

CHAPTER FOUR

Interpretive Keys

With the understanding that the Book of Mormon contains intentional parallels with valuable instruction sealed therein, we need next to consider some interpretive keys that can aid us in unearthing the treasures therein. We have already discussed the most important keys. They are as follows:

1. The *Holy Spirit* must be sought as a guide. To find, we must ask; to have mysteries opened unto us, we must knock.
2. We need to always remember that *the focus* of the parallels is on salvation through Jesus Christ. The temporal and spiritual parallels point to Him as the only means by which salvation can come.
3. We must *be faithful* to that which we already have received, realizing that the Lord can reveal things to us only to the extent that we align our lives with His teachings.
4. Inasmuch as some parallels bear a heavy message of doom, we need to *maintain hope* in the ultimate redemption to which they point. On the political level, the Lord's covenants to the house of Israel will be fulfilled. On the religious level, the way of salvation is prepared for all individuals who will repent.
5. We should realize that an *underlying theme* of the parallels is that the kingdom of God is both religious and political. If an event from one history parallels an occurrence from another, then there may well be a parallel to the individual level -- if that event is of great eternal significance. The corollary of this is that important steps of personal progression will find manifestations in the progression of nations.
6. In the process of piecing together parallels from various sources, we should remember that there is *one overreaching progressional pattern* into which each piece will blend -- all pieces that are valid will fit into the Lord's whole pattern somewhere. The specific duration of events is usually not important in parallels, except in a few isolated cases.
7. When we see two, separate scriptural passages use similar or identical wording, then we can be reasonable sure there is an intended link between the two. The more *correlations* that exist *between passages*, the stronger the link is that binds them together. The more significant passages contain tens or even hundreds of links to other passages of scripture. No single prophecy was intended to stand alone -- to be understood without further *witness*.

These keys will help us know both *what* to look for, and *how* to look. If we don't know what to look for or how to look, then the parallels are difficult to discern. Considering the nature of the keys, we can learn a bit about ourselves in the process of searching, for the Lord will reveal these things to us only to the extent that our lives reflect the ideals that these keys represent.

Of all the keys, the seventh would probably qualify as more of a tool, falling strongly into the "how to" category. Literary structure -- the organization and usage of word passages -- which in the scriptures is very deliberate, is not a style of writing the modern world is accustomed to. Thus we generally do not look for it when we read unless we have been trained otherwise. This is not the case with the prophets of God and those familiar with the language of the scriptures since Adam. This talent goes beyond inspired mortal capabilities -- though it is apparent that some prophets had a keen gift with the language of scripture. Some correlations could not have been brought about without God having been the source from whence the words came to the prophet-authors. Prophets of God, separated by oceans of water or rivers of time, could not have guessed how another was going to word a particular phrase. Direct revelation from an all-knowing God is the only explanation for the exactness of some of the correlations found throughout the scriptures.

Nephi's Wording Shows That Parallels are Intentional

Let us consider an example from Nephi's writings which shows intentional correlations in revealed writing. This example witnesses that the parallels in the Book of Mormon are meant to foreshadow the events of our day.

Consider the following verses from 2 Nephi 26:

vs3. Great and terrible shall that day be unto the wicked, for they shall perish; and they perish because they cast out the prophets, and the saints, and stone them, and slay them; wherefore the cry of the blood of the saints shall

ascend up to God from the ground against them.

vs4. Wherefore, all those who are proud, and that do wickedly, the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, for they shall be as stubble.

vs5. And they that kill the prophets, and the saints, the depths of the earth shall swallow them up, saith the Lord of Hosts; and mountains shall cover them, and whirlwinds shall carry them away, and buildings shall fall upon them and crush them to pieces and grind them to powder.

vs6. And they shall be visited with thunderings, and lightings, and earthquakes, and all manner of destructions, for the fire of the anger of the Lord shall be kindled against them, and they shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall consume them, saith the Lord of Hosts.

Without the context, we would most likely think that this is talking about the destruction of the wicked at the Second Coming. But the context is of the destruction of the wicked Lehwites on the American continent. Nephi was pointing out the "signs" that would mark the "death and resurrection" of "the Messiah." (26:3.) He concluded this prophecy lamenting, "O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people! For I, Nephi, have seen it..." (26:7.)

The reason we originally would have thought that it spoke of the destruction of the wicked at the Second Coming, was because of the language used. In the first phrase he used the words, "Great and terrible." These words are used elsewhere in the scriptures to describe the *latter-day* scene. (Joel 2:11; 1 Ne. 12:5.) The reason stated for this destruction -- "They cast out the prophets, and the saints..." -- is also spoken of in latter-day prophecy. (D&C 87:7.)

Verses four and six repeat a verse found in the Old Testament, Malachi 4:1, which is given in the context of the latter days. Compare the wording used in Malachi with that used by Nephi in these two verses:

- ! M/4:1 *all the proud*
26:4 *all those who are proud*
- ! M/4:1 *and all that do wickedly*
26:4 *and that do wickedly*
- ! M/4:1 *the day that cometh shall burn them up*
26:4 *the day that cometh shall burn them up*
26:6 *the day that cometh shall consume them*
- ! M/4:1 *saith the LORD of hosts*
26:4 *saith the Lord of Hosts*
26:6 *saith the Lord of Hosts*
- ! M/4:1 *shall be stubble*
26:4 *shall be as stubble*
26:6 *shall be as stubble*

Five entire phrases within the three verses being compared are virtually identical in their wording. It cannot be said that Nephi "quoted" Malachi, because Malachi was born around 100 years after the death of Nephi. Malachi could not have had access to Nephi's writings because they were separated by an ocean of water. When the Resurrected Lord appeared to the Nephites and quoted from Malachi, he confirmed that "the Father had given unto Malachi" His words. (3 Ne. 24:1.) Here, then, is an example of direct revelation being responsible for a correlation.

The question still has not been answered as to why Nephi is using terminology that pertains to the latter day destruction when the context says he is talking about the destruction of the wicked among his people anciently. *Without* an understanding of the concept of parallels, this might remain an enigma to us. *With* an understanding of parallels, the intention becomes quite clear here. Nephi is pointing out beyond doubt that (as President Benson put it), "The record of the Nephite history just prior to the Savior's visit reveals many parallels to our own day as we anticipate the Savior's second coming."²⁶

In case we still are not sure that this was the intent of the prophet Nephi, yet another indicator follows. In verse two of the next chapter (2 Nephi 27), he uses five separate phrases that are nearly identical with phrases found in verse two of the preceding chapter. This time, he *is* speaking of "the last days," when people "upon all the

lands of the earth...will be drunken with iniquity and all manner of abominations." (2 Ne. 27:1.) Compare his wording:

- ! 26:6 *they shall be visited*
27:2 *they shall be visited*
- ! 26:6 *with thunderings, and lightings*
27:2 *with thunder...and with storm*
- ! 26:6 *and earthquakes,*
27:2 *and with earthquakes*
- ! 26:6 *the fire of...the Lord shall be kindled*
27:2 *and with the flame of devouring fire*
- ! 26:6 *saith the Lord of Hosts*
27:2 *visited of the Lord of Hosts*

So in the first, chapter, 2 Nephi 26, the context is set at the time of the destruction of the wicked among his people preceding Christ's appearance to them. Then in chapter 27 the context is established as being that time when wicked will be destroyed before Christ's second coming. Yet the wording used in both instances is virtually identical. In these cases, we would have to say that this was done intentionally through the element of inspiration.

The Lord never comes right out and tells us directly that this is what He is doing, but when we become aware of it there is no doubt. This selective wording is pervasive throughout the canvas of the standard works. The immense cross correlation of scriptures -- often from detached sources -- into one great whole, bears the signature of an omniscient God. By recognizing this technique, we then have a tool for receiving many insights hitherto unknown.

Nephi was one of the great masters of God's language to man. With that same language, the Lord is able to speak through his prophets on many levels of reader understanding at once, each progressive level revealing greater insights proportional to one's humble persistence -- or "enduring to the end." (2 Ne. 31:20.)

Realizing this, we can now better appreciate the importance of possessing a substantial familiarity with scriptures. (For this reason, time spent on a regular basis *memorizing* scriptures enables the diligent seeker to assimilate the scriptures in a way

that brings significant dividends.) The more familiar we become with the word of God, the more readily we will recognize the profound correlations when we see them.

Modern technology has brought with it some valuable tools. Scripture searching software enables us to find occurrences of specific words or word patterns throughout the revealed word with just a press of a few buttons. In light of what we have just discussed, we can see why this capability potentially yields phenomenal results. Footnoting of scriptures is another aid that cannot go without mention. These cannot be as thorough because of space limitations, but they can be a great help nonetheless. The LDS Topical Guide is a fairly comprehensive, already-compiled listing of most any theme that occurs in the scriptures. There are other tools as well, which have assisted the hungry searcher to find great feasts of insight in God's word. These tools seem to have been designed of the Lord to further prepare a people for Zion and the wholesale unlatching of all His hitherto locked mysteries.

While the material aids are helpful, and their creation has been inspired of the Lord, if examination of the scriptures is not matched with a contrite heart and obedient observance, the word will never become etched upon the "fleshly tables of the heart." (2 Cor. 3:3.) PhD's may be gained through a brilliant study of God's brilliant work; but if God's word is not manifest in our countenances, our professed understanding of the word will pass with our passing, collecting dust on the bookshelves of stuffy universities that will burn when God's wrath consumes every corruptible thing. (D&C 112:23,24.)

True familiarity with the scriptures can only come through true adherence to God's word. The computer will never be able to detect concepts that can be discerned only through the Spirit. Some significant cross-references never made it into the footnotes of the LDS standard works. When our course is to study the words of the Master Teacher, an occasional push of a button or a cursory glance at a commentary, will never find a fitting substitute for familiarity that comes from a diligent search. (2 Ne. 31:20.)

Identifying scriptural links requires the Spirit of the Lord for confirmation. Through such links, we can match corresponding scriptural passages, whether they be direct teachings, prophecies, or parallels veiled in history -- temporal or spiritual. As we do so, line upon line, precept upon precept, we will be able to uncover the mysteries of the kingdom of God until that glorious day when all things will be revealed to our understanding. As Nephi stated (you can look for yourself to determine whether the context was ancient or latter days): "...Behold, the righteous that hearken unto the words of the prophets, and destroy them not, but look forward unto Christ with steadfastness for the signs which are given, *notwithstanding all persecution* -- behold, they are they which shall not perish. But the *Son of righteousness* shall appear unto them; and he shall *heal them*, and they shall have peace with him...." (2 Ne. 26:8,9.) Note that the phrases "Son of Righteousness" and "healing" are also found in Malachi 4:2, the verse immediately following the one Nephi quoted just six verses prior to this. (2 Ne. 26:2 = Mal. 4:1 = 3 Ne. 25:1.) Again, Nephi used wording that ties directly into the latter-day deliverance, even though he was talking about the deliverance of his own people, "until three generations shall have passed away."²⁷ (2 Ne. 26:9.)

Notes for Chapter Four:

26. Ezra Taft Benson, *Ensign*, May 1987, p. 4-7.

27. There is a very important correlation between these references here and the 3 Nephi structure described in Chapter 12: "That Which Shall Be -- According to That Which Hath Been."