

Part 7: Prophecy of Immediate Destruction

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I now turn my attention to prophecy concerning an immediate destruction for the city of Jerusalem. Parts of the original manuscript for 2 Nephi 25-30 are extant, but the portion that would have included 2 Nephi 25:9-10 has been destroyed.¹ The printer's manuscript for these verses² contains the same wording as the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon:

And as one generation hath been destroyed among the Jews, because of iniquity, even so have they been destroyed, from generation to generation, according to their iniquities; and never hath any of them been destroyed, save it were foretold them by the Prophets of the Lord. Wherefore, it hath been told them concerning the destruction which should come upon them, immediately after my father left Jerusalem; nevertheless, they hardened their hearts; and according to my prophecy, they have been destroyed, save it be those which are carried away captive into Babylon.³

From the context of this passage, I learn that the writer, Nephi (2 Nephi 25:1), wanted to make "the words of Isaiah" (which he had previously quoted) "plain" to his people who were "of the house of Israel;" hence, he said, "I shall prophesy according to the plainness which hath been with me from the time that I came out from Jerusalem with my father" (2 Nephi 25:4). In other words, Nephi here stated that he had been prophesying with plainness from the time of Lehi's escape, beginning, it seems, at the base camp near the Red Sea (1 Nephi 2:16-3:8).

I should also note that the text of 2 Nephi 25:4 does not state that every word which follows (in chapters 25-30) has to do with prophecies of future events. Indeed, Nephi's introduction of this compilation of "plain" prophecies does not end until he expresses the ideas in 2 Nephi 25:9-10, a declaration that is not about future events, but a carefully placed statement which remembers the prophecies of "the Prophets of the Lord" and describes the fulfillment of Nephi's prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews. This is the place in the small plates where Nephi chose to declare, according to his certain knowledge (1 Nephi 1:3; 17:14), that Jerusalem *had been* destroyed. Only after concluding this introduction did Nephi begin to expound on prophecies that had not yet been fulfilled: "And now this I speak because of the spirit which is in me. And notwithstanding [the exiles from Jerusalem] *have been* carried away they *shall* return again, and possess the land of Jerusalem" (2 Nephi 25:11, emphasis added). The rest of 2 Nephi

¹ Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 36-37, 189-90.

² Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts, Part One: 1 Nephi 1-Alma 17* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 212.

³ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Joseph Smith, Jr., author and proprietor, *The Book of Mormon* (Palmyra, New York: E.B. Grandin, 1830; Independence, Missouri: Herald Heritage Reprint, 1970), 103. I will not comment on the premises stated by Nephi, other than to note that: first, these were his beliefs about the history of his people up until the destruction of Jerusalem; and second, the Hebrew scriptures available to Nephi in the brass plates probably included references to multiple wars, deaths and destructions which involved the people and leaders of Israel and Judah with foreign powers, raiders, and local usurpers during and after the ministries of prophets such as Samuel, Nathan, Ahijah, Jehu, Elijah, Elisha and Isaiah (see, e.g., 2 Samuel 5; 8; 10-12; 15; 20-21; 1 Kings 1-2; 12; 14-16; 20; 2 Kings 1; 3; 6; 8-10; 13-15; 17-22).

25 and chapters 26-30 compile (and perhaps in some instances first set forth) many of Nephi's prophecies about the Nephites, Lamanites, Jews, Gentiles, the Messiah, the Nephite records and the last days.⁴

Were Nephi's statements in 2 Nephi 25:10 unimportant? S. Kent Brown and David Rolph Seely stated that in Nephi's six-chapter prophetic composition (2 Nephi 25-30), "Only one tiny part has to do with the pending destruction of Jerusalem," but then they noted, "Of course, we hasten to add that one should not minimize the importance of Nephi's words about the fate of Jerusalem."⁵ Confusingly, they went on to minimize the value of his words: "we cannot rest much weight on Nephi's statements here when seeking to solve our dating dilemma."⁶ That is, in light of what seems to be the direct contradiction of Mormon's preface in Third Nephi by Nephi's words in 2 Nephi 25:10, the "weight" of their interpretation would rest on Mormon's witness. In a further confusion, they later claimed to be doing just the opposite: "Nephi is a better witness than Mormon, who lived a thousand years after the founding family fled Jerusalem. Nephi, after all, wrote of his personal experiences and was thus a witness of the first rank."⁷ To compound the confusion, they referred to Nephi's declaration of the fall of Jerusalem as a "*pending* destruction," a prophecy of "Jerusalem's approaching horrible fate."⁸ However, one would be required to interpret the phrase *have been destroyed* in 2 Nephi 25:10 to mean *will be destroyed*, an unusual way to interpret Nephi's words. The principle of natural uniformity would suggest, as a minimum, that once Jerusalem *had been* destroyed, there could be no *pending* destruction.

It might be suggested that Nephi, like his father, referred to the pending destruction as though it had already occurred. While Nephi and his brothers were engaged in obtaining the brass plates from Laban, their mother "complained against [Lehi] ... that he was a visionary man; saying: Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness" (1 Nephi 5:2). Lehi responded, "I know that I am a visionary man; for if I had not seen the things of God in a vision I should not have known the goodness of God, but had tarried at Jerusalem, and had perished with my brethren. But behold, I have obtained a land of promise, in the which things I do rejoice" (1 Nephi 5:4-5). At the time, the city of Jerusalem had not been destroyed (1 Nephi 3:2, 11, 17-18, 24; 4:1, 4-5, 27); so, Lehi's people had not yet perished. Lehi's group had barely begun their difficult trek and voyage to the promised land (1 Nephi 16-18); so, Lehi had not yet arrived at ("obtained") his land of promise.

The context and diction of 2 Nephi 25:10 are quite different. This verse is part of Nephi's collection of prophecies (mostly his own, but he refers to Isaiah and other prophets of the Lord) in 2 Nephi 25-30 and it appears to be the concluding verse of the introduction to that collection. The preceding verse 9 is clearly an historical reference to previous destructions foretold by prophets. Verse 10 appears to refer historically to the Jews at the time of Lehi who "hardened their hearts" (past tense) and "have been destroyed" (past tense), except for "those which are carried away captive into Babylon" (present tense, apparently since at the time of Nephi's writing they were then residing in Babylon). Nephi continues in the present tense in verse 11: "And now this I speak

⁴ Nephi also noted in this compilation that some of the prophecies were not his alone (e.g., 2 Nephi 25:19-20) and he continued to quote Isaiah (compare 2 Nephi 27 and Isaiah 29).

⁵ S. Kent Brown and David Rolph Seely, "Jeremiah's Imprisonment and the Date of Lehi's Departure," *The Religious Educator* 2/1 (2001): 22.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 22 (emphasis added).

because of the spirit which is in me.”⁹ Then he switches briefly to past tense: “And not withstanding they have been carried away” (then to future tense as his prophecies begin) “they shall return again, and possess the land of Jerusalem; wherefore, they shall be restored again to the land of their inheritance.” The complexity of this introduction, with Nephi’s careful switching between past, present and future tenses, is evidence that the past tense statement about the people having been destroyed (verse 10) is an historical statement about a concluded destruction and not a forward looking statement about a destruction yet to occur.

Brown and Seely also engaged in a discussion about when 2 Nephi 25-30 was originally composed. Because Nephi referred to Lehi as “my father” in 2 Nephi 25:4, they suggested that Lehi might have been dead when the compilation occurred. The connection is not obvious. I can find no evidence for the assumption that Nephi had refused to refer, or had been prohibited from referring, to Lehi as “my father” while he was alive. Nonetheless, that strange idea led them to propose that the compilation occurred “*after* Lehi’s family arrived in the New World. If so [they continued], the language of 25:10—‘immediately after my father left Jerusalem’—loses some of its importance for dating Lehi’s departure from the city.”¹⁰ They did not explain what the timing of Nephi’s compilation had to do with the importance of his words. With what subjective value system can anyone judge the importance of some, but not all, of Nephi’s words? His chronological statements in 2 Nephi 25:10 would seem to be important (Nephi apparently thought so), no matter when he compiled the prophecies set forth in 2 Nephi 25-30.

Thus, Brown and Seely minimized the importance of what they called the *one tiny part* despite their protestation to the contrary. They claimed to view Nephi as a witness of the first rank, while not giving his words in 2 Nephi 25:10 much weight. They mischaracterized the phrase *have been destroyed* to refer to a *pending* destruction. They focused the heart of their discussion on distracting or perhaps unsolvable issues (whether Nephi referred to Lehi as *my father* while he was living and what was the date when Nephi compiled his prophecies). And thereby they gave their readers, perhaps, the impression that they had propped up the illogical notion that the chronological content of Nephi’s statements in 2 Nephi 25:10 *must be ignored*: “we cannot appeal to [2 Nephi 25:10] to solve the issue of when Lehi’s party left Jerusalem.”¹¹ For me, this was a particularly disappointing section of their article. It appears to be merely exploitation of the rhetorical techniques of minimization, confusion and inaccuracy. What could have been the impetus for minimizing, confusing and mischaracterizing Nephi’s words in 2 Nephi 25:9-10, other than, perhaps, a (misguided?) sense that they had to support tradition even if it was at odds with Nephi’s statements? To my thinking, this was an inadequate response to Nephi.

What does 2 Nephi 25:10 say about chronology? Two parts of Nephi’s retrospective statement in 2 Nephi 25:10 are chronologically relevant. First, he stated that “it hath been told [the people of Judah] concerning the destruction which should come upon them, *immediately* after my father left Jerusalem” (emphasis added). That is, the people were warned in advance by multiple prophets (e.g., 1 Nephi 1:4; 2 Nephi 25:9), including Lehi (e.g., 1 Nephi 1:18-19; 2:12-13, 16; 3:16-18; 5:4). Prophets in Judah had prophesied the city’s destruction for more than a decade before Zedekiah came to power (e.g., Jeremiah 1:1-3; 3:1-4:4; 7:1-15; Zephaniah 1:1-6). However, the word *immediately*, as used by Joseph Smith when he translated this passage of the text, would seem to mean “with no person, thing, or distance, intervening in time, space, order, or

⁹ See my discussion about Nephi’s and Lehi’s obtaining a sure knowledge concerning Jerusalem’s destruction in part 6 of this chapter.

¹⁰ Brown and Seely, “Jeremiah’s Imprisonment,” 22-23 (emphasis in the original).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

succession.”¹² Nephi seems to be referring to prophecies that came very close in time to the actual destruction of the city.

Jeremiah is known to have delivered such a prophecy to a royal delegation from Zedekiah when the Babylonians began their war against Judah: “Behold, I [the Lord] will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and against the Chaldeans, which besiege you without the walls ... [a]nd I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast” (Jeremiah 21:4, 6).¹³ On another occasion during the siege,¹⁴ the Lord sent Jeremiah to Zedekiah to prophesy, “Thus, saith the Lord; Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.” And as for Zedekiah, “thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shall surely be taken, and delivered into his hand ... and thou shalt go to Babylon” (Jeremiah 34:2-3).¹⁵ When the Babylonians withdrew the siege to battle the Egyptians, Jeremiah warned the people to escape from the city to save their lives (Jeremiah 21:8-10; 38:1-4) and he proclaimed to Zedekiah: “the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire” (Jeremiah 37:8). Thus, Nephi’s apparent reference in 2 Nephi 25:10 to the *immediacy* of such prophecies is accurate as to the Lord’s message and is consistent with Lehi departing from the city late in the reign of Zedekiah, rather than in the first year of Zedekiah.

The second part of 2 Nephi 25:10 that is chronologically relevant is Nephi’s report that “according to *my prophecy*, they have been destroyed” (emphasis added). Nephi’s reference to his own prophecy relates to one that he recorded in 1 Nephi 7:13-14 and reiterated in 1 Nephi 17:43. Brown and Seely disputed my identification of the prophecy of Nephi mentioned in 2 Nephi 25:10 with his prophetic expression in 1 Nephi 7:13-14. They wrote that this connection was “attractive,” but “only tentative at best because Nephi clearly marks out his prophecy and because it stands entirely within the book of 2 Nephi, not in 1 Nephi 7.”¹⁶ Despite their use of the phrase *my prophecy* and use of 2 Nephi 25:4 and 31:1 as proof-texts, no textual basis exists for their claim—just the contrary, in fact.

Nephi stated directly (2 Nephi 25:4) that he had been prophesying with plainness from the time he came out of Jerusalem with his father, an event recorded in 1 Nephi. The prophecies that Nephi took so much care to preserve, engrave on metal plates and set forth in his first book (such

¹² *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, two vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), I: 1379 (“Immediately”).

¹³ For some commentators, the delivery of this prophecy to the royal delegation occurred during the siege of Jerusalem. See, e.g., Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 409; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 9, 567, 570-1. For others, the prophecy to this delegation occurred before the siege of Jerusalem itself had begun, while Judah’s troops were fighting outside the walls, in the battlefield, against Babylonian forces that were “closing in,” “blockading,” “pressing hard,” but not yet “besieging.” See, e.g., John Bright, *The Anchor Bible: Jeremiah* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 213, 215; J. Arthur Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, R.K. Harrison, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 467-68.

¹⁴ “Nebuchadrezzar’s campaign in the land of Judah had reached the point where only two other towns, Lachish and Azekah, remained uncaptured. Thus the fate of Jerusalem was virtually sealed.... Hence the urgency of Jeremiah’s commission to speak to Zedekiah. Time was short and the king’s fate hung in the balance.” Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 643.

¹⁵ Zedekiah’s willingness to have Jeremiah imprisoned may have come from this confrontation between the prophet and king (Jeremiah 32:3-5), and the initial charge of desertion brought against Jeremiah may have been “only subterfuge.” Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 587. See also Bright, *Jeremiah*, 236-7.

¹⁶ Brown and Seely, “Jeremiah’s Imprisonment,” 22.

as 1 Nephi 2:20-24; 3:7, 29; 4:14; 7:13-15; 11:13-14:30; 17:7-10, 12-14, 43; 18:1-2; 19; 22:2-29) are abundant proof that Nephi's prophecy does not stand "entirely within the book of 2 Nephi." Nephi could have truthfully and logically referred to any of his prophecies in 1 Nephi as *my prophecy*. Nephi also referred to his compilation of prophecy in 2 Nephi 25-30 as *mine own prophecy* (2 Nephi 25:7), apparently because he had just finished quoting Isaiah's prophecies and he was distinguishing the two. However, that does not mean Nephi could not or would not refer to one of his prophecies in 1 Nephi as *my prophecy*. Nephi's prophecies were all *his* prophecies and he could refer to any of them as *my prophecy*. Any speculation to the contrary is irrelevant to a sound interpretation of the Book of Mormon text.

What did Nephi prophesy in 1 Nephi 7? The original manuscript for the text of 1 Nephi 7:13-14 has been preserved¹⁷ and the wording is confirmed in the printer's manuscript.¹⁸ Confronting his rebellious brothers in the wilderness, Nephi prophesied that faith in the Lord's word would be rewarded (1 Nephi 7:12). To convince them to continue trekking away from Jerusalem, he then prophesied: "And if it so be that we are faithful [to the Lord's commands, particularly the one set forth in 1 Nephi 7:1-2], we *shall* obtain the land of promise" (1 Nephi 7:13, emphasis added).¹⁹ Nephi received this prophecy when his parents and Zoram were camped near the Red Sea (1 Nephi 2:5-6, 19-20). For Nephi, this prophecy countered his brothers' desire to return to the land of Jerusalem (1 Nephi 7:6-7). A new land could be theirs, if only they would be faithful.

The next prophecy used by Nephi to convince his brothers had to do with their belief that Jerusalem could not be destroyed (1 Nephi 2:12-13), perhaps because of the misunderstanding of scripture (e.g., 2 Samuel 7; 23; Isaiah 1-12) that God would not permit it and would destroy Babylonia instead.²⁰ At the base camp, Lehi confronted Laman and Lemuel with such power that they stopped murmuring about this and did as their father commanded (1 Nephi 2:14). Writing years later about this conflict, Nephi described himself as "exceeding young," but with "great desires to know the mysteries of God, wherefore I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father" (1 Nephi 2:16).²¹ Nephi became fully converted to his father's prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction and he shared his conviction with his brothers, but Laman and Lemuel rejected his faith (1 Nephi 2:17-18). In 1 Nephi 7:13, Nephi prophesied that if they would be faithful to the Lord, they would "know *at some future period*, that the word of the Lord shall be fulfilled, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem" (emphasis added).²² Thus, Nephi prophesied that if Laman and Lemuel obeyed the Lord's commandment (1 Nephi 7:1-2) by returning to their father's camp at the Red Sea, they could gain a similar conviction about the prophets' warnings that Jerusalem would be destroyed.

Then Nephi stated a fourth prophecy to his brothers, in which he incorporated previous prophecies about the destruction of Jerusalem and expressed his own prophetic conviction: "all things which the Lord hath spoken concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, must be fulfilled. For,

¹⁷ Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 36-37, 84.

¹⁸ Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One: 72*.

¹⁹ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 17.

²⁰ "Perhaps [when the Babylonians withdrew their siege to battle the Egyptians (Jeremiah 37:1-5)] Zedekiah hoped almost beyond all hope that [the Lord] would repeat the miracle of 701 B.C. when he removed the Assyrian armies from Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah (2 [Kings] 19:32-37)." Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 631.

²¹ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 8-9.

²² Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 17.

behold, the spirit of the Lord *ceaseth soon* to strive with them” (1 Nephi 7:13-14, emphasis added).²³ The word *soon* (or, as in 2 Nephi 25:10, *immediately*) leaves no question about Nephi’s understanding at that point about the timing of the fall of Jerusalem. When Nephi uttered the prophecy to his brothers, it had yet to be fulfilled, but *soon* would be. However, when he introduced his compilation of prophecies in 2 Nephi 25-30, he was recalling multiple prophets’ warnings that the city would be destroyed *immediately* after Lehi’s escape (2 Nephi 25:9-10).²⁴ Looking back on his own prophecy to Laman and Lemuel, Nephi noted that in accordance with his prophecy, the people of Judah “hardened their hearts” against the Spirit and were “destroyed, save it be those which are carried away captive into Babylon” (2 Nephi 25:10). The content and timing of Nephi’s prophecy are entirely consistent with Jeremiah’s prophecies of an immediate destruction which were uttered late in the reign of Zedekiah (Jeremiah 21:4, 6, 8-10; 34:2-5, 12-22; 37:7-8).

Nonetheless, it might be claimed that Nephi’s statement in 1 Nephi 7:14 about the Spirit soon ceasing to strive with the people was “similar both in content and timing” to Jeremiah’s utterance of woe to king Jehoiakim, who had cut up and burned a scroll of Jeremiah’s prophecies (Jeremiah 36:30-31).²⁵ “[T]he dating of this utterance” is uncertain, but citing the writings of William L. Holladay,²⁶ one might place the prophecy of woe “by at least November/December 601 B.C.,” hence, a little more than three years before Nebuchadrezzar placed Zedekiah on the throne of Judah. To use Holladay’s phrase, one might also claim that “this divine decree represented ‘a crucial change’ in the Lord’s relationship with His people.” Thus, one could argue that such a “crucial change” ought to be closer in time to Nephi’s statement – only about four years if Lehi escaped in Zedekiah’s first year, rather than some fourteen years if Lehi escaped late in Zedekiah’s reign.²⁷

I do not think the supposed “timing” similarity exists. The prophecy of woe in Jeremiah 36:30-31 was not a new prophecy, but a reiteration of prophecy. The Lord emphasized that he would “bring upon [king Jehoiakim, his seed, and his servants] and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them” (which he had done *previously* through his prophets) because—at that point in Jehoiakim’s wicked and rebellious reign—“they hearkened not” to the Lord or his prophets (Jeremiah 36:31). Jeremiah and Zephaniah had been warning of a pending destruction since before the reign of Jehoiakim even began (see, e.g., Jeremiah 1:1-3; 3:1-4:4; 7:1-15; Zephaniah 1:1-6). Long after Jehoiakim died (under uncertain circumstances when the Babylonians were on their way to punish his rebellion)²⁸

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ As late as the lifting of the siege, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to warn the people to flee the city (Jeremiah 21:8-10). Many people may have finally listened to the prophet because court officials protested about the effect of Jeremiah’s words (Jeremiah 38:1-4). In Lachish Letter VI, the military commander “complained that certain of the nobles ‘weaken the hands’ of the people—the very thing with which Jeremiah was charged.” John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 330 n.59. Hence, Jeremiah’s voice seems not to have been the only one uttering the Lord’s warning and urging the people to repent and flee from the city to preserve their lives from the destruction to immediately follow. “Jeremiah’s campaign to persuade people to desert is represented by [Jeremiah 38:19] as a successful one.” Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 685.

²⁵ Brown and Seely, “Jeremiah’s Imprisonment,” 21.

²⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 4-5.

²⁷ Brown and Seely, “Jeremiah’s Imprisonment,” 21.

²⁸ Oded Lipschits, “‘Jehoiakim Slept with his Fathers ...’ (II Kings 24:6) – Did He?” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 4 (2002): 1-33; accessed by the author on September 5, 2008, at www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/Articles/article_23.pdf.

and after Jehoiakim's wife and posterity, and many of his servants, court officials, men of war, craftsmen, smiths and neighbors in Jerusalem were either dead or in exile, Jeremiah and others continued to warn of a pending destruction (2 Kings 24:1-16; 2 Chronicles 36:5-10, 15; Jeremiah 21; 37; 38:1-4). Hence, the principles of thoroughness, consistency and natural uniformity require me to question which utterances of woe were closer in time to the actual burning of the city and tearing down of the palace, temple and walls in Zedekiah's eleventh year. Were they the prophecies delivered by Jeremiah before or during Jehoiakim's reign, or those given by Jeremiah in Zedekiah's tenth and eleventh years? The answer is obvious.

As to the "content" similarity of the "crucial change," the principle of thoroughness leads me to ask: Did this change manifest itself in the withdrawal of the Spirit? Nephi prophesied that the Spirit would *soon cease* to strive with the people of Jerusalem (1 Nephi 7:13-14). The word *cease* means stop, discontinue, desist, come to an end.²⁹ Did the Lord stop sending prophets to warn his people to repent? Not according to 1 Nephi 1:4-20 or 2 Chronicles 36:15, where prophets or messengers are said to have appeared on the scene *after* Jehoiakim's death and the first exile. That is evidence that the Spirit had not yet ceased to strive with the people of Jerusalem.

Had the Spirit completely withdrawn as late as the lifting of the siege, some fourteen years after the supposed "crucial change"? The Lord then ordered Jeremiah to warn the inhabitants of Jerusalem to flee (Jeremiah 21:8-10). Others in Jerusalem appear to have been exhorting the people to listen to the Lord's warning and flee for their lives.³⁰ If the Spirit had ceased to strive with the people many years earlier, what was the point of that warning from the Lord? Thus, if some sort of "crucial change" occurred around 601 B.C., it would *not* appear to be the Spirit *soon ceasing* to strive with the people at Jerusalem. That event did not occur until after Lehi escaped from the city (1 Nephi 7:13-14). Nor did it occur until Zedekiah refused to heed Jeremiah's Spirit-inspired call to surrender to the Babylonian army that had surrounded the walls of Jerusalem to take up their siege again (Jeremiah 38:14-23). Only then did the kingdom of Judah irrevocably harden itself against the Spirit. "In refusing the possibility of surrender, Zedekiah ... not only sealed his own fate but also guaranteed the destruction of the city...."³¹ Immediately, the Babylonians answered the obstinate rebellion of Zedekiah by destroying the city.

When Nephi argued with his brothers about returning to Jerusalem, what were his supporting facts? Before leaving Nephi's prophecies to his brothers,³² I want to refer briefly to his mention of the prophet Jeremiah in this context. The 1830 Book of Mormon reproduces this specific text as follows: "for all things which the Lord hath spoken concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, must be fulfilled. For, behold, the spirit of the Lord ceaseth soon to strive with them; for, behold, they have rejected the prophets, and Jeremiah have they *cast into prison*. And they have sought to take away the life of my father, insomuch that they have driven him out of the land" (1 Nephi 7:13-14, emphasis added).³³ These supporting facts used by Nephi to convince his brothers to obey the Lord are similar to the facts cited in Nephi's earlier statement to his brothers when they were attempting to get the brass plates from Laban. To convince his brothers to be faithful and diligent at that time, he said, "For [my father] knew that Jerusalem must be destroyed, because of the wickedness of the people. For behold, they have rejected the words of the

²⁹ *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, I: 362 ("Cease").

³⁰ See footnote 24 above.

³¹ Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 687.

³² Another of Nephi's prophecies in 1 Nephi 7—that if any of the group were to return to Jerusalem, they would perish (1 Nephi 7:15)—will not be considered here; it was noted in part 5 of this chapter.

³³ Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 17.

prophets. Wherefore, if my father should dwell in the land after he hath been commanded to flee out of the land, behold, he would also perish" (1 Nephi 3:17-18).

The two statements differ somewhat, but they both stress four points: (1) prophetic knowledge of the pending destruction (Lehi's during the first expedition and Nephi's during the second expedition); (2) the rejection of the prophets by the people of Jerusalem; (3) the devastating consequences to follow that rejection; and (4) the need for Lehi to flee. In the argument during the first expedition to get the brass plates, Nephi made no mention of Jeremiah being cast into prison; however, during the second expedition, Jeremiah's imprisonment was a fact used in Nephi's argument that the prophesied destruction would soon befall the people.

Nephi's silence about Jeremiah during the first expedition is not weighty evidence, but it raises a question. During the second expedition to the land of Jerusalem, did Nephi and his brothers become aware that Jeremiah had attempted to leave the city and been cast into prison? The text does not provide a direct answer. However, 1 Nephi 7:13-14 is entirely consistent with Lehi escaping from Jerusalem late in the reign of Zedekiah when it is certain that Jeremiah was cast into prison and that Jeremiah and perhaps others prophesied of immediate destruction. Was Jeremiah cast into prison during or shortly after Zedekiah's first regnal year? If so, perhaps Nephi's failure to mention Jeremiah's imprisonment in the first argument is consistent with the record of Jeremiah's life. In the next part of this chapter, I will examine that question.