his people in righteousness and in holiness of heart, that they may cause to be felled to the earth all who shall seek to slay them because of power and secret combinations, even as this man hath been felled to the earth.

30 And they did rejoice and cry again with one voice, saying: **May the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, protect this people in righteousness, so long as they shall call on the name of their God for protection.**

(3 Nephi 4: 28-30)

(See reference above to **'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'**).

Alma next assures his son that he *knows* that God will support those who trust him in their trials, and will lift them at the last day. Mormon talks about the peoples' *knowledge* that it was God that delivered them from an everlasting destruction. Both Alma and Mormon talk of knowledge of salvation in an eternal context—"at the last day" and "from an everlasting destruction."

Alma 36:3**3 Nephi 4:31-33**

3 And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth, and therefore, I beseech of thee that thou wilt hear my words and learn of me; **for I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day.**

The people sang and praised God “for the great thing which he had done for them, in preserving them from falling into the hands of their enemies” (3 Nephi 4:31).

33 And their hearts were swollen with joy, unto the gushing out of many tears, because of the great goodness of God in delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; and **they knew it was because of their repentance and their humility that they had been delivered from an everlasting destruction.**

Alma relates *how* he knows these things—God made them known to him by the mouth of an *angel*. Mormon relates *how* the people knew these things—they knew it because of signs that occurred according to the words of *the prophets*.⁴

Alma 36:4**3 Nephi 5:1 - 2**

4 And I would not that ye think that I **know** of myself—not of the temporal but of the spiritual, not of the carnal mind but **of God.**

5 Now, behold, I

1 And now behold, **there was not a living soul among all the people of the Nephites who did doubt in the least the words of all the holy prophets** who had spoken; for **they knew** that it must needs be that they must be fulfilled.

⁴ (As will be seen later at Alma 36:6 and 3 Nephi 7:15-17, a strong correlation exists between prophets in Mormon’s account and the angel in Alma’s account.)

say unto you, **if I had not been born of God I should not have known these things;** but God has, *by the mouth of his holy angel*, made these things known unto me, not of any worthiness of myself.

2 And they *knew* that it must be expedient that Christ had come, *because* of the many signs which had been given, *according to the words of the prophets*; and *because* of the things which had come to pass already *they knew* that it must needs be that all things should come to pass according to that which had been spoken.

The Nephites forsook their sins. They preached the gospel to all the robbers they had taken prisoner. Those who covenanted to murder no more were set free; those who would not were killed (3 Nephi 5:3-7).

At this point, Mormon finishes the scene, inserts an editorial (3 Nephi 5:7-26) and then he starts the next scene which correlates with Alma's account:

Alma tells how he and his buddies went about seeking to *destroy the church*. Mormon tells of a group which *broke up the church* and ultimately, the righteous government.

Alma 36:6

3 Nephi 6:1 - 7:14

6 For I went about

The people returned to their own lands. They established peace. They formed laws according to equity and justice. They built new cities, rebuilt old ones, and built many roads (3 Nephi 6:1-9).

And then came disputes, pride, riches, divisions into classes because education was available only to the rich (3 Nephi 6:10-12).

14 And thus there became a great

with the sons of Mosiah, **seeking to destroy the church of God;**

inequality in all the land, insomuch that **the church began to be broken up**; yea, insomuch that in the thirtieth year **the church was broken up in all the land** save it were among a few of the Lamanites who were converted unto the true faith . . . (3 Nephi 6:10-16).

Mormon then gives details of what led to the breakup of the church. Inspired men had arisen, had testified of the people's wickedness, and had prophesied of Christ's sufferings, death, resurrection and redemption of his people. This angered powerful chief judges, high priests and lawyers. These judges secretly put to death many of those who testified of Christ. Word of these illegal executions leaked, and these chief judges were brought to trial for murder (3 Nephi 6:20-26). The family and friends of these powerful people united to save them, entering into that covenant "given and administered by the devil, to **combine against all righteousness**" (3 Nephi 6:27-28).

29 Therefore **they did combine against the people of the Lord, and enter into a covenant to destroy them. . . .**

30 And they did set at defiance the law and the rights of their country; and **they did covenant**

one with another to destroy the governor, and to establish a king over the land, that the land should no more be at liberty but should be subject unto kings (3 Nephi 6:28-30).

The conspirator judges murdered the governor, and tried to establish a king. The people rejected a king, but the contention destroyed the centralized government. People turned to their kin groups of family and friends for protection. Nearly all returned to wickedness. The judges' group fled out of the land. The remaining kin groups agreed not to war among themselves and established an uneasy peace, but they remained wicked, stoning and casting out the prophets (3 Nephi 7:1-14).

Alma then tells how God intervened, and sent an *angel* to turn his heart. An “*angel*” arose among the Nephites also, in the person of Nephi, to turn their hearts. Although Nephi is mortal, the historian Mormon closely identifies Nephi with angels at this stage of the account.⁵

Alma 36:6

3 Nephi 7:15-16

6 . . .but behold,
God sent his holy *angel* to stop us by the way.

15 And it came to pass that
Nephi—having been visited by *angels* and also the voice of the Lord, therefore **having seen *an-***

⁵ In Alma 36:5 and 3 Nephi 5:2, there is a similar correlation linking angels in Alma's account with prophets in Mormon's history. See the comparison between those passages earlier in this article.

gels, and being eye-witness, and **having had power given unto him that he might know concerning the ministry of Christ**, and also being eye-witness to their quick return from righteousness unto their wickedness and abominations;

16 Therefore, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds—**went forth among them in that same year, and began to testify, boldly**, repentance and remission of sins through faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Both Nephi and the angel who appears to Alma come with overwhelming power.

Alma 36:7

7 And behold, he spake unto us, **as it were the voice of thunder, and the whole earth did tremble beneath our feet**; and we all fell to the earth, for the fear of the Lord came upon us.

3 Nephi 7:17-18

17 And he did minister many things unto them; and all of them cannot be written, and a part of them would not suffice, therefore they are not written in this book. **And Nephi did minister with power and with great authority.**
 18 **And it came to pass that they were angry with him, even because he had greater power than they, for it were not possible that they could disbelieve his words**, for so great was his faith on the Lord Jesus Christ that **angels did minister unto him**

daily.

The angel caused Alma to *arise*. Nephi *raised* his brother from the dead.⁶

Alma 36:8

3 Nephi 7:19

8 But behold, the voice said unto me: *Arise. And I arose* and stood up, and beheld the angel.

19 And in the name of Jesus did he cast out devils and unclean spirits; and even his brother did he *raise* from the dead, after he had been stoned and suffered death by the people.

The message was undeniably true; yet Alma still had the ability to choose how he would react. This is evident from the angel's words "if thou wilt of thyself be destroyed. . ." Similarly, the people hearing Nephi, although they had no choice but to believe the words because of the power with which they were delivered, still were able to choose how they would react to them: some accepted and some rejected Nephi's words.

Alma 36:9

3 Nephi 7:20 - 26

9 And he said unto me: **If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed,** seek no more to destroy the church of God.

20 And **the people saw it, and did witness of it, and were angry with him because of his power,** and he did also do many more miracles, in the sight of the people, in the name of Jesus.

21 And it came to pass that the thirty and first year did pass away, and **there were but few who were converted unto the**

⁶ This linkage between standing up and rising from the dead is repeated and made more explicit in the comparison between Alma 36:23 and 3 Nephi 17:19-20, below.

Lord; but as many as were converted did truly signify unto the people that they had been visited by the power and Spirit of God, which was in Jesus Christ, in whom they believed.

Those who were converted received miraculous healings and were blessed with the Spirit of God. Nephi continued to preach repentance, and in the thirty-third year many were ordained to the ministry and many were baptized (3 Nephi 17:22-26).

Although the people could choose whether they would accept the words of their “angel” Nephi, they have no choice about the fulfillment of the prophesied *three days* of darkness and destruction. Alma, also, goes through his own personal *three days* of hell.

Alma 36:10-11

3 Nephi 8:3-22

10 And it came to pass that I fell to the earth; and it was **for the space of *three days and three nights*** that I could not open my mouth, neither had I the use of my limbs.

11 And the angel spake more things unto me, which were heard by my brethren, but I did not hear them; for when I heard the

3 And the people began to look with great earnestness for the sign which had been given by the prophet Samuel, the Lamanite, yea, for the time **that there should be darkness for the space of *three days over the face of the land.***

Then "there arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land." There was "a great and terrible tempest," "terrible thunder that shook the whole earth," "ex-

<p>words—If thou wilt be destroyed of thyself, seek no more to destroy the church of God—I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed, that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more.</p>	<p>ceedingly sharp lightnings" never before seen. Cities burned, sank into the sea, were buried under mountains. Destruction was terrible in the land southward, and more terrible in the land northward. The face of the land was changed, highways broken up, cities sunk, buildings destroyed, inhabitants slain and carried away by whirlwinds, and rocks broken up (3 Nephi 8:6-18).</p>
--	---

"All these great and terrible things were done in about the space of three hours—and then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land." The darkness was thick "insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel the vapor of darkness." The mists of darkness were so heavy, that there could be no fire kindled, nor glimmer of light from sun, moon or stars (3 Nephi 8:19-22).

Both Alma and the people in 3 Nephi suffered tremendously.

Alma 36:12

12 But I was racked with eternal torment, for **my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.**

3 Nephi 8:23

23 And it came to pass that it did last **for the space of three days** that there was no light seen; and **there was great mourning and howling and weeping among all the people continually**; yea, great were the groanings of the people, **because of the darkness**

and the great destruction which had come upon them.

From their sufferings sprang realization of their sins.

Alma 36:13

3 Nephi 8:24

13 Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell, yea, **I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments.**

24 And in one place they were heard to cry, saying: **O that we had repented before this great and terrible day**, and then would our brethren have been spared, and they would not have been burned in that great city Zarahemla.

Alma recognized that spiritually he had murdered many of God's children. The people in 3 Nephi bewailed their realization that they had killed and stoned the prophets.

Alma 36:14

3 Nephi 8:25

14 Yea, and **I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; . . .**

25 And in another place they were heard to cry and mourn, saying: **O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and had not killed and stoned the prophets, and cast them out;** then would our mothers and our fair daughters, and our children have been spared, and not have been buried up in that great city Moronihah. . . .

Alma's three-day hell created "inexpressible horror"; the people's three-day hell caused howlings "great and terri-

ble.”

Alma 36:14-16

3 Nephi 8:25

. . . yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that the **very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.**

15 Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.

16 And now, for three days and for three nights **was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.**

. . . And thus were **the howlings of the people great and terrible.**

Then, in his extremity, Alma remembered having heard his father prophesy. And to the people in 3 Nephi, out of the darkness, came a voice.

Alma 36:17

3 Nephi 9:1-11

17 And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of

1 And it came to pass that **there was a voice heard among all the inhabitants of the earth**, upon all the face of this land, crying:

my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people	The voice cried wo, and recounted to the people the destruction, city by city, declaring it was done “that the blood of the prophets and saints should not come up any more unto me against them” (3 Nephi 9:2-11).
---	---

Then, as the survivors’ minds were turned to remembrance, Jesus Christ spoke to them directly.⁷ He identified himself to them, not yet by sight, but by voice (3 Nephi 9:13-22). Christ’s own words repeatedly reflect the phrases that Alma, in his darkness, remembered his father speak.

Alma 36:17**3 Nephi 9:16 & 21**

17. . . behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning <i>the coming</i> . . .	16 <i>I came unto my own</i> , and my own received me not. And the scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled. * * * 21 Behold, <i>I have come unto the world</i> to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin.
---	---

Alma 36:17**3 Nephi 9:15**

17. . . of one <i>Jesus Christ, a Son of God</i> , . . .	15 Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God . I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father, and the Father in me; and in me hath the Fa-
--	---

⁷ In verses 2 through 12, Christ spoke of the Nephites in the third person, relating what happened to “them” because of wickedness. In verses 13 through 22, he turns the object of his speech to “you,” and no longer speaks of destruction, but of repentance and atonement.

ther glorified his name.

Alma 36:17**3 Nephi 9:21**

17. . **to atone for the sins of the world.**

21 Behold, I have come unto the world **to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin.**

There is an even more remarkable link between Alma 36:17 and 3 Nephi 9:13-22. Alma writes his account in chiasmic form. He places at the center of his account his father's prophecy about the coming of Jesus Christ to atone for the sins of the world. This is the turning point, the event of most importance. And in 3 Nephi—at the sacred moment when Christ speaks out of the darkness to the fearful Nephites and Lamanites, about the same themes the tormented Alma remembered hearing from his father—at that central point, Christ himself speaks chiasmically:

- A 13 O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and **repent of your sins**, and be converted, **that I may heal you?**
- B 14 Yea, verily I say unto you, **if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life.**
- C Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and **whosoever will come, him will I receive**; and blessed are those who come unto me.
- D 15 Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father, and the Father in me; and in me hath the Father glorified his name.
- 16 **I came unto my own**, and my own received me not. And the scriptures concerning **my coming** are fulfilled.
- E 17 **And as many as have re-**

ceived me, to them have I given to become the sons of God; and even so will I to as many as shall believe on my name, for behold, by me redemption cometh,

F and **in me is the law of Moses fulfilled.**

G 18 **I am** the light and the life of the world.

G' **I am** Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

F' 19 And **ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings.**

20 And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

E' **And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost**, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not.

D' 21 Behold, **I have come unto the world** to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin.

C' 22 Therefore, **whoso repenteth and cometh unto me** as a little child, **him will I receive**, for of such is the kingdom of God.

B' Behold, **for such [i.e. “whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child”] I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again;**

A' therefore **repent**, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, **and be saved.**

(3 Nephi 9:13-22)

This is a subtle and complex passage. How appropriate that Christ, introducing himself and his mission to his people, would choose his words so carefully. When read casually by a reader trained in modern stylistic conventions, these words seem to be not particularly well organized, and somewhat repetitive. But when read with an eye to a chiasmic structure, the words are sublime. Presented below are some of my thoughts as I have studied, pondered and prayed about these words.

There is much understanding to be gained by studying the relationships between the key words in the correlating passages. A number of the correlations are sufficiently obvious as to give us confidence in the chiasmic structure. Other correlated phrases then take advantage of the structure to play on similar ideas, inviting us to ponder and gain new insights in the relationships between the phrases.

In phrase A, Christ urges the people to return to him, to *repent*, to be converted; in A', to *repent* and to “come unto me.” The word *repent* is an exact correlate, and the other words are closely related in meaning. All involve coming close to Christ. In each passage, a reward is promised. In Phrase A, the people are asked to return, *repent* and be converted “that I may *heal* you.” In phrase A', they are asked to *repent* and come to Christ “and be *saved*.” In B, Christ repeats the plea to come to him, and adds another promise: “if ye will *come unto me* ye shall have *eternal life*.” In B', Christ states that for those who *repent* and *come unto him* as a little child⁸ “I have laid down my *life*, and have *taken it up again*.”

In C, Christ continues with the promises to us if we come unto him. “Whosoever will *come*, him will I *receive*.” In C', he repeats and expands on the meaning of coming unto him, and he repeats his promise: “Therefore, whoso *repenteth* and *cometh unto me as a little child*, him will I *receive*. . .”

The constants in each of these three levels are what Christ wants us to do—to come unto him, to *repent*. In each of the three levels he introduces a different blessing we shall re-

⁸ Christ refers to “such” people, meaning “whoso *repenteth* and *cometh unto me as a little child*.”

ceive by doing so: He will save and heal us; he will give us eternal life and has for us laid down his life and taken it up again; and he will receive us.

Christ weaves yet another thought into the correlating phrases in level C. At the end of the basic chiastic phrase in C, Christ adds: “and blessed are those who come unto me.” At the end of the basic chiastic phrase in C', he adds: “for of such is the kingdom of God.” Christ is foreshadowing one of his Beatitudes as he will eventually speak it to these people: “Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit *who come unto me*, for theirs is the *kingdom of heaven*” (3 Nephi 12:3).⁹

In phrases D and D' Christ shifts from his plea that we come unto him, and tells about his coming to us. After identifying himself as “Jesus Christ the Son of God” and testifying of his godship and relationship to the father (verse 15), Christ states, in D, *‘I came unto my own, and my own received me not. And the scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled.’* In D', he proclaims *‘I have come unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin.’* Christ, God’s son, came to his own people to redeem and save them, and they did not receive him.

The phrases in E and E' take advantage of the strong chiastic structure already built around them. Rather than repeating exact correlates to establish the chiasm, they use the structure to invite us to ponder the relationships between the corresponding phrases. Phrases E and E' share a similar internal structure. In each, Christ first identifies the recipients of his gift; then he states the gift he gives; third, he gives an example, preceded by “even so” or “even as”; finally, he reminds us that this redemption comes through him:

E1 And as many as have **received me**,
E2 to them **have I given to become the sons of God**;

⁹ The reference to the poor in spirit is specifically foreshadowed at a more central point in Christ’s plea, where he refers to those who come unto him “with a broken heart and a contrite spirit.” See the discussion of phrases E and E'.

E3 and **even so will I** to as many as shall **believe on my name**,
 E'4 for **behold, by me redemption cometh**,

E'1 And whoso **cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit**,

E'2 him **will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost**,

E'3 **even as** the Lamanites, because of their **faith in me** at the time of their conversion, were **baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost**, and they knew it not.

E'4 **Behold, I have come** unto the world to **bring redemption** unto the world, to save the world from sin.

Pondering the relationship between these correlate phrases yields insight. The correlation of E1 and E'1 suggests that to receive Christ we must come to him with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. The correlation of E2 and E'2 suggests that Christ gives us the blessing of becoming the sons of God by baptizing us with fire and the Holy Ghost. Both E3 and E'3 make clear that the blessing is premised on faith. According to E3, Christ gives to become his sons ("even so will I") to those who "believe on [his] name." In E'3, the Lamanites were baptized with fire and the Holy Ghost "because of their faith in [Christ]." In E4, Jesus states why we must receive him to gain these blessings--because it is by him that redemption comes. In E'4, he gives more detail: He came to this world to bring us redemption, to save us from our sins.¹⁰

¹⁰This phrase labeled E'4 clearly parallels E4. However, it also fits in as level D' of the broader chiasmic structure. If Jesus did indeed intentionally structure his words with these patterns, I speculate that in the original language the word order of E'4 was reversed, with "redemption" preceding "I have come," as follows: "Behold, to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin, I have come unto the world." This would line up the phrase "I have come" with the broader chiastic structure while still preserving the parallelism of the mention of redemption with the parallel struc-

In F, Christ makes the simple statement “in me is the law of Moses fulfilled.” In F', he amplifies. First he explains what this means practically: blood sacrifices and burnt offerings are to be done away. Then, he explains the offering that is to replace the Mosaic sacrifices: “For ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit.”

And at G and G', at the center, is that which is central: I Am. Again, the chiasmic and the parallel structures of the phrases invite us to compare the relationship between them.

G1 **I am**
 G2 the **light**
 G3 and the **life** of the world.
 G'1 **I am**
 G'2 **Alpha**
 G'3 and **Omega**,
 G'2 the **beginning**
 G'3 and the **end**.

The core is Christ, the “Great I AM” (D&C 38:1 and 39:1).

Years before and across the world, Christ had proclaimed himself unto Moses at the burning bush, by repeating his name:

And God said unto Moses,
 I AM
 THAT
 I AM. . . (Exodus 3:14).

Christ proclaimed himself unto the Jews in Jerusalem with this same name:

58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you,
 Before Abraham was, I am (John 8:58).¹¹

ture of the E level.

¹¹ See also John 7:25-32.

And to Joseph Smith, Jesus proclaimed himself as “the Great I AM, even Jesus Christ” (D&C 39:1-5).

At this moment of introduction to the Nephites and Lamanites, of all the attributes by which Christ could identify himself he chooses two: light and life. In its chiastic pairing, “light” corresponds with “Alpha,” “the beginning”; and “life” corresponds with “Omega,” “the end.” Is there any significance to this? Later, after Christ appears to the people, he discusses it further:¹²

8 For behold, the covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me.

9 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 15:8-9)

First comes the light, Christ’s example to us, Christ’s law for us. If we look to that light, then in the end, comes the gift of life. The light is the beginning, and life the end.¹³

Alma’s mind caught hold on the words of this father about Christ. The people heard and witnessed the sayings of Jesus. Alma’s pain ceased. The people ceased howling and la-

¹² And does so in the context of talking about the law of Moses, as he does here.

¹³ Other passages resonate: Moses saw the Lord “in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed” (Exodus 3:2). The burning bush gave *light* and had *life*—for it was not consumed—and it was this that drew Moses to it: “And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned” (Exodus 3:3). He did, and from the burning bush the Lord identified himself as I AM.

In Jerusalem, Christ stated that he is the light of the world, and that by following him we shall have the “light of **life**” (John 8:12). Christ linked his being the light to his time in the world: “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5).

To Joseph Smith, Jesus described the “light of Christ” as that “which is the law by which all things are governed,” and “which giveth life to all things” (D&C 88:5-13).

menting.

Alma 36:18-19

3 Nephi 10:1-9

18 Now, as **my mind caught hold upon this thought**, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

19 **And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.**

1 And now behold, it came to pass that **all the people of the land did hear these sayings**, and did witness of it. And after these sayings there was silence in the land for the space of many hours;

2 For so great was the astonishment of the people that **they did cease lamenting and howling for the loss of their kindred which had been slain**; therefore there was silence in all the land for the space of many hours.

The voice came again, exclaiming both words of comfort and words of warning (3 Nephi 10:3-8).

Then, the darkness broke.

Alma 36:20

3 Nephi 10:9

20 And oh, what joy, and **what marvelous light I did behold**; . . .

9 And it came to pass that thus did the three days pass away. **And it was in the morning, and the darkness dispersed from off the face of the land**, and the earth did cease to tremble, and the rocks did cease to rend, and the dreadful groanings did cease, and all the tumultuous noises did pass away.

With the light came joy.

Alma 36:20-21

3 Nephi 10:10

. . .yea, **my soul was filled with *joy* as exceeding as was my *pain!***

21 Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my *joy*.

10 And the earth did cleave together again, that it stood; and the mourning, and the weeping, and the wailing of the people who were spared alive did cease; **and their mourning was turned into *joy*, and their lamentations into the praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ, their Redeemer.**

Mormon then pauses in the narration, and testifies that these events fulfill the prophecies of many holy prophets (3 Nephi 10:11-17). Within his editorial, Mormon includes what has long seemed to me an invitation to read this account more deeply, to look for something less than obvious:

14 And now, whoso readeth, let him understand; he that hath the scriptures, let him search them, and see and behold if all these deaths and destructions by fire, and by smoke, and by tempests, and by whirlwinds, and by the opening of the earth to receive them, and all these things are not unto the fulfilling of the prophecies of many of the holy prophets. (3 Nephi 10:14)

Perhaps one understanding Mormon hoped we would see is the way in which Alma's conversion foreshadowed the coming of Christ to his people.

Alma, continuing his story, tells his son of his vision of

God. The story in 3 Nephi continues “in the ending of the thirty-fourth year” (3 Nephi 10:18).¹⁴ The people see Jesus Christ their God.

Alma 36:22**3 Nephi 11:1-11**

The people had gathered into a huge multitude. As they were marveling at the great changes and were conversing about Jesus Christ “they heard a voice as if it came out of heaven.” It was not harsh nor loud, but “notwithstanding it being a small voice . . . it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn.” They did not understand the voice the first or second time. The third time, they “did open their ears to hear it; and their eyes were towards the sound thereof; and they did look steadfastly towards heaven, from whence the sound came” (3 Nephi 11:1-5).

6 And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them:

7 Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him.

8 And it came to pass, as they understood they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and **behold,**

22 Yea,
methought I saw,

¹⁴ This appears to be nearly one year after the three days of destruction ended, although Mormon de-emphasizes the passage of time. Compare 3 Nephi 8:5. Perhaps the people had gathered at the temple for the one-year anniversary of hearing the voice out of the darkness.

even as our father Lehi saw, **God** sitting upon his throne, surrounded by numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God. . .

they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them and the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst not open their mouths, even one to another, and wist not what it meant, for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them.

9 And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying:

10 Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

11 And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.

Thus began the glorious visit of Jesus Christ to his people. He let them feel the prints of the nails in his hands and feet, and the wound in his side, that they would know (3 Nephi 11:13-15). They praised him and worshipped him (3 Nephi 11:16-17). He called Nephi, and others, and gave these twelve power to baptize. He taught how to baptize (3 Nephi 11:18-28). He warned against contention (3 Nephi 11:29-30). He taught his doctrine, his gospel (3 Nephi 11:31-41). He introduced the twelve to the people (3 Nephi 12:1-2). He taught much of what he had taught in the sermon on the mount in Jerusalem (3

Nephi 12:3-14:27). He spoke of his fulfilling the law (3 Nephi 15:2-10). He told of his other sheep (3 Nephi 15:11-16:20).

As the day ended, the people longed to remain with Jesus. Alma, seeing God on his throne, longed to be with him.

Alma 36:22**3 Nephi 17:5**

22 . . . yea, and **my soul did long to be there.**

5 And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus spoken, he cast his eyes round about again on the multitude, and beheld **they were in tears, and did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them**

Alma regained the strength in his arms and legs. In 3 Nephi, Christ healed the sick, the afflicted, the lame and the blind.

Alma 36:23**3 Nephi 17:9-18**

23 But behold, **my limbs did receive their strength again . . .**

9 And it came to pass that when he had thus spoken, **all the multitude, with one accord, did go forth with their sick and their afflicted, and their lame, and with their blind, and with their dumb, and with all them that were afflicted in any manner; and he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him.**

The people bowed and worshipped Jesus. He commanded that the children be brought. He stood in their midst, commanded the people to

bow, and then he prayed marvelous, ineffable words, and the people were overcome with joy (3 Nephi 17:10-18).

Alma stood. The people in 3 Nephi arose,¹⁵ at Jesus' bidding.

Alma 36:23

3 Nephi 17:19-20

23 . . . **and I stood upon my feet, . . .**

9 And it came to pass that Jesus spake unto them, and bade them arise.

20 **And they arose from the earth**, and he said unto them: Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full.

Jesus wept. He blessed the little children (3 Nephi 17:21-25). He gave bread and wine. He touched and spake to each of the twelve, and then he left, promising to return the next day (3 Nephi 18).

The next day, many more had gathered. The twelve divided them into twelve groups and taught them the words Jesus had taught the day before (3 Nephi 19:1-10). The twelve then went into the water and were baptized, and filled with the Holy Ghost. Fire from heaven encircled the twelve. Angels came and ministered to the disciples, and Jesus came and stood in their midst (3 Nephi 9:11-15).

¹⁵ An earlier correlation between Alma 36:8 and 3 Nephi 7:17-19 (see above) suggests that Alma's being bid to arise is a type of being raised from the dead. Perhaps Christ's command to the people to arise bears similar significance. It is interesting that before Alma arose, his limbs had to be given strength. Before Jesus bade the people to stand, he gave strength to the sick. It is through Christ's gift that both Alma and the people could arise. Note also, that it is immediately after the people arise that Jesus announces, "And now behold, my joy is full." (Compare Moses 1:39: "this is my work and **glory**—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.")

Christ's second day's visit is in many ways a repeat of his first visit, for those that could not be there the first day. The events parallel Alma's vision as did the events of the first day: The people see their God, surrounded by angels (3 Nephi 19:14 - 15). Great scenes of longing and love occur (3 Nephi 19:16 - 20:1). Jesus bids that the people arise, and they do (3 Nephi 20:2). They partake of the sacrament (3 Nephi 20:3-9).

Chapters 20 through 26 of 3 Nephi relate many other things Jesus taught and did during his visit.

Alma, after his vision, became great in establishing the church. So also Nephi and the disciples, after seeing Christ, were great in preaching to the people and leading the church. Alma emphasizes his being born of God, and Mormon emphasizes the correlating ordinances of baptism and being filled with the Holy Ghost (compare John 3:1-5).

Alma 36:23

3 Nephi 26:17

23 . . . and I . . . did **manifest unto the people** that I had been *born of God*.

17 And it came to pass that **the disciples whom Jesus had chosen began from that time forth to baptize and to teach as many as did come unto them**, and as many as were baptized in the name of Jesus **were filled with the Holy Ghost**.

Mormon reports yet another visit by Jesus to the twelve. Jesus instructed them in various matters. He expressed his great joy that in this generation not one shall be lost, and he foretold with sorrow that the fourth generation would turn from him and be led away captive by the devil (3 Nephi 27).

Jesus then blessed each of his twelve disciples with their desire. Nine wanted to live out their natural lives, then speedily come to Christ in his kingdom (3 Nephi 28:1-3), but three had a different desire. Mormon's account of the three tracks Alma's relation of his own desires after his conversion:

Alma 36:24**3 Nephi 28:4-8**

4 Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored **without ceasing**, . . .

. . . that I might **bring souls unto repentance**; . . .

. . . that **I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste**; . . .

Christ asked the three, “What will ye that I should do unto you, when I am gone unto the Father?” They remained silent, afraid to speak of their desire. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, compared them to John, and promised:

7 Therefore, more blessed are ye, for ye shall never taste of death; but **ye shall live to behold all the doings of the Father unto the children of men, even until all things shall be fulfilled according to the will of the Father**, when I shall come in my glory with the powers of heaven.

* * *

9 And again, ye shall not have pain while ye shall dwell in the flesh, neither sorrow save it be for the sins of the world; and all this will I do because of the thing which ye have desired of me, **for ye have desired that ye might bring the souls of men unto me, while the world shall stand**.

10 And for this cause ye shall have *fulness of joy*; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, **your joy shall be full**, even as the Father hath given me *fulness of joy*; and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one;

. . . that they might also be born of God, **and be filled with the Holy Ghost.**

11 And **the Holy Ghost** beareth record of the Father and me; and **the Father giveth the Holy Ghost unto the children of men, because of me.**

Jesus then touched the three, and they were caught up into heaven. They felt they were transfigured, and they “saw and heard unspeakable things” (3 Nephi 28:12-15).

Alma then recounts his missionary labors after his conversion, causing many to be born of God. Mormon recounts the labors of the three, causing many to be baptized and to receive the Holy Ghost:

Alma 36:25-26

3 Nephi 28:16-18

25 Yea, and now behold, O my son, the Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy in the fruit **of my labors**;

26 For because of the word which he has imparted unto me, behold, **many have been born of God**, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen; therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken, as I do know; and the knowledge which I

16 But it came to pass **that they did again minister upon the face of the earth . . .**

* * *

18 But this much I know, according to the record which hath been given—they did go forth upon the face of the land, and did minister unto all the people, uniting as many to the church as would believe in their preaching; **baptizing them, and as many as were baptized did receive the Holy Ghost.**

have is of God.

Alma tells of his deliverance from prison and trials. Mormon talks of the three disciples' deliverance from prison and trials.

Alma 36:27

3 Nephi 28:19-22

27 And **I have been supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions; yea, God has *delivered me from prison, and from bonds, and from death;* yea, and I do put my trust in him, and **he will still *deliver me.*****

19 And **they were cast into *prison*** by them who did not belong to the church. And **the *prisons* could not hold them**, for they were rent in twain.

20 And **they were cast down into the earth;** but they did smite the earth with the word of God, in-somuch that **by his power they were *delivered out of the depths of the earth;*** and therefore they could not dig pits sufficient to hold them.

21 And **thrice they were cast into a furnace and received no harm.**

22 And **twice were they cast into a den of wild beasts;** and behold they did play with the beasts as a child with a suckling lamb, and **received no harm.**

Alma testifies of his knowledge that he will be raised up in the last day. Mormon talks of his knowledge that the three will be changed in the last day.¹⁶

¹⁶ At the end of his ministry, Alma passed the prophetic burden to his son Helaman, and blessed him and the church. What then happened to him resonates with what happened to the three Nephites:

Alma 36:28**3 Nephi 28:36-40**

8 And I know . . .

. . . that he will
raise me up at the
last day, . . .

37 **But behold, since I wrote, I have inquired of the Lord, and he hath made it manifest unto me** that there must needs be a change wrought upon their bodies, or else it needs be that they must taste of death;

* * *

39 Now this change was not equal to that which shall take place at the *last day*; but there was a change wrought upon them, inasmuch that Satan could have no power over them, that he could not tempt them; and they were sanctified in the flesh, that they were holy, and that the powers of the earth could not hold them.

40 And in this state they were to remain **until the judgment day**

18 And when Alma had done this he departed out of the land of Zarahemla, as if to go into the land of Melek. And it came to pass that he was never heard of more; as to his death or burial we know not of.

19 Behold, this we know, that he was a righteous man; and the saying went abroad in the church that he was taken up by the Spirit, or buried by the hand of the Lord, even as Moses. But behold, the scriptures saith the Lord took Moses unto himself; and we suppose that he has also received Alma in the spirit, unto himself; therefore, for this cause we know nothing concerning his death and burial (Alma 45:18-19).

Mormon supposes that the Lord “received Alma in the spirit, unto himself,” perhaps without a normal death. Was Alma possibly referring to this in Alma 36:27, where he stated that “God has delivered me . . . from death”? Perhaps Alma received that part of the blessing given to the three Nephites that “ye shall never endure the pains of death . . .” (3 Nephi 28:8).

<p>... <i>to dwell with him in glory</i>; ...</p>	<p>of Christ; and at that day they were to receive a greater change, and to be received into the kingdom of the Father to go no more out, but <i>to dwell with God eternally in the heavens.</i></p>
---	---

Mormon then talks about the latter days, and how the covenant to restore his people to the lands of their inheritance is beginning to be fulfilled. Similarly, Alma talks about deliverance out of Egypt to the promised land and the deliverance of Lehi's family out of wicked Jerusalem to their own promised land.

Alma 36:28

28 ... yea, and I will praise him forever, for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea; **and he led them by his power into the promised land**; yea, and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time.

29 Yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; and he has also, by his everlasting power, delivered them

3 Nephi 29:1-8

1 And now behold, I say unto you that when the Lord shall see fit, in his wisdom, that these sayings shall come unto the Gentiles according to his word, then ye may know that the covenant which the Father hath made with the children of Israel, **concerning their restoration to the lands of their inheritance**, is already beginning to be fulfilled.

* * *

3 And ye need not imagine in your hearts that the words which have been spoken are vain, for behold, **the Lord will remember his covenant which he hath made unto his people of the house of Israel.**

* * *

out of bondage and captivity, from time to time even down to the present day; and I have always retained in remembrance their captivity; yea, and ye also ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done, their captivity.

8 Yea, and ye need not any longer hiss, nor spurn, nor make game of the Jews, nor any of the remnant of the house of Israel; for behold, **the Lord remembereth his covenant unto them, and he will do unto them according to that which he hath sworn.**

The book of Third Nephi is ended, but Mormon's story is not ended, and the story of the 400-year period prophesied by Alma is not ended. The correlation between Alma 36 and Mormon's history continues.

The overriding theme of the entire Fourth Book of Nephi is contained in the first part of Alma 36:30.

Alma 36:30

4 Nephi

30 But behold, my son, this is not all; for ye ought to know as I do know, that **inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land; . . .**

2 And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, **the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another.**

3 **And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift.**

4 And it came to pass that the thirty and seventh year passed

away also, and **there still continued to be peace in the land.**

The book of 4 Nephi is replete with repetitions of this theme (see verses 7, 12-13, 15, 16, 17-18, and 23).

But the people eventually returned to wickedness. The sad tale of the end of the Nephite people is mirrored in the second part of Alma 36:30.

Alma 36:30

4 Nephi 27-45; Mormon 1:1-6:18

. . . and ye ought to know also, that **inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence**

27 And it came to pass that when two hundred and ten years had passed away there were many churches in the land; **yea, there were many churches which professed to know the Christ, and yet they did deny the more parts of his gospel, insomuch that they did receive all manner of wickedness, . . .** (4 Nephi 27).

* * *

8 And it came to pass in this year there began to be a war . . . (Mormon 1:8)

13 But wickedness did prevail upon the face of the whole land, insomuch that the Lord did take away his beloved disciples, and the work of miracles and of healing did cease because of the iniquity of the people (Mormon 1:13).

Again, the story at this point is filled with statements linking the peoples' wickedness to their destruction. See 4 Nephi 34, 40, 45; Mormon 1:6, 8, 13, 18, 19; Mormon 2:15; Mormon 3:2-3, 14-15; Mormon 4:4-5, 10-11, 16-18; Mormon 5:2, 18-19.

Mormon witnesses the bitter fruit of wickedness, the destruction of his people:

16 And my soul was rent with anguish, because of the slain of my people, and I cried:

17 O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you!

18 **Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But behold, ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss** (Mormon 6:16-18).

Mormon then speaks to us, who in these days have read his *words*. Alma ends his account also by referring to the *word*.

Alma 36:30

. . . Now **this is according to his word.**

Mormon 7:1-10

1 And now, behold, I would speak somewhat unto the remnant of this people who are spared, **if it so be that God may give unto them my words**, that they may know of

the things of their fathers; year, I speak unto you, ye remnant of the house of Israel; and these are the words which I speak:

Mormon then gives his last testimony and exhortation (Mormon 7:2-10). Mormon's life's work is finished. In the next verse, his son Moroni picks up the historian's pen. He tells of the tremendous battle at Cumorah, of Nephites who escaped to the south and were hunted down and killed, and of his father's death.

6 Behold, four hundred years have passed away since the coming of our Lord and Savior.

7 And behold, the Lamanites have hunted my people, the Nephites, down from city to city and from place to place, even until they are no more; and great has been their fall; yea, great and marvelous is the destruction of my people, the Nephites.

8 And behold, it is the hand of the Lord which hath done it . . . (Mormon 8:6-8).

The 400 years are ended. Alma's prophecy is fulfilled. Mormon's 400 year history and Alma's conversion testimony, in a remarkable resonance, each reflect and enhance the other in testifying of Christ's gift of redemption.