

# Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision

## Apocalyptic Revelations in Narrative Context

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Isaiah 49:23–26 expresses the following dramatic prophecy portraying the Lord as a divine warrior:

And thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me. Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captives delivered? But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children. And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the LORD *am* thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.<sup>1</sup>

This theme of the Lord as a divine warrior protective of his people is also used extensively by the early Nephite prophets in their teachings to describe the eschatological dualism between righteousness and wickedness that will exist in the last days. This passage, quoted both by Nephi (1 Ne. 21:23–26) and Jacob (2 Ne. 6:6–18), is in a way as messianic and apocalyptic in content and symbolic quality as are the biblical books of Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation. While it is arguably the most significant passage on deliverance in the first half of the Book of Mormon, many other Nephite texts likewise give valuable knowledge and assurances to the covenant people of the Lord on earth in the last days in the form of sweeping apocalyptic revelations. These densely allusive prophetic teachings are similar in message to the prophetic writings of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature.<sup>2</sup>

This particular study examines Lehi's fundamental and symbolic dream as being profoundly apocalyptic. Recorded at some length in 1 Nephi 8, its symbols and themes pervade 1 and 2 Nephi. In contrast to those capable

scholars who have spoken only of Nephi's vision (1 Ne. 11–14) as apocalyptic,<sup>3</sup> I claim that Lehi's dream, Nephi's vision, and Nephi's narrative use of these revelations in 1 and 2 Nephi are pervasively apocalyptic in content and quality. I wish to show that Lehi's dream, like Nephi's vision, represents different worlds of time (present and future) and of global and cosmological space (heaven and hell); that each revelation is not only intensely symbolic but also nuanced and evolving, becoming ever more complex and interesting; and that each revelation symbolically represents the events and people near the end of the world.

The first section of this paper explains some of the general characteristics of apocalyptic literature. The next two sections, using these characteristics of apocalyptic as a guide, identify and describe the unfolding symbols of Lehi's dream. The fourth section examines certain parts of 1 and 2 Nephi, highlighting some of the thematic and symbolic intersections with the earlier material. Finally, I discuss within this apocalyptic context Nephi's sustained emphasis on obedience and enduring to the end.

### What Is Apocalyptic Literature?

Apocalyptic revelations unveil, discover, or describe events just before, during, and after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Other apocalyptic periods or events occurring before that time, such as the destruction of the temple described in the early part of Matthew 24, are but foreshadowings of this later period. M. H. Abrams, a Romantic literary critic who wrote in the 1960s during a time of renewed interest in apocalyptic, has given this helpful description of what this literature entails: "In its late and developed form an apocalypse (Greek *apokalypsis*, 'revelation') is a prophetic vision, set forth in arcane and elaborate symbols, of the imminent events which will bring an abrupt end to the present world order and replace it by a new and perfected condition of man and his milieu."<sup>4</sup>

Apocalyptic literature can be described in various other ways, not all of which apply to the early pages of the Book of Mormon. For instance, the apocalyptic passages in the Book of Mormon do not describe angelic trumpets or strange creatures, familiar characteristics of canonical and non-canonical apocalyptic literature.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in many respects the early parts of the Book of Mormon are both apocalyptic and, perhaps ironically, textually coherent, as I will show in what follows, using primarily Greg Carey's recent book *Ultimate Things* to frame my observations.<sup>6</sup> While my observations will be new to a degree, it should be noted that Carey's treatment of the subject is more or less commonplace to those who analyze apocalyptic literature.

Many of Carey's criteria do in fact apply to Lehi's dream, Nephi's vision, and the related material subsequently running through 1 and 2 Nephi. For instance, John Collins argues, "'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendental reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world."<sup>7</sup> Bruce R. McConkie has candidly written that by these sorts of definitions much of the standard works would qualify as apocalyptic,<sup>8</sup> and yet the genre has distinguishing features. Carey, perhaps drawing on those before him like Collins, explains that apocalyptic is a literature of: (1) "alternative worlds"; (2) "visions and/or auditions"; (3) "heavenly intermediaries"; (4) "intense symbolism"; (5) "catastrophe"; (6) "dualism"; (7) "determinism"; and (8) "judgment and the afterlife."<sup>9</sup> Beyond Carey's helpful categories, other scholars have described apocalyptic literature as multidimensional, physical,<sup>10</sup> and messianic.<sup>11</sup> These widely accepted criteria for analyzing apocalyptic literature may be used to establish that the early parts of the Book of Mormon can, to a fascinating degree, especially in terms of its themes and symbols, be correctly understood and classified as apocalyptic literature.

Apparently not really solidifying as a literary genre until the intertestamental period,<sup>12</sup> apocalyptic literature was written primarily by Jews and Christians living in Egypt and Palestine between 200 BC and AD 200.<sup>13</sup> Examples include texts composed by Matthew (Matt. 24–25), Paul (1 and 2 Thes.), Peter (2 Pet. 3:1–13), and, of course, John (Revelation). This literature, however, like parts of the Book of Mormon itself, has a strong relationship going back to preexilic prophetic writings. Fragments of this literature found at Qumran, such as those from the apocalypse of Enoch, "antedate the book of Daniel [itself exilic]<sup>14</sup> by at least a century, [which] suggests that the phenomenon had a long history in Judaism."<sup>15</sup> Moreover, apocalyptic may have had its ultimate roots in "ancient mythic themes" or in the Hebrew Psalter and more fully emerged sometime during the second half of the sixth century BC.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, however wide-ranging the estimates for the dates of its origin and continuance, many scholars agree that this literature in part developed from earlier prophetic writings in the Old Testament,<sup>17</sup> sometimes referred to as proto-apocalyptic. The most common examples of apocalyptic literature's apparent emergence in the Old Testament include such books as those composed by Isaiah (24–27; 33–35), Ezekiel (38–39), Daniel (7–12), and Zechariah (9–14).

Considering the foregoing estimates, it is entirely conceivable that Lehi and Nephi knew this genre and recorded apocalypses themselves.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the embedded apocalyptic imagery<sup>19</sup> in the first pages of the Book of

Mormon suggests that this literature significantly predates the intertestamental period (1 Ne. 8:23; 19:11). Nephi recorded his apocalyptic accounts around 570 BC; tellingly, Nephi more closely aligns with the proto-apocalyptic narratives of the Old Testament than with later stylistic forms.

It is clear from the Book of Mormon that apocalyptic literature comes forth along *with* prophecy and not merely as a separate result *of* prophecy. In other words, apocalyptic literature attempts to mirror an actual apocalyptic experience. For example, if apocalyptic literature is written to be disorienting, it may be that the revelatory experience itself was disorienting. Apocalyptic literature, therefore, may not be so much derivative as it is generative; the prophecy and apocalyptic apparently emerge together and work together. Hence apocalyptic experience, and its resultant literature, inspires and shapes Nephi's and Jacob's recorded prophecies and teachings to a degree that we have not understood or appreciated enough.<sup>20</sup>

Within the first eight chapters of the Book of Mormon, it appears that Lehi, "a visionary man" (1 Ne. 5:4), experienced at least three apocalyptic revelations (1 Ne. 1:6; 1:8–13; 8:2–33) in addition to many other revelations (1 Ne. 2:1–2; 3:2; 7:1). The second of Lehi's apocalyptic revelations (1 Ne. 1:8–13; see also 1 Ne. 10:17) appears to be a very condensed narrative; Nephi, who abridged his father's record, dedicates more of his limited space to Lehi's third recorded apocalyptic revelation, his well-known dream.<sup>21</sup> Nephi's selection of detail highlights opposition, as symbolized by the tree (later Zion) and the building (later Babylon), as well as another oppositional principle—one must endure persecution and all that follows in its wake (1 Ne. 8:33–34). The noncanonical literature of apocalypse, like the canonical, was a "literature [born] of crisis" and of persecution, predicting the coming of the Messiah, destruction of the wicked, and final judgment.<sup>22</sup> Persecution is a sign that catastrophe and, therefore, a new creation are imminent.<sup>23</sup>

This reading differs from most modern portrayals of Lehi's dream. Latter-day Saints often focus on the tree, which is usually said to represent the love of God in sending his Son to redeem fallen humankind (John 3:16; see Rom. 5:5). However, Nephi used the tree, a very complex symbol, differently.<sup>24</sup> The tree for Nephi was apparently as much a representation of "the presence of the Lord" (1 Ne. 8:36), "the kingdom of God" (1 Ne. 15:33–35), and "eternal life" as it was the love and condescension of God in sending his Son (2 Ne. 31:20–21). It ought to be noted also that Nephi in his later teachings spent a disproportionate amount of time describing directly and indirectly the symbols of the river (1 Ne. 15:26–36) and of the building (1 Ne. 22:13–14, 23). The tree is seemingly treated with less frequency in the same material. Verses 24–33 of 2 Nephi 26 appears to be the one place where the

later material prophetically embodies the familiar idea that the tree represents the love, condescension, and inclusiveness of God. It is clear that Nephi sought to describe and interpret Lehi's dream holistically, even if he was instructed to omit those scenes describing the very end of the world (1 Ne. 14:25).

Interestingly, Lehi's dream is distinctly placed near the end of the opening abridged material (ending at 1 Ne. 9:6) and at the beginning of Nephi's autobiographical narrative (beginning at 1 Ne. 10:1), which extends through 2 Nephi. The dream's significant location draws the reader's attention to it, so that its densely packed symbols can lay the foundation for the apocalyptic themes of 1 and 2 Nephi.

### **In What Ways Is Lehi's Dream Apocalyptic?**

Based on the foregoing, Lehi's dream can be classified as apocalyptic literature in at least four ways: (1) the abridged dream or vision<sup>25</sup> is apparently a survey<sup>26</sup> of time and space and otherworldly places initiated by a heavenly intermediary or angel; (2) the complex dream is intensely symbolic, textually disorienting, and indeterminate in tone; (3) it represents an unresolved personal and global dualism that is eschatological, or that deals with human salvation and with the events just prior to the catastrophic end; and finally (4) it supplies the symbolic, conceptual, and doctrinal basis for the apocalyptic content of messianic deliverance found in 1 and 2 Nephi. These four points will assist readers in appreciating the apocalyptic features of Lehi's dream.

1. *Lehi's dream is a guided survey of space and time, especially the last days.* Carey explains that "the most distinctive trait of apocalyptic discourse is its interest in alternative worlds, whether in terms of *time* (such as the age to come) or *space* (as in the heavenly realms)."<sup>27</sup> The textual evidence for seeing in Lehi's dream a personal "alternative world" and a global "age to come" is found in the patriarch's words to his family in 1 Nephi 8:3: "I have reason to rejoice in the Lord," Lehi said, "because of Nephi and also of Sam; for I have reason to suppose that they, and many of their seed, will be saved." Nephi and Sam were Lehi's living sons; the phrase "many of their seed," however, suggests that in his dream Lehi saw future generations and, therefore, alternative worlds on a forthcoming temporal plane. Perhaps his seed were also among the numberless multitudes in the series of scenes appearing in the second half of his dream.

In confirmation of a reading that emphasizes the present and future, modern prophets often apply the dream to the people of the last days, including Lehi's seed (Lamanites) and believing Gentiles, who would be

“numbered among” the house of Israel after gathering to the gospel tree (1 Ne. 14:2). Furthermore, the familiar phrase “And it came to pass” may to a degree mark the passage of time (whether narrative or historical or both) between the first and second set of groups who “press forward” toward the tree (1 Ne. 8:24).<sup>28</sup> This suggestion of a redemptive age to come, where many of the seed would be saved, is apparently confirmed when the patriarch, after seeing his dream and because of concern for his sons, felt compelled to prophesy of the Jews and Gentiles and his seed’s future redemption along with the house of Israel (1 Ne. 8:38; 10:2–15). Moreover, according to the important apocalyptic pattern found in Daniel 12:4, the Book of Mormon itself would eventually be “shut up” and “sealed” after the sudden fall of a nation, to come forth in another world at “the time of the end.” The book would provide correction, warning, hope, and promises of deliverance from destruction for the repentant righteous just before the Second Coming.<sup>29</sup>

In his dream, Father Lehi apparently not only saw his family and his future seed but was also escorted, by an anonymous intermediary or angelic guide, from a personal world of darkness into other realms (1 Ne. 8:8–9). The movement of the protagonist more or less follows a pattern also seen in the writings of Daniel (Dan. 8:16–19) and Ezekiel.<sup>30</sup> Lehi’s dream is global and perhaps even cosmic. His personal journey is not a traditional ascent into heaven or descent into hell (although Nephi later explained that the tree in part represents the supernal “kingdom of God”<sup>31</sup> and the river an “awful hell,” which may strike readers as rather Dantean) but a journey through a wasteland to a “large and spacious field” representing “a world” (1 Ne. 15:35; 8:20). Verses 4–7 in 1 Nephi 8 describe a man “dressed in a white robe,” who, after bidding Lehi to “follow him,” led him through a “dreary wilderness” to a symbolic scene involving his family and many others searching or wandering about.

This journey from a wilderness to a place full of extraordinary symbols is not entirely unlike the ascent or descent common to apocalypses, since it associates the guided movement of the visionary with obtaining special knowledge or enlightenment. Moreover, because God’s deliverance is a major theme in Nephi’s writings (see 1 Ne. 1:20), it should be noted that on Lehi’s journey toward meaning, one that took “many hours,” he prayed to the Lord for mercy and was delivered from darkness and a foreboding sense of destruction (1 Ne. 8:8). In his intensely symbolic dream, Lehi was guided by an angel to survey alternative worlds of time and space, including his family’s own world and the future world of his seed, which is the world of the last days.

2. *Lehi’s dream is symbolically and tonally disorienting.* Literary critic Leland Ryken argues that apocalyptic literature, because it is structurally complex, intensely symbolic, and disjointed, “attacks” the reader’s rationality.<sup>32</sup> In other

words, this literature forces interpretive choices. For example, it often employs the coordinating conjunction *or*, and therefore tends to read the reader, so to speak (1 Ne. 8:2; see 11:25). Not unlike the ambiguous imagery of Lehi's earlier apocalyptic revelations in 1 Nephi 1, a symbolic assault on rationality occurs when Nephi's readers learn that the building juxtaposed with the tree in Lehi's dream "stood as it were in the air, high above the earth" (1 Ne. 8:26). What is one to make of this strange floating symbol? This vague metaphorical language disorients, for saying "*as it were* in the air, high above the earth" is not the same as saying "*it was* in the air, high above the earth."<sup>33</sup> Is the building's height to be understood archetypally, as emblematic of pride? (1 Ne. 11:35–36). If so, the image may illuminate later references to the churches "built up" in the last days whose inhabitants "must be brought low in the dust" and finally "consumed [by fire] as stubble" (1 Ne. 22:23; see Morm. 8:27–41). Pride is a distinguishing feature of those in the foundationless building and fundamental to connecting the later prophecies to Lehi's dream (see 2 Ne. 25–30), but such vague language invites other symbolic possibilities.

That Lehi's dream is intensely symbolic is common knowledge. However, it is less evident that many symbols in 1 Nephi 8 (wilderness, tree, fruit, river, rod, paths, multitudes, mist, and building) transform themselves and, therefore, disorient the reader. For instance, in 1 Nephi 8:20, one might ask what Lehi meant with the phrase "strait and narrow path." Is the phrase redundant, since "strait" can mean "narrow"?<sup>34</sup> Or is that double construction used for rhetorical emphasis or pneumonic effect? Moreover, is the "fountain" mentioned in verse 20 the same as the "river" described in verse 13, or something else? (The word "fountain" is also later confusedly used to describe the tree.) Furthermore, is the "field" in verse 20 the same as the "field" referred to in verse 9? If so, why did Lehi not refer to it using the definite article "the" instead of the indefinite article "a" when he mentioned it again? His use of "a" the second time implies that he has not mentioned the field yet. This nuance in the dream's language may suggest two settings—the field in verse 9, and another "field, as if it had been a world" in verse 20—each an alternative world, as explained above. Furthermore, what is the relationship between the field and the building, since both are called "large," "great," and "spacious?" To complicate the symbolism further, the phrase describing the field as "large and spacious" is eventually used in 1 Nephi 12:18 in reference to the building, which was earlier called "great and spacious" (1 Ne. 8:26). That said, should these symbols be linked in the reader's imagination in some way?

Questions like these often go unanswered, because great literature does not attempt to explain itself fully.<sup>35</sup> While the ambiguous symbols and use of language in Lehi's dream can disorient readers, this effect does not discredit the account. To the contrary, it suggests that this is an authentic

apocalyptic text. Any attempts at interpretation of 1 Nephi 8 must follow Lehi's humble pattern: "I have reason to suppose . . ." a phrase that is hardly dogmatic (1 Ne. 8:3).

In addition to the language and symbols of Lehi's dream, its organic tonality also disorients. One may ask whether the account of the dream evokes happiness or sadness, or both. Lehi clearly was saddened by his own understanding of the dream, as Nephi later was by his vision (1 Ne. 15:5). Yet in both Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision, great joy is experienced and salvation obtained, at least by some. Apparently, the original dream powerfully moved Lehi's heart, even if this pathos is somewhat lost on modern readers, because Nephi radically simplified and condensed the account of his father's dream. Nephi reported that "because of these things which he [Lehi] saw in a vision, he *exceedingly feared* for Laman and Lemuel; yea, he *feared* lest they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord [a first glance at one of the tree's meanings]. And he did exhort them *with all the feeling* of a tender parent" (1 Ne. 8:36–37, italics added).

As Carey explains, suffering fear and feeling emotion on this scale is a mark of apocalyptic experience; it is often emotionally and physically overpowering.<sup>36</sup> On seeing his interpreting guide approach him, Daniel similarly reports fearing and falling prostrate on the ground, even fainting with sickness for days (Dan. 8:17, 27). The visionary Lehi was moved profoundly by the settings, characters, actions, and symbols of his dream. This is true as well of his earliest recorded vision, itself a disorienting apocalyptic ascension (1 Ne. 1:6–7). Nephi accommodates his father's dream in 1 Nephi 8 to his readers in clear, didactic terms. In other words, he uses Lehi's ambiguous dream to teach them a pointed lesson. Despite this, the intense symbolism, occasional textual disorientation, and ambiguous tonality mark 1 Nephi 8 as a troubling apocalyptic experience.

Carey points out that the tone of apocalyptic literature is "pessimistic" or tragic, which supports the idea that it develops from a deep dissatisfaction with the way things are in the actual world.<sup>37</sup> However, this same literature promises deliverance and a better day beyond the temptations and tribulations of this world. And so, paradoxically, like prophetic literature in general, it also strengthens hope and is optimistic in tone.<sup>38</sup> Apocalypse is ultimately a literature of consolation that promises, as in Isaiah, a day when "the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces" (Isa. 25:8).

3. *Lehi's dream contains personal, global, and cosmic dualism that is ultimately eschatological.* In one sense, dualism is at least as old as the Creation account. God created order from chaos, and he divided the sea from the land and the light from the dark. Even in Eden, Adam was required



to choose between alternatives (2 Ne. 2:15). After the Fall, Adam could progress by choosing the better part of corresponding alternatives or realities (2 Ne. 2:11). Dualism, as defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is “the division of something conceptually into two opposed or contrasted aspects, such as good and evil.” Later biblical examples of personal and global dualism include the writer of Proverbs juxtaposing the “whorish woman” (Prov. 7) with wisdom (Prov. 8) or Zechariah describing Jerusalem in contrast to “all the nations that come against Jerusalem” (Zech. 12:2, 9). Of course, in the case of the prophecies of Zechariah, the global conflict necessitates a cosmic messianic deliverance, ending in millennial safety and holiness for those who remain (Zech. 14).

This same dualism is threaded throughout Old Testament prophecy. For instance, Isaiah juxtaposes the joyous “meek” and “poor” of Zion against the “terrible one” and “scorner” of Babylon (29:19–20). Ezekiel speaks of Gog and Magog rising up against “my people of Israel” (Ezek. 38:16). Daniel writes of “the king of fierce countenance . . . [who] shall stand up” against the “holy people” and even against the “Prince of princes,” or the promised Messiah (Dan. 8:23, 25). The “meek” and “poor,” or “holy people,” are those who, despite their relatively small numbers and the greatness of the number of their adversaries, are said repeatedly to wait on the Lord and for the Lord (Isa. 27–35; Dan. 12:12).

Having this definition and these examples of dualism in place helps one appreciate Carey’s statement as it works in apocalyptic literature: “Dualism provides the ideological lens through which apocalyptic discourse evaluates people, institutions, events, and even time.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, symbols in apocalyptic literature represent at least one side or part of an opposition, as when Lehi’s symbolic dream revealed to him that part of his family is saved and part damned. This apparently final assessment, “saved” or “damned,” is a common evaluation inherent in dualism. In this case, we are to understand Lehi’s personal family in terms of those who come to the tree and partake and those who do not. Readers are to empathize with those who do partake and fear for those who do not, and they should also understand the ideology of righteousness from that of wickedness (see 2 Ne. 2:11) by observing what the people in the dream choose. Lehi’s dream is an example of conflict and personal dualism, or what Halverson calls “prophetic dualism,” as it represents Lehi’s family and his personal concern for those he sees as rejecting his offer of fruit. This personal level, however, constitutes only half of the dream. The other half is global and is less well defined. It must be understood in apocalyptic terms to be more fully appreciated as the basis for Nephi’s vision and his subsequent prophetic writings.

Chapter 8 of 1 Nephi is an example not only of personal dualism, therefore, but of global dualism—the eschatological and global conflict between good and evil, between Zion and Babylon. Structurally, chapter 8 can be divided into two equal parts (verses 9–20 and verses 21–33, minus verse 29). Symbolically and doctrinally, Lehi’s dream is really about the relationship between two major symbols—the tree of life (Christ, his people, and their future) and the great and spacious building (Satan, his people, and their future). These opposed and yet balanced symbols capture the central thematic conflict of Nephi’s writings between the righteous and the wicked, between those who “labor for Zion” (2 Ne. 26:31) and those who “fight against Zion” (2 Ne. 27:3). Nephi’s two books are filled with this dualist prophetic worldview and should be read in this light. The symbols from Lehi’s dream therefore inform the later eschatological prophecies and teachings of Nephi and Jacob that stress sudden messianic deliverance, such as their use of Isaiah 49:23–26, discussed at the head of this article.

4. *Lehi’s dream provides the conceptual and doctrinal basis for the apocalyptic content in 1 and 2 Nephi.* In the first half of Lehi’s dream, Nephi as narrator allows Lehi in his own voice (through what appears to be an embedded document)<sup>40</sup> to share his deeply dualistic dream (1 Ne. 8:2–33). Nephi first focuses his reader on the tree of life, its fruit, and those symbols that lead to the tree, such as the rod of iron and the strait and narrow path. In the second half of the dream, the emphasis shifts from the tree to the great and spacious building and its associated symbols, such as the mist of darkness, strange roads, and river; the focus likewise turns to four complex groups of people who have some connection with the tree. The first groups commence in the path that leads to the tree but eventually fall away (1 Ne. 8:21–23); the second groups arrive there, partake of the fruit, but also fall away (1 Ne. 8:24–28); the third, oddly only briefly treated in the narrative by Nephi, arrive at the tree, partake, but do not fall away (1 Ne. 8:30);<sup>41</sup> and the final groups, apparently due to thick darkness, only feel their way towards the building (1 Ne. 8:31–33).

Appropriately, the dualistic dream contains no middle ground. The river running between the tree and the building is not middle ground, as I will explain later. Lehi’s dream symbolically depicts, among other things, the early stages of the spiritual battle between good and evil near the end of the world (Rev. 12:9, 17). This conflict, suggested by the balanced structural and symbolic separation between the tree and the building, the righteous and the wicked, is the doctrinal essence of both apocalyptic literature and of Nephi’s subsequent writings (1 Ne. 22; see 2 Ne. 29–30).

In summary, Lehi’s dream qualifies as apocalyptic literature because it seems to be a guided survey of time and space, or alternative worlds;

it is densely symbolic, particularly disorienting, challenging, and tonally complex; and it contains a structural and doctrinal dualism that thematically relates to events at the end of time, namely persecution, apostasy, destruction, and deliverance. Persecution prefigures the end but is not itself the actual end. Nephi's apparent omission of the actual end of his father's dream tends to cause the reader to pay more attention to the material that follows, material that itself is also cut short. In this broad apocalyptic context, Nephi emphasizes endurance in the face of such persecution. Lehi's apocalyptic dream, moreover, is the symbolic and conceptual basis of 1 and 2 Nephi, especially of Nephi's great vision recorded in 1 Nephi 11–14.

### **In What Ways Is Nephi's Vision Apocalyptic?**

This section applies some of the same principles used above to examine Nephi's more obviously apocalyptic vision, together with related eschatological and messianic prophecies in 1 and 2 Nephi. Although Nephi's vision, unlike Lehi's earlier revelations and Lehi's dream, has been widely accepted as apocalyptic literature by LDS scholars, I hope to add to the discussion by applying Carey's criteria. The symbols of Lehi's dream continue to challenge, illuminate, and transform during Nephi's vision to a degree that has not been fully appreciated and understood. Three points will be made about Nephi's vision: (1) it is an ascension text that surveys future temporal time and reveals at least three apocalyptic or catastrophic events projected to occur beyond Nephi's day; (2) it becomes increasingly complex in terms of its symbolism, a quality it shares with Lehi's dream; and (3) it is deeply dualistic and immediately contextualized in a way that marks it as apocalyptic literature.

1. *Nephi's vision, or ascension, is a survey of time periods and places, three of which end catastrophically.* Understanding these alternative historical worlds apparently depends on Lehi's symbolic dream (1 Ne. 8) and a framing prophecy (1 Ne. 10).<sup>42</sup> Nephi clearly felt compelled to place before his reader Lehi's prophecy concerning the Jews and Gentiles in the narrative before he described his own seeric vision of all things. In fact, Nephi explicitly responded to the Spirit's opening question "What desirest thou?" by confessing, "I desire to behold the things which my father saw" (1 Ne. 11:3), which we know was much more extensive than what is recorded (1 Ne. 8:29; see 1 Ne. 8:36). Even more, Nephi desired to see not only what his father saw but also what his father had prophesied of "by the power of the Holy Ghost" (1 Ne. 10:17; see 1 Ne. 11:3, 5). His request was apocalyptic in scale, not simply a request to understand the tree as symbol.

Nephi's readers are apparently to understand his vision by the same power enjoyed by Lehi and Nephi (1 Ne. 10:17–19). Furthermore, 1 Nephi

10:17 and 11:5 make it clear that Nephi desired his readers to bring together Lehi's dream and his prophecy. The dream and subsequent prophecy prepare the reader for Nephi's fast-moving and complex vision, which is unfolded in 1 Nephi 11–14. Within this vision, the second intermediary or angel showed Nephi at least three catastrophic events from “an exceedingly high mountain” (1 Ne. 11:1).<sup>43</sup> The seer was transported to a place above the earth, where he could see things as they really would be.<sup>44</sup>

In the course of the angelically guided vision, Nephi stood in a place he “never had before seen” or “set his foot” and was shown three apocalyptic (or dispensation-ending) events, each in an alternative world that was future to him (1 Ne. 11:1). First, Nephi viewed the rejection of the “apostles of the Lamb” by the “multitudes of the earth” in the meridian of time (1 Ne. 11:34–36; see 2 Ne. 25:14); second, he viewed the destruction of the wicked and the preservation of the righteous at Christ's coming to the Nephites (1 Ne. 12:4–6; see 2 Ne. 26:1–9); and third, he viewed the persecution of the Latter-day Saints and alluded to the destruction of the wicked and the deliverance of the righteous at the end of the world (1 Ne. 14:10–17). These are themes that Nephi fleshed out in later prophecies in 1 and 2 Nephi (see 2 Ne. 27:3). Each of these events has a symbolic relationship to Lehi's dream and either typologically foreshadows or directly refers to the events of the last days, as shall be demonstrated (1 Ne. 11:36).

The second of the three catastrophic events foreseen and recorded is central to the mystery unfolded to Nephi in his apocalypse. Again, a symbol from Lehi's dream is involved, but this time it is incorporated in a delayed way that may slightly disorient readers. When the central purpose of the vision was announced to Nephi by the Spirit (the first intermediary) in 1 Nephi 11:7, it was made clear to him that the tree itself was not so important but rather what the tree represents—a specific future messianic advent. (This advent is yet another way to understand the symbol of the tree.) Apparently, the tree represents, among other things, the “love of God” as manifest to Lehi's and Nephi's seed in the account of 3 Nephi and, by extension, as manifest to all those who would eventually receive the record of the event before the Second Coming. “And behold this thing [a special future event that will be revealed for the first time to Nephi and his people] shall be given unto thee for a sign, that after thou hast beheld the tree which bore the fruit which thy father tasted [notice that the tree as symbol is subordinated], thou shalt also behold a man descending out of heaven, and him shall ye witness; and after ye have witnessed him ye shall bear record that it is the Son of God” (1 Ne. 11:7). Yet in Nephi's vision, the promise “thou shalt also behold a man descending out of heaven” is not fulfilled until 1 Nephi 12:6. The record of the descent of Jesus to the Nephites is also emphasized later in the vision and in Nephi's writings,

where he also gives his prophetic witness (1 Ne. 13:35–37, 40–41; see 2 Ne. 26:1–9; see also 2 Ne. 32:6).

Before this epic descent occurs, a destructive event is prophesied that has been described by a modern prophet as a pattern for the days before the Second Coming of Christ (1 Ne. 19:11–12; see 2 Ne. 26:1–9).<sup>45</sup> According to the vision of Nephi, signs would be given to the Lehites such as “wars and rumors of wars” (1 Ne. 12:2–3; see 2 Ne. 26:2). Heavy destruction would follow (1 Ne. 12:4; see 2 Ne. 26:3–7), and then the Lord would save them from their enemies and manifest himself to them, establishing millennial-like peace among them (1 Ne. 12; see 2 Ne. 26:8–9). “And it came to pass after I saw these things, I saw the vapor of darkness, that it passed from off the face of the earth; and behold, I saw multitudes who had not fallen because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord. And I saw the heavens open, and the Lamb of God descending out of heaven; and he came down and showed himself unto them” (1 Ne. 12:5–6). This is the sign promised by the Spirit. Seen in context, Christ’s coming is deliverance for the patiently waiting righteous (2 Ne. 26:8–9) that ushers in an era of peace, itself ending in apocalyptic terms when pride again rears its ugly head (1 Ne. 12:13–19; see 2 Ne. 26:9–10).

Interestingly, many symbols from Lehi’s dream are used to represent the catastrophe among the seed of Lehi both at Christ’s coming to Bountiful and when the Nephites are utterly and suddenly destroyed later (2 Ne. 26:18). For example, “mist of darkness” and “vapor of darkness” are both phrases Nephi employs to describe these apocalyptic events at the center of the visionary action (1 Ne. 12:4–5, 17). Later in the vision, other foundational symbols from Lehi’s dream surface—building, river, and roads (1 Ne. 12:16–18)—but do not accumulate their full meaning until deeper into the dramatic narrative.

2. *Like Lehi’s dream, Nephi’s vision is intensely symbolic and increasingly complex, as demonstrated by the transformation of a single symbol—the river.* As we have seen, every symbol introduced by Lehi’s dream seems to be incorporated into the dramatic narrative through 1 Nephi 14 and 15. I will therefore offer only a brief discussion concerning the symbol of the “river of water” from 1 Nephi 8:13. I choose the river because it is represented interestingly, powerfully, and apocalyptically; it is also transformative, being equated with the building, or with the dwelling place of the wicked.

Although many readers of the Book of Mormon take a partial or reductive approach to individual symbols of Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision, the apocalyptic symbol of the river has many layers of meaning and can reward the reader who takes the time to note carefully how the symbol is used in the text. For example, the river can represent a line of demarcation

between the wicked and the righteous; war and desolation (1 Ne. 12:15–16); “filthiness” (1 Ne. 15:26–27); “the depths of hell” (1 Ne. 12:16; see 1 Ne. 15:29, 35); a “great and terrible gulf” (1 Ne. 12:18; see 1 Ne. 15:28); “the justice of God” whose “brightness . . . was like unto the brightness of a flaming fire, which ascendeth up unto God for ever and ever, and hath no end” (1 Ne. 15:30; see 1 Ne. 12:18); and that “great pit” (1 Ne. 14:3).

Truly the symbol of the river, like the symbols of Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision in general, is layered with themes and motifs characteristic of apocalyptic literature. The “justice of God,” for instance, alludes to final judgment and the afterlife. These several meanings are spread over many chapters, which demonstrates that the symbol evolves and accumulates meaning. Moreover, resonances of this complex symbol can be found even in Nephi’s latest prophecy, wherein the river is evoked in describing in an apocalyptic context two cyclical Nephite national collapses: the first for which they would be swallowed up in “the depths of the earth” (2 Ne. 26:5, fulfilled in 3 Nephi), and the second in which “they must go down to hell” (2 Ne. 26:10; see 28:15, 21). This second fall is described in 4 Nephi.

3. *Nephi’s vision is deeply dualistic and contextualized in an apocalyptic manner.* Like Lehi’s intensely symbolic dream, Nephi’s vision ends with the intermediary making a dualistic reference to “two churches only” (an indirect reference to the tree and the building) and “the wrath of God . . . poured out upon the great and abominable church” (1 Ne. 14:15). While Nephi’s vision only suggests messianic deliverance, the promise of deliverance is made more explicit later (1 Ne. 22:17; 2 Ne. 30:10). But aside from this stark dualism of “two churches only,” one also finds apocalyptic motifs in the local contextual material. For instance, even before Nephi describes his visionary experience, he focuses his reader’s attention on the Messiah’s first coming, the “mysteries of God” soon to be “unfolded,” and the final judgment: “Therefore remember, O man, for all thy doings thou shalt be brought into judgment” (1 Ne. 10:11, 17–21).

Furthermore, after Nephi descended from the mountain top, he very emotionally explained the separating force of judgment and justice even further, specifically applying what he had seen to his brothers Laman and Lemuel, as did Lehi (1 Ne. 15:26–36; see 1 Ne. 16:1–3). The scene that apparently moved Nephi the most was not the tree but seeing the destruction of his seed by the seed of his own brethren (1 Ne. 12). In apocalyptic fashion, Nephi spoke of the inevitability of the vision (Carey’s notion of “determinism”) and its divine fulfillment: “I, Nephi, was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts, and also, because of the things which I had seen, and knew they must *unavoidably come to pass* because of the great wickedness of the children of men” (1 Ne. 15:4; italics added).

Lastly, so powerful and polarizing is apocalyptic experience that it overcomes the visionary who participates, and it troubles the recipients who later read the revelatory literature. Carey explains that apocalyptic experience is accompanied by “traumatic physical manifestations” such as “fear,” “trembling,” “prostration,” and “exhaustion.”<sup>46</sup> Both Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision exhausted the visionary. After his initial vision, Lehi cast “himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit,” and his dream troubled him and struck him with great fear (1 Ne. 1:6–7). Similarly, Nephi’s vision so overcame him emotionally and spiritually that he lost his great physical strength: “And it came to pass that I was overcome because of my afflictions, for I considered that mine afflictions were great above all. . . . And it came to pass that after I had received strength I spake unto my brethren” (1 Ne. 15:5–6). Lehi’s and Nephi’s experiences apparently troubled both visionaries long afterward (2 Ne. 26:7, 10). If one includes Lehi’s first vision (1 Ne. 1:6) with his dream (1 Ne. 8), he suffered from quaking, trembling, and emotional, spiritual, and physical exhaustion. Both were distraught about their families, or portions of them, yet each apparently knew, despite their sorrow, that some portion of their family would be saved at some future time (1 Ne. 22:17).

### **Is the Narrative Context of 1 and 2 Nephi Also Apocalyptic?**

So far, I have proposed that Nephi’s vision and Lehi’s dream exemplify apocalyptic literature in the Book of Mormon. More specifically, I have argued that Nephi recorded a series of revelations from his father, some of which are apocalyptic in content and quality, with Lehi’s dream being the fullest example. Nephi deliberately situated the dream (or part of it) in his narrative arrangement, providing his reader subsequently with an account of his own more complex ascension, prophecies, and doctrine. This paper now suggests that much of the content of 1 and 2 Nephi depends on these foundational revelations for imagery and is, therefore, also apocalyptic in theme. Unlike the earlier dream and vision, though, the later prophetic material more fully introduces messianic promises of deliverance and millennial rest, thus to a degree resolving the tensions caused by the earlier prophetic omissions (1 Ne. 22:24–28; see 2 Ne. 30:9–18).

*1 Nephi.* Chapters 19–22 of 1 Nephi give pointed prophetic instruction about the last dispensation and the end of the world structured on the order of events in Nephi’s vision and dependent on the symbols of Lehi’s dream (1 Ne. 19:12–15, 22–23). The apocalyptic instruction promises messianic deliverance in a future day for the “righteous” covenant people and, therefore, gives them power to endure the persecution of the “wicked” who “fight against” them (1 Ne. 22:14–19). At the beginning of this section of the



Book of Mormon, Nephi was commanded to make another more specific record for the “instruction of [his] people” (1 Ne. 19: 1, 3). Nephi considered the “plain and precious” truths in this second record to be of “great worth, both to the body and soul” (1 Ne. 19:7). After touching upon Christ’s nativity, the visit of the Lord to the Nephites, and the subsequent gathering of Israel through the Gentiles (1 Ne. 19:7–9, 15–17), Nephi quoted and then commented upon Isaiah 48 and 49. In connection with Isaiah 49:22–26, Nephi devoted much of the final chapter of 1 Nephi to explaining the covenants associated with the fulness of the gospel and the promise of messianic deliverance (1 Ne. 22:15). The apocalyptic content at the conclusion of 1 Nephi is thereafter powerfully summarized and directly alluded to by Jacob in an important sermon that he delivered to his people at Nephi’s request:

Wherefore, they that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord shall lick up the dust of their feet; and the people of the Lord shall not be ashamed. For the people of the Lord are they who wait for him; for they still wait for the coming of the Messiah. And . . . the Messiah will set himself again the second time to recover them; wherefore he will manifest himself unto them in power and great glory, unto the destruction of their enemies, when that day cometh that they shall believe in him; and none will he destroy that believe in him. And they that believe not in him shall be destroyed, both by fire, and by tempest, and by earthquakes, and by bloodsheds, and by pestilence, and by famine. And they shall know that the Lord is God, the Holy One of Israel. For shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captives delivered? (2 Ne. 6:13–16)

Significantly, the end of 1 Nephi imparts emphatic prophetic instruction that draws Nephi’s readers’ attention to gospel covenants and the promise of deliverance from apocalyptic destruction. Both Nephi’s vision and his later instruction end with a focus on “the covenant people of the Lord” persecuted by “the proud and they who do wickedly” (1 Ne. 14:13–14; 22:15; see 2 Ne. 26:4). However, neither Lehi’s dream nor Nephi’s vision ends with millennial rest. Each surprisingly ends with the crisis between good and evil in the balance. These unsatisfying endings create a dramatic narrative tension in the earlier revelations. Only Nephi’s later instruction and prophecies in 1 and 2 Nephi begin to fully resolve the apocalyptic material found in 1 Nephi 8 and 11–14.

2 *Nephi*. The connection between Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision and the similarly patterned instruction in 1 Nephi 19–22 is part of something much larger going on in Nephi’s apocalyptic books, as evidenced by his tantalizing conclusion to 1 Nephi: “And now I, Nephi, make an end; for I durst not speak *as yet* concerning these things” (1 Ne. 22:29, italics added).



“These things” in large part refer to the end of the world and the deliverance of the covenant people by the Messiah, as represented in the writings and sermons of Jacob, Isaiah, and Nephi. Nephi did not waste any time returning to his theme in 2 Nephi (2 Ne. 6:6–7; see 1 Ne. 21:22–23). After quoting Jacob’s (2 Ne. 6–10) and Isaiah’s (2 Ne. 12–24; see 25:3, 6, 9) apocalyptic teachings extensively, Nephi, in sharp contrast, offers his reader another emphatically plain prophecy. This prophecy uses the chronological structure of his earlier vision and his instruction in 1 Nephi 19–22 to further elaborate on the meaning of the tree and the building and the other symbols seen by his father (see 1 Ne. 22:1–2).

In this great and final prophecy (2 Ne. 25–30), Nephi describes events or people connected to the building and its inhabitants: the fall of Jerusalem (2 Ne. 25:14), the sudden destruction of the Nephites (2 Ne. 26:18), and the pride of the Gentiles (2 Ne. 26:20–21). Nephi then briefly focuses his readers’ attention on the pure love of God, or the tree: “He [Christ] doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation” (2 Ne. 26:24). Nephi continues: “He doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness” (2 Ne. 26:33). This verse sounds very much like when Lehi beckoned to his family; in fact, “partake” is the word used often in Lehi’s dream.

Nephi then resumes his description of the “days of the Gentiles” (2 Ne. 27:1) and the end of the world, a dark time when the Gentiles “have all gone out of the way” (2 Ne. 28:11). In those days of wickedness and false churches, a book (the rod of iron, specifically the Book of Mormon) would come forth and lead the humble through the Gentile “mists of darkness” and false doctrine to God and his redeeming love. Others would “stumble” along in “an awful state of blindness” due to “the greatness of their stumbling block” (1 Ne. 13:29, 32; 2 Ne. 26:20). One can readily relate the darkness of Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision in relationship to this Gentile blindness and stumbling.

Simultaneously, many others not gathered under the tree would be stirred to “rage” and would “persecute the meek and poor in heart, because in their pride they are puffed up” (2 Ne. 28:20, 28; see Morm. 8:17–22). Some of the humble would come unto Christ but then afterward fall away because they were led by the uninspired “precepts of men,” apparently becoming ashamed of Christ and his gospel (2 Ne. 28:14). Variants of the word “shame” are worth tracing from Lehi’s dream through Jacob’s sermon and beyond into Nephi’s writings (2 Ne. 9:18). Moreover, many who hearken to Satan’s temptations, for “he whispereth in their ears” (2 Ne. 28:22), would be lulled

or flattered away (2 Ne. 28:15, 21) from the path and fall into the depths of hell (2 Ne. 26:5, 10; see 1 Ne. 15:26–36).

The whole prophecy ends on this apocalyptic and prophetic note: “For the time speedily cometh that the Lord God shall cause a great division among the people, and the wicked will he destroy; and he will spare his people, yea, even if it so be that he must destroy the wicked by fire” (2 Ne. 30:10). This prophecy, prefiguring a “great division” between the “wicked” and “his people” and messianic deliverance, recalls the symbols and themes of the final part of Nephi’s vision when all factions are said to belong to “two churches only” (1 Ne. 14:10). This separation was of course also apparent in Lehi’s dream.

The verbal, symbolic, and thematic cohesion achieved through the apocalyptic books of 1 and 2 Nephi is remarkable. Nephi’s earlier visionary account abruptly ends with gathering persecution, rising priesthood power, and descending divine destruction. But Nephi’s last prophecy, as apocalyptic prophecy often does, promises dramatic deliverance and a new age of millennial rest (2 Ne. 30:11–18; see 1 Ne. 14:14). The material on the Millennium (2 Ne. 30:11–18; see 1 Ne. 22:24–26), absent from Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision, tends to resolve the conflict and literary tension inherent in the earlier material. Like Isaiah’s and Zechariah’s apocalyptic writings, the strong presence of millennial hope marks 1 and 2 Nephi as apocalyptic literature, or at least apocalyptic in symbols and themes, for it imparts consolation to those who hold on.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

I have explored the following points: (1) that Lehi, as a “visionary man,” apparently had important apocalyptic revelations other than his famous dream; (2) that Lehi’s dream, strategically located in Nephi’s narrative, is apocalyptic and therefore focused on apostasy, endurance, and by inference messianic deliverance; (3) that Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision are representative samples of the genre of apocalyptic literature and have certain identifiable characteristics, such as their use of alternative worlds, dense symbolism, and difficult textual features that disorient their readers even while they spiritually edify and impart hope; and lastly, (4) that Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision shape and inform the dualistic prophecies and eschatological teachings of 1 and 2 Nephi, all of which have not been appreciated or understood well enough. These books are in a way as apocalyptic in their themes and symbolic features as other apocalypses such as Daniel and Revelation—although neither Daniel nor John had a Nephi to come after them and show how history would flow.

One should understand Nephi's doctrinal teachings on making and keeping covenants (2 Ne. 31–32) in terms of symbolism and imagery found in the apocalyptic backdrop of 1 and 2 Nephi. For instance, Nephi refers to phrases familiar to Lehi's dream, such as "the strait and narrow path" and "ye must press forward." In his doctrinal teachings following his last extended prophecy on the high-minded Gentiles (2 Ne. 25–30), Nephi emphasizes for his readers the importance of avoiding personal apostasy after they have come unto Christ and partaken of his goodness (2 Ne. 31:14–15). He then asks rhetorically "if all is done" once they have obtained the path that leads to eternal life, or the tree. He answers for his readers: "Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold thus says the Father: ye shall have eternal life" (2 Ne. 31:19–20). Enduring to the end, or not giving heed to those in the building and falling away, was the very point Nephi immediately emphasized after recording Lehi's apocalyptic dream (1 Ne. 8:34). Moreover, the angelic guide in Nephi's vision had said to Nephi that those who "endure unto the end" in "that day" shall be "lifted up" (1 Ne. 13:37).

However, neither Lehi's dream nor Nephi's vision, prophecies, or teachings fully unveil or reveal the very end. John the Revelator, according to Nephi, was "ordained" by God to "see and write the remainder of these things" (1 Ne. 14:25, 21). This is another powerful evidence that 1 and 2 Nephi should be seen within the apocalyptic genre, for the record itself recognizes the connection between Nephi's writings and John's apocalypse. Nephi, as selective editor, seer, and narrator, not only prepares his readers for John's account of "the end of the world" but also for the actual end of the world with all its promised drama (1 Ne. 14:22). Nephi's is a warning voice. His voice speaks peace to the righteous and assures them of messianic deliverance "even if it so be as by fire" (1 Ne. 22:17). It is no surprise, therefore, that the Apostle John, as well as Peter (2 Pet. 2, 3), Alma (Alma 32, 36), and Mormon (Morm. 8), all use the language and symbols that Lehi does, exhorting his audience in crisis to faith and patience, assuring them that if they "hold fast" against temptation and opposition, they will not fall away but soon "eat of the tree of life" in the kingdom of God (Rev. 2:7; 3:11; see D&C 20:35).

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1. The Joseph Smith Translation of Isaiah 49:25 adds more about God delivering his people: “But thus saith the Lord; even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away [using this language, one can infer a narrow escape], and the prey of the terrible [the wicked] shall be delivered, for the mighty God shall deliver his covenant people [the prey]. For thus saith the Lord, I will contend with them that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children.” Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 2004), 821. The Joseph Smith Translation adds to Matthew that the covenant people are “the elect according to the covenant” (JST Matt. 24:22). ^

2. According to Christopher Rowland, there are really two ways of viewing apocalyptic literature: “On the one hand, there is the view that apocalypticism is determined by the revelatory character of this literature. On the other hand, there is the view that the religion is determined entirely by the (mainly eschatological) contents of these texts. This difference explains the great variety in definitions that modern literature on the subject offers of this phenomenon.” Christopher Rowland, “Apocalyptic,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 52. For the purposes of this paper, apocalyptic literature is both “revelatory” (it unveils hidden knowledge) and “eschatological” (having to do with the end of times, particularly with those events that will, according to the prophets, take place just before, during, and just after Christ’s second coming to the earth). ^

3. For example, Stephen E. Robinson, “Great and Abominable Church,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Desert Book, 2003), 310–15; and S. Kent Brown and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, *Between the Testaments from Malachi to Matthew* (Salt Lake City: Desert Book, 2002), 152–54. Jared M. Halverson has recently made a somewhat similar argument, although his work is not concerned with the relationship between the apocalypses of Lehi and Nephi and the other prophetic material in 1 and 2 Nephi. Instead, it compares Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision to John’s famous apocalypse in the Bible. Moreover, whereas Halverson insightfully describes Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision as a mutually dependent pair of apocalypses (the one ultimately fitting within the other in a two-part whole), I read Lehi’s dream as possessing two parts itself; and even though it is dramatically abridged, I see it as ending, so to speak, in omission. Jared M. Halverson, “Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision as Apocalyptic Literature,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2011), 53–69. In this study, I focus only on the words of Nephi and Jacob; I do not attempt to discuss the many additional ways in which the embedded Isaiah chapters also qualify as apocalyptic. ^

4. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 38. ^

5. On the usual elements of visionary literature, see Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1984), 165–75. <sup>^</sup>

6. Greg Carey, *Ultimate Things: An Introduction to Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Literature* (Danvers, Mass.: Chalice Press, 2005), 1–18. <sup>^</sup>

7. John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel* (Missoula, 1977), quoted in Richard E. Sturm, “Defining the Word ‘Apocalyptic’: A Problem in Biblical Criticism,” in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament*, ed. Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards (Great Britain: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 24. <sup>^</sup>

8. “Anything viewed as a prophetic revelation is an apocalypse.” Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1966), 40–41. <sup>^</sup>

9. Carey, *Ultimate Things*, 6–10. Carey also lists cosmic speculation, prophecy after the fact, and pseudonymity. <sup>^</sup>

10. Hugh W. Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet*, ed. Stephen Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 83, 218–19. The reference to physicality is interesting given how often the phrase “according to the flesh” is repeated in the first two books of Nephi (see 1 Ne. 22:1–2), especially in Jacob’s teachings (see 2 Ne. 6–10), wherein he also speaks of the literal resurrection (2 Ne. 9), another apocalyptic motif found in relevant sections of the Old Testament (Isa. 26:20–21; Dan. 12:2). <sup>^</sup>

11. D. S. Russell, *Prophecy and the Apocalyptic Dream: Protest and Promise* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 19–30. <sup>^</sup>

12. Although the origin of apocalyptic literature has for a long time been disputed, many scholars agree that one source for the themes within the literature is Old Testament prophecy, including preexilic prophecy. William R. Millar reports that scholars such as Edward Kissane and Yehezkel Kaufman have seen Isaiah 24–27 as “pre-exilic prophetic judgment literature thoroughly at home in the work of eighth-century Isaiah.” In this connection, Millar reports that even Kissane admits that this early Isaiah material may be understood “in a very wide sense” as apocalyptic; and that, similarly, Kaufman asserts that the later writers of apocalyptic literature “borrowed” motifs from First Isaiah. William R. Millar, *Isaiah 24–27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), 1, 6, 8.

More recently, J. G. McConville, the contributor of “Prophetic Writings” to Vanhoozer’s important edited work, connects questions about judgment and salvation oracles and determinism to Amos; the “‘Divine Warrior’ attitude” and “eschatological holy war” motifs to Joel; God’s justice and judgment of the nations to Isaiah and Jeremiah; and a day of knowledge (or millennial renewal) to Habakkuk and Joel. J. G. McConville, “Prophetic Writings,” in Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 628–32. Another scholar explains that Joel portrays “the eschatological day of the Lord” and the earth’s “renewal.” Willem VanGemeren, “Joel, Book of,” in Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 389–91.

These archetypal themes found at least loosely strewn through the preexilic prophetic literature clearly have a direct relationship to what later becomes fully developed apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature, therefore, apparently transitions from what is called classical prophecy to more complex apocalyptic literature by way of proto-apocalyptic literature, a literature in various stages of transition. Lehi’s writings probably fall within this last more mixed and fluid category. Brown and Holzapfel confirm that fully formed apocalyptic literature belongs mainly to the intertestamental time period. Brown and Holzapfel, *Between the Testaments*,

146–47. And Griggs helpfully adds, “The apocalyptic tradition was one of those the early Christian church rejected in the third through the fifth centuries, only to be recovered in modern times through [nineteenth-century] discoveries.” C. Wilford Griggs, “Apocalyptic Texts,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:54. <sup>^</sup>

13. “Apocalyptic Literature,” in *Compact Bible Dictionary*, ed. Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 47. <sup>^</sup>

14. “Daniel, Book of,” in Bible Dictionary, in *Holy Bible* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979), 653, explains that the book of Daniel is “the earliest example of apocalyptic literature currently in the Bible” and adds, “There are, however, examples of apocalyptic literature in Moses 7 and 1 Nephi 8, 11, which are of earlier date.” Moses 7 contains the prophecies of Enoch, seventh from Adam. <sup>^</sup>

15. Rowland, “Apocalyptic,” 52. On the origin of apocalyptic, Richard E. Sturm reports that R. H. Charles “sees apocalyptic arising out of prophecy in the fourth century.” And Sturm asserts that H. H. Rowley “holds that when late prophecy saw history as moving swiftly toward a great climax and birth of a new age for a remnant of Israel, it was only a short step to apocalyptic, from which messianism developed . . . and . . . the concept of a great world judgment.” Lastly, Sturm shares Philipp Vielhauer’s four theories explaining apocalyptic literature’s origin: (1) it “arose out of . . . Persian cosmological dualism, stimulating eschatological thinking in post-exilic circles around 400–200 BC”; (2) it “is a continuation of prophecy”; (3) it “is an expression of ‘folkbooks’ or esoteric literature of rabbis”; and (4) it “is a product of the Wisdom tradition.” Sturm, “Defining the Word ‘Apocalyptic,’” 22–23. <sup>^</sup>

16. Millar takes this view. Millar, *Isaiah 24–27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic*, 7, 118. <sup>^</sup>

17. Rowland, “Apocalyptic,” 52. <sup>^</sup>

18. Millar suggests that after the Babylonian captivity occurred, literature went in a new direction due to the sheer trauma that would have resulted from such a historical event. Millar, *Isaiah 24–27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic*, 118. Avraham Gileadi, *The Literary Message of Isaiah* (New York: Hebraeus Press, 1994), 2, argues that the book of Isaiah (much quoted in 1 and 2 Nephi) is an apocalypse predating the exile. In this connection, he reminds us of the importance of the “spirit of prophecy” in interpreting apocalyptic texts (see 2–3; see 2 Ne. 25:1–10). <sup>^</sup>

19. Some of this imagery can be traced as far back as the prophet Zenos, who spoke apocalyptically of a “vapor of darkness” (1 Ne. 19:11), which resembles Lehi’s “mist of darkness” (1 Ne. 8:23, 24). <sup>^</sup>

20. On the relationship between prophecy and apocalyptic, see Russell, *Prophecy and the Apocalyptic Dream*, 19–30, and Brown and Holzapfel, *Between the Testaments*, 143–45. <sup>^</sup>

21. Griggs, “Apocalyptic Texts,” 1:54. Griggs writes that in apocalyptic literature “the seer often gives a brief autobiographical account in which he recounts his initial experiences and important personal events.” In 1 Nephi 8, Nephi allows his father to share his dream with us from the first-person point of view. Because this point of view remains largely consistent throughout 1 Nephi 8, it has the tendency to stabilize the ambiguity of the dream’s other parts. The dream’s ambiguity is explored later in this paper. It is interesting to note that Lehi’s point of view is often limited to what he can see from his position under the tree, but not always. <sup>^</sup>

22. Russell, *Prophecy and the Apocalyptic Dream*, 19–30. Brown and Holzapfel confirm that this literature is a literature created in end-time crisis. The Essene community who saw themselves as in crisis is a case in point. Brown and Holzapfel, *Between the Testaments*, 151–52. <sup>^</sup>

23. Carey, *Ultimate Things*, 8. <sup>^</sup>

24. Catherine Thomas has noted the complexity of the divine symbol of the tree as treated in the text. However, she has made no attempt to exhaustively explore the meaning; nor do I. She has observed that the tree of life is juxtaposed with the olive tree in 1 Nephi. M. Catherine Thomas, “Jacob’s Allegory: The Mystery of Christ,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 11–20. Most LDS teachers seem to discuss the tree as Christ and its fruit as coming unto him through baptism and confirmation. Elder David A. Bednar has recently described it this way in an *Ensign* article. David A. Bednar, “Lehi’s Dream: Holding Fast to the Iron Rod,” *Ensign* 41 (October 2011): 32–37. This apostolic interpretation is very important, but is apparently not Nephi’s own view, at least not his sole view, for in 2 Nephi 31 Nephi speaks of entering the path (also as symbol from Lehi’s dream) as coming unto Christ through the ordinances and of obtaining the tree as something far more significant—laying hold of the promise of eternal life and of entering the kingdom of God. <sup>^</sup>

25. Talmage discusses the difference between dreams and visions, and clarifies that in general terms dreams are not open visions. Dreams are had while asleep and visions while awake. Waking visions can render one “practically unconscious,” however. Even visions of the night must be understood as revelations that come to the waking senses and not the unconscious mind or spirit. Lehi’s dream came to him as a result of his priesthood role. James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1977), 226. Joseph Smith taught that open visions are of great importance and ought to be interpreted or shut up. Richard C. Galbraith, *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 184. The fact that Lehi and Nephi never settle on whether to call Lehi’s revelation a dream or a vision is an ambiguity. Ambiguity will be further explored later in the paper. <sup>^</sup>

26. The word “survey” contains the idea of alternative worlds, world ages past or future, and otherworldly places. Carey, *Ultimate Things*, 6. <sup>^</sup>

27. Carey, *Ultimate Things*, 6. <sup>^</sup>

28. The all too common phrase “And it came to pass” is often glossed over but does convey the passage of time, as Arthur Henry King explains: “The task of the phrase is to nudge the attention, which is why it naturally occurs at the beginning of paragraphs, but it occurs elsewhere when particular attention has to be drawn to the narrative’s taking a further step.” Arthur Henry King, “Language Themes in Jacob 5: ‘The Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts Is the House of Israel (Isaiah 5:7),” in Ricks and Welch, *Allegory of the Olive Tree*, 151. <sup>^</sup>

29. Griggs speaks to this issue, as have others. Griggs, “Apocalyptic Texts,” 1:54. <sup>^</sup>

30. Millar suggests that Ezekiel fathers the “apocalyptic tour of space” narrative. Millar, *Isaiah 24–27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic*, 8. <sup>^</sup>

31. The use of superlative language, “most sweet” or “white, to exceed all whiteness,” in describing the tree suggests that the tree represents the kingdom of God. This reading is borne out later in Nephi’s account when it becomes clear that the tree represents more than the love of God. <sup>^</sup>



32. Ryken, *How to Read the Bible*, 169, 174. <sup>^</sup>

33. There are other examples of disorientation in the dream. Lehi reports in 1 Nephi 8:11 that “I beheld that it [the tree] was most sweet.” The reader wonders exactly how sweetness is registered to the eyes. Later, the eyes of some are “cast . . . about” in shame as opposed to more common expression “cast down in shame.” And, all this is done before the building has yet been identified for the reader. Jacob speaks at length about shame. Does he have his father’s dream in mind when he does so? There is much evidence that he saw what his father and his brother saw, particularly in his speech recorded in 2 Nephi 6–10. “Partake” and “pressing forward” are words and phrases that also get into the later teachings as the paper makes clear. Must they also be understood to connect in some way to the dream? <sup>^</sup>

34. John W. Welch, “Strait, Straight,” in Largey, *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 746. <sup>^</sup>

35. Rowland clarifies that some apocalyptic literature does attempt to explain itself. This motif (to be both obscure and plain) is a style of this literature itself. That is, “some [apocalypses] include explanations of their imagery by means of an authoritative angelic interpreter.” Rowland, “Apocalyptic,” 52. This angelic teacher motif, also used by Milton in his great epic, *Paradise Lost*, is used in Nephi’s account. In 1 Nephi 11–14, an angel shows to Nephi what his father has seen. The problem is that the new material explains many important events to come in some clarity, but it ironically also raises many additional questions. Some of the new questions are indirectly answered in the subsequent material of 1 and 2 Nephi. There is no direct attempt, however, to answer the textual questions that I have raised about 1 Nephi 8. My point is that textual indeterminacy is a mark of authentic apocalyptic literature and should not alarm us. <sup>^</sup>

36. Carey, *Ultimate Things*, 7. <sup>^</sup>

37. Carey, *Ultimate Things*, 2. <sup>^</sup>

38. Brown and Holzapfel, *Between the Testaments*, 150–51. <sup>^</sup>

39. Carey, *Ultimate Things*, 8. <sup>^</sup>

40. S. Kent Brown, “Lehi’s Personal Record: Quest for a Missing Source,” *BYU Studies* 24, no. 1 (1984): 29. <sup>^</sup>

41. Most modern readings emphasize this short section. For instance, Elder Bednar does this in his *Ensign* article. Nephi does not seem to, however. If anything, he seems to draw his reader’s attention to group 2. Bednar, “Lehi’s Dream: Holding Fast to the Rod,” 32–37. <sup>^</sup>

42. John W. Welch has done some work on this. “Getting through Isaiah with the Help of the Nephite Prophetic View,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Perry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 19–47. He has identified the stages of history that are repeated in Nephi’s writings. He shows that they correspond to the structure or sequence of Nephi’s vision. <sup>^</sup>

43. The battle described in 1 Nephi 13:12–18 (possibly referring to the American Revolution) may also be a type of the end-time battle. The people are few in number, “humble themselves,” and are delivered by the “wrath of God” from “all other nations.” <sup>^</sup>

44. Nibley clarifies this privileged point of view in apocalyptic literature. Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet*, 83. He argues that the visionary’s ability to see events from different points of view (due to his ability to move up or down or to travel), including



God's point of view, marks this kind of literature as theodicy. Lehi, of course, did not see his visions from a mountaintop but from under a tree, a place that he had traveled to with some difficulty. ^

45. Ezra Taft Benson, "The Savior's Visit to America," *Ensign* 17 (May 1987): 4-7. ^

46. Carey, *Ultimate Things*, 7. ^

47. Paul O'Callaghan describes the "eschatological doctrine contained in apocalyptic works under the following seven headings: divine predeterminism; the imminence of the eschatological end; eschatological signs and portents; the arrival of the savior figure; the resurrection of the dead and final judgment; the fate of the righteous and the wicked." Paul O'Callaghan, "The Eschatological Doctrine of Apocalyptic Works," in *The Christological Assimilation of the Apocalypse: An Essay on Fundamental Eschatology* (Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 2004), 69-70. The doctrine expressed by O'Callaghan clearly would include the LDS concept of millennium since that period of rest is ushered in along with the "resurrection of the dead" at the "arrival of the savior figure" and precedes the "final judgment." The millennium is often expressly included if not always implied in discussions of apocalyptic literature, for example in Morton D. Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Carey's notion of "alternative worlds" embraces the idea of old and new worlds. Carey, *Ultimate Things*, 6. The millennium is the new world order under Christ. It replaces the old world order in part under Satan, for he has "his own dominion" even if the earth has never been his possession (D&C 1:35). ^