1 Nephi 12:1-5

1 And it came to pass that the angel said unto me: Look, and behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren. And I looked and beheld the land of promise; and I beheld multitudes of people, yea, even as it were in number as many as the sand of the sea.

2 And it came to pass that I beheld multitudes gathered together to battle, one against the other; and I beheld wars, and rumors of wars, and great slaughters with the sword among my people.

3 And it came to pass that I beheld many generations pass away, after the manner of wars and contentions in the land; and I beheld many cities, yea, even that I did not number them.

4 And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many cities that they were sunk; and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof.

5 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.

The chapter break created in 1879 camouflages the context for these battles. Separated from the previous verses, these simply discuss military actions. However, the context following immediately upon the heels of 1 Nephi 11:34-36 is the war for humankind's souls. 1 Nephi 11:34 is explicit: "and after [Christ] was slain I saw the multitudes of the earth, that they were gathered together to fight against the apostles of the Lamb." This places even the apparently secular battles of 1 Nephi 12:1-5 in the greater context of the spiritual battle.

The descriptions lead to the coming of the Messiah to the Nephites as will be described in 3 Nephi. In this vision, Nephi sees the physical destructions and conditions that will immediately precede that event.

From a structural point of view, it is interesting that each verse of the set selected begin with "and it came to pass." That is a phrase that Nephi uses to move along a narrative. The quick succession of these may intend not only to show a chain of events, but to imply the long passage of time required for the fulfillment of those events.

1 Nephi 12:6-8

6 And I saw the heavens open, and the Lamb of God descending out of heaven; and he came down and showed himself unto them.

7 And I also saw and bear record that the Holy Ghost fell upon twelve others; and they were ordained of God, and chosen.

8 And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the twelve disciples of the Lamb, who are chosen to minister unto thy seed.

The vision continues the description of the future events in Bountiful. These twelve are the Nephite twelve.

1 Nephi 12:9-10

> 9 And he said unto me: Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb? Behold they are they who shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, the twelve ministers of thy seed shall be judged of them; for ye are of the house of Israel.
>
> 10 And these twelve ministers whom thou beholdest shall judge thy seed. And, behold, they are righteous forever; for because of their faith in the Lamb of God their garments are made white in his blood.

The vision clarifies the difference between the Old World twelve and the New World twelve. The pronouns leave the interpretation more open than we might like, but the verses appear to indicate that the New World twelve would be the judges for Nephi's descendants, but that the New World twelve are themselves judged by the Old World twelve as part of the whole house of Israel for whom the Old World twelve have responsibility.

> 1 Nephi 12:11-15
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> 11 And the angel said unto me: Look! And I looked, and beheld three generations pass away in righteousness; and their garments were white even like unto the Lamb of God. And the angel said unto me: These are made white in the blood of the Lamb, because of their faith in him.
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> 12 And I, Nephi, also saw many of the fourth generation who passed away in righteousness.
>
> 13 And it came to pass that I saw the multitudes of the earth gathered together.
>
> 14 And the angel said unto me: Behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren.
>
> 15 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the people of my seed gathered together in multitudes against the seed of my brethren; and they were gathered together to battle.

Nephi's vision of the future includes the ultimate destruction of his people at Cumorah. The prophecy is specific in retrospect because we know that the four generations equaled four hundred years. The term *generation* is not that specific. If taken as a literal generation, it would be shorter than a hundred years.

> 1 Nephi 12:16
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> 16 And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the fountain of filthy water which thy father saw; yea, even the river of which he spake; and the depths thereof are the depths of hell.

Although the vision has been showing secular events, the angel makes it clear that the secular wars are simply part of the spiritual war for the souls of humankind. Thus, right when we have combatants gathered for the final battle, the angel returns to the symbolic element of the vision of the tree—the fountain of filthy water. When Nephi recounted his father's vision, he mentioned the water, but not that it was filthy. Here, that element is clear and Nephi indicates that it was a part of his father's dream. There is no indication of why he left it out in the earlier account.

> 1 Nephi 12:17-18
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> 17 And the mists of darkness are the temptations of the devil, which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men, and leadeth them away into broad roads, that they perish and are lost.

> 18 And the large and spacious building, which thy father saw, is vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men. And a great and a terrible gulf divideth them; yea, even the word of the justice of the Eternal God, and the Messiah who is the Lamb of God, of whom the Holy Ghost beareth record, from the beginning of the world until this time, and from this time henceforth and forever.

The symbolic explication continues. Placed right after the description of gathering for the final battle at Cumorah and the foretelling of the demise of the Nephites at that location, these verses contextualize Nephi history into the larger pattern of righteousness and unrighteousness. The suggestion here is that the Nephite demise will be a result of their acceptance of the ways of the world, the ways of the large and spacious building.

The Nephite promise of the land is that they would be protected if they continued in righteousness. This vision not only shows that they cease to be protected, but clarifies that the destruction will come as a result of their abandoning principles of righteousness in favor of those of the large and spacious building.

> 1 Nephi 12:19-20
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> 19 And while the angel spake these words, I beheld and saw that the seed of my brethren did contend against my seed, according to the word of the angel; and because of the pride of my seed, and the temptations of the devil, I beheld that the seed of my brethren did overpower the people of my seed.
>
> 20 And it came to pass that I beheld, and saw the people of the seed of my brethren that they had overcome my seed; and they went forth in multitudes upon the face of the land.

The end of the Nephites is explicitly related to “the pride of my seed, and the temptations of the devil.” That is the statement that is to be expected from the symbolic interlude describing the large and spacious building.

> 1 Nephi 12:21-23
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> 21 And I saw them gathered together in multitudes; and I saw wars and rumors of wars among them; and in wars and rumors of wars I saw many generations pass away.
>
> 22 And the angel said unto me: Behold these shall dwindle in unbelief.
>
> 23 And it came to pass that I beheld, after they had dwindled in unbelief they became a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations.

It is interesting that this description is for the Lamanites and that they will “dwindle in unbelief.” We expect that they had already been unbelievers. This prophecy continues the process and moves them even farther from their roots in the house of Israel. Verse 23’s description of “a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people” is a set of descriptions that are applied to the Lamanites long before this event. While it is tempting to see that particular phrasing being adopted from this prophecy and applied throughout the Book of Mormon, there is little indication that the contents of the small plates of Nephi has any real impact on Nephite life. This was simply a set of terms that was used to describe a people in apostasy. In the case of the vision, it describes Lamanites after the close of the Book of Mormon, but the description is also applied throughout.