

1 Nephi 11:32-36

Apocalypse of Nephi 1f: (1 Nephi 11:32-33)

Crucifixion

32 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me again, saying: **Look!** And I looked and beheld the **Lamb of God**, that he was taken by the people; yea, [**the Son of the everlasting God** was **judged** of the world; and I saw and bear record.

There is another significant textual variant in this verse. The 1830 edition read “the everlasting God was judged” (1830); in 1837 Joseph Smith added “**the Son of the everlasting God was judged,**” following the pattern of the changes in verses 11:18 and 11:21 (BMET 748). (See discussion there.)

In this verse the Lamb is “judged by the world,” probably referring to the double trial of Jesus before both the Jewish Sanhedrin (Mt. 26:57-68; Mk. 14:43-52; Lk. 22:54-71; Jn. 18:13-24) and the Gentile Roman Pilate (Mt. 27; Mk. 15; Lk. 23; Jn. 18:28-19:15).

Some English translations unfortunately sometimes translate several different Greek and Hebrew terms as *world*. There are four distinct concepts in the Bible which can become conflated and confused by modern readers.

First, *kosmos* is a Greek word with a primary meaning of “adornment or beautification,” (from which our English term *cosmetics* derives).¹ However, its broader meaning is to “organize or arrange,” and from that it comes to mean “that which is ordered, arranged or beautified by God,” that is, God’s created order, or the world.² The term appears rarely in the Septuagint, never consistently translating a single Hebrew word.³ *Kosmos* is usually translated as “world,” in the sense the earth and its inhabitants, but generally not including the heavens in its New Testament usage.⁴ For example, Christ proclaimed: “I came from the Father and have come into the *kosmos*, and now I am leaving the *kosmos* and going to the Father” (Jn 16.28), implying that heaven, where the Father dwells, is not part of the *kosmos*.⁵

The second concept is the Hebrew *’eres* (Greek *gē*) which refers to land, ground or earth. It means earth not in the modern sense of *planet earth*, or the world, but simply land, dirt or ground, and hence province or region--for example, the land^{’eres/gē} of Israel. When Jesus says “the meek shall inherit the earth” (Mt. 5:5), he is saying they shall inherit the land^{’eres/gē} [of Israel] as the true heirs of the Abrahamic covenant, not necessarily that they shall inherit the earth in the modern sense of the planet Earth.

¹ It is used once in the New Testament in the sense of “adornment” in 1 Pet. 3.3.

² The Greek *kosmos* is thus the obvious origin for our word *cosmos*, meaning the universe.

³ See BADG 561-3 and TDNT 3:867-98, for the discussion in this paragraph.

⁴ Acts 17:24, however, may imply that *kosmos* includes the heavens.

⁵ See also Jn. 10.36, 13.1, 17.11.

A third term is Hebrew *tēbēl* means the inhabited world, translated into the Greek *oikoumenē*, which is sometimes rendered *world*.⁶ It means the civilized or inhabited world. For example, in Luke 2.1, Augustus Caesar taxes the *oikoumenē*/world--that is, the Roman Empire--while in Mark 16.15 Christ commands the disciples to “go into all the *kosmos*--God’s created world--to proclaim the gospel.” Unfortunately, there is sometimes no way to distinguish between these terms in many English translations.

A final important term sometimes translated as “world” is Hebrew *‘ōlām*, Greek *aiōn*--“an age, aeon, epoch, or period of history.”⁷ The Greek *aiōn* is translated as “world” in the KJV, but is often rendered “age” in modern translations. For example, when Christ tells the disciples, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the *world*” (Mt. 29:20), he is talking about the *aiōn*/age, not the *kosmos*. Indeed, all discussions of the “end of the world” in the New Testament refer to the “end of the *aiōn*/‘ōlām/age.”⁸ Satan is described as “God of this world/ *aiōn*” (2 Cor. 4:4). Likewise, New Testament discussions of “this world”⁹ and the “world to come” refer to the present and future *aiōn*/age, not the *kosmos*.¹⁰ This Christian concept parallels contemporary Jewish and Rabbinic concepts of the *‘ōlām ha-zeh* (this [mortal] world), and the *‘ōlām ha-bā* (the coming/future [eschatological] world) with the Greek *aiōn* paralleling the Hebrew *‘ōlām*.

Finally, we must recognize that ancient Greek and Hebrew cosmology--the understanding of the world and universe--was quite different than modern cosmology.¹¹ Although there were a number of alternative speculations, the standard view of antiquity was geocentric--that the sun revolved around the earth. Furthermore, the stars were not perceived as separate suns many light-years away, but were small, lesser celestial lights in the heavens directly surrounding the earth, and likewise revolving around the earth. The universe as a whole was thus divided into two realms: the heavens and the earth/world.

When trying to understand the Book of Mormon concept of “world,” we need to think in terms of these four biblical antecedents, rather than modern astrophysics.

33 And I, Nephi, saw that he was **lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world**.

⁶ Our English term ecumenical derives from the Greek *oikoumenē*.

⁷ BDAG 32-33.

⁸ Mt 13.39, 49, 24.3, 14, 29.20; 1 Cor 10.11; Heb 9.26.

⁹ Mt 12.32, 13.22; Mk 4.19; Lk 16.8, 20.34; Rom 12.2; 1 Cor 1.20. 2.6-8, etc.

¹⁰ Mt 12.32; Mk 10.30; Lk 18.30.

¹¹ M. Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity*, (1995); J. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis 1: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*, (2009); J. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*, (Eisenbrauns, 2011); K. Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Settings of the Sacrifice* (2010).

The earlier concept of the of **descent** (“condescension”) of God (1 Ne. 11:16-26) is transformed into Christ’s “**lifting up**” and ascent: “no man hath **ascended** up to heaven, but he that **came down** from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.” (Jn. 3:13, 6:62)

The description of Christ being “lifted up” is unique to John (Jn. 3:14, 8:28, 12:32-34), where it is described by the verb *hupsoō* (ὑψόω) (BDAG 1045), meaning “to be lifted up, to be exalted, or, more literally, made *hupsistos* (“most high, highest”), the equivalent of the Hebrew *‘elyōn* (עֲלִיּוֹן), (Dt. 38:2; Is. 14:14; Ps. 78:17, 83:19, 97:9), (See note to 1 Ne. 11:6).

Likewise, the description of Christ being “slain for the sins of the world” (*kosmos*) is a phrase unique to John (Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 2:2), based on Jewish sacrificial atonement rituals and theory where animals were slain for the sins of Israel (Ex. 29:36, 30:10; Lev. 4-16; Num. 7)--hence Christ as the symbolic sacrificial “Lamb of God” (1 Ne. 11:21-36).

This verse also creates the antitype of Christ being judged by **world** (1 Ne. 12:32), while simultaneously being slain for sins of **world** that falsely judges him (1 Ne. 12:33).

The **lifting up** of Christ on the **cross** in this verse is an allusion to the crucifixion (Mt. 27:24-56; Mk. 15:15-41; Lk. 23:24-49; Jn. 19:16-37), but more specifically to the crucifixion as symbolically reenacting the life-saving lifting up (Jn. 3:14, 8:28) of the *Nehustān* (נֶחֱשֶׁתָּן), the “serpent of brass” by Moses in the wilderness (Num. 12:19; 2 Kgs. 18:4) to “draw all men unto him” (Jn. 12:32-34). This connection is made explicit in Hel. 8:14-15.

Nephi here sees the Lamb “lifted up” on a Cross, which is not a normal description of the process of crucifixion. Crucifixion was practiced in the Near East from at least the time of Persians, and may have been known to the Jews of the early sixth century BC. (Fitzmyer, J. “Crucifixion in Ancient Palestine, Qumran Literature, and the New Testament” *Catholic Bible Quarterly*, 40 (1978): 493-513). Jewish tradition equated crucifixion with the Jewish form of execution by hanging the criminal on a tree, noting that “he that is hanged [on a tree] is accursed of God” (Dt 21:22-23; see also Josh. 8:29, Esth. 2:23). This is not an allusion to hanging someone by the neck from a tree-limb cowboy-style, but to tying the person to the limbs of the tree. Jesus’ crucifixion is explicitly connected with this Jewish form of execution in the New Testament (Acts 5:30, 10:39; Gal. 3:13).

Recognizing this conceptual overlap between crucifixion and execution by hanging on a tree creates a symbolic antitype between the BOM images of the Tree of Life (1 Ne. 11:8-25), with Christ as the fruit, and the Tree of Death, with Christ’s hanging corpse the fruit of death, which paradoxically transforms through the resurrection into the first-fruits of life (1 Cor. 15:20).

It is interesting to note that the Cross and Tree of Life are overlapping concepts in Mesoamerica (Gardner, SW 1:211-214); A. Christenson, “The World Tree and Maya Theology” TLEE (2011) 151-170)

Apocalypse of Nephi 1g: (1 Nephi 11:34-36)
Fall of the Great and Spacious Building

34 And after he was slain I saw the **multitudes** of the earth, that they were **gathered** together to **fight** against the **apostles** of the Lamb; for thus were the **twelve** called by the angel of the Lord.

The gathering multitudes here probably alludes to the the lost multitudes in Lehi's Dream who enter the Great and Spacious Building (GSB) to mock the righteous (11:31, 33), cast out Jesus (11:28), then fight against the righteous (11:34). Lehi's Dream is thus again interpreted historically rather than just spiritually in Nephi's Apocalypse.

The "twelve" are first mentioned in Lehi's vision in 1 Ne. 1:10. However, this is the first occurrence of the word "apostles" in BOM, so Nephi explains that the term was revealed to him by the angel (←11:28-9). The Greek *apostolos* means "one who is sent," and translates the Aramaic *seliaḥ* (ܫܠܝܗ, Ezra 7:14; Dan. 5:24; 2 Chr. 17:7-9), meaning one who is sent as a formal representative of another.

An interesting feature of the prophecy of Christ's ministry here is that there is *no resurrection narrative* (→1 Ne. 19:10-11). The first explicit discussion of the resurrection of Jesus occurs in 2 Ne. 9:12, where Nephi is not beholding a vision, but citing the ancient prophets Neum and Zenos from the Brass Plates.

35 And the **multitude** of the earth was gathered together; and I beheld that they were in a **large and spacious building**, like unto the **building which my father saw**. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: **Behold the world and the wisdom thereof; yea, behold the house of Israel hath gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**

The **Multitudes** in "large/great and spacious building" consistently refer to those who oppose the saints of God (12:18, 13:4), and is expressly equated with the GSB in Lehi's Dream (8:26, 31). Nephi is again historicizing Lehi's allegory.

The angel now begins an explicit historical-apocalyptic interpretation of Lehi's dream. The GSB is equated with the "wisdom of the world" paralleling the Pauline concept, *sofia tou kosmou* or *aiōs* (σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου or αἰῶνος) in 1 Cor. 1:20-21, 1 Cor. 2:6-7, 1 Cor. 3:19. The phrase "wisdom of the world" is, of course, intended ironically here, meaning that their wisdom (ܚܟܡܐ, *hākmāh*) is really foolishness (1 Cor. 1:20), as reflected in the teachings of Lehi's contemporary Jeremiah (Jer. 8:9, 9:23, 49:7).

The “multitude of all the earth” who gathered together are the “House of Israel,” *not* the gentiles. Their “fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb” reflects the early Jewish persecution of the apostles and the early Church as reflected in Acts. In its apocalyptic context, the GSB to which the Jews of the world gathered is undoubtedly the temple, the visual and physical symbol of the New Testament “Chief Priests” (ἀρχιερεύς, *archiereus*) who are described as leading the Jewish opposition to Jesus and his followers. In this regard it is important to note that many Jews--notably Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls--viewed the apostate temple and its high priests not as manifestations of God’s covenant, presence, and sanctity, but as signs of the failure of the Jews to keep God’s covenant.

Craig Evans has written several studies on the topic of Jewish views of apostasy of the temple: “Opposition to the Temple: Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” J. Charlesworth (ed), *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (1992) 235-253; “Jesus’ Action in the Temple and Evidence of Corruption in the First-Century Temple,” in D. J. Lull (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature 1989 Seminar Papers*, (1989) 522-539; “Jesus’ Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 51 (1989): 237-270.

Thus the “great and spacious building” represents apostate Judaism symbolized by the apostate temple of Jerusalem, precisely paralleling the “great and abominable church” which represents apostate Christianity (1 Ne. 13-14). The “great and abominable church” can arise only after the destruction of the “great and spacious building,” *which it replaces*.

On the centrality of Jerusalem in various apocalyptic schemas, see M. Lepparkari, *Apocalyptic Representations of Jerusalem*, (Brill, 2006).

36 And it came to pass that I saw and bear record, that the great and spacious building was the **pride of the world**; [and it **fell**,] and the fall thereof was exceedingly great. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: **Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**

The phrase “and it fell,” was added to the 1837 edition.

Nephi’s overlapping concept of the GSB as both the “wisdom of the world” (11:35) and the “pride of the world” (11:36 → 1 Jn. 2:16) reflects Ezekiel’s explicit equation of false wisdom and pride in his cosmic allegory of the fall of Tyre (Ezek. 28:4-5, 12, 17), which itself allegorically parallels the GSB.

Nephi’s vision of the apocalyptic fall of the GSB points to the fall of Jerusalem and its temple to Romans in 70 AD. See Josephus, *The Jewish War*, tr. B. Radice, 2nd ed. (Penguin, 1984).

The ultimate “destruction of all” who fight against twelve reflects the final defeat of of Satan and his followers described in Revelation of John (Rev. 7:9, 11:19)

At this point in Nephi’s apocalypse we can see the interesting development of of a double allegory from Lehi’s Dream: 1- a personal and spiritual meaning, and 2- an apocalyptic and historical meaning. The Dream makes perfect sense and has continuity at both levels. And, as we shall see, it also will develop a third level of meaning associated with the “great and abominable church” as described in 1 Ne. 13-14. The creation of this triple allegory is a remarkable literary achievement, especially considering claims that Joseph Smith invented the book.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Spiritual</u>	<u>Historical</u>
Tree	Love of God	Mary
Fruit	Love of God	Jesus
Living Water	Love of God	Jesus
Path	Israelite Covenant	Christian (New) Covenant (“Way”)
Iron Rod	Word of God	Jesus
GSB	Wisdom/Pride of World	Apostate Judaism/Jerusalem/Temple

On the multiple meanings of Lehi’s Dream, see: Volluz, C. “Lehi’s Dream of the Tree of Life: Springboard to Prophecy” JBMS 2/2 (1993): 14-38; Halverson, J. “Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision as Apocalyptic Literature,” TMFS (2011): 53-69; Hardy, G. “Prophetic Perspectives: How Lehi and Nephi Applied the Lessons of Lehi’s Dream” TMFS (2011): 199-213.