## A Comparison of Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision

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<td>Many are lost in strange roads</td>
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1 Nephi 11:1

1 By pondering, we give the Spirit an opportunity to impress and direct. Pondering is a powerful link between the heart and the mind. As we read the scriptures, our hearts and minds are touched. If we use the gift to ponder, we can take these eternal truths and realize how we can incorporate them into our daily actions.


Study and Meditation

2 While Nephi was pondering in his heart the things his father had seen, he was “caught away in the Spirit of the Lord” (1 Nephi 11:10).

Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon were reading the scriptures when one verse, as they later wrote, “caused us to marvel, for it was given unto us of the Spirit.” And while we meditated upon these things, the Lord touched the eyes of our understandings” (D&C 76:19; emphasis added). What followed was the vision of the three degrees of glory.

President Joseph F. Smith recorded: “On the third of October, in the year nineteen hundred and eighteen, I sat in my room pondering over the scriptures; “And reflecting upon the great atoning sacrifice that was made by the Son of God…. “As I pondered over these things which are written, the eyes of my understanding were opened” (D&C 138:1-2, 11; emphasis added). President Smith then had a great vision of the spirit world and Christ's visit to it.

These accounts teach an important lesson concerning the value of quiet study and meditation and how one comes to know the mysteries of God. In Moroni 10:3-5 Moroni uses the word ponder as one of the steps in acquiring a testimony of the Book of Mormon.

3 Nephi 17:3

3 Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again.

Jean Louis Agassiz was a professor of natural science who taught at Harvard in the 1860s—that’s around the time the pioneers were settling Utah. Professor Agassiz believed students should study nature itself rather than acquire facts through lectures or books. To effectively master such a study, a student needed to develop the critical intellectual tools of observation and comparison. An unforgettable lesson he used to develop this skill was jokingly named by his students “The Incident of the Fish.” As I share with you a paraphrase of the words of one student’s memory of his encounter with “The Incident of the Fish,” I want you to think of how the fish might be like a thread of faith.

“Agassiz brought me a small fish, placing it before me with the rather stern requirement that I should study it but should on no account talk to any one concerning it nor read anything relating to fishes, until I had his permission so to do.

“What shall I do?” I asked.

“He replied, ‘Find out what you can, and by and by I will ask you what you have seen.’

“I was disappointed. I concluded gazing at a fish did not relate to the study of insects—which was my desire. In ten minutes I saw all that could be seen in that fish. Half an hour passed, an hour, another hour—the fish began to look loathsome. I turned it over and around; looked it in the face—from behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a three-quarters’ view—just as ghastly. I was in despair. So I decided it was time for lunch. For an hour I was free!
“On my return, I slowly pulled forth my mute companion, that awful fish, and with a feeling of desperation, I looked at it again. At last a happy thought struck me—I would draw the fish. With surprise, I began to discover new features in the creature. Just then the Professor returned.

“That is right,” said he, “a pencil is one of the best of eyes. So what have you seen?”

“He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal of the parts of the fish. When I finished, he waited, expecting more, and then, with an air of disappointment said, ‘You have not looked very carefully; why, you haven’t even seen one of the most obvious features of the animal, and it is plainly before your eyes! Look again! Look again!’ And he left me to my misery.

“I was mortified. Still more of that fish! But now I set myself to my task with a will, and I discovered one new thing after another, until I saw how correct the Professor’s criticism had been. The afternoon passed quickly, and at the end of the day, the Professor asked, ‘Do you see it yet?’

“No,” I replied, ‘I am certain I do not, but I see how little I saw before.’

“Well,” he said, ‘put away your fish and go home; perhaps you will be ready with a better answer in the morning.’

“This was disconcerting. Not only must I puzzle over my observations of my fish all night without it in front of me, but the next day I was going to have to give an exact account of my discoveries without verifying them, and I had a bad memory! So I walked home by the Charles River, pondering over my problem.

“After a sleepless night, I arrived at the lab the next morning. The Professor seemed to be as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw.

“Do you perhaps mean,” I asked, ‘that the fish has symmetrical sides with paired organs?’

“Of course! Of course!” he said. He was thoroughly pleased.

“Then I ventured to ask, ‘So what should I do next?’

“Oh, look at your fish!” he said. And so for three more long days he placed that fish before my eyes, forbidding me to look at anything else or to use any artificial aid. ‘Look, look, look,’ was his repeated injunction. Only later did I come to realize that this was not only one of the best lessons of my life but a turning point as well.”

This story teaches: First, at any given time you are limited by your perceptions. Second, it is necessary to analyze what you saw and then articulate your conclusions to help you figure out what you really saw. Third, by constantly refining and analyzing what you perceive, you can move closer and closer to a complete understanding of the truth. And fourth, you must come to your own understanding and not rely upon secondhand observations.

Carolyn Colton, “Threads of Faith,” BYU Women’s Conference 2005

The things of God are of deep import: and time and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man! If thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss and the broad expanse of eternity—thou must commune with God.

Joseph Smith

1 Nephi 11:6-12

One is faced right away with an interesting theological question: Is Nephi’s guide, designated by him as “the Spirit of the Lord,” the premortal Christ (the individual spirit personage who became Jesus Christ in mortality) or the Holy Ghost?

If this is a personal appearance of the Holy Ghost to a man, it is indeed a singular occasion, so far as our scriptural accounts are concerned. In addressing this issue some years ago, Sidney B. Sperry suggested the latter alternative—that the "Spirit of the Lord" refers to the Holy Ghost-based upon the following textual evidence. First, we read of Nephi’s desires to "see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost." He further testified that the Holy Ghost gave authority for his words (see 1 Nephi 10:17-22; italics added). Second, Nephi used
phrases such as "the Spirit said," "the Spirit cried," and "I said unto the Spirit" (1 Nephi 11:2, 4, 6, 8, 9), all of which sound very much like references to the Holy Ghost rather than to Jehovah. Third, Nephi never spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ as the "Spirit of the Lord" when the Master appeared to him on other occasions (see 1 Nephi 2:16; 2 Nephi 11:2-3). Fourth, the phrase Spirit of the Lord occurs some forty times in the Book of Mormon, and in every case reference seems to be to either the Holy Ghost or to the Light of Christ. Examples of this would be 1 Nephi 1:12, where Lehi, having read from the book delivered to him, was filled with the "Spirit of the Lord"; 1 Nephi 13:15, where the "Spirit of the Lord" was poured out upon the Gentiles in preparation for the establishment of the American nation; Mosiah 4:3, where the "Spirit of the Lord" came upon the people of King Benjamin and they experienced a remission of sins and its subsequent joy; and, of course, those references wherein the expression Spirit of the Lord is used after the mortal ministry of Jesus Christ and could only mean the Holy Ghost (for example, Mormon 2:26; 5:16; Moroni 9:4).

"The Holy Ghost undoubtedly possesses personal powers and affections," wrote Elder James E. Talmage; "these attributes exist in Him in perfection. . . . That the Spirit of the Lord is capable of manifesting Himself in the form and figure of man, is indicated by the wonderful interview between the Spirit and Nephi, in which He revealed Himself to the prophet, questioned him concerning his desires and belief, instructed him in the things of God, speaking face to face with the man."

After explaining to the Holy Ghost that he sought the meaning behind the representation of the tree of life, Nephi "looked as if to look upon" the Spirit, "and [he] saw him not; for he had gone from before [his] presence" (1 Nephi 11:12).

Robert L. Millet, The Power of the Word: Saving Doctrines from the Book of Mormon, p.9-10

That the Spirit of the Lord is capable of manifesting Himself in the form and figure of man, is indicated by the wonderful interview between the Spirit and Nephi, in which he revealed Himself to the prophet, questioned him concerning his desires and belief, instructed him in the things of God, speaking face to face with the man [1 Nephi 11:11]. However, the Holy Ghost does not possess a body of flesh and bones, as do both the Father and the Son, but is a personage of spirit. Much of the confusion existing in human conceptions concerning the nature of the Holy Ghost arises from the common failure to segregate His person and powers. Plainly, such expressions as being filled with the Holy Ghost, and His falling upon persons, have reference to the powers and influences that emanate from God, and which are characteristic of Him; for the Holy Ghost may in this way operate simultaneously upon many persons even though they be widely separated, whereas the actual person of the Holy Ghost cannot be in more than one place at a time.

James E. Talmage, Articles of Faith, p. 42

The Holy Ghost is a male personage. Note how often Jesus refers to the Holy Ghost as "he" and "him."

LeGrand Richards, A Marvelous Work and a Wonder, p. 115

1 Nephi 11:13

Can we speak too highly of her whom the Lord has blessed above all women? There was only one Christ, and there is only one Mary. Each was noble and great....We cannot but think that the Father would choose the greatest female spirit to be the mother of his Son.

Bruce R. McConkie, Mortal Messiah, 1:326-27, n. 4
1 Nephi 11:16

Nephi's attention was drawn specifically to Nazareth of Galilee. There he "beheld a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white." The angel then asked Nephi a penetrating question: "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" (1 Nephi 11:13-16.) To condescend is literally to "go down with" or to "go down among." It is "the act of descending to a lower and less dignified state; or waiving the privileges of one's rank and status; of bestowing honors and favors upon one of lesser stature or status." The angel's question might be restated thus: "Nephi, do you fathom the majesty of it all? Can your mortal mind comprehend the infinite wonder and grandeur of the marvelous love made manifest by the Father and the Son?" Nephi answered: "I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things" (1 Nephi 11:17). One of the remarkable discoveries of those who come to know him who is Eternal is that God's infinity as the Almighty does not preclude either his immediacy or his intimacy as a loving Father of spirits. Enoch learned this precious lesson during his ministry (see Moses 7:28-32), and Nephi evidenced his knowledge of the same principles.

The "condescension of God" described in 1 Nephi 11 seems to be twofold: the condescension of God the Father (verses 16-23) and the condescension of God the Son (verses 24-36). "Without overstepping the bounds of propriety by saying more than is appropriate," Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, "let us say this: God the Almighty; the Maker and Preserver and Upholder of all things; the Omnipotent One . . . elects, in his fathomless wisdom, to beget a Son, an Only Son, the Only Begotten in the flesh. God, who is infinite and immortal, condescends to step down from his throne, to join with one who is finite and mortal in bringing forth, 'after the manner of the flesh,' the Mortal Messiah." In the words of President Ezra Taft Benson: "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which He performed His mission in the flesh was sired by that same Holy Being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was He begotten by the Holy Ghost. He is the Son of the Eternal Father!"

The condescension of God the Son consists in the coming to earth of the great Jehovah, the Lord God Omnipotent, the God of the ancients. The 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon contains the following words from the angel to Nephi: "Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the *mother of God*, after the manner of the flesh" (1 Nephi 11:18; italics added). The angel later said unto Nephi regarding the vision of the Christ child, "Behold the Lamb of God, yea, the *Eternal Father*!" (1 Nephi 11:21; italics added; compare 1 Nephi 13:40, 1830 edition). Later in the same vision of the ministry of Christ, the angel spoke, saying, "Look! And I looked," Nephi added, "and behold the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the *everlasting God* was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record" (1 Nephi 11:32; italics added). In the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith the Prophet changed these verses to read "the *mother of the Son of God,*" "the *Son of the Eternal Father,*" and "the *Son of the everlasting God,*" respectively (italics added). It would appear that the Prophet made these textual alterations to assist the Latter-day Saints in fully understanding the meaning of the expressions.

Robert L. Millet, *The Power of the Word: Saving Doctrines from the Book of Mormon*, p.10-1

He showed condescension in his patience and restraint when brought before men for judgment. . . . (1 Nephi 19:9.)

The God who created everything was judged to be nothing! And yet he endured it with complete patience. Imagine the Being whose power, whose light, whose glory holds the universe in order, the Being who speaks and solar systems, galaxies, and stars come into existence—standing before wicked men and being judged by them as being of no worth or value! When we think of what he could have done to these men who took him to judgment, we have a new and different sense of his condescension. When Judas led the soldiers and the high priests to the Garden of Gethsemane and betrayed him with a kiss, Jesus could have spoken a single word and leveled the entire city of Jerusalem. When the servant of the high priest stepped forward and slapped his face, Jesus could have lifted a finger and sent that man back to his original elements. When another man stepped forward and spit in his face,
Jesus had only to blink and our entire solar system could have been annihilated. But he stood there, he endured, he suffered, he condescended.

1 Nephi 11:18
Why was it necessary for Jesus to have a mortal mother?

From his mother he inherited mortality, the power to lay down his life, to die, to permit body and spirit to separate. From his Father he inherited the power of immortality [and life].
Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, 64

1 Nephi 11:20

[Jesus’] mortal mother, Mary, was called a virgin, both before and after she gave birth.
Ezra Taft Benson, Teachings, 7

1 Nephi 11:21-23

The tree laden with fruit was a representation of the love of God which he sheds forth among all the children of men. The Master himself, later in his earthly ministry, explained to Nicodemus how that great love was manifested. Said he: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son”…(John 3:16-17).
Harold B. Lee, Ensign, June 1971, 6

1 Nephi 11:7-14; 26
Nephi’s vision of the tree of life was a vision about the Son of God.

Thirteen times in the vision Nephi is told to look; each time he learns something new about the Lord:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>“Look” Reference</th>
<th>What is Learned about Jesus Christ</th>
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<tr>
<td>Look #1 1 Nephi 11:8-10</td>
<td>The white fruit of the tree is “precious above all.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Look #2 1 Nephi 11:12-18</td>
<td>In Nazareth is the most beautiful virgin of all. She is the mother of “the Son of God.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Look #3 1 Nephi 11:19-23</td>
<td>The woman is still called a “virgin” after the birth of the child. The child is the “Lamb of God,” the “Son of the Eternal Father.” Through Jesus Christ the Father offers his love, which is “most desirable above all” and brings much joy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Look #4 1 Nephi 11:24-25</td>
<td>The Son of God lived among men. Many believed and worshiped him.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Look #5 1 Nephi 11:26-29</td>
<td>The Son of God is the Redeemer of the world. John the Baptist was a prophet who prepared the way for Jesus and baptized him. Afterward Jesus ministered to the people with “power and great glory.” The people eventually rejected him. He called twelve apostles to assist him in his work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Look #6 1 Nephi 11:30</td>
<td>The ministering of angels assisted in the ministry of the Savior.</td>
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1 Nephi 11:9-25

How do the elements of the vision of the tree of life represent Jesus Christ?

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<th>Vision of the Tree</th>
<th>Vision of the Savior</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The tree is “precious above all” (1 Nephi 11:9).</td>
<td>“God’s…most precious of all gifts…[is] the gift of His Son Jesus Christ” (Melvin J. Ballard, Conference Report, October 1910, 82).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People “fell down” to partake of the fruit (1 Nephi 8:30).</td>
<td>People “fall down” before the Lord and “worship him” (1 Nephi 11:24).</td>
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<tr>
<td>The tree represents the love of God (1 Nephi 11:22).</td>
<td>Jesus Christ is God’s love manifest to us (John 3:16).</td>
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<td>The “rod of iron” is the “word of God” (1 Nephi 11:25).</td>
<td>Jesus Christ is the “Word of God” (Revelation 19:13).</td>
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<td>“The tree of life” is the “living waters” (1 Nephi 11:25).</td>
<td>Jesus is called the “living water” (John 4:10; 7:37).</td>
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<tr>
<td>The path is the way to the tree (1 Nephi 8:20).</td>
<td>Jesus is the only “way” to “life” (John 14:6).</td>
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1 Nephi 11:26

How did the Son condescend?

Jesus Christ condescended below all things in several notable ways:

In birth:

The Saviour…descended below all things….There never was a child born on this earth with any less capacity than dwelt in the child that was born in a manger of his mother Mary….There never was a child that descended lower in capacity, or that knew less (Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, 7:286).
In baptism:
The place of Jesus’ baptism was at Bethabara, near the place where the Jordan River empties into the Dead Sea. When a person stands in these waters he is standing at the lowest point on earth, about 1,300 feet below sea level. Therefore, at his baptism, when Jesus was lowered in the waters of Jordan, he physically descended below all living things on the earth.

In life:
As a God, He descended below all things, and made Himself subject to man in man’s fallen condition; as a man, He grappled with all the circumstances incident to His sufferings in the world (John Taylor, Mediation and Atonement, 151).

In the Atonement:
The Almighty must descend below all things….
…To suffer both body and spirit, bleeding from every pore, as he takes upon himself the sins of all men (Bruce R. McConkie, Millennial Messiah, 16).

In death:
[Jesus] submitted to all the trials of mortality, suffering “temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death” (Mosiah 3:5-8), finally being put to death in a most ignominious manner (Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, 155). See also Isaiah 53:12.

Brian D. Garner, Search These Things Diligently, p. 18-19

1 Nephi 11:27
“In the form of a dove”

The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost….The Holy Ghost is a personage, and is in the form of a personage. It does not confine itself to the form of the dove, but in sign of the dove. The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a dove;…the dove is an emblem or token of truth and innocence.

Joseph Smith, Teachings, 276; emphasis in original. See also LDS Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Dove, sign of.”

1 Nephi 11:32

What a bitter irony this was! He to whom all judgment has been committed (John 5:28)…would be judged and condemned by a wicked people.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, Doctrinal Commentary, 1:83

1 Nephi 11

Among other things, Nephi’s account of the visions tells us the following about Christ’s mortal works:
1. Jesus would be the Messiah, Savior of the world (1 Nephi 10:4).
2. All are lost, and none can be saved except through him (1 Nephi 10:6).
3. He would come six hundred years after Lehi’s time (1 Nephi 10:4).
4. He would be the Son of God, born of Mary (1 Nephi 11:13-21).
5. John the Baptist would prepare the way for Christ’s coming (1 Nephi 10:7-8).
6. Jesus would be baptized by John (1 Nephi 10:9; 11:27).
7. Jesus would minister among men, performing great miracles (1 Nephi 11:24, 28, 31).
8. The twelve apostles would follow Christ (1 Nephi 11:29).
9. Jesus would be judged and slain by the Jews; he would rise from the dead (1 Nephi 10:11; 11:32-33).

Kent P. Jackson, Studies in Scripture, p. 37
1 Nephi 11:33

Crucifixion was an indescribably cruel and loathsome mode of death....It was always preceded by scourging, which reduced the naked body to a bleeding, quivering mass, and when the victim, after this unnecessary cruelty, was tied, or nailed, to the cross, where he suffered...burning fever, thirst, the sting of insects, utter helplessness...the spectacle presented was one of extreme horror.
George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, Commentary on the Book of Mormon, 1:90

D&C 19:16-19

For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;
But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;
Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit--and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink--
Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.