

“And Thus We See”

CRAIG A. CARDON

President Uchtdorf, President Samuelson, trustees, honored guests, distinguished faculty and staff, parents and family members, friends, and graduates: Dear brothers and sisters, it is an honor to be with you on this significant occasion. I offer my congratulations and deep respect for what you have achieved with the degrees now bestowed upon you. I acknowledge the years of commitment, sacrifice, and hard work that have occasioned your presence here today. I honor not only you graduates but also all the family members, friends, deans, professors, and university staff who have sustained you in so many ways. I highly commend all of you. President Samuelson, to you I offer my congratulations and appreciation for your eleven years of inspired leadership and devoted service to this outstanding university.

Following the kind introduction, I think it is appropriate for you to know of an incident in my educational past. Sister Cardon and I enjoyed living in the Boston area during our time at Harvard. For those of you who have lived in or visited the area, you know that the roads are sometimes full of curves over uneven terrain. At the end of the academic year I drove with Sister Cardon to the school

to retrieve one of my final papers, whereupon I learned that although my final grade for the course was what I had hoped, the grade for this paper, although respectable, was not.

When we returned to the car, I handed the paper to Sister Cardon, and she began reading as we drove along a curvy, hilly road—not the best experience for one prone to motion nausea. After some time we came to a stop, and Sister Cardon put the paper down and said, “Honey, I just finished reading your paper, and I think I’m going to be sick.”

My only response was, “I’m sorry you feel that way, dear, but evidently it had the same effect on the professor.”

Over the years I have collected many quotations about education. One of my favorites comes from Sir Francis Bacon, an English statesman and philosopher. He identifies three central elements of education: reading, conference (or conferring with others), and writing. He says:

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*Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man. And therefore, if a man write little, he had need have a great memory; if he confer little, he had need have a present wit: and if he read little, he had need have much cunning, to seem to know that he doth not.*¹

This observation is wise counsel to all who are engaged in educational pursuits, formal and informal. Reading, conferring, and writing all serve to exercise the mind, quicken the intellect, and discipline our expression—eliciting our very best. But unless reading, conferring, and writing have an essential spiritual element, they fall woefully short in pursuing the highest education available to us. In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord admonishes us to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith.”² This admonition suggests that the education God desires us to obtain embodies these two essential elements of study and faith—and that the absence of either study or faith compromises learning. Furthermore, this manner of learning invites us to engage in a never-ending commitment to continuing education. Indeed, though you will receive diplomas evidencing the attainment of a particular level of formal education, you now embark on a lifetime of learning—much of it exhilarating, most of it informal, and all of it of inestimable value.

Thirteen years ago I returned as a student to the formal classroom after a thirty-year absence. This experience afforded me the opportunity to examine important societal issues with honorable men and women of compatible and opposing views. Because most of the professors and other students held worldly views on many social issues, and because of the rigorous way we explored those issues, learning by faith in addition to learning by study was for me essential. It provided an inextinguishable flame of truth that enlightened every subject I encountered—in and out of the classroom.

This perspective is reflected in a host of scriptures³ typified by the following words from Jacob:

O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.

*But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.*⁴

And also these words of the Lord to the Prophet Joseph Smith:

The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.

*Light and truth forsake that evil one.*⁵

These and similar verses emphasize the importance of both gaining knowledge and ensuring that the knowledge we gain is founded in truth and is applied in a way that is consistent with the counsel of God.

It is in this light that, while I was preparing this address, the Lord brought to my attention a scriptural phrase I soon discovered to be unique to the Book of Mormon. This phrase, with its specific word content and sequencing, is not found in any other book of scripture. The phrase is simply this: “and thus we see.”⁶

Other related phrases unique to the Book of Mormon include “thus we see,” “thus we may see,” “we can behold,” “we can see,” and, finally, the descriptive and meaningful “and thus we can plainly discern.”⁷ Once again, these specific words in these specific sequences are found only in the Book of Mormon.⁸

In total, the phrase “and thus we see” is used twenty-one times in the Book of Mormon. Not surprisingly, Mormon, the principal compiler of the book, uses this phrase sixteen times.⁹

I would like to explore with you the educational values embedded in the phrase “and thus we see.”¹⁰ Those values have much to do with your continuing education. We will focus on how just two of the Book of Mormon writers, Mormon and Nephi, use this phrase.

We begin with Mormon. The first time Mormon employs this phrase is in abridging the account of the remarkable conversion of the Lamanites who changed their name to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. Subsequently they presented themselves to be slaughtered by their former fellow Lamanites rather than risk offending God by using their swords against them. After recording these extraordinary events, Mormon observes:

*And thus we see that, when these Lamanites were brought to believe and to know the truth, they were firm, and would suffer even unto death rather than commit sin; and thus we see that . . . they buried the weapons of war, for peace.*¹¹

Mormon goes on to explain that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies “would lie down and perish, and praised God even in the very act of perishing under the sword.”¹² In sharing this significant account of applied faith, Mormon explains:

Now when the [other] Lamanites saw this they did forbear from slaying them; and there were many whose hearts had swollen in them for those of their brethren who had fallen under the sword, for they repented of the things which they had done.

*And it came to pass that they threw down their weapons of war, and they would not take them again, for they were stung for the murders which they had committed; and they came down even as their brethren, relying upon the mercies of those whose arms were lifted to slay them.*¹³

Mormon records that “the people of God were joined that day by more than the number who had been slain” and that “those who had been slain were righteous people, therefore we

have no reason to doubt but what they were saved.”¹⁴ He then adds, “*Thus we see that the Lord worketh in many ways to the salvation of his people.*”¹⁵

But Mormon found even more in this account to help us see and discern. He continues:

Now the greatest number of those of the Lamanites who slew so many of their brethren were [former Nephites], the greatest number of whom were after the order of the Nehors.

*Now, among those who joined the people of the Lord, there were none who were [former Nephites], or who were of the order of Nehor.*¹⁶

With this sad commentary Mormon employs a phrase found only once in all of scripture:

*And thus we can plainly discern, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things.*¹⁷

Now, in light of the importance of continuing education and the Lord’s admonition to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith,” what is there in this account that Mormon invites us to see and discern with him?

Over a period of a few hundred years, Lamanite and Nephite cousins had been at war, fighting and killing each other. Certain mileposts in Mormon’s earlier writings help us see how the Lamanites and Nephites got to this point. Recognizing these mileposts may help us avoid similar conflicts in our journey through life.

Lehi’s family had been divided because of Laman’s and Lemuel’s hard hearts, by their desire to rule over others,¹⁸ and by the contention they continually brought to their familial

interactions.¹⁹ Because they were unwilling to change, Nephi had attempted to distance himself from them by physical separation,²⁰ but this did not resolve the real problem. The Lamanites pursued the Nephites and battled them even in their new locations.²¹ Hatred,²² hard-heartedness,²³ pride,²⁴ murmuring,²⁵ rudeness,²⁶ and contention²⁷ were the real problems, and Laman and Lemuel were content in their contention.

Rudeness and contention offend conscience and often provoke one to assuage conscience through self-justification, and one's associates will not condone rudeness or contention without justification. Therefore Laman and Lemuel had to justify themselves and convince others of their justification. This they did by indoctrinating their families with messages of hatred for Nephi and his descendants.²⁸ Mormon sometimes referred to this pattern of self-justification and indoctrination as the incorrect "tradition of their fathers."²⁹ Indeed, he records that in an uninterrupted pattern, Lamanite parents had taught their children to hate their cousins over many generations.³⁰

Only through the exercise of faith by servants of the Lord, and through the operation of the Spirit, did the Lamanites finally come "to the knowledge of the truth [and] to the knowledge of the baseness of the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct."³¹ By this means many lives were changed eternally and conflicts were resolved. This simple formula of exercising faith and the operation of the Spirit is the means to resolve hatred and contentions among today's families, nations, and peoples. Mormon saw the effect of it within the context of generations. We may do the same.

However, there is an even more egregious element associated with this account: the apostate Nephites after the order of Nehor.

Nehor was a man who taught two simple, intoxicating false doctrines against which the people of God in the Book of Mormon forever struggled thereafter and against which we

struggle today. The first false doctrine is this: religious leaders should be popular and should be supported financially by the people.³²

The second false doctrine has profound spiritual implications: Don't worry about sinning because the Lord has redeemed all mankind, no matter what they do. In other words, because God is merciful, there is no wrong and no one need repent.³³

Alma identified these flattering concepts as priestcraft. When he encountered this false doctrine, he observed that "were priestcraft to be enforced among this people it would prove their entire destruction."³⁴

Indeed, priestcraft among the apostate Nephites nearly destroyed the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. In his account of these converted Lamanites, Mormon notes that while some hardened Lamanite hearts were softened when they saw their brethren prostrate themselves before them, the hearts of the apostate Nephites—those who had once known the truth and had then turned to the falsehoods perpetrated by Nehor—could not be penetrated. This was not only self-justification in the way they conducted themselves; it was self-justification as a foundational religious doctrine. And that doctrine is dangerously false.

In today's world the false doctrines of Nehor surround you. Popular propagandists supported by the people loudly proclaim that actions and lifestyles mocking God's commandments are merely acceptable expressions of individual freedoms. They say that if there is a God, He would not hold people accountable for such actions. This philosophy now permeates virtually every aspect of life.

It is not surprising, then, that Mormon uses the singularly unique phrase "and thus we can plainly discern" to help the spiritually inclined see the dangers of apostasy. In using this phrase Mormon employs the notion of discernment—of "seeing" with spiritual eyes and identifying the risks of sinning against light and knowledge.

Let us now consider the perspective of another writer in the Book of Mormon: Nephi. While Mormon's "and thus we see" comes from a perspective arising in part from patterns he saw occurring over centuries, Nephi's "and thus we see" comes from events he personally experienced. Like Mormon, Nephi derived lessons from those experiences for other aspects of life. We will look at his use of this phrase as it relates to the Liahona, which the Book of Mormon often refers to as "the ball."

While journeying in the wilderness, Nephi broke his bow. Because the bows of his brethren had "lost their springs,"³⁵ the family was unable to obtain food. In this precarious circumstance, most of the family began to murmur against the Lord. Nephi was the exception. Rather than murmur, he went to work. He "did make out of wood a bow, and out of a straight stick, an arrow; wherefore, [he] did arm [himself] with a bow and an arrow, with a sling and with stones."³⁶ Always respectful of the Lord's anointed, Nephi went to his father and asked where he should go to obtain food. Humbled by Nephi's faithfulness, Lehi inquired of the Lord. The Lord chastened Lehi and then told him to "look upon the ball, and behold the things which are written."³⁷

The record indicates that the writing on the Liahona directed Nephi to the top of the mountain, where he obtained food for the family. The record also indicates much more. When Lehi saw what was written, he and his entire family "did fear and tremble exceedingly."³⁸ That sounds like something more than just "go to the top of the mountain." Perceptive Nephi recognized that "the pointers which were in the ball . . . did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them."³⁹ He goes on to say that

there was also written upon them a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord;

*and it was written and changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it.*⁴⁰

In this context Nephi says, "And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things."⁴¹ Remember, it was Nephi's faithfulness—simply doing what he could to solve the problem without murmuring—that led the group to look at the Liahona for guidance. The resulting educational value for Nephi, Lehi, and the others far exceeded the physical understanding of where to find food. Nephi's "and thus we see" comes from his personal experience and from a much more narrow range of time than that which Mormon addressed.

In your continuing education, in your employment, in your families, and in life, you are going to face both kinds of circumstances. Some circumstances you encounter will be rooted in self-justifications that have been perpetuated over long periods of time. You will also face circumstances that are rooted in personal responses to immediate, direct challenges. In all of this, your education will be greatly enhanced by your ability to see the spiritual lessons and connections that evidence the true underlying principles that can lead to resolution. With that capacity you can also be "and thus we see" scholars.

I conclude with another story from my experience at Harvard. While there I unofficially audited a class jointly taught by three Harvard professors: a lawyer, a theologian, and a scientist. The title of the course was intriguing: "Thinking About Thinking."

The format of the class was to introduce subjects of societal interest, such as Religion and Violence or The Role of Dissent, and then examine each subject rigorously from the perspective of each of these three disciplines. In each session one of the professors would introduce the subject, and then each professor would explain the perspective of his discipline

on it. The three professors would engage one another directly, often pointedly criticizing the lack of relevance or outright error he found in the other disciplines. These exchanges sometimes spilled over into the several hundred students gathered in the amphitheater classroom. I found it a remarkable experience.

One such session focused on the sources of authority in law, religion, and science—especially on matters of morality. Following the introduction by the theologian, the scientist simply observed that science creates moral dilemmas; it doesn't answer them. He noted, for example, that without science there would be no transplanting of human organs and therefore no black market for such organs. He had little to say thereafter.

The lawyer then stood and declared that there are only three sources of knowledge or authority: revelation, discovery (of something already existing), and invention. He then began a vigorous line of questioning, wanting to know from the theologian, in essence, the difference between religion and philosophy. The theologian's reply was, frankly, anemic. He acknowledged the contributions of philosophers and defined religion as a belief system and a body of believers. The lawyer was not satisfied, and with great animation he questioned why he or anyone else should consider religion's voice any more authoritative than philosophy's voice. He also demanded to know where there was any religious voice on earth even claiming to speak authoritatively in the name of God.

A few moments of awkward silence ensued as the theologian considered how he might respond. His next words were, for me, both unexpected and remarkable. He said, in essence: "Well, there was a man by the name of Joseph Smith who lived in the 1800s and claimed that God spoke to him, and he printed a book entitled the Book of Mormon that he claimed came from God and contains God's

word for the world today. And the church that he founded, the Mormon Church, is directed today by those who claim to be prophets and apostles to whom God speaks."

The lawyer was momentarily silenced as he attempted to process what he had just heard. He then asked, in essence, "Well, is there anyone else?"

The theologian responded, "No."

The lawyer then continued his critique of religion, essentially ignoring what had just been "placed in evidence."

Although the response of this capable theologian was inconsistent with his own belief, in the press of the moment he had unwittingly identified the singular place where revealed truth and the preeminence of spiritual enlightenment in learning are found and taught. He had also affirmed their validity.

Surprising though this interchange was, especially in the environment in which I sat, the significance of what I had just witnessed was not lost on me. Nor was it lost on my non-member colleagues, who, following the class, wondered why the lawyer had not engaged the response more directly. Not knowing the mind of the lawyer, I could only surmise that he was attempting to not give added attention to the one voice that directly and authoritatively refuted his premise.

As you leave this university and as your education continues, you will come to know more fully, as I have come to know, the essential place of spiritual elements in learning and teaching. Mormon expressed the principle well. Even with all of his preparation in abridging the Book of Mormon, with all of his reading, conferring, and writing, he wanted to be sure that we know what he knows above everything else:

And now I, Mormon, proceed to finish out my record . . . ; and I make it according to the knowledge and the understanding which God has given me.⁴²

As you continue your education, make sure you continue to develop an essential spiritual capacity, as the prophets have done, to see as the Source of all knowledge sees and thereby know and understand as He knows and understands.⁴³ In these continuing efforts, may the unique Book of Mormon phrase “and thus we see” typify and be a reminder to you of the spiritual capacity you are developing.

No matter what challenges or uncertainties you face, I pray that you will always faithfully employ this essential spiritual element in your learning. I promise that as you enthusiastically embrace this spiritual element, you and your families will receive everlasting blessings.

Congratulations, and may the Lord’s blessings rest upon you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Sir Francis Bacon, “Of Studies,” *Essays* (1625).
2. D&C 88:118.
3. See John 14:26; 16:13; 4:13–14; Acts 22:3; 1 Corinthians 2:1–2; 1 Nephi 1:1; Mosiah 12:27; D&C 1:24–28; 55:4; 88:77–80; 90:15; 130:18; 131:6; Moses 1:8–9, 27–31; 7:21, 67; Abraham 1:2.
4. 2 Nephi 9:28–29.
5. D&C 93:36–37.
6. This phrase has received some attention from others in various teachings and writings. See “And Thus We See,” *Ensign*, August 2008, 40–43; “Helaman 12: ‘And Thus We See,’” *Book of Mormon Seminary Student Study Guide* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 152–53; Henry B. Eyring, “‘And Thus We See’: Helping a Student in a Moment of Doubt,” address to religious educators, Temple Square Assembly Hall, Salt Lake City, 5 February 1993; David A. Bednar, “Come unto Christ,” BYU–Idaho religion symposium address, 29 January 2000.

7. In total, the following six phrases are used thirty times in the Book of Mormon. The compilers of the Book of Mormon record—Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni—used the phrases twenty-five of these thirty times, with Mormon, the principal compiler, using them twenty-one times.

<u>Phrase</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Occurrences</u>
“And thus we see”	1 Nephi 16:29	1
	1 Nephi 17:3	1
	Alma 12:21, 22	2
	Alma 24:19	2
	Alma 28:13, 14	3
	Alma 30:60	2
	Alma 42:4, 7, 14	3
	Alma 50:19	1
	Helaman 6:34, 35, 36, 40	4
	Helaman 12:3	1
“Thus we see”	Ether 14:25	1
	Alma 24:27	1
“Thus we may see”	Alma 46:8	1
	Helaman 3:28	1
	Helaman 3:27	1
“We can behold”	Alma 50:19	1
	Helaman 12:1	1
“We can see”	Ether 2:9	1
	Helaman 12:1	1
“And thus we can plainly discern”	Alma 24:30	1

8. There are two other similar phrases in the Book of Mormon that are also in other scriptures, but these phrases in other scriptures rarely convey the same significance as those in the Book of Mormon. Those phrases are “we see” (Alma 9:14; 12:24; 19:23, 36; 26:37; 29:8; 37:26; 42:3; 46:10; 50:21; Helaman 3:29; Psalms 36:9; 74:9; Jeremiah 5:12; John 9:41; Romans 8:25; 1 Corinthians 13:12; Hebrews 2:8, 9; 3:19) and “we may see” (Helaman 12:2; 2 Nephi 15:19; Isaiah 5:19; Mark 15:32; John 6:30). Other derivations include “we saw” and “we shall see.” There is one similar phrase unique to the Doctrine and Covenants. It is “and thus we saw” (D&C 76:89, 91, 92).

9. <u>Writer</u>	<u>Occurrences of “And thus we see”</u>
Nephi	2
Antionah (quoted)	1
Alma	1
Mormon	16
Moroni	1

10. Given the divinely unique role of the Book of Mormon in this dispensation as another testament of Jesus Christ and the extraordinarily unique circumstances surrounding its writing, its preservation, its translation, and its publication, if there is a phrase unique to the book, this one seems to be particularly well suited.

11. Alma 24:19; emphasis added.
12. Alma 24:23.
13. Alma 24:24–25.
14. Alma 24:26.
15. Alma 24:27; emphasis added.
16. Alma 24:28–29.
17. Alma 24:30; emphasis added.
18. See 2 Nephi 5:3.
19. See 2 Nephi 5:1.
20. See 2 Nephi 5:6–8.
21. See Alma 48:1–6.
22. See Jacob 7:24; Enos 1:20; Mosiah 10:17; 28:2.
23. See 1 Nephi 17:19.
24. See 1 Nephi 8:31–35; 11:36.
25. See 1 Nephi 3:5, 31; 17:22.
26. See 1 Nephi 18:9; 2 Nephi 2:1.
27. See 1 Nephi 3:28; 7:16; 18:11; 2 Nephi 5:1–3.

28. See Mosiah 10:12–17; Alma 20:10, 13.

29. Mosiah 10:12; see also Mosiah 1:5; Alma 3:8; 9:17.

30. See Mosiah 10:12–17; Alma 20:13; 54:17, 24; 60:32; 4 Nephi 1:39.

31. Alma 17:9.

32. See Alma 1:3.

33. See Alma 1:4; 21:6.

34. Alma 1:12. It may well be that Alma’s perspective on this was influenced by his father’s earlier experience with wicked King Noah and his priests, wherein the people “were deceived by the vain and flattering words of the king and priests; for they did speak flattering things unto them” (Mosiah 11:7) and those who followed them were eventually destroyed. Generationally, Alma also had direct, personal experience that influenced his counsel against the dangers of these two false doctrines of Nehor when he and Amulek encountered the people of Ammonihah. See Alma 9–16, noting especially Alma 14:16–18, 15:15, and 16:11.

35. 1 Nephi 16:21.

36. 1 Nephi 16:23.

37. 1 Nephi 16:26.

38. 1 Nephi 16:27.

39. 1 Nephi 16:28.

40. 1 Nephi 16:29.

41. 1 Nephi 16:29; emphasis added.

42. Words of Mormon 1:9.

43. See 2 Nephi 9:20.