

THE GOSPEL STUDY SERIES

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—THE BOOK—
OF MORMON
MADE EASIER

PARTS ONE, TWO & THREE



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DAVID J. RIDGES

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THE GOSPEL STUDIES SERIES

Welcome to Volume 4 in the Gospel Studies Series, which covers the first portion of the Book of Mormon. In this volume, we will study First Nephi through The Words of Mormon. As with other books in this series of study guides, we will use the Book of Mormon as published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as our basic text. Any references to the Bible come from the King James Version of the Bible as published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The entire text from First Nephi through The Words of Mormon is included, with brief notes of explanation between and within the verses to clarify and help with understanding.

This work is intended to be a user-friendly, introductory study to this portion of the Book of Mormon as well as a refresher course for more advanced students of the scriptures. It is also designed to be a quick-reference resource which will enable readers to look up a particular passage of scripture for use in lessons, talks, or personal study as desired. The author hopes that readers will write in their own scriptures some of the notes given in this book in order to assist them as they read and study the Book of Mormon in the future.

David J. Ridges

THE JST REFERENCES IN STUDY GUIDES BY DAVID J. RIDGES

Note that some of the JST (The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible) references I use in my study guides are not found in our LDS Bible in the footnotes or in the Joseph Smith Translation section in the reference section in the back. The reason for this, as explained to me while writing curriculum materials for the Church, is simply that there is not enough room to include all of the JST additions and changes to the King James Version of the Bible (the one we use in the English speaking part of the Church). As you can imagine, as was likewise explained to me, there were difficult decisions that had to be made by the Scriptures Committee of the Church as to which JST contributions were included and which were not.

The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible in its entirety can generally be found in or ordered through LDS bookstores. It was originally published under the auspices of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Independence, Missouri. The version of the JST I prefer to use is a parallel column version, *Joseph Smith's "New Translation" of the Bible*, published by Herald Publishing House, Independence, Missouri, in 1970. This parallel column version compares the King James Bible with the JST side by side and includes only the verses that have changes, additions, or deletions made by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

By the way, some members of the Church have wondered if we can trust the JST since it was published by a breakaway faction from our Church. They worry that some changes from Joseph Smith's original manuscript might have been made to support doctrinal differences between us and the RLDS Church. This is not the case. Many years ago, Robert J. Matthews of the Brigham Young University Religion Department was given permission by leaders of the RLDS Church to come to their Independence, Missouri, headquarters and personally compare the original JST document word for

word with their publication of the JST. Brother Matthews was thus able to verify that they had been meticulously true to the Prophet's original work.

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FOREWORD

In over thirty-five years of teaching in the Church and for the Church Educational System, I have found that members of the Church encounter some common problems when it comes to understanding the scriptures. One problem is understanding symbolism. Another common concern is how best to mark their own scriptures and perhaps make brief notes in them. Yet another concern is how to understand what the scriptures are actually teaching. In other words, what are the major messages being taught by the Lord through His prophets?

This book is designed to address each of the concerns mentioned above for First Nephi through The Words of Mormon in the Book of Mormon. The format is intentionally simple, with some license taken with respect to capitalization and punctuation in order to minimize interruption of the flow. It is intended to help readers:

- Quickly gain a basic understanding of these scriptures through the use of brief, italicized explanatory notes in brackets within the verses, as well as occasional notes between verses. This paves the way for even deeper testimony and understanding later.
- Better understand the beautiful language of the Book of Mormon. This is accomplished in this book with in-the-verse notes which define difficult terms.
- Mark their scriptures and put brief notes in the margins which will help them understand now and remember later what particular passages of scripture teach.
- Better understand symbolism, especially in the writings of Isaiah that Nephi included in the Book of Mormon.

Over the years, one of the most common expressions of gratitude from

my students has been, “Thanks for the notes you had us put in our scriptures.” This book is dedicated to that purpose.

Complete sources for the notes given in this work are found in the back of this book and also include the standard works of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible.

The author hopes that this book will serve effectively as a “teacher in your hand” for members of the Church as they seek to increase their understanding of the writings and teachings found in the Book of Mormon. Above all, if this work serves to bring increased understanding and testimony of the Atonement of Christ, all the efforts to put it together will have been far more than worth it. A special thanks goes to my wife, Janette, and to my sons and daughters who have encouraged me every step of the way.

David J. Ridges

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Mormon—Another Testament of Jesus Christ is indeed a witness for Christ. On average, Christ is mentioned every 1.7 verses in the Book of Mormon. No wonder it is “the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.” (See “Introduction” at the beginning of the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith made this statement to the Twelve Apostles in Brigham Young’s home in Nauvoo on November 28, 1841.)

ABOUT THE TITLE PAGE

The title page, found at the beginning of the Book of Mormon, is a literal translation of Moroni’s last statement, last page, left-hand side of the plates. (See *History of the Church*, Volume 1, p. 71.) The title page is a fascinating example of non-punctuated near eastern languages. In and of itself, it is a strong witness that the Book of Mormon is a translation of an ancient record.

If you will take a look at the title page of your Book of Mormon (which begins with the words, “The Book of Mormon, an account written by the hand of Mormon upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi”), you will note that there are only two periods in the whole text, one at the end of each paragraph. In near eastern languages, the words are all “run on,” that is to say, there aren’t any spaces between them and it is up to the reader to separate them. An example, in English, might be as follows:

THISISANEXAMPLEOFASENTENCEINWHICHALLOFTHEWORDS
RUNTOGETHERANDTHEREADERHASTOSEPARATETHEMINOR
DERTOMAKESENSEOUTOFTHEM.

Properly punctuated, with individual words separated by spaces, in English the above would read, “This is an example of a sentence in which all of the words run together, and the reader has to separate them in order to

make sense out of them.”

It is interesting to note as you read the title page that Joseph Smith dictated the translation to his scribe, who then wrote it down. When it was taken to the printer, it was left up to the printer to punctuate it. In this case, the printer chose to use dashes to separate the various phrases, along with a few commas and an occasional semicolon.

For instance, if you read the last phrase of the first paragraph where it says, “The interpretation thereof by the gift of God,” you will sense the problem the printer faced in punctuating a translation from an ancient language. If it were normal English, it would need some additional words to make a proper English sentence out of it. As it is, it is just there, as is the case with such ancient languages, one thought coming after the previous thought, in a manner typical of near eastern languages. This is what is known as an “internal witness.” It is a witness that the Book of Mormon was translated from an ancient language, whose origins were in the area of the Holy Land.

In fact, Nephi tells us that the language he used to write the record on his plates consisted of “the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” (see 1 Nephi 1:2.). In other words, the origins of the language he used are found in the Near East.

The title page is Moroni’s last statement to us. In the first paragraph, he tells us to whom the Book of Mormon is addressed, namely, the Lamanites, the Jews and the Gentiles, in other words, to all people. It is not just another book; rather, it is “written by way of commandment.” Thus, it is the revealed word of God to be brought forth to the world in the last days, translated by the gift of God.

Moroni instructs us that it is an abridgment (a shortened or condensed version) of the record of the Nephites as well as an abridgment of the record of the Jaredites (the book of Ether). In the second paragraph of the title page, he tells us that he had three major purposes in mind for us as he prepared the gold plates for Joseph Smith to translate, namely:

1. To show us, who are a remnant of Israel (who are descendants of Abraham) what great things the Lord did for our ancestors. Among other things, this reminds us who we are and what our potential really is when we follow Christ faithfully.

2. To testify to us of the vital role which covenants play in bringing us back to God. Nephi reminds us that covenants were taken away as “plain and precious things” (1 Nephi 13:26–29). They were removed from the gospel because of apostasy. You may recall also that covenants are only required for entrance into celestial glory and exaltation. No covenants are required for entrance into terrestrial or telestial glory. Thus, when we make and keep covenants, we are qualifying to return to God and to live in His presence forever.

3. To convince all of us “that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations.” As stated above, the Book of Mormon mentions the Savior, one way or another, on average, every 1.7 verses. Every time we read from its sacred pages, we are giving the Holy Ghost many specific opportunities to bear direct witness to us that Jesus is the Christ and that His Atonement can be completely effective in our personal lives.

One could perhaps summarize the above-mentioned three major purposes of the Book of Mormon as follows: the Book of Mormon is a sacred, inspired volume of scripture in which the Savior teaches us about the history of His dealings with people in the past, about His desire to make covenants with us for our safety and well-being, and about the role of His Atonement in bringing peace and optimism into our lives.

This peace and optimism is emphasized in the last phrase of the title page wherein Moroni assures us that through the Atonement of Christ we “may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ.”

THE TESTIMONY OF THE THREE WITNESSES

AND THE EIGHT WITNESSES

It is of great worth to take a careful look at the testimony of the Three Witnesses and the Eight Witnesses. These testimonies stand as powerful witnesses of the Book of Mormon as well as of the Prophet Joseph Smith. The fact that six of these eleven men left the Church but never denied that they had seen the plates gives strong validity to their testimonies. A list of each of these men, accompanied by a note as to whether or not they remained faithful, follows:

THE THREE WITNESSES

Oliver Cowdery: Left the Church, came back later.

David Whitmer: Left the Church, never came back.

Martin Harris: Left the Church, came back later.

THE EIGHT WITNESSES

Christian Whitmer: Remained faithful.

Jacob Whitmer: Left the Church, never came back.

Peter Whitmer, Junior: Remained faithful.

John Whitmer: Left the Church, never came back.

Hiram Page: Left the Church, never came back.

Joseph Smith, Senior: Remained faithful.

Hyrum Smith: Remained faithful.

Samuel Smith: Remained faithful.

As you study the testimony of the Three Witnesses, located near the beginning of your Book of Mormon, you will note that theirs is a spiritual

witness. They keep it very simple and straightforward, certifying that:

1. They have seen the plates.
2. They know that the plates were translated by the gift and power of God.
3. They heard the voice of God so testifying.
4. They know the work is true.
5. They have personally seen the engravings upon the plates, and they were shown them by the power of God.
6. An angel brought the plates and showed them to the three men.

It is interesting to note that both Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris personally handled the plates as the angel showed them to them, whereas David Whitmer chose not to handle them (see *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, by Richard Lloyd Anderson, p. 81).

As you read the testimony of the Eight Witnesses, you will note that it is primarily a physical witness. In other words, they did not see an angel nor hear the voice of God. Rather, they bear sober witness that Joseph Smith showed them the plates, that they had “the appearance of gold” (these were honest, careful men), that they handled the leaves which had been translated, that the engravings had “the appearance of ancient work” (again, very honest and careful wording), that they had seen and lifted the plates and knew for certain that Joseph Smith had them in his possession.

These two testimonies, one of the Three and one of the Eight, have gone forth and continue to go forth to all the world bearing witness of the Book of Mormon and of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Each of us who prayerfully studies this sacred record can add our testimony to theirs.

THE FIRST BOOK OF NEPHI

Four different sets of metal plates or engraved records are spoken of in the Book of Mormon itself. For more information about these sets of plates, see “A Brief Explanation About the Book of Mormon” in the introductory pages to your Book of Mormon.

The first six books of the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Jarom, and Omni) are taken from the small plates of Nephi. According to 2 Nephi 5:28–33, Nephi began the small plates thirty years after Lehi’s family had left Jerusalem. It was to be a special record emphasizing spiritual things and teachings. Another set of plates, known as the large plates of Nephi, had been kept since they left Jerusalem. This set contained more of the history and secular records of the people.

As we begin our study of First Nephi, we see the importance of the small plates of Nephi. For one thing, after Joseph Smith had translated 116 handwritten pages of the large plates of Nephi, Martin Harris, who was serving as his scribe, begged him to let him take the precious manuscript pages home to Palmyra, New York, to stop the wagging tongues and gossip which was being spread about Martin. It was said that he had been fooled and taken in by Joseph Smith. After repeated requests by Martin, Joseph allowed him to take the 116 pages. They were lost and never recovered.

After a difficult period of waiting, Joseph was allowed to take up the work of translating the plates again. We learn from D&C 10:30, 38–41 that Joseph was instructed by the Lord not to retranslate the plates from which the lost 116 manuscript pages had been taken. Rather, he was to translate from the small plates of Nephi (which were contained in the gold plates he had taken from Hill Cumorah) to make up for what had been lost. Joseph obeyed, and we have 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Jarom, and Omni in place of the material which had been translated from the large plates. In fact, we came out ahead because we are now privileged to read and study

the more spiritual matters contained in the small plates as opposed to the things contained in the large plates which covered the same period of time and whose translation was lost with the 116 pages. As usual, the Lord triumphs over Satan's efforts to halt the work.

By the way, the main heading to First Nephi, given in italics at the very beginning of the book starting with "*An account of Lehi . . .*," is a direct translation from the plates. However, the headings at the beginning of each chapter, such as "*Nephi begins the record of his people—Lehi sees . . .*" at the beginning of the first chapter, were written by Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles by assignment from the First Presidency, to help us have an overview of each chapter's contents.

FIRST NEPHI 1

It is interesting to consider how old Nephi might be as he writes this. As mentioned above, we know from 2 Nephi 5:28–33 that he started engraving his small plates thirty years after they left Jerusalem. If we assume that Nephi was somewhere between fifteen and twenty years old when Lehi and his family left Jerusalem, it would make Nephi perhaps forty-five to fifty years old as he begins engraving the first verse of our Book of Mormon.

Thus, it would be reasonable to think that he is looking back with tender memories and is somewhat nostalgic as he thinks about his parents and the events which have taken place over the last thirty years.

1 I, NEPHI, having been born of goodly [*an Old Testament word which means "praiseworthy, morally good, noble," according to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, word #2570*] parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days.

We learn many things about Nephi from verse 1, above. First, he is appreciative of

righteous parents. Second, he emphasizes the positives in his life. After mentioning that he has “seen many afflictions” in his days, which is an understatement, he immediately tells us that he has been “highly favored of the Lord” in **all** his days, thus underscoring the kind of lives positive personalities enjoy.

For perspective, we might just take a quick look at a few of the “many afflictions” in Nephi’s life up to this point. He was nearly murdered four times by his own brothers (1 Nephi 7:16, 1 Nephi 16:37, 1 Nephi 17:45, 2 Nephi 5:4). Laban tried to kill him and his brothers (1 Nephi 3:25). They spent eight difficult years in the wilderness. He had much opposition in building the ship (1 Nephi 17), plus he was tied up on the ship (1 Nephi 18).

In spite of such afflictions, Nephi focused on the great blessings he had received from the Lord, which included “a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God” (verse 1, above). We might note that the word “mysteries” as used here means basic doctrines such as correct knowledge of the Godhead, the plan of salvation, priesthood authority, resurrection, and so forth, rather than strange, mysterious trivia or secret teachings (see Bible Dictionary, p. 736, under “Mystery” in your Bible).

2 Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians.

3 And I know that the record which I make is true; and I make it with mine own hand; and I make it according to my knowledge.

Next, Nephi will mention Zedekiah, king of Judah. This is about 600 B.C.; Zedekiah is a wicked, twenty-one-year-old king (see 2 Kings 24:18–19). He will reign for eleven years, during which time, among other evil deeds, he will imprison the Prophet Jeremiah in a miserable dungeon with deep mire (see Jeremiah, chapters 38–39). Finally, after Lehi and his family have fled Jerusalem, King Zedekiah will be captured by King Nebuchadnezzar’s forces of Babylon about 587 B.C. Zedekiah’s sons (except for Mulek) will be killed before his eyes, and he will be blinded and carried as a prisoner to Babylon (see 2 Kings 25).

4 For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, (my father, Lehi, having dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days); and in that same year there came many prophets [*including Jeremiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*], prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed.

5 Wherefore it came to pass that my father, Lehi, as he went forth prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people.

You may wish to underline in your own Book of Mormon several words and phrases from verses 6 through 16, which point out to us that Lehi, himself, was indeed a great prophet. We will underline and **bold** some of them now, and then return to these verses for some

additional teaching.

6 And it came to pass as he prayed unto the Lord, **there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him**; and **he saw and heard much**; and because of the things which he saw and heard he did quake and tremble exceedingly.

7 And it came to pass that he returned to his own house at Jerusalem; and he cast himself upon his bed, being **overcome with the Spirit** and the things which he had seen.

8 And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was **carried away in a vision**, even that he **saw the heavens open**, and he thought he **saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God**.

9 And it came to pass that **he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day**.

10 And he also **saw twelve others following him**, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament.

11 And they came down and went forth upon the face of the earth; and **the first came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a book, and bade him that he should read**.

12 And it came to pass that as he read, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord.

13 And he read, saying: Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations! Yea, and **many things did my father read concerning Jerusalem—that it should be destroyed**, and the inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword, and **many should be carried away captive into Babylon**.

14 And it came to pass that when **my father had read and seen many great and marvelous things**, he did exclaim many things unto the Lord;

such as: Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!

15 And after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God; for his soul did rejoice, and his whole heart was filled, because of the things which he had seen, yea, which the Lord had shown unto him.

16 And now I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written, for he hath written many things which **he saw in visions** and in **dreams**; and he also hath written many things which he **prophesied** and spake unto his children, of which I shall not make a full account.

Now that we have paid attention to certain words of Nephi which point out what a great prophet his father, Lehi, was, we will repeat verses 6 through 16 and add a few notes for teaching purposes.

6 And it came to pass as he prayed unto the Lord, there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard much; and because of the things which he saw and heard he did quake and tremble exceedingly.

7 And it came to pass that he returned to his own house at Jerusalem; and he cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen.

Next, in verse 8, we run into an interesting phrase which causes some readers to ask, "Why doesn't it come right out and say that Lehi saw God, rather than saying that he thought he saw God?"

The answer is simple. In order to avoid even the slightest chance of using the name of God inappropriately, ancient prophets sometimes used the "polite" indirect reference rather than using "God" outright. Lehi did see God the Father, but in writing about it, Nephi uses the indirect "thought he saw God." We see other examples of this indirect mode in the scriptures. For instance, in Abraham 3:24, Abraham refers to the premortal Christ as one "that was like unto God." In Daniel 3:25, Christ is referred to as "like the Son of God." In Revelation 1:13, Jesus is referred to as "one like unto the Son of man."

8 And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God [*the Father; compare with Revelation 4:2, 5:7*] sitting upon his throne, surrounded with

numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God.

9 And it came to pass that he [*Lehi*] saw One [*Christ*] descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster [*brightness*] was above that of the sun at noon-day.

10 And he also saw twelve others [*the Twelve Apostles*] following him [*the Savior*], and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament [*the heavens*].

11 And they came down and went forth upon the face of the earth; and the first [*Christ*] came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a book [*symbolic of a mission to perform—compare with D&C 77:14 and Revelation 10:2 and 9*], and bade him that he should read [*asked him to read the book*].

12 And it came to pass that as he read, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord.

13 And he read, saying: Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations [*terrible wickedness*]! Yea, and many things did my father read concerning Jerusalem—that it should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon [*a powerful enemy nation headquartered about five hundred miles east of Jerusalem*].

14 And it came to pass that when my father had read and seen many great and marvelous things, he did exclaim many things unto the Lord; such as: Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!

15 And after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God; for his soul did rejoice, and his whole heart was filled, because of the things which he had seen, yea, which the Lord had shown unto him.

16 And now I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written, for he hath written many things which he saw in visions and in dreams; and he also hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children, of which I shall not make a full account.

17 But I shall make an account of my proceedings in my days. Behold, I make an abridgment [*a shortened version or summary*] of the record of my father, upon plates which I have made with mine own hands [*this brief summary of his father's writings goes through 1 Nephi, chapter 8*]; wherefore, after I have abridged the record of my father then will I make an account of mine own life.

18 Therefore, I would that ye should know, that after the Lord had shown so many marvelous things unto my father, Lehi, yea, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, behold he went forth among the people, and began to prophesy and to declare unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard.

19 And it came to pass that the Jews did mock him because of the things which he testified of them; for he truly testified of their wickedness and their abominations; and he testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book [*referred to in verse 11*], manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world.

20 And when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him; yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away. But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.

Nephi tells us in verse 20, above, that one of his major goals in his writing is to show us the “tender mercies” of the Lord. Verse 20 of course is in the first chapter of the Book of Mormon. In the last chapter of the Book of Mormon (Moroni 10:3), Moroni expresses a hope that we will have noticed “how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men” as we studied this precious volume of scripture.

To me, these two verses, one at the beginning and one at the end, form “bookends” for the

content of the Book of Mormon. They serve as a reminder that the Lord loves to extend kindness and mercy to each of us. The whole book is a reminder of this. One of my friends once found more than four hundred “tender mercy” statements or experiences, in one form or another, within the Book of Mormon.

FIRST NEPHI 2

In this chapter, Lehi is warned by the Lord to take his family and flee into the wilderness. He, of course, obeys, leaving his wealth and worldly possessions behind. Some readers are inclined to ask why he didn't just leave Laman and Lemuel home also, rather than being subjected to the problems they continued to cause. While Lehi and Sariah are best qualified to respond to this question, perhaps we may venture a few responses. First of all, faithful parents continue to hope that wayward children will repent and they often do. Another facet of the answer may be that in each family, it is not just the wayward or rebellious members who need to learn lessons, but the faithful members also have the need to grow in patience, wisdom, forgiving, striving to bring them back, etc., and to learn almost countless other attributes of exalted beings.

1 FOR behold, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto my father, yea, even in a dream, and said unto him: Blessed art thou Lehi, because of the things which thou hast done; and because thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee, behold, they seek to take away thy life.

2 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness.

3 And it came to pass that he was obedient unto the word of the Lord, wherefore he did as the Lord commanded him.

4 And it came to pass that he departed into the wilderness. And he left his house, and the land of his inheritance, and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things, and took nothing with him, save it were his family, and provisions, and tents, and departed into the wilderness.

Just an interesting “internal evidence” that the Book of Mormon is a translation from an ancient Near-Eastern (Semitic) language. Count the number of times “and” is used in verse 4, above. This usage is very typical of such languages.

5 And he came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea [*about 180–200 miles from Jerusalem*]; and he traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea; and he did travel in the wilderness with his family, which consisted of my mother, Sariah, and my elder brothers, who were Laman, Lemuel, and Sam.

According to 2 Nephi 5:6, Lehi’s family increased in the wilderness to include two more sons (Jacob and Joseph, plus daughters).

6 And it came to pass that when he had traveled three days in the wilderness, he pitched his tent in a valley by the side of a river of water.

The phrase “a river of water” in verse 6, above, is another internal evidence that the Book of Mormon account is a translation of an ancient record which originates in the area of the Holy Land. In that arid country, there are many “rivers” which are usually dry river beds and are commonly called “wadis.” Here, Nephi indicates that the “river” actually has water flowing in it at the time they camp by it.

7 And it came to pass that he built an altar of stones, and made an offering unto the Lord, and gave thanks unto the Lord our God.

Building an altar and giving an offering to the Lord, in verse 7, above, is a reminder that Lehi and his family worship God according to Old Testament laws and ceremonies (compare with Exodus 20:24–26). The Book of Mormon people will continue to keep the law of Moses until the Savior appears (3 Nephi) and gives them the higher laws of the New Testament.

8 And it came to pass that he called the name of the river, Laman [*this was quite an honor given to Laman*], and it emptied into the Red Sea; and the valley was in the borders near the mouth thereof.

9 And when my father saw that the waters of the river emptied into the fountain of the Red Sea, he spake unto Laman, saying: O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness! [*Perhaps meaning that he wishes that Laman’s deeds and desires would always merge with the Lord’s will and the course of righteousness.*]

10 And he also spake unto Lemuel: O that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord!

We will take a moment here to look at some possible reasons for recording Laman and Lemuel's murmuring and rebellious behavior. One reason for so doing is to avoid such behaviors ourselves. Another reason is so that we can perhaps better understand why they continue to cause trouble as Nephi's record continues. Yet another reason might be so that we gain better insight into how patient the Lord is with all of us as He gives us opportunity after opportunity to repent and change our ways.

Neither Laman nor Lemuel appear to honor their father, which is one of the Ten Commandments that they were no doubt taught. Both seem to be materialistic, according to Nephi (verse 11, next). They do not seem spiritual or sensitive to the things of God (verse 12). They obviously don't believe the words of other prophets about the fate of Jerusalem, according to verse 13. Yet another reason for such rebellion and spiritual insensitivity may be revealed by Nephi in the last half of verse 13. This is a rather startling and serious insight. Nephi says that "they were like unto the Jews who were at Jerusalem."

With this in mind, let's see what the Prophet Jeremiah said about the evils indulged in by the Jews at Jerusalem during this period in history. Jeremiah 9:2–3 says (**bold** added for emphasis):

2 Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! for **they be all adulterers**, an assembly of treacherous men.

3 And **they bend their tongues like their bow for lies**: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for **they proceed from evil to evil**, and they know not me, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 6:15 tells us that the Jews had gotten to the point of such spiritual insensitivity that they were no longer embarrassed by wickedness. We read (**bold** added for emphasis):

15 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, **they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush**: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time *that* I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD.

Sexual immorality seems to have run wild among the Jews at this time as stated in Jeremiah 5:7–8 (**bold** added for emphasis):

7 How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by *them that are* no gods: when I had fed them to the full, **they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses**.

8 They were as fed horses in the morning: **every one neighed after his neighbour's**

wife.

D&C 42:23, which follows next, tells us one of the awful consequences of continued sexual immorality. It is the loss of the Spirit. When people lose the Spirit, they no longer see evil as being wrong or even dangerous. And they see righteous people and principles as foolish.

D&C 42:23

23 And he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith, and shall not have the Spirit; and if he repents not he shall be cast out.

While we cannot know for sure that Laman and Lemuel were involved in such evil, Nephi's statement that they "were like unto the Jews" gives us strong reason to wonder, and is powerful counsel to avoid such evils in our own lives. Whatever the case, Laman and Lemuel had become very selfish and insensitive to spiritual things. It became a downward spiral in their lives and even led to murderous desires in their hearts.

11 Now this he [*Lehi*] spake because of the stiffneckedness of Laman and Lemuel; for behold they did murmur in many things against their father, because he was a visionary man, and had led them out of the land of Jerusalem, to leave the land of their inheritance, and their gold, and their silver, and their precious things, to perish in the wilderness. And this they said he had done because of the foolish imaginations of his heart.

12 And thus Laman and Lemuel, being the eldest, did murmur against their father. And they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them.

13 Neither did they believe that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed according to the words of the prophets. And they were like unto the Jews who were at Jerusalem, who sought to take away the life of my father.

14 And it came to pass that my father did speak unto them in the valley of Lemuel, with power, being filled with the Spirit, until their frames did shake before him. And he did confound them, that they durst not utter against him; wherefore, they did as he commanded them.

We might learn at least two lessons from verse 14, above. One would be that even though

Laman and Lemuel were so rebellious, the Lord still gave them a miraculous experience to help them repent and become righteous, if they so chose. Another lesson is that when people ignore the gentle whisperings of the Spirit and continue in wickedness, the Lord “turns up the volume” to try to get them to listen and repent. It is so in our day, with the forces of nature in an uproar—storms, earthquakes, pestilence, natural disasters—because so many of the inhabitants of the earth have ignored the gentler invitations to come unto Christ (see D&C 88:88–90).

15 And my father dwelt in a tent.

16 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires to know of the mysteries [*the basic truths and doctrines, see Bible Dictionary, p. 736, under “Mysteries”*] of God, wherefore, I did cry [*pray mightily*] 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; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers.

There is an important lesson to learn from Nephi in verse 16, above. Some people ask whether or not it is wrong to doubt or wonder about matters related to the gospel. Given the fact that individual agency is a gift from God, the answer has to be “No.” But it is wrong and foolish to rebel. It is what we do about doubts when they arise in our hearts that makes or breaks us. When doubts about their father and his visions arose in Laman and Lemuel’s minds, they chose to murmur and rebel. A careful reading of verse 16 may indicate that Nephi also had doubts in his heart, because he tells us that the Lord “did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel.” Nephi’s approach was different from that of his two older brothers. He had an honest heart, a great desire to know the basic truths and doctrines of the gospel, and a desire to know the truthfulness of what his father taught. He humbly prayed to the Lord until he received the sweet, reassuring answer about the truthfulness of his father’s revelations. Thus, he had full ownership of faithfully following his prophet father.

17 And I spake unto Sam, making known unto him the things which the Lord had manifested unto me by his Holy Spirit. And it came to pass that he believed in my words.

Sam is one of my favorite people in the Book of Mormon. I have tender feelings for him and hope to meet him someday. Though older than Nephi, he faithfully follows him and assists him. He reminds me of Hyrum Smith, Joseph Smith’s older brother. Though they were older brothers, both Sam and Hyrum seemed to have the gift of believing the words of others, a gift of the Spirit spoken of in D&C 46:14. They both followed and faithfully supported their younger prophet brothers throughout the rest of their lives.

18 But, behold, Laman and Lemuel would not hearken unto my words; and being grieved because of the hardness of their hearts I cried unto the Lord for them [*Nephi really cares about his rebellious older brothers*].

19 And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart [*humility*].

20 And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands [*symbolic of heaven, celestial glory, exaltation*].

21 And inasmuch as [*if*] thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

There is probably quite an important lesson here for us. It may be that Nephi did not get the answer he wanted. He had obviously been praying for the souls and salvation of Laman and Lemuel. Instead of being reassured that they would be saved, he is reminded that they have agency, and their judgment will depend on how they use it. However, in the next verse, he is reassured that if he continues to keep the commandments, he will be saved. Thus, we are reminded that we need to do all we can to save others, including praying continually for them. But we cannot force anyone to salvation against his or her agency.

22 And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren [*this prophecy is fulfilled as the Book of Mormon continues*].

23 For behold, in that day that they shall rebel against me, I will curse them even with a sore curse, and they shall have no power over thy seed [*Nephi's posterity*] except they shall rebel against me also.

24 And if it so be that they [*Nephi's posterity*] rebel against me, they [*Laman and Lemuel's posterity*] shall be a scourge [*trouble*] unto thy seed, to stir them up in the ways of remembrance. [*In other words, if necessary, the Lamanites will cause the Nephites trouble in order to try to get them to repent.*]

FIRST NEPHI 3

In this chapter, Lehi's sons will be asked to go back to Jerusalem to get the brass plates of Laban. There are many major messages and lessons for us here. For one thing, this is certainly a mission to which the brothers are called by the Lord. Sometimes we find ourselves thinking that since the call comes from the Lord, everything ought to work out smoothly, with every potential obstacle removed. We forget sometimes that life is a "schooling" provided for our growth and development, and that if every time we went on the Lord's errand, things were to go perfectly well because of the Lord's blessings, we would be deprived of much of our education.

Another issue which students sometimes bring up as they study this chapter is the question, "Since the Lord knew that they would need the brass plates, why didn't He tell Lehi before they left the Jerusalem area, instead of having the boys go back 180–200 miles, one way, through a very dangerous wilderness filled with robbers, murderers, and wild beasts?"

Again, the answer lies in the fact that mortal life is for our learning and development. Nephi and his brothers each had many opportunities for increased faith and testimony during the hardships they encountered. Some of them grew spiritually, and some did not.

There is one major blessing which came as a result of this commandment of the Lord to go back and get the brass plates, which we may sometimes overlook. It has to do with strengthening Sariah's testimony. In order to see this, we will skip ahead to 1 Nephi, chapter five, for a moment. As we do so, we will focus on the difficult unknowns Sariah faced as a mother and wife as her boys were gone on such a dangerous undertaking. At best, her sons would have been gone for at least a month, perhaps closer to two months. It was a long and treacherous journey to Jerusalem and back, and there were dangers that could befall Nephi and his brothers while in the Jerusalem area. Remember, the Jews had tried to kill Lehi, and perhaps felt animosity for his family members too.

We are told by Nephi, in 1 Nephi 5:1, that his mother "truly had mourned" for her sons while they were gone. Verse 2 tells us that she had eventually

assumed that they had died in the wilderness, and that she had complained rather bitterly against her husband, Lehi, accusing him of leading them away from the comforts of home, getting their sons killed in the wilderness, and that they, too, would die.

According to 1 Nephi 5:4–6, Lehi was able to “comfort” Sariah somewhat, but when their sons actually returned safely to camp (verse 7), she indeed *was* comforted! In fact, her testimony that they were working under the direction of the Lord thus became “a surety” (verse 8), and we never hear another complaint nor lack of support from her again. Such a firm testimony is priceless, and the whole journey back to Jerusalem would have been well worth it if only to provide noble Sariah with such strength and sure knowledge that they were on the Lord’s errand.

Regardless of the reasons the Lord had for commanding Lehi’s sons to return for the brass plates, we know that it was worthwhile because the Lord commanded it. Now, let’s return to Nephi’s account.

1 AND it came to pass that I, Nephi, returned from speaking with the Lord, to the tent of my father.

2 And it came to pass that he spake unto me, saying: Behold I have dreamed a dream, in the which the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brethren shall return to Jerusalem.

3 For behold, Laban hath the record of the Jews and also a genealogy of my forefathers, and they are engraven upon plates of brass.

It would appear that Laban was probably Lehi’s relative and that he was the one in the family who possessed the family genealogy and records. Among other things, the brass plates contained what we know as the Old Testament, from Genesis up to and including some of the writings of Jeremiah (see 1 Nephi 5:11–13).

4 Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brothers should go unto the house of Laban, and seek the records, and bring them down hither [*here*] into the wilderness.

5 And now, behold thy brothers murmur [*complain*], saying it is a hard thing which I have required of them; but behold I have not required it of

them, but it is a commandment of the Lord.

Verse 5 is a valuable reminder to us all that when our prophet speaks to us, it is not his instructions we are hearing; rather, it is the word of the Lord.

6 Therefore go, my son, and thou shalt be favored of the Lord, because thou hast not murmured.

Verse 7, next, is one of the most famous verses in the Book of Mormon, with a very valuable message.

7 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.

8 And it came to pass that when my father had heard these words he was exceedingly glad [*very, very glad*], for he knew that I had been blessed of the Lord.

9 And I, Nephi, and my brethren took our journey in the wilderness, with our tents, to go up to the land of Jerusalem.

Even the phrase “up to the land of Jerusalem” is a bit of internal testimony of the truth of the Book of Mormon. Those of you who are familiar with the geography of the Holy Land realize that Jerusalem is up high in the mountains, and most other sites are “down” from Jerusalem. Therefore, most people in that area, as they travel to Jerusalem, are indeed traveling “up.”

10 And it came to pass that when we had gone up to the land of Jerusalem, I and my brethren did consult one with another.

11 And we cast lots—who of us should go in unto the house of Laban. And it came to pass that the lot [*the short straw, the short stick, or whatever they used*] fell upon Laman; and Laman went in unto the house of Laban, and he talked with him as he sat in his house.

12 And he desired of Laban the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, which contained the genealogy of my father.

13 And behold, it came to pass that Laban was angry, and thrust him out

from his presence; and he would not that he should have the records. Wherefore, he said unto him: Behold thou art a robber, and I will slay thee. [*This false accusation would be a shock and a major disappointment, especially since Laman had been assured by Nephi and Lehi that the Lord had sent them to get the brass plates.*]

14 But Laman fled out of his presence, and told the things which Laban had done, unto us. And we began to be exceedingly sorrowful, and my brethren were about to return unto my father in the wilderness.

As mentioned earlier, this was the work of the Lord, and the Lord could have caused things to go well on this first attempt to get the brass plates from Laban. However, as you know, sturdy and lasting growth does not come from constant ease. By the way, it appears from verse 14, above, that this setback was hard on all four sons, including Nephi, because he says, “**We** began to be exceedingly sorrowful.” However, Nephi was completely determined to keep the commandment of the Lord to get the plates and did not join with his brethren in their desire to go back to their father in the wilderness. Therefore, Nephi grew from this experience, and Laman and Lemuel weakened. We don’t know about Sam but suspect that he also grew.

In verse 15, next, Nephi uses the strongest possible oath in his Semitic culture to express his commitment to fulfill the commandment of the Lord. In his culture, to promise or swear by any living thing was a very strong oath. But to swear by one’s own life was stronger still, and to promise by the living God was the strongest of all promises or oaths.

15 But behold I said unto them that: As the Lord liveth, and as we live, we will not go down unto our father in the wilderness until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord hath commanded us.

16 Wherefore, let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; therefore let us go down to the land of our father’s inheritance [*indicating probably that Lehi and his family lived somewhere near Jerusalem but outside of the actual city limits*], for behold he left gold and silver, and all manner of riches. And all this he hath done because of the commandments of the Lord.

True Saints, past and present, are like Lehi in that they willingly give up whatever it takes in order to do the work of the Lord. This certainly includes missionaries, both young elders and sisters as well as senior couples and sisters.

17 For he knew that Jerusalem must be destroyed, because of the

wickedness of the people.

Verse 18, next, is highly symbolic and significant. The destruction of Jerusalem will of course be literal, as history shows. However, when we see such verses in scripture, we would do well to shift our mind into “symbolism mode” and note the many possible messages provided in symbolism. Symbolism is almost infinitely deep and thus allows the Holy Ghost to point out different messages to our minds each time we encounter the same passages of scripture.

For instance, the phrase “if my father should dwell in the land after he hath been commanded to flee out of the land, behold, he would also perish” in verse 18 could have many different applications. It could apply literally to a family camping in a steep-walled canyon who are prompted by the Spirit to flee because a flash flood is coming. It could likewise apply to a member who is in a relationship which threatens to compromise the moral standards of the gospel. If he or she does not flee the circumstance, danger of great spiritual damage or even perishing spiritually could follow.

Yet another example of the symbolic lesson in verse 18 might be that of a younger or older member of the Church who has fallen in with the wrong crowd. If he or she does not heed the warnings of the Spirit to flee and get away from the temptations, dire consequences may follow. Such warnings of the Holy Ghost could be with respect to reading material, financial dealings, physical danger, military dangers, political trends and philosophies, social philosophies, and disobeying the wisdom and counsel of parents, bishops, grandparents, or whomever. The list goes on and on, as do the symbolic applications of verse 18.

18 For behold, they have rejected the words of the 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. Wherefore, it must needs be that he flee out of the land.

Nephi next reminds his brothers why it is so important for them to follow through and get the brass plates. As mentioned in the previous note, there is much symbolism in scripture, and you will readily see how the next verses symbolically apply to the importance of scriptures and family history in your own life.

19 And behold, it is wisdom in God that we should obtain these records, that we may preserve unto our children the language of our fathers;

20 And also that we may preserve unto them the words which have been spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets, which have been delivered unto them by the Spirit and power of God, since the world began, even down unto this present time. [*All this was contained on the brass plates.*]

21 And it came to pass that after this manner of language did I persuade my brethren, that they might be faithful in keeping the commandments of God. [*The prophecy, given in 1 Nephi 2:22, that Nephi would become “a ruler and a teacher” over his brothers is already coming to pass.*]

22 And it came to pass that we went down to the land of our inheritance, and we did gather together our gold, and our silver, and our precious things.

23 And after we had gathered these things together, we went up again unto the house of Laban.

24 And it came to pass that we went in unto Laban, and desired him that he would give unto us the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, for which we would give unto him our gold, and our silver, and all our precious things.

25 And it came to pass that when Laban saw our property, and that it was exceedingly great, he did lust after it [*Laban was a greedy man*], insomuch that he thrust us out, and sent his servants to slay us, that he might obtain our property. [*Laban was willing to murder for selfish gain.*]

26 And it came to pass that we did flee before the servants of Laban, and we were obliged to leave behind our property, and it fell into the hands of Laban.

27 And it came to pass that we fled into the wilderness, and the servants of Laban did not overtake us, and we hid ourselves in the cavity of a rock [*probably meaning a cave*].

Next, we are reminded again that when circumstances become difficult, some people weaken while some grow stronger as a result. Usually, those who weaken try to find someone other than themselves to blame. Common companions to blame are anger and violence.

28 And it came to pass that Laman was angry with me, and also with my father; and also was Lemuel, for he hearkened unto the words of Laman. [*Lemuel seems to be a follower but is unwise in his choice of whom to follow.*] Wherefore Laman and Lemuel did speak many hard words unto us, their younger brothers, and they did smite [*hit*] us even with a rod.

29 And it came to pass as they smote us with a rod, behold, an angel of the Lord came and stood before them, and he spake unto them, saying: Why do ye smite your younger brother with a rod? Know ye not that the Lord hath chosen him [*Nephi; see 1 Nephi 2:22*] to be a ruler over you, and this because of your iniquities [*evil doings*]? Behold ye shall go up to Jerusalem again, and the Lord will deliver Laban into your hands.

This is a promise. Therefore, they know that they will succeed in obtaining the brass plates if they go back for them again. What it takes for Nephi to actually take possession of them, though, will become one of the most difficult trials of his young life so far. Yet, after the severe trial of his faith, he will succeed, and he will have grown tremendously in his ability to follow the commandments of God. Likewise, he will have obtained great blessings.

30 And after the angel had spoken unto us, he departed.

31 And after the angel had departed, Laman and Lemuel again began to murmur, saying: How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands? Behold, he is a mighty man, and he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty; then why not us?

We are left almost stunned by Laman and Lemuel's response to the appearance of the angel. How could they possibly be so boldly foolish and rejecting of his message? How could they immediately turn such a wonderful thing as the appearance of an angel into a strong negative? We are left to conclude that wickedness does not promote rational thought. This is, in fact, a major message of the scriptures.

FIRST NEPHI 4

So far, the four sons of Lehi have done everything in their power to accomplish their mission and still have failed. There seems to be a lesson here for all of us. In many things and responsibilities, we succeed on the first try. The Lord encourages us to use our mind to solve problems and tells us that it is not necessary for Him to “command” us “in all things” and that “the power is in us” to solve many situations (see D&C 58:26–28). However, it seems that we need to be reminded of our complete dependence upon the Lord from time to time. For instance, this is absolutely the case with respect to our dependence on the Atonement. When we need to revisit this lesson, it seems that nothing we try succeeds. Then the Lord steps in and shows forth His power, and we succeed in His way.

1 AND it came to pass that I spake unto my brethren, saying: Let us go up again unto Jerusalem, and let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; for behold he is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty, yea, or even than his tens of thousands? [*In other words, even if Laban had tens of thousands of soldiers, the Lord could still overcome them and bless us with success in obtaining the plates.*]

2 Therefore let us go up; let us be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground, and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea.

It seems that many people who read the Bible, along with most Bible scholars today, do not believe that Moses and the children of Israel literally had the Red Sea part for them and that they went through on dry ground with the armies of Pharaoh drowning as they pursued them. In fact, some scholars say that it was the “Reed” Sea, not the Red Sea, which Moses and his people crossed, that the water was very shallow, and that the hot desert wind just happened to push it back for the Israelites.

In verse 2, above, we see the Book of Mormon supporting and verifying the Bible. The Israelites did experience the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea and they did go through on dry ground, a major miracle in and of itself. The prophecy of Ezekiel in Ezekiel 37:15–17 is being fulfilled before our eyes. The Bible and the Book of Mormon, the stick of Judah and the stick of Ephraim, have “become one in thine hand.”

3 Now behold ye know that this is true; and ye also know that an angel hath spoken unto you; wherefore [*how*] can ye doubt? Let us go up; the Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptians.

4 Now when I had spoken these words, they were yet wroth [*angry*], and did still continue to murmur; nevertheless they did follow me up until we came without [*outside of*] the walls of Jerusalem.

5 And it was by night; and I caused that they should hide themselves without [*outside of*] the walls. And after they had hid themselves, I, Nephi, crept into the city and went forth towards the house of Laban.

As mentioned in a previous note, Nephi is about to encounter a very severe test of faith. He will pass the test, but not before he has been through an internal struggle of deepest proportions. There is a lesson in this for each of us. Sometimes, as we strive to faithfully

live the gospel, and to carry out our callings and responsibilities at home and in the Church organization, we encounter obstacles which we most certainly did not expect, especially in the light of the Lord's promises to the faithful. At such times, Nephi's experience in the next verses can be most helpful and reassuring.

6 And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do.

7 Nevertheless I went forth, and as I came near unto the house of Laban I beheld a man, and he had fallen to the earth before me, for he was drunken with wine.

8 And when I came to him I found that it was Laban.

9 And I beheld his sword, and I drew it forth from the sheath thereof; and the hilt thereof was of pure gold, and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine, and I saw that the blade thereof was of the most precious steel.

Just a thought. We know that Nephi was still a young man when he encountered Laban. We can't help but note his admiring, detailed description of Laban's fine sword in verse 9, above. It is what we would expect from a typical young man.

Next, we see and feel the struggle in Nephi's mind and heart as he seeks to sort out the teachings of his youth about not killing people, his commitment to follow God, and the commandment to kill Laban. It is a profoundly deep struggle, and we can learn much from it.

10 And it came to pass that I was constrained [*compelled, obligated*] by the Spirit that I should kill Laban; but I said in my heart: Never at any time have I shed the blood of man. And I shrunk [*held back*] and would [*wished*] that I might not slay him.

11 And the Spirit said unto me again: Behold the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands. Yea, and I also knew that he had sought to take away mine own life; yea, and he would not hearken unto [*listen to; obey*] the commandments of the Lord; and he also had taken away our property [*Laban was a robber*].

12 And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me again: Slay him, for the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands;

13 Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief [*a very famous quote from the Book of Mormon*].

14 [*Nephi's intense internal struggle continues.*] And now, when I, Nephi, had heard these words, I remembered the words of the Lord which he spake unto me in the wilderness, saying that: Inasmuch as thy seed [*posterity*] shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise [*literally, the Americas; symbolically, heaven*].

15 Yea, and I also thought that they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save [*unless*] they should have the law [*the scriptures*].

16 And I also knew that the law was engraven upon the plates of brass.

17 And again, I knew that the Lord had delivered Laban into my hands for this cause—that I might obtain the records according to his commandments.

18 Therefore I did obey the voice of the Spirit, and took Laban by the hair of the head, and I smote off his head with his own sword.

As mentioned previously, this was a most difficult choice for Nephi. It seems that Nephi has always been quick to obey, yet, in this instance, it takes 9 verses for him to obey, signifying the struggle within his soul. However, having passed this extreme test, he will now be able to quickly obey the Lord when it comes to future difficult assignments. For instance, when asked to build a ship, a rather startling assignment for one without any shipbuilding experience, he simply asks, "Whither shall I go that I may find ore to molten, that I may make tools to construct the ship?" (1 Nephi 17:9)

19 And after I had smitten off his head with his own sword, I took the garments of Laban [*Laban's clothes*] and put them upon mine own body; yea, even every whit [*every bit*]; and I did gird on his armor about my loins [*I put his armor on*].

20 And after I had done this, I went forth unto the treasury of Laban. And as I went forth towards the treasury of Laban, behold, I saw the servant of Laban [*Zoram, see verse 35*] who had the keys of the treasury. And I commanded him in the voice of Laban, that he should go with me into the

treasury.

21 And he supposed me to be his master, Laban, for he beheld [*saw*] the garments [*Laban's clothes*] and also the sword girded about my loins.

22 And he spake unto me concerning the elders [*religious leaders, see verse 26*] of the Jews, he knowing that his master, Laban, had been out by night among them.

23 And I spake unto him as if it had been Laban.

24 And I also spake unto him that I should carry the engravings, which were upon the plates of brass, to my elder brethren, who were without the walls [*outside the city walls*].

25 And I also bade [*requested*] him that he should follow me.

26 And he, supposing that I spake of the brethren of the church, and that I was truly that Laban whom I had slain, wherefore [*therefore*] he did follow me.

27 And he spake unto me many times concerning the elders of the Jews, as I went forth unto my brethren, who were without [*outside of*] the walls.

28 And it came to pass that when Laman saw me he was exceedingly frightened, and also Lemuel and Sam. And they fled from before my presence; for they supposed it was Laban, and that he had slain me and had sought to take away their lives also.

29 And it came to pass that I called after them, and they did hear me; wherefore they did cease to flee from my presence.

Imagine how surprised and startled Zoram must have been when Nephi spoke in his own voice, and his brothers actually stopped!

30 And it came to pass that when the servant of Laban beheld [*saw*] my brethren he began to tremble, and was about to flee from before me and return to the city of Jerusalem.

31 And now I, Nephi, being a man large in stature, and also having received much strength of the Lord, therefore I did seize upon the servant of Laban, and held him, that he should not flee.

Nephi is certainly humble about his size and strength, and sets a good example by giving the Lord credit for his ability to restrain Zoram. Next, we see again the use of the strongest possible oath in Jewish culture (see note prior to 1 Nephi 3:15 in this book) as Nephi talks to Zoram and Zoram responds.

32 And it came to pass that I spake with him, that if he would hearken unto my words, as the Lord liveth, and as I live, even so that if he would hearken unto our words, we would spare his life.

33 And I spake unto him, even with an oath, that he need not fear; that he should be a free man like unto us if he would go down in the wilderness with us.

34 And I also spake unto him, saying: Surely the Lord hath commanded us to do this thing; and shall we not be diligent in keeping the commandments of the Lord? Therefore, if thou wilt go down into the wilderness to my father thou shalt have place with us.

Next, we see the confidence which Nephi's oath gives Zoram. Zoram's oath in return frees Nephi of any concerns about him.

35 And it came to pass that Zoram did take courage at the words which I spake. Now Zoram was the name of the servant; and he promised that he would go down into the wilderness unto our father. Yea, and he also made an oath unto us that he would tarry [*remain*] with us from that time forth.

36 Now we were desirous that he should tarry with us for this cause, that the Jews might not know concerning our flight into the wilderness, lest they should pursue us and destroy us.

37 And it came to pass that when Zoram had made an oath unto us, our fears did cease concerning him.

38 And it came to pass that we took the plates of brass and the servant of Laban [*Zoram*], and departed into the wilderness, and journeyed unto the

tent of our father.

FIRST NEPHI 5

Imagine the joy and relief for all concerned as the sons returned safely to camp, along with Zoram! As mentioned in the note at the beginning of 1 Nephi, chapter three, in this book, many things had been accomplished by fulfilling the commandment of the Lord to return and get the brass plates of Laban, not the least of which was the strengthening of Sariah's testimony of her husband's prophetic calling.

1 AND it came to pass that after we had come down into the wilderness unto our father, behold, he was filled with joy, and also my mother, Sariah, was exceedingly glad, for she truly had mourned because of us.

2 For she had supposed that we had perished in the wilderness; and she also had complained against my father, telling him 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.

3 And after this manner of language had my mother complained against my father.

4 And it had come to pass that my father spake unto her, saying: 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.

5 But behold, I have obtained a land of promise [*literally, the Americas; symbolically, heaven*], in the which things I do rejoice; yea, and I know that the Lord will deliver my sons out of the hands of Laban, and bring them down again unto us in the wilderness.

6 And after this manner of language did my father, Lehi, comfort my mother, Sariah, concerning us, while we journeyed in the wilderness up to the land of Jerusalem, to obtain the record of the Jews [*the brass plates*].

7 And when we had returned to the tent of my father, behold their joy was full, and my mother was comforted.

Listen now to Sariah's testimony and imagine Lehi and Nephi's joy and comfort as they and the others listened to it.

8 And she spake, saying: Now I know of a surety [*for sure*] that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them. And after this manner of language did she speak.

9 And it came to pass that they did rejoice exceedingly, and did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings unto the Lord; and they gave thanks unto the God of Israel.

Verse 9, above, reminds us that they were still living the law of Moses, including animal sacrifices, symbolic of the coming Atonement of Christ. In this sense, we are still in Old Testament times at this point in the Book of Mormon and will be until the visit of the resurrected Savior in Third Nephi.

And, speaking of this part of the Book of Mormon as being Old Testament, it is very significant to note that the Book of Mormon gives us a more accurate understanding of Old Testament teachings about Christ than our current version of the Old Testament does.

10 And after they had given thanks unto the God of Israel, my father, Lehi, took the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, and he did search them from the beginning.

Apostle Bruce R. McConkie said the following about the brass plates: "The brass plates . . . contain more of the word of the Lord for the comparable period than does our present Old Testament. They will also come forth in due time as part of the restoration of all things" (McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, p. 113).

Now Nephi gives us a detailed description of the contents of the brass plates of Laban.

11 And he beheld that they did contain the five books of Moses [*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*], which gave an account of the creation of the world, and also of Adam and Eve, who were our first parents [*our first ancestors; in other words, this is as far back as our mortal*

genealogy goes];

Perhaps one quote from the First Presidency would be helpful here, in conjunction with verse 11, above. The question as to whether or not organic evolution was the means by which our ancestors eventually came on the scene seems to be answered in the last phrase of verse 11.

Concerning the origins of mankind, the First Presidency said:

“It is held by some that Adam was not the first man upon this earth, and that the original human being was a development from lower orders of the animal creation. These, however, are the theories of men. The word of the Lord declares that Adam was ‘the first man of all men’ (Moses 1:34), and we are therefore in duty bound to regard him as the primal parent of our race . . . Man began life as a human being, in the likeness of our heavenly Father.” (Smith, Winder, and Lund, *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, p. 4:205–6)

12 And also a record of the Jews from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah; [*In other words, down to about 600 B.C.*]

13 And also the prophecies of the holy prophets, from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah; and also many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah. [*This would be basically the words of the prophets, including those contained in our Old Testament, up to and including much of Jeremiah.*]

14 And it came to pass that my father, Lehi, also found upon the plates of brass a genealogy of his fathers; wherefore he knew that he was a descendant of Joseph [*through Manasseh, see Alma 10:3*]; yea, even that Joseph who was the son of Jacob, who was sold into Egypt, and who was preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he might preserve his father, Jacob, and all his household from perishing with famine.

15 And they were also led out of captivity and out of the land of Egypt, by that same God who had preserved them.

There is symbolism in verse 15, above. The Lord literally led the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, but the symbolism, as is the case for so many literal events in scripture, is that if we faithfully follow the Lord, we will be led out of the “captivity” of sin, and out of the world (Egypt) into the “promised land” (heaven).

16 And thus my father, Lehi, did discover the genealogy of his fathers. And Laban also was a descendant of Joseph, wherefore he and his fathers had kept the records.

Verse 16, above, is where we learn that Laban was a relative, near or distant, of Lehi.

17 And now when my father saw all these things, he was filled with the Spirit, and began to prophesy concerning his seed [*posterity*]—

18 That these plates of brass should go forth unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people who were of his seed.

19 Wherefore, he said that these plates of brass should never perish; neither should they be dimmed any more by time. And he prophesied many things concerning his seed.

We learn from verse 19, above, that the brass plates of Laban still exist. They have been preserved by the Lord and, no doubt, someday the faithful will be able to see them.

20 And it came to pass that thus far I and my father had kept the commandments wherewith the Lord had commanded us.

21 And we had obtained the records which the Lord had commanded us, and searched them and found that they were desirable; yea, even of great worth unto us, insomuch that we could preserve the commandments of the Lord unto our children. [*A major reason for having the scriptures and studying and teaching them.*]

22 Wherefore, it was wisdom in the Lord that we should carry them with us, as we journeyed in the wilderness towards the land of promise. [*Again, the “land of promise” also symbolizes celestial glory and living in the presence of God forever.*]

FIRST NEPHI 6

Next, Nephi refers to the special record which the Lord commanded him to write thirty years after they left Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 5:28–33). We usually refer to this record as the small plates of Nephi. He carefully limits

what things he engraves on these small plates to more spiritual matters, lessons and messages, with just enough history to provide background and setting for what he wants to teach us, as well as his own people, as we read and study his writings. Another set of plates had been kept over the years and are commonly referred to as the large plates of Nephi (see “A Brief Explanation About the Book of Mormon” at the beginning of your Book of Mormon for more about the various sets of plates referred to in it; see also the note at the beginning of First Nephi in this book).

1 AND now I, Nephi, do not give the genealogy of my fathers in this part of my record; neither at any time shall I give it after upon these plates [*the small plates*] which I am writing; for it is given in the record which has been kept by my father [*the large plates*]; wherefore, I do not write it in this work [*the small plates*].

2 For it sufficeth me to say that we are descendants of Joseph.

3 And it mattereth not to me that I am particular to give a full account of all the things of my father, for they cannot be written upon these plates [*the small plates*], for I desire the room that I may write of the things of God.

4 For the fulness of mine intent [*in engraving these small plates as well as everything else I do*] is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob [*in other words, the only true God*], and be saved.

5 Wherefore, the things which are pleasing unto the world I do not write, but the things which are pleasing unto God and unto those who are not of the world [*the righteous*].

6 Wherefore, I shall give commandment unto my seed [*my posterity*], that they shall not occupy these plates [*the small plates*] with things which are not of worth unto the children of men.

FIRST NEPHI 7

It is interesting to observe that this time when the sons of Lehi and Sariah are asked to go back to Jerusalem, Laman and Lemuel do not murmur, probably because there is something in it for them, namely, wives. This may be another clue to their personalities.

There is another point we will mention before we start this next chapter. We see the hand of the Lord in providing a family, in advance, with just the right number of unmarried daughters. We note that there are five who need wives, namely, Laman, Lemuel, Sam, Nephi, and Zoram. Ishmael's family has five unmarried daughters plus two married sons and their families. Also, we are given to understand that Ishmael's two sons had married into Lehi's family. Apostle Erastus Snow said that Joseph Smith said that this was the case. From this we would gather that Lehi and Sariah had two older daughters, and that they had married Ishmael's sons and already had families of their own. Here is the quote from Elder Erastus Snow (**bold added for emphasis**):

“The Prophet Joseph informed us that the record of Lehi, was contained on the 116 pages that were first translated and subsequently stolen, and of which an abridgement is given us in the first book of Nephi, which is the record of Nephi individually, he himself being of the lineage of Manasseh; but that Ishmael was of the lineage of Ephraim, and that **his sons married into Lehi's family, and Lehi's sons married Ishmael's daughters.**” (Snow, *Journal of Discourses*, 23:184.)

1 AND now I would that ye might know, that after my father, Lehi, had made an end of prophesying concerning his seed [*posterity, descendants*], it came to pass that the Lord spake unto him again, saying that it was not meet for him [*not good for him*], Lehi, that he should take his family into the wilderness alone; but that his sons should take daughters to wife, that they might raise up seed [*children*] unto the Lord in the land of promise.

2 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded him that I, Nephi, and my brethren, should again return unto the land of Jerusalem, and bring down Ishmael and his family into the wilderness.

3 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did again, with my brethren, go forth

into the wilderness to go up to Jerusalem.

There may be some rather significant symbolism containing a very important lesson for us in the fact that the four brothers are asked to return to Jerusalem again. We noted in their previous return to Jerusalem that difficulties while on the Lord's errand tend to provide growth or emphasize weaknesses, depending on how we choose to use our agency. Laman and Lemuel weakened. Nephi and Sam strengthened.

Now, they are given another opportunity to make the journey. This can be symbolic of the fact that we are given many, many chances during our mortal lives, to take the same tests over and over. For instance, if we "fail" the Word of Wisdom "test" we get to "retake" it, via the principle of repentance. If we fail the "be kind to others" test, we get plenty of additional opportunities to take it again. If we fail the "keep the Sabbath Day holy" test, we get plenty of additional Sabbaths in which we can do better.

At this point in the Book of Mormon, the Lord is kind enough to give Laman and Lemuel a chance to "retake" the "return to Jerusalem" test, along with Nephi and Sam, who passed the test last time. In fact, it seems that whenever we fail one of the Lord's tests, we get to retake it with faithful Saints who have already passed it. They are good examples for us.

4 And it came to pass that we went up unto the house of Ishmael, and we did gain favor in the sight of Ishmael, insomuch that we did speak unto him the words of the Lord.

5 And it came to pass that the Lord did soften the heart of Ishmael, and also his household, insomuch that they took their journey with us down into the wilderness to the tent of our father.

It will be interesting when we get the rest of the details of this meeting of Nephi and his brothers with Ishmael and his family. We note that, whereas Nephi took the brunt of the responsibility for getting the brass plates on their last journey to Jerusalem, this time it seems that they all participated in the responsibility. At least, the use of the word "we" in verse 4, above, leads us to that conclusion. The Lord was involved this time also, and softened the hearts of Ishmael and his family (verse 5, above) so they came. No doubt they had all felt the Spirit of the Lord and thus had at least the beginnings of testimonies. If so, their level of accountability for obeying the Lord's commandments would have increased, at least a bit.

We also understand, from the quote from Erastus Snow in the note at the beginning of this chapter, that Ishmael was from the tribe of Ephraim. We will repeat a part of the quote here and add **bold** for emphasis:

"The Prophet Joseph informed us that **Ishmael was of the lineage of Ephraim**, and that his sons married into Lehi's family, and Lehi's sons married Ishmael's daughters, thus fulfilling the words of Jacob upon Ephraim and Manasseh in the 48th chapter of Genesis,

which says: 'And let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the land.' Thus these descendants of Manasseh and Ephraim grew together upon this American continent." (Snow, *Journal of Discourses*, 23:184)

6 And it came to pass that as we journeyed in the wilderness, behold Laman and Lemuel, and two of the daughters of Ishmael, and the two sons of Ishmael and their families, did rebel against us; yea, against me, Nephi, and Sam, and their father, Ishmael, and his wife, and his three other daughters.

7 And it came to pass in the which rebellion, they were desirous to return unto the land of Jerusalem. [*They obviously did not believe that Jerusalem would be destroyed, even though many prophets had said so.*]

8 And now I, Nephi, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, therefore I spake unto them, saying, yea, even unto Laman and unto Lemuel: Behold ye are mine elder brethren, and how is it that ye are so hard in your hearts, and so blind in your minds, that ye have need that I, your younger brother, should speak unto you, yea, and set an example for you?

9 How is it that ye have not hearkened unto the word of the Lord?

One way we keep our testimonies strong is by remembering past blessings from the Lord to us. This is emphasized in Alma 5:6, among other places. Nephi will use the term "forgotten" three times in the next three verses. "Forgetting" past blessings from the Lord is one way to lose or ignore one's testimony.

10 How is it that ye have forgotten that ye have seen an angel of the Lord?

11 Yea, and how is it that ye have forgotten what great things the Lord hath done for us, in delivering us out of the hands of Laban, and also that we should obtain the record [*the brass plates*]?

12 Yea, and how is it that ye have forgotten that the Lord is able to do all things according to his will, for the children of men, if it so be that they exercise faith in him? Wherefore, let us be faithful to him.

13 And if it so be that we are faithful to him, we shall obtain the land of promise; and ye shall know at some future period that the word of the Lord shall be fulfilled concerning the destruction of Jerusalem; for all things

which the Lord hath spoken concerning the destruction of Jerusalem must be fulfilled.

14 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.

From verse 14, above, we learn that the Spirit of the Lord had not yet stopped trying to bring the inhabitants of Jerusalem away from wickedness and toward God. Because of the Lord's patience, it takes a lot to cause Him to withdraw His Spirit from His children, but the citizens of Jerusalem and the surrounding area are obviously pushing that limit at this time. By the way, you can read about Jeremiah's imprisonment by young King Zedekiah in Jeremiah 37:3–38:28. Zedekiah's behavior is a strong reminder that wickedness does not promote rational thought.

15 Now behold, I say unto you that if ye will return unto Jerusalem ye shall also perish with them. And now, if ye have choice, go up to the land [*go ahead and go back to Jerusalem if you want to*], and remember the words which I speak unto you, that if ye go ye will also perish [*die*]; for thus the Spirit of the Lord constraineth me [*compels me*] that I should speak.

16 And it came to pass that when I, Nephi, had spoken these words unto my brethren, they were angry with me. And it came to pass that they did lay their hands upon me, for behold, they were exceedingly wroth [*very angry*], and they did bind me with cords, for they sought to take away my life, that they might leave me in the wilderness to be devoured by wild beasts.

We spoke earlier of the Lord's kindness in allowing each of us to have many chances to overcome wrong thinking and wrong behaviors. We mentioned that even the commandment to return to Jerusalem again was a kindness from the Lord because it gave Laman and Lemuel a chance to "retake" the test. We pointed out that, in this sense, Laman and Lemuel had failed the first "go-back-to-Jerusalem" test and that Sam and Nephi had passed it. We had our hopes up a bit for Laman and Lemuel when they went willingly back to Jerusalem the second time, but now we have seen that their selfishness and rebellion led them down to the point of having murder in their hearts. They are failing their "retake" of the go-back-to-Jerusalem test. Not only that, but they have led and encouraged some members of Ishmael's family to join them. In contrast, Nephi's faith has continued to grow through adversity and persistent, patient obedience. We now see this faith in action as we continue this chapter.

17 But it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord, saying: O Lord,

according to my faith which is in thee, wilt thou deliver me from the hands of my brethren; yea, even give me strength that I may burst these bands with which I am bound.

18 And it came to pass that when I had said these words, behold, the bands were loosed from off my hands and feet, and I stood before my brethren, and I spake unto them again.

Because of the miracle that had just happened, we would hope that Laman and Lemuel and the angry others would be swayed toward humility and apologizing, but we are disappointed. Perhaps one of the lessons we learn from this teaching scene in the Book of Mormon record is that intentional, continued wickedness leads to deeper, unrelenting pride, which continues to damage in spite of the obvious.

19 And it came to pass that they were angry with me again, and sought to lay hands upon me; but behold, one of the daughters of Ishmael [*I hope that this is the one Nephi eventually marries*], yea, and also her mother, and one of the sons of Ishmael, did plead with my brethren, insomuch that they did soften their hearts; and they did cease striving to take away my life.

20 And it came to pass that they were sorrowful, because of their wickedness, insomuch that they did bow down before me, and did plead with me that I would forgive them of the thing that they had done against me. [*This is evidence that they are not yet beyond feeling and gives us hope that they will repent and draw close to God after all. The Lord is still working with them and giving them every possible chance to use their agency wisely.*]

21 And it came to pass that I did frankly forgive them all that they had done, and I did exhort them that they would pray unto the Lord their God for forgiveness. And it came to pass that they did so. And after they had done praying unto the Lord we did again travel on our journey towards the tent of our father.

Nephi's complete willingness to forgive his offenders is a marvelous example for all of us. Not only does it give them an opportunity to start over as far as he is concerned, it also frees Nephi's soul, heart, and mind of the heavy burden of ill feelings and harboring bitterness and possibly hatred. Thus, it frees both his offenders and himself of damaging burdens.

22 And it came to pass that we did come down unto the tent of our father. And after I and my brethren and all the house of Ishmael had come down unto the tent of my father, they did give thanks unto the Lord their God; and they did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings unto him.

Assuming that the word “they” in “they did offer sacrifice” includes Laman and Lemuel, it would indicate that they held the priesthood. According to Joseph Fielding Smith, this would have been Melchizedek Priesthood at this time in the Book of Mormon. He taught (**bold** added for emphasis):

“The Nephites were descendants of Joseph. Lehi discovered this when reading the brass plates. He was a descendant of Manasseh, and Ishmael, who accompanied him with his family, was of the tribe of Ephraim (Alma 10:3). Therefore there were no Levites who accompanied Lehi to the Western Hemisphere. Under these conditions the **Nephites officiated by virtue of the Melchizedek Priesthood from the days of Lehi to the days of the appearance of our Savior among them.**

“It is true that Nephi ‘consecrated Jacob and Joseph’ that they should be priests and teachers over the land of the Nephites, but the fact that plural terms priests and teachers were used indicates that this was not a reference to the definite office in the priesthood in either case, but it was a general assignment to teach, direct, and admonish the people. Otherwise the terms priest and teacher would have been given in the singular.

“From these and numerous other passages we learn that it was by the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood that the Nephites administered from the time they left Jerusalem until the time of the coming of Jesus Christ.” (Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 1:124–26)

FIRST NEPHI 8

In this chapter, Lehi will see the vision of the tree of life and will ask his family to come and partake of it with him. Before we proceed to this part of the Book of Mormon account, we will pause and consider a marvelous dream which Joseph Smith’s father had. Have you ever wondered how the Lord prepared the Prophet Joseph Smith’s parents to be the parents of a prophet? Have you ever wondered how they could be so supportive of their prophet son, in the face of such persecution and scorn?

Part of the answer certainly lies in the fact that both of Joseph’s parents were given dreams and visions which specifically foreshadowed what their son would restore. It was tender and wonderful preparation for them in their

role. They were prepared in ways similar to Abraham and Sarah (Isaac), Zacharias and Elizabeth (John the Baptist), even Mary and Joseph (Jesus). You can read more about the dreams and visions of Joseph Smith's parents in *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*. For our purposes here, we will just quote Lucy Mack Smith's account of a dream which Joseph Smith Sr. had in 1811. Watch for similarities between it and Lehi's dream, then you will understand even better why Joseph Smith Sr. knew his son was indeed a prophet called of God to restore the true Church.

"In 1811, we moved from Royalton, Vermont, to the town of Lebanon, New Hampshire. Soon after arriving here, my husband received another very singular vision, which I will relate:

" 'I thought,' said he, 'I was traveling in an open, desolate field, which appeared to be very barren. As I was thus traveling, the thought suddenly came into my mind that I had better stop and reflect upon what I was doing, before I went any farther. So I asked myself, "What motive can I have in traveling here, and what place can this be?" My guide, who was by my side, as before, said, "This is the desolate world; but travel on." The road was so broad and barren that I wondered why I should travel in it; for, said I to myself, "Broad is the road, and wide is the gate that leads to death, and many there be that walk therein; but narrow is the way, and strait is the gate that leads to everlasting life, and few there be that go in thereat." Traveling a short distance further, I came to a narrow path. This path I entered, and, when I had traveled a little way in it, I beheld a beautiful stream of water, which ran from the east to the west. Of this stream, I could see neither the source nor yet the mouth; but as far as my eyes could extend I could see a rope, running along the bank of it, about as high as a man could reach, and beyond me was a low, but very pleasant valley, in which stood a tree such as I had never seen before. It was exceedingly handsome, insomuch that I looked upon it with wonder and admiration. Its beautiful branches spread themselves somewhat like an umbrella, and it bore a kind of fruit, in shape much like a chestnut bur, and as white as snow, or, if possible, whiter. I gazed upon the same with considerable interest, and as I was doing so, the burs or shells commenced opening and shedding their particles, or the fruit which they contained, which was of dazzling whiteness. I drew near and

began to eat of it, and I found it delicious beyond description. As I was eating, I said in my heart, "I cannot eat this alone, I must bring my wife and children, that they may partake with me." Accordingly, I went and brought my family, which consisted of a wife and seven children, and we all commenced eating and praising God for this blessing. We were exceedingly happy, insomuch that our joy could not easily be expressed. While thus engaged, I beheld a spacious building standing opposite the valley which we were in, and it appeared to reach to the very heavens. It was full of doors and windows, and they were all filled with people, who were very finely dressed. When these people observed us in the low valley, under the tree, they pointed the finger of scorn at us, and treated us with all manner of disrespect and contempt. But their contumely we utterly disregarded. I presently turned to my guide and inquired of him the meaning of the fruit that was so delicious. He told me it was the pure love of God, shed abroad in the hearts of all those who love him, and keep his commandments. He then commanded me to go and bring the rest of my children. I told him that we were all there. "No," he replied, "look yonder, you have two more, and you must bring them also." Upon raising my eyes, I saw two small children, standing some distance off. I immediately went to them, and brought them to the tree; upon which they commenced eating with the rest, and we all rejoiced together. The more we ate, the more we seemed to desire, until we even got down upon our knees and scooped it up, eating it by double handfuls. After feasting in this manner a short time, I asked my guide what was the meaning of the spacious building which I saw. He replied, "It is Babylon, it is Babylon, and it must fall. The people in the doors and windows are the inhabitants thereof, who scorn and despise the Saints of God because of their humility." I soon awoke, clapping my hands together for joy.' " (Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, p. 48)

This was one of at least seven dreams or visions which Joseph Smith Sr. had which were written down by his wife. Can you imagine how Father Smith felt when he read the translation of the gold plates which contained the account of Lehi's dream? What a wonderful testimony to the truthfulness of his son's work!

You will note, as we continue now with the Book of Mormon account of

Lehi's dream, that there is a significant difference between Father Smith's dream and Lehi's dream, namely, all of Joseph Smith Senior's children came and partook of the fruit of the tree (in fact, during the dream, Brother and Sister Smith discovered that they were yet to have two more children, which they did), whereas, Laman and Lemuel refused Lehi's invitation to partake. We will read several verses without interruption and then go back and look at quite a bit of symbolism and teaching.

1 AND it came to pass that we had gathered together all manner of seeds of every kind, both of grain of every kind, and also of the seeds of fruit of every kind.

2 And it came to pass that while my father tarried in the wilderness he spake unto us, saying: Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision.

3 And behold, because of the thing which I have seen, I have reason to rejoice in the Lord because of Nephi and also of Sam; for I have reason to suppose that they, and also many of their seed, will be saved.

4 But behold, Laman and Lemuel, I fear exceedingly because of you; for behold, methought I saw in my dream, a dark and dreary wilderness.

5 And it came to pass that I saw a man, and he was dressed in a white robe; and he came and stood before me.

6 And it came to pass that he spake unto me, and bade me follow him [*invited me to follow him*].

7 And it came to pass that as I followed him I beheld myself that I was in a dark and dreary waste.

8 And after I had traveled for the space of many hours in darkness, I began to pray unto the Lord that he would have mercy on me, according to the multitude of his tender mercies.

9 And it came to pass after I had prayed unto the Lord I beheld a large and spacious field.

10 And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.

11 And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen.

12 And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit.

13 And as I cast my eyes round about, that perhaps I might discover my family also, I beheld a river of water; and it ran along, and it was near the tree of which I was partaking the fruit.

14 And I looked to behold from whence it came; and I saw the head thereof a little way off; and at the head thereof I beheld your mother Sariah, and Sam, and Nephi; and they stood as if they knew not whither [*where to*] they should go.

15 And it came to pass that I beckoned unto them; and I also did say unto them with a loud voice that they should come unto me, and partake of the fruit, which was desirable above all other fruit.

16 And it came to pass that they did come unto me and partake of the fruit also.

17 And it came to pass that I was desirous that Laman and Lemuel should come and partake of the fruit also; wherefore, I cast mine eyes towards the head of the river, that perhaps I might see them.

18 And it came to pass that I saw them, but they would not come unto me and partake of the fruit.

We will now go back and note several examples of symbolism in the dream so far plus point out a few other items of instruction. In order to do this, we will reread verses 1 through 18, using **bold** type and notes in parentheses along with our regular format of notes and comments.

1 AND it came to pass that we had gathered together all manner of seeds of every kind, both of grain of every kind, and also of the seeds of fruit of every kind. [*Perhaps symbolic of the fact that we need much specific preparation in order to successfully make our journey to the “promised land” or heaven.*]

2 And it came to pass that while my father tarried in the wilderness he spake unto us, saying: Behold, I have **dreamed a dream**; or, in other words, I have **seen a vision**.

Here, the terms “dream” and “vision” seem interchangeable. There may be a message in this for us. Sometimes we can’t tell the difference between whether or not we are dreaming something, under the direction and inspiration of the Holy Ghost, or actually seeing real people and objects. It is probably best not to spend too much time trying to differentiate, rather, just heed the message.

3 And behold, because of the thing which I have seen, I have reason to rejoice in the Lord because of Nephi and also of Sam; for I have reason to suppose that they, and also many of their seed, will be saved.

4 But behold, **Laman and Lemuel, I fear exceedingly because of you**; for behold, methought I saw in my dream, a dark and dreary wilderness.

Here, we might ask a question: since Lehi saw this about Laman and Lemuel, does it mean that it has to happen? The answer is obviously “No.” If we were to say “Yes,” then we would be endorsing the idea of predestination. But it is certainly a warning to Laman and Lemuel that they need to change their ways. And these two rebellious sons will yet have many opportunities to change their ways. In verse 37 of this chapter, Lehi pleads with Laman and Lemuel to heed his words so that they can partake of the mercies of the Lord and not be “cast off.”

5 And it came to pass that I saw a man, and he was dressed in a white robe; and he came and stood before me.

6 And it came to pass that he spake unto me, and bade me follow him [*invited me to follow him*].

7 And it came to pass that as I followed him I beheld myself that I was in a **dark and dreary waste**.

This could symbolize the world without the gospel of Christ. It could also be symbolic of

our desperate situation in our sins and imperfections without the Atonement of Christ to redeem us. Whatever the case, as the time becomes disturbingly long for Lehi in this “darkness” (verse 8, next), he becomes acutely aware of his need for redemption and prays fervently for “the multitude of His tender mercies” made available through the Atonement.

8 And after I had traveled for the space of many hours in darkness, I began to pray unto the Lord that he would have mercy on me, according to the multitude of his tender mercies.

9 And it came to pass after I had prayed unto the Lord I beheld a large and spacious field.

Verse 20 explains that the “large and spacious field” in verse 9, above, is symbolic of a world. Since the “strait and narrow path” and the “rod of iron” lead to this “large and spacious field” or “world,” we can see at least two symbolic meanings for the field or world. For one thing, they can symbolize the celestial kingdom, the presence of God. Another possible meaning would be that following the “strait and narrow path” and the “rod of iron” leads us to a “large and spacious field” of new opportunities, of new starts in life because of the Savior’s Atonement. This symbolism of fresh starts is taught many places in the scriptures. For instance, in Leviticus 14:7 we read of a living bird being let loose into an “open field” which symbolizes a new, wide open set of opportunities. The living bird is symbolic of a person who has been cleansed by blood (Leviticus 14:6–7.) Being cleansed by blood is symbolic of being cleansed by the Savior’s Atonement. In fact, if you read Leviticus 14:1–9, you will see much Atonement symbolism.

Verse 4 mentions cedar wood (symbolic of the cross), scarlet, and hyssop (both associated with the Savior’s trial and crucifixion; in other words, they are part of symbolism) and thus represent being cleansed by the Savior’s Atonement. In summary, when we qualify for the Atonement to be active in our behalf, we find newness of life and wide open opportunities for progression to celestial exaltation.

10 And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.

Here, again, there is much symbolism, this time with respect to the tree in verse 10. You have already noticed that the Lord uses much symbolism in the scriptures. Some people wish this were not the case, because things can be harder to understand. They wish He would simply come out and say what He means. Well, symbolism can be infinitely deep, and thus allows the Holy Ghost to teach many different lessons from the same object. Such is the case with the tree in verse 10, above. In one context, the tree can symbolize the tree of life mentioned in Genesis 2:9, or the tree of life mentioned in Revelation 2:7 and in Revelation 22:2. These trees can represent nourishment from God, both in mortality as well as in eternity.

Another possible interpretation for the tree that Lehi saw is found in 1 Nephi 11:21–22. Here it seems that the tree is sym-bolic of the Savior. The Savior is the manifestation of the love of God. This love of the Father for us is shown by His giving His Only Begotten Son for us, that we might return to Him.

Yet another use of tree in the Book of Mormon is found in Alma 32. There, a seed is planted in faith, nourished over a period of time, and finally becomes a “tree springing up unto everlasting life” (Alma 32:41.) It yields fruit, which is symbolic of the very best that God has for us, in other words, exaltation.

11 And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white [*symbolic of purity, coming from God*], to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen.

12 And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy [*symbolic, among other things, of the joy the gospel brings*]; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit [*symbolic of the fact that the things of God are the most desirable of all*].

13 And as I cast my eyes round about, that perhaps I might discover my family also, I beheld a river of water [*symbolic of the depths of hell (1 Nephi 12:16); Lehi didn't notice that the water was filthy, but Nephi noticed when he saw the same vision (Nephi 15:26–27)*]; and it ran along, and it was near the tree of which I was partaking the fruit [*symbolic of the fact that Satan puts evil and temptation just as close to the righteous as he possibly can, during our mortal lives*].

14 And I looked to behold from whence it came; and I saw the head thereof a little way off; and at the head thereof I beheld your mother Sariah, and Sam, and Nephi; and they stood as if they knew not whither [*which direction*] they should go. [*This is a reminder that even righteous people can be confused at times as to which direction they should go. We all need the guidance of the Lord's prophets.*]

15 And it came to pass that I beckoned unto them [*motioned to come to me*]; and I also did say unto them with a loud voice that they should come unto me, and partake of the fruit, which was desirable above all other fruit

[symbolic of the love of God, manifested by His giving His Son for us. Also, a reminder that exaltation is by far the most desirable glory in which to spend eternity].

16 And it came to pass that they did come unto me and partake of the fruit also.

17 And it came to pass that I was desirous that Laman and Lemuel should come and partake of the fruit also; wherefore, I cast mine eyes towards the head of the river, that perhaps I might see them.

18 And it came to pass that I saw them, but they would not come unto me and partake of the fruit. *[Symbolic of the fact that Laman and Lemuel refused to accept the gospel and participate actively and faithfully in it.]*

Having repeated verses 1–18 for teaching purposes, we now continue with verse 19.

19 And I beheld a rod of iron *[symbolic of the word of God; see 1 Nephi 11:25]*, and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood.

20 And I also beheld a strait and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron, even to the tree by which I stood; and it also led by the head of the fountain, unto a large and spacious field, as if it had been a world.

The phrase “strait and narrow path” in verse 20, above, is an interesting one. Note the spelling of “strait.” It is not “straight.” “Strait” means “narrow” or “restricted.” So, in effect, we have the phrase “narrow and narrow path.” It has also been suggested that the phrase can mean “narrow and narrowing” path. Perhaps the phrase itself contains an important lesson for us. It is that as the Holy Ghost reveals “line upon line” to us, the “path” gets narrower and narrower, thus leading us to exaltation.

In fact I had an interesting experience with this concept. A friend of mine had gotten way off the path for a time in his life. Through repentance and much effort, he regained his membership in the Church and was doing very well, having served a mission with his wife and done much good.

However, one day he came to see me in my office. He expressed grave concern about his chances for gaining celestial exaltation, whereas, he had been very confident about his chances for several years now. His concern boiled down to this: He was now noticing flaws and imperfections in his daily living which he had not even noticed before this time in his life. I guess I startled him when I said, “Rejoice!”

As we chatted, I explained that the fact that he was now noticing things heretofore unnoticed by him in his life was evidence that he was now much closer to the Spirit than before. He was drawing closer and closer to God, and the “light” was shining much brighter on the path so that he was noticing and worrying about littler things in his life. It was a sign that he was doing much better! When he realized this, he paused, smiled, breathed a big sigh of relief, and left the office very happy. He has since continued to progress and serve very effectively in the Church and community. Such is the power of travel along the “narrow and narrowing” path.

Next, we will see four different groups or categories of people in Lehi’s dream. The first three will have many similarities, but only one will successfully make it to salvation. The fourth group will not even get to the path. In order to study these groups, we will use **bold** to draw attention to things we want to especially consider.

Group One: (verses 21–23)

21 And I saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were **pressing forward**, that they might **obtain the path** which led unto the tree by which I stood.

22 And it came to pass that **they did come forth, and commence in the path which led to the tree.**

So far, those in Group One want to come unto Christ. They have successfully begun to “press forward” in their lives toward that goal. In fact, they have actually entered onto the “strait and narrow path” which leads to eternal life. From 2 Nephi 31:17–18, we understand this to mean that they had been baptized into the Church. These verses explain that the “gate” which leads to entrance to the “strait and narrow path” which leads to “eternal life” is baptism. Next, sadly, these people, who had such good intentions to begin with, will be led astray and off the path.

23 And it came to pass that there arose a **mist of darkness** [*symbolic of the “temptations of the devil” according to 1 Nephi 12:17*]; yea, even an exceedingly great mist of darkness, insomuch that **they** who had commenced in the path **did lose their way**, that they **wandered off and were lost.**

Group Two: (verses 24–28)

Those in this group start out like the ones in Group One, “pressing forward,” but they make it farther along the path. These make it through the “mist of darkness” by holding on to the iron rod. Do you remember what the iron rod symbolizes? It is the “word of God” (see 1 Nephi 11:25). How do we obtain God’s word? From reading and studying the scriptures and listening to the words of our living prophets. Therefore, we conclude that

the people in Group Two were strengthened by the scriptures and the words of their prophets which enabled them to successfully make it through the temptations of the devil as they progressed along the “strait and narrow path.” In fact, these actually make it to the tree and partake of the fruit. In other words, among other things, they actually have testimonies of the gospel.

24 And it came to pass that I beheld others **pressing forward**, and they came forth and **caught hold of the end of the rod of iron**; and **they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron**, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.

One thing we are taught in the next verses is that Satan doesn't quit working on people who have reached “the tree” and partaken of its “fruit.” He seems to have some especially powerful weapons designed to take them out, to destroy them. One of these is peer pressure.

25 And **after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about** [*looked around*] **as if they were ashamed.**

26 And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water [*filthiness; see 1 Nephi 15:26–27*], **a great and spacious building**; and it stood as it were **in the air**, high above the earth.

Two things. First, the righteous were separated from the proud, worldly occupants of the “great and spacious building” by filthiness. Second, the building had no foundation! It is not safe to be in! It will fall, guaranteed! (See 1 Nephi 11:36.)

27 And it was **filled with people**, both old and young, both male and female; and **their manner of dress was exceedingly fine** [*they were materialistic and full of pride; see 1 Nephi 11:36*]; and they were in the attitude of **mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit.** [*Symbolic of peer pressure.*]

28 And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and **they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.**

Those people in Group One “wandered away” or “wandered off,” whereas those in Group Two “fell away.” Perhaps one lesson we could learn from this is that the more knowledge and testimony you have, the farther and faster you fall if you choose to break your commitments and covenants.

29 And now I, Nephi, do not speak all the words of my father.

Group Three: (verse 30 and the last part of verse 33)

Those in this group are also “pressing forward” like those in the first two groups. These “caught hold of the end of the rod of iron” as did those in Group Two. So what are the differences between those in the third group which Lehi saw and those in the first two groups? If we learn our lesson here, from what Nephi chose to engrave for us on the small plates of Nephi, we will have some keys to successfully returning home to our Father in Heaven. We will **bold** these “keys” and make brief teaching comments in parentheses. Before we do, please note that the members in this group do not “wander off” nor do they “fall away.” They remain faithful. They are successful. They obtain the prize of eternal life.

30 But, to be short in writing, behold, he saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, **continually** [*not just when they felt like being faithful*] holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and **fell down** [*they remained humble*] and partook of the fruit of the tree. [*And, according to the last lines of verse 33, they **continued partaking of the fruit**, with Lehi and those of his family who remained faithful, plus, they “**heeded . . . not**” those who “did point the finger of scorn” at the righteous. In other words, they **did not yield to peer pressure** to become involved in wickedness.*]

Group Four: (verses 31–33)

Whereas the people in the first three groups appear to be members of the Church, those in Group Four do not even get on the “strait and narrow path.” They do not seem to have definite direction, nor do they “press forward.” Rather, they “feel” their way (verse 31) and “wander” (verse 32.)

31 And he also saw other multitudes **feeling their way** towards that great and spacious building.

32 And it came to pass that many were **drowned in the depths of the fountain** [*were overcome by filthiness*]; and many were lost from his view, **wandering** in strange roads [*well-used roads which led away from God*].

33 And great was the multitude that did enter into that strange building [*the great and spacious building, verse 26–27*]. And after they did enter into that building they did point the finger of scorn at me and those that were

partaking of the fruit also; but **we heeded them not**. [*This is a great “short sermon” on how to deal with negative peer pressure.*]

34 These are the words of my father: For as many as heeded them [*the occupants of the great and spacious building*], had fallen away.

We might ask ourselves if we have ever entered the “great and spacious building.” The answer is probably “Yes” for each of us. If we have ever said to a fellow member of the Church, “What’s the matter? Can’t you handle it?” when they were offended by inappropriate language, music, or perhaps a movie, then we stepped into the “great and spacious building” for a few dangerous moments. If we have ever tried to talk a friend or an acquaintance into departing from his or her higher standards for even a brief visit with us into foolish or forbidden paths, we have entered this treacherous structure. If we have ever balked at gathering for family prayer or home evening, or invited someone to join with us in skipping a Church meeting, we have entered this worldly palace and joined those who scorn the righteous. Gratefully, there is repentance, and hopefully, we will stay on the safe side of the river, by the tree, from now on.

35 And Laman and Lemuel partook not of the fruit, said my father.

36 And it came to pass after my father had spoken all the words of his dream or vision, which were many [*there is apparently much more about the dream which is not recorded here*], he said unto us, because of these things which he saw in a vision, he exceedingly feared for Laman and Lemuel; yea, he feared lest they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord [*this is yet another opportunity for Laman and Lemuel to heed their prophet father and change their ways.*]

37 And he did exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and not cast them off; yea, my father did preach unto them.

38 And after he had preached unto them, and also prophesied unto them of many things, he bade them to keep the commandments of the Lord; and he did cease speaking unto them.

There is a bit of a message or lesson for us in the fact that Lehi “did cease speaking unto them.” If we strive to listen to the Lord and His prophets, and try to hear and obey the promptings of the Holy Ghost, as did Nephi and others, there will be constant communication to us from on high. However, if we rebel and murmur constantly, as did Laman and Lemuel, there comes a time when the Spirit of the Lord will begin to withdraw from us. This is verified in 2 Nephi 26:11 wherein we are told, “For the Spirit of the Lord

will not always strive with man.”

FIRST NEPHI 9

In 1 Nephi 1:17, Nephi told us that he would first “make an abridgment (a summary) of the record of my father” upon the small plates, and then he would tell us of his own life. As of the end of 1 Nephi, chapter 8, he has now finished his basic summary or abridgment of his father’s record. Chapter 9 is a transition between Nephi’s abridgment of his father’s record and the beginning of his account of his own life and proceedings which he engraved also on the small plates. In this chapter, Nephi mentions the small set of plates and the large set of plates a number of times. As mentioned in the introduction to your Book of Mormon, these are the small plates of Nephi and the large plates of Nephi. The small plates contained more of the spiritual matters and gospel teachings and less of the day-to-day history and secular doings of the people. The large plates contained more of the history of these Book of Mormon peoples.

1 AND all these things did my father see, and hear, and speak, as he dwelt in a tent, in the valley of Lemuel, and also a great many more things, which cannot be written upon these plates [*the small plates*].

2 And now, as I have spoken concerning these plates [*the small plates*], behold they are not the plates [*the large plates*] upon which I make a full account of the history of my people; for the plates [*the large plates*] upon which I make a full account of my people I have given the name of Nephi; wherefore, they are called the plates of Nephi [*the large plates*], after mine own name; and these plates [*the small plates*] also are called the plates of Nephi.

3 Nevertheless, I have received a commandment of the Lord that I should make these plates [*the small plates*], for the special purpose that there should be an account engraven of the ministry of my people [*in other words, more of the spiritual things and teachings of the prophets*].

4 Upon the other plates [*the large plates*] should be engraven an account of

the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions of my people [*in other words, the history and day-to-day happenings, political history, etc.*]; wherefore these plates [*the small plates*] are for the more part of the ministry; and the other plates [*the large plates*] are for the more part of the reign of the kings and the wars and contentions of my people.

5 Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates [*the small plates*] for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not.

6 But the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words. And thus it is. Amen.

In verse 5, above, Nephi tells us he does not know why the Lord commanded him to make the small plates and keep a separate account on them. He is a wonderful example of simple, pure faith and obedience to the commandments of God (see verse 6). Can you imagine how much extra work it would take to keep this commandment? He would have to find ore, smelt it to get the metal out, carefully pound the metal into thin enough sheets to enable engraving, and then painstakingly engrave this separate record. This would be very time-consuming! But he did it.

We now know one of the major reasons why this separate set of plates was needed. The Lord knows the future. He knew that Martin Harris would lose the 116 manuscript pages (see Doctrine and Covenants, sections 3 and 10, including the headings for each section). When Joseph Smith was once again permitted to translate the Book of Mormon plates, he was told not to go back and retranslate the portion of the gold plates he had translated while Martin Harris served as his scribe (see D&C 10:30). The lost 116 manuscript pages were the written translation from the large plates of Nephi (see D&C 10:38, including footnote 38a).

Rather than retranslating from the large plates of Nephi (in the stack of plates Joseph had been given by Moroni on the Hill Cumorah), Joseph was instructed to use the small plates of Nephi, which were also contained in the gold plates, and to translate from them to cover the same period of time dealt with in the lost 116 pages (see D&C 10:39–41). In order to summarize what we have said above, we will now quote from D&C 10:38–45, using **bold** for emphasis as well as giving a few notes in parentheses.

D&C 10:38–45

38 And now, verily I say unto you, that an account of those things that you have written [*the 116 manuscript pages*], which have gone out of your hands [*which you have lost*] is engraven upon the plates of Nephi [*the large plates of Nephi*];

39 Yea, and you remember it was said in those writings that a more particular account was given of these things upon the plates of Nephi [*the small plates of Nephi*].

40 And now, because the account which is engraven upon the plates of Nephi [*the small plates*] is more particular concerning the things which, in my wisdom, I would bring to the knowledge of the people in this account—[*the Book of Mormon*]

41 Therefore, you shall translate the engravings which are on the plates of Nephi [*the small plates*], down even till you come to the reign of king Benjamin, or until you come to that which you have translated, which you have retained [*which didn't get lost*];

The instructions in verse 41, above, are in effect saying that the first six books in the Book of Mormon, or 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Jarom, and Omni, are the translation of the small plates. They cover the time down to the reign of King Benjamin, which is mentioned in The Words of Mormon and is reported in Mosiah, chapters 1 through 6. The Words of Mormon is the small book within the Book of Mormon which provides the transition from the small plates of Nephi to Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi.

42 And behold, you shall publish it [*the small plates*] as the record of Nephi; and thus I will confound those who have altered my words.

43 I will not suffer that they shall destroy my work; yea, **I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil.**

44 Behold, they [*those who stole the 116 pages*] have only got a part, or an abridgment of the account of Nephi.

45 Behold, there are **many things engraven upon the plates of Nephi** [*the small plates*] **which do throw greater views upon my gospel** [*which teach and explain more things about the gospel*]; therefore, it is wisdom in me that you should translate this first part of the engravings of Nephi [*the small plates*], and send forth in this work [*the Book of Mormon*].

It must be quite frustrating for the devil to see that we actually came out ahead when he engineered the theft of the 116 pages. The lost manuscript pages contained more history and secular proceedings of the Book of Mormon people; whereas, the replacement translation from the small plates teaches us more about the gospel. This situation reminds us of Satan's attempts to ruin things in the Garden of Eden. Actually, his plot blessed our lives tremendously by getting things moving so that we could enter mortality. Perhaps such failures to stop the gospel plan are alluded to in the phrase "dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life" (Genesis 3:14; Moses 4:20). A modern translation of this phrase could be that Satan will always be eating the Savior's dust, or that the devil will always, ultimately, be left behind. At any rate, we have been greatly blessed by the loss of the 116 manuscript pages.

FIRST NEPHI 10

As Nephi now proceeds to engrave an account of his own life and ministry on the small plates, he will summarize many things his father prophesied as context and background for his own writings.

1 AND now I, Nephi, proceed to give an account upon these plates [*the small plates*] of my proceedings, and my reign and ministry; wherefore, to proceed with mine account, I must speak somewhat of the things of my father, and also of my brethren [*I will give you a context and setting for the things I will write later*].

2 For behold, it came to pass after my father had made an end of speaking the words of his dream [*as recorded in 1 Nephi 8*], and also of exhorting them to all diligence, he spake unto them concerning the Jews—

Nephi now records some very specific prophecies which his prophet father, Lehi, gave about the Jews and their coming captivity, about the Savior, John the Baptist, the Atonement, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the scattering and gathering of Israel, and the restoration of the gospel. All these things and more are contained in the remaining twenty verses in this short chapter.

3 That after they [*the Jews*] should be [*had been*] destroyed, even that great city Jerusalem, and many be carried away captive into Babylon [*a powerful enemy nation about five hundred miles east of Jerusalem; basically, where modern-day Iraq exists today*], according to the own due time of the Lord, they [*the Jews*] should [*would*] return again, yea, even be brought back out of captivity; and after they should be brought back out of captivity they should possess again the land of their inheritance.

As you have no doubt already noticed, although the prophecies in verse 3, above, are literal, meaning they literally happened, there is also much scriptural symbolism here, which is often used elsewhere in the scriptures. For instance:

Jews can be symbolic of the Lord's covenant people.

Babylon is often symbolic of worldliness, wickedness, Satan's kingdom.

Returning from Babylon often symbolizes repentance and returning to the Lord.

Brought out of captivity symbolizes the Atonement of Christ and the gospel which leads us to the Atonement.

Possessing again the land of their inheritance is symbolic of attaining celestial exaltation, which is the “birthright” of each of us since we are the spirit children of our Heavenly Parents (see the second paragraph of “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”).

4 Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem [*Lehi and his family left in 600 B.C.*], a prophet [*Christ*] would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world.

5 And he [*Lehi*] also spake concerning the prophets, how great a number had testified of these things, concerning this Messiah, of whom he had spoken, or this Redeemer of the world.

6 Wherefore, all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state [*because of the fall of Adam*], and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer. [*In other words, without the Savior, we would all be permanently lost.*]

7 And he spake also concerning a prophet [*John the Baptist*] who should [*would*] come before the Messiah, to prepare the way of the Lord—

8 Yea, even he should go forth and cry in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; for there standeth one [*Christ*] among you whom ye know not; and he is mightier than I [*John the Baptist*], whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose [*perhaps meaning “I am not even worthy to unbuckle His sandals in order to take them off to wash His feet”*]. And much spake [*spoke*] my father concerning this thing.

9 And my father said he [*John the Baptist*] should [*would*] baptize in Bethabara, beyond Jordan [*on the east side of the Jordan River*] and he also said he should baptize with water; even that he should baptize the Messiah with water.

10 And after he had baptized the Messiah with water, he should behold [*see*] and bear record that he had baptized the Lamb of God [*Christ*], who should take away the sins of the world [*Christ’s Atonement makes*

exaltation available to everyone in the whole world, contingent upon personal repentance and living the gospel].

The prophecies in the above verses are very specific, reminding us that the Lord does know the future. More such prophecies follow next.

11 And it came to pass after my father had spoken these words he spake unto my brethren concerning the gospel which should be [*would be*] preached among the Jews, and also concerning the dwindling of the Jews in unbelief [*apostasy*]. And after they had slain the Messiah [*crucified Christ*], who should come, and after he had been slain he should rise from the dead, and should make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles [*the non-Jews; the non-Israelites*].

12 Yea, even my father spake much concerning the Gentiles, and also concerning the house of Israel, that they should be compared like unto an olive-tree, whose branches should be broken off and should be scattered upon all the face of the earth.

Comparing the house of Israel (the tribes of Israel) to an olive tree involves interesting and significant symbolism. It is used often in scripture. We will take time here to go over some of this symbolism. We will use excerpts from the Institute of Religion *Book of Mormon Student Manual*, and use **bold** for emphasis.

“The use of the **olive tree as a symbol for the house of Israel** is an excellent example of how God uses symbolism to teach his children gospel laws and principles. For centuries the olive tree has been associated with peace. War and its grim attendants of destruction—rape of the land, siege, and death—were hardly conducive to the cultivation of **olive orchards, that require many years of careful husbandry to bring into full production**. When the dove returned to the ark, it carried an olive leaf in its beak, as though to symbolize that God was again at peace with the earth (see Genesis 8:11). The olive branch was used in ancient Greece and Rome to signify peace, and it is still used in that sense in the great seal of the United States where the American eagle is shown grasping an olive branch in its talons. The only true source of peace is Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. His peace comes through obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. These laws and ordinances are given to the world through the house of Israel, symbolized by the olive tree. Someone once said that Israel was not chosen to be an *uplifted* people, but an *uplifting* people.

“There is further **symbolic significance in the cultivation of an olive tree**. If the green slip of an olive tree is merely planted and allowed to grow, it develops into the wild olive, a bush that grows without control into a tangle of limbs and branches producing only a small, worthless fruit (Moldenke and Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible*, p. 159). To become the

productive 'tame' olive tree, the main stem of the wild tree must be cut back completely and a branch from a tame olive tree grafted into the stem of the wild one. **With careful pruning and cultivating** the tree will begin to produce its first fruit in about seven years, but it will not become fully productive for nearly fifteen years.

"In other words, **the olive tree cannot become productive by itself**; it requires grafting by the husbandman (the farmer; symbolic of God) to bring it into production. Throughout its history **Israel** has demonstrated the remarkable aptness **characterized by the symbol of the olive tree**. **When they gave themselves to their God for pruning and grafting the Israelites prospered and bore much fruit, but when they turned from Christ, the Master of the vineyard, and sought to become their own source of life and sustenance they became wild and unfruitful.**

"**Two other characteristics** of the olive tree further illustrate how it is an appropriate symbol for Israel. **First**, though requiring nearly fifteen years to come into full production, **an olive tree may produce fruit for centuries**. Some trees now growing in the Holy Land have been producing fruit abundantly for at least four hundred years. The **second** amazing quality of the tree is that **as it finally grows old and begins to die, the roots send up a number of new green shoots that, if grafted and pruned, will mature into full-grown olive trees. The root of the tree will also send up shoots after the tree is cut down**. Thus, while the tree itself may produce fruit for centuries, **the root of the tree may go on producing fruit and new trees for millennia**. It is believed that some of the ancient olive trees located in Israel today have come from trees that were ancient during Christ's mortal ministry.

"Zenos was not the only prophet to use the olive tree as a symbol for the chosen people of God. Jeremiah, foreseeing the coming destruction of the Jews by Babylonia, compared the covenant people to a green olive tree consumed by fire (see Jeremiah 11:16). The apostle Paul used a brief allegory almost identical to that of Zenos's to warn the Roman Christians against pride as they compared their favored position to that of the Jews (see Romans 11:16–24). In modern revelation, the Lord uses the parable of a vineyard and olive trees to show his will concerning the redemption of Zion (see D&C 101:43–58)." (*Book of Mormon Student Manual*, pp. 47–48).

Now, we will continue with Nephi's summary of his father's prophecies.

13 Wherefore, he said it must needs be [*it is necessary*] that we [*those journeying away from Jerusalem with Lehi at this time*] should be led with one accord into the land of promise, unto the fulfilling of the word of the Lord, that we should be scattered upon all the face of the earth. [*In other words, Nephi is telling us that he and his people are part of the fulfillment of the prophecy that Israel will be scattered throughout the world.*]

14 And after the house of Israel [*the twelve tribes of Israel*] should be scattered they should be gathered together again; or, in fine [*in summary*],

after the Gentiles had received the fulness of the Gospel [*after the restoration of the gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith*], the natural branches of the olive-tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer.

The gathering of Israel, spoken of above, is certainly going on at an intense pace today. This gathering is both literal and spiritual. New converts as well as lifelong members are being “gathered” into the stakes of the Church wherever they live throughout the world today. However, it is not sufficient to be gathered physically. We must be gathered spiritually, in order to literally be gathered back to the presence of the Father in celestial glory and exaltation.

15 And after this manner of language did my father prophesy and speak unto my brethren, and also many more things which I do not write in this book [*the small plates*]; for I have written as many of them as were expedient for me in mine other book [*the large plates*].

16 And all these things, of which I have spoken, were done as my father dwelt in a tent, in the valley of Lemuel.

Next, we will be taught many things by Nephi, including how to get our own testimony. We will **bold** some things for emphasis.

17 And it came to pass after I, Nephi, having **heard all the words** [*we must hear the gospel*] of my father, concerning the things which he saw in a vision, and also the things which **he spake by the power of the Holy Ghost** [*we must feel the power of the Holy Ghost bearing witness to what we have heard*], which power he received by **faith on the Son of God** [*we must have faith in Christ*]*—and the Son of God was the Messiah who should come—I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know* [*we must have a sincere, honest desire to gain a testimony*] of these things, by the power of **the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him** [*such a testimony is available to all*], as well in times of old as in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men.

18 For he is the same yesterday, today, and forever [*the plan of salvation and the requirements for exaltation have always been the same and always*

will be]; and the way is prepared for all men from the foundation of the world [*the plan of salvation was prepared in premortality*], if it so be that they repent and come unto him.

19 For **he that diligently seeketh shall find** [*it requires diligence and time to gain a deep, abiding testimony*]; and the mysteries of God [*the basics of the gospel*] shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round.

The use of the phrase “the course of the Lord is one eternal round” in verse 19, above, invites many interpretations. For instance, it can mean that God uses the same plan of salvation for all His children on all His worlds. Another interesting aspect of this phrase is that the path which leads to exaltation will always use the same principles and ordinances of the gospel for each individual who attains it.

It can also mean that He always brings each group of His spirit offspring through the same “eternal round”: First, “eternal” premortal life—intelligence, which was not created (D&C 93:29) and therefore was forever; second, spirit birth by heavenly parents (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” paragraph two); third, mortality on an earth—which is not eternal, but is part of eternity; fourth, resurrection, which places his children in an eternal state of being again.

The foregoing is a bit complex, so let’s just summarize it by saying that “one eternal round” can mean “from eternity to mortality, then back to eternity.”

We are taught that we will use this same “eternal round” or plan of salvation for our spirit children when we become gods. The First Presidency made the following statement on this subject in 1916, as follows (**bold** added for emphasis):

“Only **resurrected and glorified beings can become parents of spirit offspring**. Only such exalted souls have reached maturity in the appointed course of eternal life; and **the spirits born to them** in the eternal worlds **will pass in due sequence through the several stages or estates by which the glorified parents have attained exaltation.**” (Smith, Lund, and Smith, 1916 First Presidency Statement, p. 942.)

Next, Nephi teaches the principle of accountability and warns of the consequences of foolish choices. (**Bold** added for emphasis.)

20 Therefore remember, O man, **for all thy doings thou shalt be brought into judgment.**

21 Wherefore, if ye have sought to do wickedly in the days of your probation [*during your mortal lives*], then ye are found unclean before the

judgment-seat [*at the final judgment*] of God; and no unclean thing can dwell with God [*no one can dwell with God without having been made clean by the Atonement of Christ*]; wherefore, ye must be cast off forever [*you would be kept out of God's presence forever*].

22 And the Holy Ghost giveth authority that I should speak these things, and deny them not.

FIRST NEPHI 11

In the previous chapter, verse 17, Nephi told us he desired to “see, hear, and know” the things his father saw. His desire will be granted by the Lord; 1 Nephi, 11–14 provide us with a record of Nephi’s vision, wherein he saw what his father saw (see 1 Nephi 14:29.) As we begin this next chapter, Nephi gives us three keys to receiving revelation. We will **bold** these for emphasis.

1 FOR it came to pass after I had **desired** to know the things that my father had seen, and **believing** that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat **pondering** in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain, which I never had before seen, and upon which I never had before set my foot.

Many of us who desire revelation and help from the Lord do pretty well at doing the first two things Nephi mentioned above. But when it comes to “pondering,” it seems that we don’t do well at taking the time or making the time to do so. In our fast-paced lives, many of us are out of the habit of providing peaceful, non-pressured time for the Holy Ghost to get a word in edgewise into our minds. Thus, we miss out on much personal inspiration which we would otherwise receive.

Another thing we might note in verse 1 is the phrase “exceedingly high mountain.” This is symbolic, among other things, of perspective. It is symbolic of seeing things as God sees them. If we are willing, the Lord gives us, through His Spirit, what we can call “high mountain experiences.” During such times, the Lord takes our minds up “high,” where we can see things from a much broader perspective. Joseph Smith had several “high mountain experiences” such as the First Vision, the visits from Moroni and other ancient prophets, the vision of the three degrees of glory (D&C 76), the revelation on celestial marriage, and many others.

The interesting thing about “high mountain experiences” in our lives is that we have to

come back down to earth, so to speak, and live in a normal, everyday world with the daily tasks and challenges which are the lot of all mortals. However, once we have been on some “high mountains,” daily life can be much more meaningful and our ability to be patient and cope with trials and difficulties is much increased. We see this exemplified in the case of Joseph Smith and the Liberty Jail (see D&C 121–23). Something marvelous happens to the Prophet between the time he cries out in humble desperation at the beginning of section 121 and the ending of section 123 (see verse 17). Without once being told that the Lord would have him out of this dungeon within three weeks, Joseph’s outlook changes completely.

You may wish to read D&C sections 121 through 123 in one sitting and note this change in perspective, while he still has to deal with the same dismal circumstances. You will see how the Lord takes Joseph’s mind up into a “high mountain,” as it were, and thus changes everything that is important.

Nephi will experience revelation and gain new perspectives while he is on this “exceedingly high mountain” which will prepare and qualify him to be a tremendous prophet and leader of his people.

It is interesting to see how “interactive” this vision is for Nephi. An active dialogue with questions and answers takes place between him and the Spirit as we will see, starting in verse 2. We will again use some **bold** for teaching purposes.

Question:

2 And the Spirit said unto me: Behold, **what desirest thou?**

Answer:

3 And I said: I desire **to behold** [*see*] **the things which my father saw.**

Question:

4 And the Spirit said unto me: **Believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken?**

Answer:

5 And I said: **Yea, thou knowest that I believe all the words of my father.**

6 And when I had spoken these words, the Spirit cried with a loud voice, saying: Hosanna [*“save now”*; see *Bible Dictionary*, p. 704] to the Lord, the most high God; for he is God over all the earth, yea, even above all. And

blessed art thou, Nephi, **because thou believest in the Son of the most high God**; wherefore, **thou shalt behold** [*see*] the things which thou hast desired.

7 And behold this thing shall be given unto thee for a sign, that after thou hast beheld the tree which bore the fruit which thy father tasted, thou shalt also behold a man [*Christ*] descending out of heaven, and him shall ye witness [*you will see Him*]; and after ye have witnessed him ye shall bear record [*bear testimony; stand as a witness*] that it is the Son of God.

8 And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me: Look! And I looked and beheld a tree; and it was like unto the tree which my father had seen; and the beauty thereof was far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty; and the whiteness thereof did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow. [*In other words, the love of God the Father—as demonstrated by His giving His Son to atone for our sins and guide us back to Him—is far beyond our ability to comprehend and is by far the most desirable thing of all!*]

9 And it came to pass after I had seen the tree, I said unto the Spirit: I behold thou hast shown unto me the tree [*symbolic of the love of God; also symbolic of Christ Himself, who is a manifestation of the love of the Father*] which is precious above all.

Question:

10 And he said unto me: **What desirest thou?**

Answer:

11 And I said unto him: **To know the interpretation thereof**—for I spake unto him as a man speaketh; for I beheld that he was in the form of a man; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another.

Throughout the years, many members of the Church have asked who the “Spirit of the Lord” is in verse 11, above. Some say that it is the premortal Christ, while others believe him to be the Holy Ghost. Apostle James E. Talmage taught the following about this:

“The Holy Ghost, called also Spirit, and Spirit of the Lord, Spirit of God, Comforter, and

Spirit of Truth, is not tabernacled in a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of spirit; yet we know that the Spirit has manifested Himself in the form of a man (see 1 Nephi 11:11).” (Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, p. 38)

“That the Spirit of the Lord is capable of manifesting Himself in the form and figure of man, is indicated by the wonderful interview between the Spirit and Nephi, in which He revealed Himself to the prophet, questioned him concerning his desires and belief, instructed him in the things of God, speaking face to face with the man. ‘I spake unto him,’ says Nephi, ‘as a man speaketh; for I beheld that he was in the form of a man; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another.’” (Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, p. 144).

12 And it came to pass that he said unto me: Look! And I looked as if to look upon him, and I saw him not; for he had gone from before my presence. [*Another “guide” will join Nephi in verse 14.*]

Next, Nephi will be shown, in effect, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the New Testament. We will **bold** many of the things he saw to emphasize that he was seeing what we know as the first four books of the New Testament.

13 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld [*saw*] the great city of **Jerusalem**, and also other cities. And I beheld the city of **Nazareth**; and in the city of Nazareth I beheld a **virgin** [*Mary, mother of Jesus*], and she was exceedingly fair and white.

14 And it came to pass that I saw the heavens open; and an angel [*Nephi’s guide for this portion of the vision*] came down and stood before me; and he said unto me: Nephi, what beholdest thou?

15 And I said unto him: **A virgin** [*Mary*], **most beautiful and fair above all other virgins**. [*Mary’s highly respected status is strongly emphasized in this vision. This is another witness for the fact that she was a virgin, as stated in the Bible.*]

16 And he said unto me: Knowest thou the condescension of God [*the Father*]?

The phrase “condescension of God” will be used twice in this chapter. In verse 16, above, it means that the Father is kind enough to work with us at our level of understanding. This phrase will be used again in verse 26, but this time it will refer to Jesus, the Son of God, and it will mean that Christ, a God, submitted to the trials of mortal life in order to provide salvation for us. This is explained in the *Book of Mormon Student Manual*, used in the

institutes of religion of the Church, as well as at BYU and other Church schools, as follows (**bold** used for emphasis):

“In 1 Nephi 11: 26, Nephi is taught a second time about **the condescension of God**. The first time this subject was taught (verse 16) it was followed by a vision of the birth of the Son of God. This time it is followed by a vision of his ministry. Elder Bruce R. McConkie commented on the **two different senses of the phrase** in this way:

“ ‘The condescension of God (verse 16) (**meaning the Father**) consists in the fact that though he is an exalted, perfected, glorified Personage, he became the personal and literal Father of a mortal Offspring born of mortal woman. And the condescension of God (verse 26) (**meaning the Son**) consists in the fact that though he himself is the Lord Omnipotent, the very Being who created the earth and all things that in it are, yet being born of mortal woman, he submitted to all the trials of mortality, suffering “temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death” (Mosiah 3:5–8), finally being put to death in a most ignominious manner.’ ” (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 155, as quoted in the 1989 edition of the *Book of Mormon Student Manual*, p. 32)

17 And I said unto him: I know that he [*the Father*] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things [*a very wise answer by Nephi*].

18 And he said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh. [*The angel is explaining the vision and here tells Nephi that he is seeing Mary, the mortal mother of Christ.*]

19 And it came to pass that I beheld [*I saw*] that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look!

20 And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child [*Jesus*] in her arms.

21 And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of **the tree** which thy father saw?

22 And I answered him, saying: Yea [*Yes*], it is **the love of God**, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things.

23 And he spake unto me, saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul.

Next, Nephi will be shown the Savior's mortal ministry, plus, he will be shown the interpretation of many things which his father, Lehi, saw when he was shown this vision.

24 And after he had said these words, he said unto me: Look! And I looked, and **I beheld the Son of God going forth among the children of men**; and I saw many fall down at his feet and worship him.

25 And it came to pass that I beheld that **the rod of iron**, which my father had seen, **was the word of God**, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; which waters are a representation of the love of God; and I also beheld that **the tree of life was a representation of the love of God**.

26 And the angel said unto me again: Look and behold the condescension of God [*the willingness of God the Son, Christ, to become mortal and redeem us; see note by verse 16, above*]!

27 And I looked and beheld the Redeemer of the world, of whom my father had spoken; and I also beheld the prophet [*John the Baptist*] who should [*who would*] prepare the way before him [*Jesus*]. And the Lamb of God [*Jesus*] went forth and was baptized of [*by*] him [*John the Baptist*]; and after he was baptized, I beheld the heavens open, and the Holy Ghost come down out of heaven and abide upon him [*Jesus*] in the form of a dove.

The "form of a dove" here is symbolism. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained this symbolism as follows, as he taught of the mission of John the Baptist (**bold** added for emphasis):

"First. He (John the Baptist) was entrusted with a divine mission of preparing the way before the face of the Lord. Whoever had such a trust committed to him before or since? No man. Second. He was entrusted with the important mission, and it was required at his hands, to baptize the Son of Man. Whoever had the honor of doing that? Whoever had so great a privilege and glory? Whoever led the Son of God into the waters of baptism, and had the privilege of **beholding the Holy Ghost descend in the form of a dove, or rather in the sign of the dove**, in witness of that administration? The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in the sign of a dove. **The Holy Ghost is a personage, and is in the form of a personage. It does not confine itself to the form of the dove, but in sign of the dove.** [This is not a misprint, with *the* accidentally left out; the Prophet said "in sign of the dove."] **The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a dove**, but the sign of a dove was

given to John to signify the truth of the deed—as the dove is an emblem or token of truth and innocence.” (Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 275)

28 And I beheld that he [*the Savior*] went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory; and the multitudes were gathered together to hear him; and I beheld that they cast him out from among them. [*Nephi is shown that the people rejected Christ.*]

29 And I also beheld twelve others [*the Twelve Apostles in the days of Jesus*] following him. And it came to pass that they were carried away in the Spirit from before my face, and I saw them not.

30 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me again, saying: Look! And I looked, and I beheld the heavens open again, and I saw angels descending upon the children of men; and they did minister unto them. [*From this we learn that those on the other side of the veil are very much involved in what goes on here.*]

31 And he spake unto me again, saying: Look! And I looked, and I beheld the Lamb of God going forth among the children of men. And I beheld multitudes of people who were sick, and who were afflicted with all manner of diseases, and with devils and unclean spirits; and the angel spake and showed all these things unto me. And they were healed by the power of the Lamb of God; and the devils and the unclean spirits were cast out.

The literal physical healings shown in verse 31, above, are symbolic of the power of the Savior to heal our spiritual wounds and sicknesses. He can heal “all manner of (spiritual) diseases” including the consequences of sin and foolishness. Every time we read of the physical, observable healings performed by the Master, we would do well to be reminded that the most important healing of all is the healing of the soul who is weighed down by the aftermath of sin, or who feels inadequate in a Church calling, or who mourns, etc.

Next, Nephi will see the crucifixion of the Savior in the vision.

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 [*by*] the world; and I saw and bear record.

33 And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the

sins of the world.

Next, Nephi will be shown what we know as the rest of the New Testament, beginning with Acts.

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.

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.

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.**

FIRST NEPHI 12

Nephi's vision continues in this chapter and will continue to the end of chapter 14. In this chapter, he will basically see the whole Book of Mormon.

1 AND it came to pass that the angel said unto me: Look, and behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren [*look at your descendants as well as the descendants of the others in Lehi's group*]. And I looked and beheld the land of promise [*the Americas*]; and I beheld multitudes of people, yea, even as it were in number as many as the sand of the sea. [*The Nephites and Lamanites multiplied and became very large numbers of inhabitants in the Americas.*]

Verse 2, next, would especially represent Alma and Helaman, where we read accounts of

multiple wars and terrible slaughter and destruction.

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.

Just a quick comment here. Occasionally, you may run into theories that the Book of Mormon peoples represent relatively small numbers of people in scattered villages and small cities. Verses 1–3, above, do not appear to support such theories.

Next, in verses 4–10, Nephi will be shown the events of Third Nephi. In verse 4, he is shown the destruction which took place among the Book of Mormon people at the time of the Savior's crucifixion. In verse 4, he is especially seeing 3 Nephi, chapter 8, in vision.

4 And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness [*it was completely dark upon this land for three days after Christ was crucified; see 3 Nephi 8:19–23*] 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 [*were torn*]; 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 [*after three days of total darkness*]; and behold, I saw multitudes [*who were not wicked enough to be destroyed*] who had not fallen because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord.

Next in the vision, Nephi sees the Savior's appearance to the people in Third Nephi. Imagine how everything which he is seeing in this marvelous vision prepares and qualifies him for the responsibilities he will yet have in the future.

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 [*the Nephite Twelve Apostles*]; and they were ordained of God, and chosen.

Some members wonder whether or not to refer to the Nephite Twelve as “Apostles.” We usually refer to them as the “Twelve (Nephite) Disciples” as in verse 8, below. But, it is also proper to refer to them as Apostles, since the Prophet Joseph Smith did, as recorded in *History of the Church*, 4:538.

8 And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold [*see*] the Twelve Disciples of the Lamb, who are chosen to minister unto thy seed [*unto your descendants*].

Next, we are taught some things about the judgment. We discover from what Nephi was shown here that the Twelve Apostles organized by Jesus during His earthly ministry will judge the twelve tribes of Israel. They will also judge the Twelve Nephite Disciples, who, in turn, will judge Nephi’s descendants. This is rather interesting, because it seems to tell us that our judgment will involve those who have held priesthood keys and had stewardship over us throughout our lives. While we do not have much detail as to how this all works out, we do know that Jesus will be our final judge, and that He will have the final say as to our eternal placement after the Judgment Day (see John 5:22).

9 And he said unto me: Thou rememberest the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb [*in Jerusalem*]? Behold they are they who shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore [*therefore*], the twelve ministers of thy seed [*the Twelve Nephite Disciples; see 3 Nephi 12:1, 19:4*] shall be judged of them; for ye are of the house of Israel.

10 And these twelve ministers [*the Nephite Twelve*] 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 [*they will be exalted*].

Next, in verses 11–12, Nephi is shown what we will read about in Fourth Nephi, where there will be about two hundred years of peace after the Savior departs, then apostasy. In other words, falling away from the Church will take place rapidly.

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. [*In other words, they were worthy of exaltation with Christ.*] And the angel said unto me: These are made white in the

blood of the Lamb, because of their faith in him.

The symbolism in the phrase “made white in the blood of the Lamb” (verse 11, above) is beautiful and very significant. There is much of color symbolism in the scriptures. The color white symbolizes purity, cleansed from sin, worthiness to live in the presence of God forever, and usually means exaltation. Thus, being made white “in the blood of the Lamb” means to have been cleansed and redeemed from sin through the Atonement of Christ and made clean and worthy to live with God forever.

Just one more little bit about the color white. Once you understand what this color symbolizes in scripture, it becomes a type of “shorthand” or “one-word-says-it-all” which can take the place of much writing and explanation. For instance, in place of a longer explanation that certain people have attained celestial glory, the scriptures could simply say “they are dressed in white.” An example of this is found in Revelation 7:9. A brief list of some colors and associated symbolism often used in scripture follows:

Color Symbolism Often Used in the Scriptures

white: purity; righteousness; exaltation (Example: 1 Ne. 12:10; Rev. 3:4–5)

black: evil; famine; darkness (Example: Rev. 6:5–6)

red: sins; bloodshed (Example: Rev. 6:4; D&C 133:51)

blue: heaven; godliness; remembering and keeping God’s commandments (Example: Num. 15:37–40)

green: life; nature (Example: Rev. 8:7)

amber: sun; light; divine glory (Example: D&C 110:2, Rev. 1:15, Ezek. 1:4, 27; 8:2)

scarlet: royalty (Example: Dan. 5:29; Matt. 27:28–29)

silver: worth, but less than gold (Example: Ridges, *Isaiah Made Easier*, Isa. 48:10 notes)

gold: the best; exaltation (Example: Rev. 4:4)

12 And I, Nephi, also saw many of the fourth generation who passed away in righteousness.

Next, Nephi will see the terrible destruction of his descendants as described in Mormon. He will also be given more symbolic interpretations of what his father saw. We will use **bold** to highlight these interpretations.

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. [*In other words, the Nephites and the Lamanites as they gather for the final great battles depicted in Mormon.*]

15 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the people of my seed [*the Nephites*] gathered together in multitudes against the seed of my brethren [*the Lamanites*]; and they were gathered together to battle.

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**.

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.

Nephi, no doubt, wants us to learn many lessons from what he wrote for us in verse 17, above. Among these things would be that Satan attempts to “blind our eyes” so that we can’t see danger, or so that we can’t see nor understand spiritual truths and perspectives. He takes away wisdom and respect for those who have true wisdom. His success in such “blinding” is very evident in much of modern society.

Another warning for us from Nephi, in verse 17, is that the devil strives to harden our hearts. One definition of “hardened hearts” is lack of feeling, lack of concern about sin, lack of concern for the rights and needs of others.

Yet another warning in this verse is that Satan attempts to lead people into “broad roads.” This is an interesting term. When we are on the “strait and narrow path” (1 Nephi 8:20), we have many commandments. We are blessed “with commandments not a few” (D&C 59:4), and with rules and guidelines from the Lord through the prophets. The cry of the wicked and the quest of the foolish is to do away with restrictions and rules. Thus they plunge rapidly or wobble slowly down the “broad roads” which ultimately lead to captivity, remorse, and loss of freedom. Whereas, those who voluntarily and diligently travel up the “strait and narrow” gain more and more freedom until they are among the freest people in the universe, namely, the gods.

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 “great and terrible gulf” in verse 18, above, is a reminder that “mercy” cannot rob justice (see Alma 42:25). Those who squander opportunities to repent when mercy could have been extended to them, and thus arrive at the final judgment bar of God “filthy still” (2 Nephi 9:16), will be subject to the law of justice. They will not be deemed worthy to live in the presence of God, and will thus be out of His presence forever (see D&C 29:29, D&C 76:112, and the following quote from Spencer W. Kimball).

“After a person has been assigned to his place in the kingdom, either in the telestial, the terrestrial, or the celestial, or to his exaltation, he will never advance from his assigned glory to another glory” (Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, pp. 243–44).

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 [*the Lamanites destroyed the Nephite civilization (see Mormon, chapters 6 and 8)*].

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.

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.

Nephi has now seen the end of the Book of Mormon and beyond in this portion of his vision.

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.

The net result of pride and willful wickedness, described in verse 23, above, applies to any people, at any time, anywhere, regardless of race, gender, privilege, or position.

FIRST NEPHI 13

As Nephi's vision continues, he will be shown the formation of a "great and abominable church" and what we usually refer to as the "Dark Ages" along with some incredible details concerning Christopher Columbus, the Pilgrims, the destructions among the Lamanites in the Americas, the thirteen American colonies, the Revolutionary War, and God's help for the fledgling colonies as they fought for independence against Great Britain. In addition, he will be shown that the Bible would be brought by them and that many "plain and precious things" had been taken out of it. He will also be shown the establishment of the United States, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the joining together of the Bible and the Book of Mormon, and then a very brief view of the last days.

1 AND it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld many nations and kingdoms [*by the context, we understand these to be the nations of Europe*].

2 And the angel said unto me: What beholdest thou? And I said: I behold many nations and kingdoms.

3 And he said unto me: These are the nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles.

The word "Gentiles" as used in verse 3, above, has many different definitions, which can lead to confusion if not kept in context. In its most basic sense, it can mean "someone who is not of your group." In the scriptures, it has two general meanings, depending on context.

In one sense, it came to mean people who were not of the lineage of Israel. In other scriptural contexts, it means nations which do not have the gospel, even though they may have Israelite blood (See Bible Dictionary, pp. 679–80). In the Book of Mormon, it often means people who were not from the Jerusalem area. That is what it means in verse 3, above, and it especially has reference to the nations of Europe during the Dark Ages and beyond, almost all of whom had Israelite blood.

4 And it came to pass that I saw among the nations of the Gentiles the formation of a great church.

Here, we will be taught about the "great and abominable church." Sometimes, there is misunderstanding about this "church." In times past, many have considered this church to be a specific Christian church. If we read carefully, we will find that this is not the case, nor can it be. If it were limited to one existing church or denomination, it would leave out all

others who teach or sponsor falsehood or evil, including gangs, secret combinations, nations or groups who seek the downfall of democracy, and so on.

5 And the angel said unto me: Behold the formation of a church which is most abominable above all other churches, which slayeth the saints of God, yea, and tortureth them and bindeth them down, and yoketh them with a yoke of iron, and bringeth them down into captivity.

6 And it came to pass that I beheld this great and abominable church; and I saw the devil that he was the founder of it.

We discover in verses 5 and 6, above, that the devil is the “founder” of the “great and abominable church.” This teaches us that the great and abominable church is the kingdom of the devil, no matter which front organization he may be hiding behind. This is confirmed in 1 Nephi 14:10, wherein we are told that there are basically just two churches, one is the “church of the Lamb” and the other is the “church of the devil.”

The word “church” in the phrase “church of the devil” can confuse people a bit. It sometimes makes them think it is referring to a religious organization only. It can be helpful to substitute the word “kingdom” for “church” and thus have the phrase “kingdom of the devil” meaning any groups, individuals, or organizations which fight against that which is right. The phrase “kingdom of the devil” is used in 1 Nephi 22:22.

Next, in verses 7 through 9, we run into what could be termed “Satan’s big three tools.” They are materialism, sexual immorality, and pride. These three major categories of temptation and sin seem to have been terribly effective in leading people astray throughout history, and are still being used by the devil today. We will use **bold** for emphasis in pointing these “big three” out.

Materialism and

Sexual Immorality.

7 And I also saw **gold**, and **silver**, and **silks**, and **scarlets**, and **fine-twined linen**, and **all manner of precious clothing**; and I saw **many harlots**.

8 And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold [*look at*] the **gold**, and the **silver**, and the **silks**, and the **scarlets**, and the **fine-twined linen**, and the **precious clothing**, and the **harlots**, are the desires of this great and abominable church.

Pride

9 And also **for the praise of the world** do they destroy the saints of God, and bring them down into captivity.

10 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld many waters [*oceans*]; and they divided the Gentiles [*especially those in Britain and Europe*] from the seed of my brethren [*from the Lamanites in the Americas*].

11 And it came to pass that the angel said unto me: Behold the wrath of God is upon the seed of thy brethren [*the anger of the Lord is upon the Lamanites*].

12 And I looked and beheld a man [*Christopher Columbus*] among the Gentiles [*in Europe*], who was separated from the seed of my brethren [*in the Americas*] by the many waters [*oceans*]; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon [*inspired and worked upon*] the man; and he went forth upon the many waters [*Columbus sailed out upon the ocean*], even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land.

Elder Mark E. Peterson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote that Christopher Columbus felt that he was inspired to make his journey. Elder Peterson explained:

“Columbus believed he could reach ‘the Indies’ by sailing westward. Although there were some people who still thought the world was flat, Columbus did not, and he was anxious to make his journey. But it was more than an urge for adventure that impelled the discoverer to undertake what he called ‘his enterprise.’

“Go to any public library, read almost any detailed biography of the discoverer [*Columbus*], and it becomes immediately clear that he felt himself an inspired man, sent of heaven to make the voyage. For example, *Columbus, Don Quixote of the Seas*, written in German by Jacob Wassermann and translated into English by Eric Sutton, tells the story very well [*quoting Columbus*]:

“From my first youth onward, I was a seaman and have so continued until this day. . . . Wherever on the earth a ship has been, I have been. I have spoken and treated with learned men, priests, and laymen, Latins and Greeks, Jews and Moors, and with many men of other faiths. The Lord was well disposed to my desire, and He bestowed upon me courage and understanding; knowledge of seafaring He gave me in abundance, of astrology as much as was needed, and of geometry and astronomy likewise. Further, He gave me joy and cunning in drawing maps and thereon cities, mountains, rivers, islands, and harbours, each one in its place. I have seen and truly I have studied all books—cosmographies, histories, chronicles, and philosophies, and other arts, for which our Lord unlocked my mind, sent me upon the sea, and gave me fire for the deed. Those who heard of my emprise called it foolish, mocked me, and laughed. But who can doubt but

that the Holy Ghost inspired me?’ ” (Petersen, *The Great Prologue*, pp. 25–26).

Next, Nephi sees the Pilgrims fleeing oppression and coming to America.

13 And it came to pass that I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles [*the Pilgrims*]; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters.

14 And it came to pass that I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles [*early colonists*] upon the land of promise; and I beheld the wrath of God, that it was upon the seed of my brethren [*the Lamanites in the Americas*]; and they were scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten.

In verse 14, above, Nephi sees devastation among the Lamanites as foreign explorers and colonists come to the Americas and begin to spread out among the Indians. The following quote from the old *Book of Mormon Student Manual*, page 35, (1982 edition, used at BYU and in the Institutes of Religion plus other Church schools) gives a summary of ways in which the Indians were “scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten” (**bold** added for emphasis):

“The fulfillment of Nephi’s prophecy concerning the scattering of the seed of his brethren is so vast a topic as to fill volumes and can be touched on here only briefly. It is one of the most tragic stories of history, equaling in many ways the persecution and suffering of the Jewish people through the centuries (see 1 Nephi 19:13–15). From the time Columbus landed in the West Indies, the destruction and driving of the Indian people began. The extent of this destruction has only recently started coming to full light.

“For example, Wilbur R. Jacobs, a noted historian, refutes the earlier projections made by European and American scholars of the Indian population **at the time Columbus arrived in the Western Hemisphere** in 1492. Estimates used to place the **Indian population** of North America at about a million, and in both North and South America at no more than 8 million. However, according to Jacobs, modern projections which are widely accepted today place the total at **90 million** for the whole of the Western Hemisphere and nearly **10 million in North America alone** (Jacobs, “The Indian and the Frontier in American History—A Need for Revision,” p. 45).

“When this total of **10 million Indians living in North America** is compared with the **estimated 235,000 who were alive at the turn of the twentieth century**, one begins to glimpse the scope of the tragedy.

“What happened to all those Indians? Cook and Dobyns, researchers in the spread of **epidemic diseases among Indians**, argue convincingly that millions of Indians were killed off by catastrophic disease frontiers in the form of epidemics of **smallpox, bubonic plague, typhus, influenza, malaria, measles, yellow fever, and other diseases**. (Besides bringing Old World strains of virus and bacteria, Europeans brought weeds,

plants, rats, insects, domestic animals, liquor, and a new technology to alter Indian life and the ecological balance wheel.) **Smallpox**, caused by an airborne virus, was and is about the most deadly of the contagious diseases. Virulent strains, transmitted by air, by clothing, blankets, or by slight contact (even by an immune individual), **snuffed out whole tribes**, often leaving only a handful of survivors. Although some kinds of epidemic diseases might be reduced to a mild virulence among Indians (as among whites) after generations of exposure, **smallpox was undoubtedly the Indians' worst killer** because it returned time and again to attack surviving generations of Indians to kill them off too." (See Jacobs, *The Indian*, p. 46.)

"Nor was the decimation by disease the only tragedy to befall the descendants of Lehi. The Indians as described by Columbus were 'gentle beings, souls of hospitality, curious and merry, truthful and faithful, walking in beauty and possessors of a spiritual religion' (Collier, *The Indians of the Americas*, pp. 97–98). They were not prepared for the ruthless, predatory nature of the white men who came in search of gold and converts. 'The situation was as if a mysterious stranger, announcing himself with words of love, welcomed with delight as a guest, embraced as a friend, given the run of the house and taken into the family's bosom, had suddenly revealed himself as no man at all but a devouring werewolf' (Collier, *The Indians*, p. 97). Immediate exploitation of the Indians as a cheap source of slave labor took place. **Thousands were shipped to Europe** and thousands of Europeans came to America to receive a grant of land with accompanying **unpaid, forced, Indian labor** for life." (Collier, *The Indians*, p. 98)

"But in the West Indies it was not decimation that befell the Indians the peoples whom Columbus had found to be gentle, merry and walking in beauty. It was annihilation. Since the supply was supposed to be unlimited in the beginning, these **chattel slaves** (Indians) **were worked to death**. So terrible was their life that they were driven to **mass suicide**, to mass **infanticide**, to mass **abstinence from sexual life** in order that children should not be born into horror. **Lethal epidemics** followed upon the will to die. The **murders and desolations** exceeded those of the most pitiless tyrants of earlier history; nor have they been surpassed since." (Collier, *The Indians*, p. 98)

Collier notes that "**the Indian population of Haiti and Santo Domingo, estimated to be between two and three hundred thousand when Columbus arrived, had plummeted to less than five hundred natives surviving in 1548, only fifty-six years later!**" (Collier, *The Indians*, p. 99)

That story was repeated numerous times at the hands of men like Cortez, Pizzaro, and DeSoto, in Peru, Colombia, Mexico, and the United States. The scenes viewed by Nephi six hundred years before Christ's birth were fulfilled with horrible reality. As one author put it:

"Here was a race in process of being engulfed in an irresistible flood of peoples of an utterly different culture. Dislocated from their accustomed seats, transplanted again and again, treated by whites as hostile encumbrances of the fertile earth to be brushed aside or destroyed, bewildered by a type of economy for which they were unprepared, decimated by disease and vices to which they had built up no resistance, repeatedly seeing solemn treaties violated, subject to shifting governmental policies, preyed upon by

incompetent and greedy officials, and at times demoralized by an excess of well intentioned but ill directed paternalistic kindness, it is a wonder that the Indians survived.” (Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity, The Great Century*, 4:323)

15 And I beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon the Gentiles [*the colonists*], and they did prosper and obtain the land for their inheritance; and I beheld that they were white, and exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people [*the Nephites*] before they were slain.

16 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles [*who became the thirteen colonies and eventually became the United States*] who had gone forth out of captivity did humble themselves before the Lord; and the power of the Lord was with them.

Next, the prophet Nephi sees the Revolutionary War in his vision. He sees the hand of God helping the small, poorly equipped and undertrained bands of colonist under the leadership of George Washington. He is shown their triumph over vastly better trained and equipped armies of the British.

17 And I beheld that their mother Gentiles [*Great Britain*] were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also [*Great Britain sent navies and armies*], to battle against them [*the colonists in North America*].

18 And I beheld that the power of God was with them, and also that the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle.

There are numerous accounts of the power of God exercised in behalf of George Washington and his soldiers. Time and time again, his ragged and struggling fighters were saved against all odds. In a fascinating article in the October 1987 *Ensign* entitled “Delivered by the Power of God,” Jonathan A. Dibble gives examples of this power. One excerpt from this article follows:

“The British soon withdrew from Boston and sailed toward New York. Washington, anticipating this move, marched on New York. There, several events led to another miraculous rescue of the American soldiers. Washington split his command and landed most of his troops on Long Island’s Brooklyn Heights. He had only ten thousand troops to guard a fifteen-mile front, while General Howe embarked approximately fifteen thousand British and Hessian soldiers at Gravesend Bay, Long Island. He left four thousand soldiers behind on Staten Island as reinforcements. . . . The British, by sailing up the East River, could land troops behind Washington and surround his army. The prospect for the Americans was serious. If Washington were to lose ten thousand men at the outset of the war, the Declaration of Independence would most likely not gain the public support to fuel

the fires of freedom.

“However, once again the elements intervened. On 26 August 1776, Howe’s reinforcements (the British) were delayed by a strong northeast wind and an ebbing tide that ‘compelled the fleet to drop down the bay and come to anchor.’ At nine o’clock the next morning, the Americans could hear the British cannons in the American rear. In a brilliant night march, the British General Henry Clinton had slipped by the east side of the Americans and had captured eight hundred prisoners, including Generals John Sullivan and William Stirling.

“At this point, Washington, instead of retreating across the East River, reinforced the American positions on Brooklyn Heights and waited for Howe’s assault. Seeing the entrenched American troops, British General Howe decided to delay his attack until the fleet had entered the East River. But the British ships were held back again by another strong northeast wind. Then torrents of rain fell, further hindering the fleet in the East River and subduing the efforts of the British troops on land. Howe began to raise siege works along Washington’s lines when, according to historian Henry B. Carrington, ‘The rain (became) so incessant, and accompanied by a wind so violent, that the British troops kept within their tents, and their works made slow progress.’

“Finally, on the night of 29 August 1776, Washington, recognizing the opportunity to make a tactical retreat, ordered his troops across the East River. The first unit embarked at ten o’clock. But at midnight, the wind changed. Just as the British advance had earlier been halted by the elements, this time the Americans’ retreat was threatened with disaster. Sloops and other sailing craft could not sail, and there were too few rowboats to complete the evacuation in one night. According to Carrington, ‘the wind and tide were so violent that even the seamen soldiers of Massachusetts could not spread a close reefed sail upon a single vessel; and the larger vessels, upon which so much depended, would have been swept to the ocean if once entrusted to the current.’

“Washington was urged to abandon the evacuation; but then, miraculously, the wind abruptly shifted, allowing the Americans to cross the river in the predawn hours. Nine thousand men were moved in that retreat, and historian Bart McDowell records that after dawn, as the last of the army sailed away, one young captain noted that the boats moved under ‘the friendly cover of a thick fog,’ which ‘increased the danger of panic, but also prevented discovery.’ Historian Christopher Ward points out that ‘freakish Nature (had) again favored the Americans.’ Washington ‘had snatched a beaten army from the very jaws of a victorious force, and practically under the nose of the greatest armada ever seen in American waters’” (Dibble, “ ‘Delivered by the Power of God’: The American Revolution and Nephi’s Prophecy,” pp. 45–52).

19 And I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles that had gone out of captivity [*the colonists*] were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations.

20 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that they did prosper in the

land; and I beheld a book [*the Bible*], and it was carried forth among them. [*The Christian immigrants brought the Bible with them from the “old countries.”*]

21 And the angel said unto me: Knowest thou the meaning of the book?

22 And I said unto him: I know not.

23 And he said: Behold it [*the Bible*] proceedeth out of the mouth of a Jew [*the Bible comes to us from the Jews*]. And I, Nephi, beheld it [*saw the Bible*]; and he said unto me: The book that thou beholdest [*which you are seeing*] is a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; and it also containeth many of the prophecies of the holy prophets; and it is a record like unto the engravings which are upon the plates of brass, save there are not so many; nevertheless, they contain the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; wherefore, they are of great worth unto the Gentiles.

We learn from verse 23, above, that the brass plates contained more Old Testament writings than our current Old Testament. Next, Nephi will be shown that much was taken out of the Bible before we got it.

24 And the angel of the Lord said unto me: Thou hast beheld [*you have seen*] that the book [*the Bible*] proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew; and when it proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew it contained the fulness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record; and they bear record according to the truth which is in the Lamb of God.

In other words, the original sermons and teachings from which the Bible was eventually compiled, contained the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We will use **bold** to emphasize some things in the next few verses.

25 Wherefore, these things [*the original writings and teachings of the Bible*] go forth from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles, according to the truth which is in God.

26 And after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb [*Christ*], from the Jews unto the Gentiles [*non-Jews*], thou seest the

formation of that great and abominable church [*the church of the devil; see 1 Nephi 14:10*], which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, **they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants** of the Lord have they taken away.

You may have noticed that covenants are only required to enter the celestial kingdom. Covenants are not required for entrance into terrestrial or telestial glory. Thus, by taking away priesthood and covenants, Satan has done major damage.

27 And all this have they done that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men.

28 Wherefore, thou seest that after the book [*the Bible*] hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God.

29 And **after these plain and precious things were taken away it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles**; and after it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles, yea, even across the many waters which thou hast seen with the Gentiles which have gone forth out of captivity, thou seest—**because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book**, which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God—because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great **many do stumble**, yea, insomuch that **Satan hath great power over them**. [*Ignorance of gospel truths and covenants is a terrible disadvantage. This is one of the reasons that the Book of Mormon and modern scriptures are so precious. They restore these “plain and precious things” to us.*]

We owe a great debt of gratitude to the Catholic monks and priests and others of long ago who meticulously preserved the Bible for us in its present form. It has gone to all the world basically in the form in which they preserved it, as attested by ancient manuscripts in museums and archives today. They took great pains to preserve it in the form in which they received it from previous generations.

Unfortunately, some people today blame them for significantly altering the Bible. But verse 29, above, tells us that the “plain and precious things” were taken out before the Bible went “forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles.” We might do well to tell a Catholic friend “Thanks!” for the great gift they have given the world. Next, Nephi will be taught about the divine help received by the United States.

30 Nevertheless, thou beholdest that the Gentiles who have gone forth out of captivity [*the early colonists in the new world who became the United States*], and have been lifted up by the power of God above all other nations, upon the face of the land which is choice above all other lands, which is the land that the Lord God hath covenanted with thy father that his seed should have for the land of their inheritance; wherefore, thou seest that the Lord God will not suffer that the Gentiles will utterly destroy the mixture of thy seed, which are among thy brethren. [*Nephi’s surviving descendants, who will have intermixed with the Lamanites, will not be completely destroyed by the influx of immigrants from across the oceans.*]

31 Neither will he suffer [*permit*] that the Gentiles shall destroy the seed of thy brethren [*the Lamanites*].

Next, the stage will be set in Nephi’s mind for him to be shown the restoration of the gospel through Joseph Smith.

32 Neither will the Lord God suffer [*allow*] that the Gentiles shall forever remain in that awful state of blindness, which thou beholdest they are in, because of the plain and most precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back by that abominable church, whose formation thou hast seen.

33 Wherefore saith the Lamb of God [*Christ*]: I will be merciful unto the Gentiles, unto the visiting of the remnant of the house of Israel [*Lehi’s descendants, in other words, the Lamanites; see verse 34*] in great judgment.

“Visited with great judgment” is a scriptural term which basically means to finally reap the consequences of continued rejection of God’s commandments and teachings.

34 And it came to pass that the angel of the Lord spake unto me, saying: Behold, saith the Lamb of God, after I have visited the remnant of the house of Israel—and this remnant of whom I speak is the seed of thy father [*the*

Indians in the Americas—wherefore, after I have visited them in judgment, and smitten them by the hand of the Gentiles, and after the Gentiles do stumble exceedingly, because of the most plain and precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back by that abominable church, which is the mother of harlots, saith the Lamb—I will be merciful unto the Gentiles in that day, insomuch that I will bring forth unto them, in mine own power, much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious, saith the Lamb. [*In other words, God will restore His true Church to the earth. This is the Restoration which began with the Prophet Joseph Smith.*]

The phrase “mother of harlots” in verse 34 above, is very typical of near eastern languages. “Mother” can mean “the source of” or “the leader of.” Perhaps a bit of explanation of the word “harlot” could be helpful, too. A synonym would be the verb “prostitute” which means to badly misuse that which is holy and pure. Thus, the term “mother of harlots” is a very accurate description of the devil and his evil work.

35 For, behold, saith the Lamb: I will manifest myself unto thy seed [*this would be the visit of the Resurrected Lord as recorded in Third Nephi*], that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious; and after thy seed shall be destroyed [*as recorded in Fourth Nephi*], and dwindle in unbelief, and also the seed of thy brethren, behold, these things shall be hid up [*Moroni hid the records in the Hill Cumorah*], to come forth unto the Gentiles [*through Joseph Smith to all of us*], by the gift and power of the Lamb.

36 And in them [*the plates, including those from which the Book of Mormon was translated*] shall be written my gospel, saith the Lamb, and my rock and my salvation.

37 And blessed are they [*including all faithful Church members today*] who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day [*in the last days*], for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up [*exalted*] at the last day [*on Judgment Day*], and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb [*in the celestial kingdom*]; and whoso shall publish peace, yea, tidings of great joy, how beautiful upon the mountains shall they be.

Next, Nephi will be shown how the restoration of the true gospel of Jesus Christ will take place in the last days.

38 And it came to pass that I beheld [*saw*] the remnant of the seed of my brethren [*the Lamanites*], and also the book [*the Bible*] of the Lamb of God, which had proceeded forth from the mouth of the Jew, that it came forth from the Gentiles [*the colonists, Pilgrims, missionaries, immigrants, etc., who came to the Americas*] unto the remnant of the seed of my brethren [*the Lamanites*].

39 And after it [*the Bible*] had come forth unto them I beheld other books [*such as the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price*], which came forth by the power of the Lamb, from the Gentiles [*Joseph Smith and the members of the Church, including us*] unto them [*the Lamanites*], unto the convincing of the Gentiles [*generally speaking, non-members everywhere*] and the remnant of the seed of my brethren [*specifically speaking of the Lamanites*], and also the Jews [*this part of the vision has not yet been fulfilled, except for isolated, wonderful cases here and there*] who were scattered upon all the face of the earth, that the records of the prophets [*contained in the Bible*] and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb [*contained in the New Testament*] are true.

The Book of Mormon plus the “other books” referred to in verse 39, above, bear witness of the Bible. This is particularly needed in our day when so many people no longer consider the Bible to contain the word of God. Rather, they have “demoted it” to a position of simply being cultural literature.

Perhaps you remember when the statement “Another Testament of Jesus Christ” was added to the title of the Book of Mormon. Thus, the Book of Mormon and the other standard works, as well as the teachings of modern prophets and apostles all sustain the Bible as containing the word of God, as seen by Nephi in this vision.

40 And the angel spake unto me, saying: These last records [*the Book of Mormon plus the “other books” in verse 39*] which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first [*will sustain and support the Bible as having truths from God in it*], which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them [*will restore the teachings, doctrines, and covenants which were taken out of the Bible*]; and shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people [*everyone on earth*], that the Lamb of God [*Christ*] is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved.

From such small beginnings, in upstate New York on April 6, 1830, we are witnessing the fulfillment of the prophecy in verse 40, above, that this gospel will go to all the world. In fact, in the October General Conference of the Church of 1995, President Gordon B. Hinckley told members that early in 1996 there would be more members of the Church outside the United States than in it. This has now come to pass. Thus, we are privileged to witness the fulfilling of ancient and modern prophecies on every side. What an exciting time to be alive!

In verse 41, next, you will see it emphasized again that there is no other way to be saved, other than coming unto Christ. There is only one path which leads to salvation and exaltation in celestial glory. Many other churches can lead to terrestrial glory, but only one can lead to celestial.

41 And they must come [*all people must come to Christ, as stated in verse 40*] according to the words which shall be established by the mouth of the Lamb; and the words of the Lamb shall be made known in the records of thy seed [*the Book of Mormon*], as well as in the records of the twelve apostles of the Lamb [*the Bible*]; wherefore they both shall be established in one [*the Bible and the Book of Mormon will come together, united as witnesses for Christ; see also Ezekiel 37:16–17*]; for there is one God and one Shepherd [*Christ*] over all the earth.

Next, Nephi will be taught that Christ will come to earth and establish His gospel among the Jews and then among the Gentiles (especially through the Apostle Paul). This happened in New Testament times. Nephi is then shown that in the last days, it will be in reverse order. That is, Jesus will manifest Himself first to the Gentiles (through Joseph Smith and the Restoration), and lastly, there will be a large-scale conversion among the Jews.

42 And the time cometh [*in about six hundred years from when Nephi is seeing this vision*] that he [*Christ*] shall manifest himself unto all nations, both unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles [*New Testament times*]; and after he has manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles, then [*in the last days*] he shall manifest himself unto the Gentiles [*non-Jews*] and also unto the Jews, and the last [*Gentiles who received the gospel “last” in the New Testament, after the Jews*] shall be first, and the first [*the Jews, who were given the gospel first in the New Testament ministry of the Savior*] shall be last [*to receive the gospel in the last days*].

FIRST NEPHI 14

This chapter is the last chapter of Nephi's vision, wherein he was shown the things which his father, Lehi, saw. In it, he will be shown things concerning the latter days, including the day in which we now live. The angel, mentioned in chapter 13, verse 40, is still directing this vision for Nephi and explaining things to him, which he is seeing and feeling.

In the next several verses, the main issue is the significance of having God on your side through personal righteousness, even though living in a wicked world. This is a most crucial message for each of us.

1 AND it shall come to pass, that if the Gentiles [*the people to whom the restoration of the gospel comes first, in the last days*] shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day [*the last days*] that he shall manifest himself unto them in word, and also in power, in very deed, unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks—[*the stumbling blocks mentioned in 1 Nephi 13:26–29*]

2 And harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God, [*in other words, if they accept and live the gospel faithfully*] they shall be numbered among the seed of thy father [*they will be considered worthy and righteous like Nephi and other righteous descendants of Lehi were*]; yea, they shall be numbered among the house of Israel [*a scriptural phrase for saying that they will receive all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who have already become gods (see D&C 132:37); in other words, this is a way of saying they will receive exaltation*]; and they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land forever [*symbolic of attaining heaven, the celestial glory, and living in the presence of the Father and Christ forever*]; they shall be no more brought down into captivity [*Satan will not succeed against them*]; and the house of Israel shall no more be confounded [*confused, stopped, led astray*].

3 And that great pit [*Satan's trap for us; hell; outer darkness*], which hath been digged for them by that great and abominable church [*the church of the devil; everything Satan tries to do to trap and destroy us; 1 Nephi 14:10*], which was founded by the devil and his children [*his followers*], that he might lead away the souls of men down to hell—yea, that great pit which hath been digged for the destruction of men shall be filled by those who digged it [*the wicked end up destroying themselves; see Mormon 4:5*],

unto their utter destruction, saith the Lamb of God; not the destruction of the soul, save it be the casting of it into that hell which hath no end.

“Not the destruction of the soul” in verse 3, above, is a very important doctrinal statement. Nobody can or will ever cease to exist. I had a student once who asked me if I knew of a sin she could commit which would cause her to cease to exist completely. She explained that she knew that after we die, and our mortal body eventually dissolves away, that we still continue to exist until resurrection as spirit beings. She wanted her spirit and intelligence also to cease to exist. I gently explained that this was impossible. Then with the help of her good bishop, problems were resolved and life became worthwhile again. The point here is that we are eternal beings already and that the “destruction of the soul,” verse 3, above, means total captivity of the soul by the devil, and being under such captivity forever (see Alma 34:35). This “forever” captivity would only apply to sons of perdition, since all others are eventually out of Satan’s reach (see the vision of the three degrees of glory and sons of perdition—outer darkness—in Doctrine and Covenants, section 76).

4 For behold, this is according to the captivity of the devil, and also according to the justice of God [*the law of justice*], upon all those who will [*want to, desire to*] work wickedness and abomination [*terrible, blatant, wide open wickedness*] before him.

It is interesting that, according to verse 4, above, self-destruction (unrepented of personal wickedness) follows rules too.

The prophecy in verse 5, next, is what can be termed a “conditional prophecy,” meaning that there is an “if—then” relationship involved. In other words, “If they do or do not . . . whatever the topic is . . . then thus and such will or will not happen.” It is the type of prophecy which reminds us that we have agency, and that by how we use our agency, we are determining our future. We will **bold** and underline for emphasis and teaching purposes.

5 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, Nephi, saying: Thou hast beheld that **if** the Gentiles **repent** it shall be **well with them**; and thou also knowest concerning the covenants of the Lord unto the house of Israel; and thou also hast heard that whoso **repenteth not** must **perish**.

6 Therefore, wo be unto the Gentiles **if** it so be that they **harden their hearts** against the Lamb of God.

7 For the time cometh, saith the Lamb of God, that I will work a great and a marvelous work among the children of men; a work which shall be everlasting, either on the one hand or on the other—**either** to the

convincing of them unto peace and life eternal, or unto the **deliverance of them to the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds** unto their being brought down into **captivity**, and also into **destruction**, both temporally [*being killed, destroyed literally here in mortality*] and spiritually [*as far as personal spirituality and righteousness are concerned*], according to the captivity of the devil, of which I have spoken.

The above verses are clear reminders of the role which our agency plays in our eventual “placement” for eternity. Our choices have everlasting consequences. In effect, we are now, during our “University of Earth” experience, making our final decisions for our eternal placement. We prepared for eons of time in premortality for this final test, and we are now taking it.

8 And it came to pass that when the angel had spoken these words, he said unto me: Rememberest thou the covenants of the Father unto the house of Israel? [*By the way, you can review these covenants by reading Abraham 2:9–11, in your Pearl of Great Price.*] I said unto him, Yea [*Yes*].

9 And it came to pass that he [*the angel*] said unto me: Look, and behold [*see*] that great and abominable church, which is the mother of abominations [*which produces such terrible corruption and wickedness*], whose founder is the devil.

10 And he said unto me: Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth.

Verse 10, above, is filled with very strong, basic doctrine. Ultimately, there are just two positions you can take. Either you are with God or with the devil. Many people are uncomfortable with boiling it down to such simple terms. Indeed, part of Satan’s cunning deception is that there is lots of middle ground and that we can put off making decisions as to loyalty to God or the devil for a future time.

Furthermore, there are just two “churches.” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints stands alone as the one true Church and stands alone in glory and power to make exaltation available to all who will come unto Christ. All influences which lead people away from the commitments and covenants available in the true Church are part of the other “church,” or the “kingdom of the devil” as it is referred to in 1 Nephi 22:22.

We must be careful not to be “down” on all Christian and non-Christian churches as a result of our reading of verse 10, above. Indeed, D&C 10:52 reminds us not to “bash” other churches, rather to understand that our church fills in the gaps in the doctrines and teachings of others and thus builds them up and completes what they have started.

Next, in verse 11, strong language is used to describe Satan’s kingdom and power in the last days. The term “whore” is a word which means “one who takes that which is pure and holy and good and converts it to uses which degrade, make filthy, and destroy.” The image of the “whore” (Satan and his evil followers) sitting upon the “many waters” reminds us that filthy water, for instance in the case of a devastating flood in one’s basement, tries to get into everything. Thus, Satan, in the last days, will be very powerful and will be trying to “get into” every aspect of our lives.

11 And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the whore of all the earth [*Satan’s kingdom in the last days*], and she sat upon many waters [*symbolic of ability to get into every aspect of society*]; and she had dominion [*great power*] over all the earth, among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people.

Next, Nephi sees that, in the last days, after the restoration of the gospel through Joseph Smith, the members of the Church, though relatively small in number, have influence throughout the world.

12 And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God [*the true Church*], and its numbers were few, because of the wickedness and abominations of the whore who sat upon many waters [*because of Satan’s power and dominion*]; nevertheless, I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth; and their dominions upon the face of the earth were small, because of the wickedness of the great whore whom I saw.

13 And it came to pass that I beheld that the great mother of abominations [*Satan and his evil followers*] did gather together multitudes upon the face of all the earth, among all the nations of the Gentiles, to fight against the Lamb of God. [*Satan will have many “allies” in the last days, as he wages war against the spread of the true gospel of Christ.*]

Verse 14, next, is very comforting and reassuring. It reminds us that we are definitely not alone. (**Bold** added for emphasis.)

14 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the

covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they were **armed with righteousness** and with the **power of God in great glory**.

Next, Nephi sees the “wars and rumors of war” which are one of the prominent signs of the times, signaling that the Second Coming of the Savior is not far off.

15 And it came to pass that I beheld that the wrath of God was poured out upon that great and abominable church, insomuch that there were wars and rumors of wars among all the nations and kindreds of the earth.

16 And as there began to be wars and rumors of wars among all the nations which belonged to the mother of abominations [*which adhere to Satan’s goals and personal standards*], the angel spake unto me, saying [*the angel will now emphasize and explain key concepts and teachings in this vision for Nephi*]: Behold, the wrath of God is upon the mother of harlots [*the wicked; Satan’s kingdom*]; and behold, thou seest all these things.

As stated above, the angel is now reviewing key elements of the vision, leading up to the restoration of the true Church in the last days.

17 And when the day cometh that the wrath of God is poured out upon the mother of harlots, which is the great and abominable church of all the earth, whose founder is the devil, then, at that day, the work of the Father shall commence, in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants, which he hath made to his people who are of the house of Israel. [*In other words, when the time arrives, as depicted in the vision, the gospel will be restored, and the long-prophesied gathering of Israel will begin. Nephi is seeing our day.*]

18 And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, saying: Look!

19 And I looked and beheld a man [*John, the Beloved Apostle, who wrote the book of Revelation in our Bible; see verse 27 in this chapter*], and he was dressed in a white robe.

Just a reminder of scriptural symbolism. John is dressed in white, symbolizing purity and worthiness to be in the presence of God. He is dressed in a robe, symbolizing that he has made and kept covenants, and is thus worthy of exaltation, godhood.

20 And the angel said unto me: Behold one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

21 Behold, he shall see and write the remainder of these things [*the next things you, Nephi, will see in this vision*]; yea, and also many things which have been.

22 And he shall also write concerning the end of the world.

23 Wherefore, the things which he shall write are just and true; and behold they are written in the book [*the Bible*] which thou beheld proceeding out of the mouth of the Jew; and at the time they proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, or, at the time the book proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, the things which were written were plain and pure, and most precious and easy to the understanding of all men. [*In other words, when the book of Revelation was first written, it was clear and easy to understand.*]

24 And behold, the things which this apostle of the Lamb shall write are many things which thou hast seen; and behold, the remainder shalt thou see.

25 But the things which thou shalt see hereafter thou shalt not write; for the Lord God hath ordained the apostle of the Lamb of God that he should write them.

This is a most fascinating instruction given to Nephi. He will now see many more things leading up to the end of the earth. But it is not his stewardship to write them. It is the stewardship of the Apostle John, who lived almost seven hundred years after Nephi, seeing the same things Nephi will now see. John is the one who is to write these things for us to read. These writings of John are written in the Bible in the book of Revelation.

Unfortunately for many people, the book of Revelation is a very difficult book to understand. However, for those who pay the price to study and understand it, it becomes a most beautiful book and a wonderful doctrinal review of the plan of salvation, containing several doctrines which have been left out or intentionally taken out of other books in the Bible. You may wish to get additional help understanding the book of Revelation by reading through the notes on it given in *The New Testament Made Easier, Part 2*, by David J. Ridges, published by Cedar Fort, Inc., 2003.

26 And also others who have been, to them hath he shown all things, and they have written them; and they are sealed up to come forth in their purity, according to the truth which is in the Lamb, in the own due time of the

Lord, unto the house of Israel.

Verse 26, above, informs us that there are yet other sealed records, which someday will be made available to the people of the Lord by the power of God. This must have been a fascinating verse for Joseph Smith, to realize that others would also be involved someday in bringing ancient records to light.

27 And I, Nephi, heard and bear record, that the name of the apostle of the Lamb was John, according to the word of the angel.

John, mentioned above, was the apostle who wrote the Gospel of John, plus 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and the book of Revelation. He was the one who served in the First Presidency of the Church after the Savior's ascension into heaven. It was this presidency—Peter, James, and John—who restored the Melchizedek Priesthood to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery (see D&C 27:12).

Next, Nephi brings his recording of his vision to a close, reminding us that he is simply following the instructions of the angel not to write the rest of what he saw in the vision.

28 And behold, I, Nephi, am forbidden that I should write the remainder of the things which I saw and heard; wherefore the things which I have written sufficeth me; and I have written but a small part of the things which I saw. [*It will be interesting to someday be with Nephi when he has time and is permitted to tell us the rest of what he saw.*]

29 And I bear record [*I bear testimony*] that I saw the things which my father saw, and the angel of the Lord did make them known unto me.

30 And now I make an end of speaking concerning the things which I saw while I was carried away in the spirit; and if all the things which I saw are not written [*perhaps he is saying, "I don't have time, energy, or enough room on these plates to record everything I am permitted to write, and so. . . ."*], the things which I have written are true. And thus it is. Amen.

This is the end of Nephi's vision.

FIRST NEPHI 15

Nephi has now had a marvelous "high mountain" experience. He has seen what will happen to his descendants and what will happen to the

descendants of his brethren. He has been shown what we know as the New Testament, the discovery and colonization of America, the Revolutionary War, the establishment of the United States of America, the restoration of the gospel, the coming forth of the book of Mormon, and the last days, plus everything which John the Revelator saw. No doubt he is now anxious to share his witness and testimony of these things which his father saw with the others back at camp. As he approaches, however, he sees his brothers arguing. What a letdown! We will now listen to him as he recounts this part of his history.

1 AND it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had been carried away in the spirit, and seen all these things, I returned to the tent of my father.

2 And it came to pass that I beheld my brethren, and they were disputing one with another concerning the things which my father had spoken unto them.

3 For he truly spake many great things unto them, which were hard to be understood, save a man should inquire of the Lord; and they being hard in their hearts, therefore they did not look unto the Lord as they ought.

We are reminded by Nephi in the previous verse that the things of God are hard to understand unless we turn to the Lord for help. This is a most important lesson for all of us.

Next, we will see Nephi almost overcome with grief. Knowing that Nephi was inspired as to what to include in the special record contained on the small plates, we can perhaps take comfort in this message from the Lord that even great and highly capable people can have times of depression and sorrow.

4 And now I, Nephi, was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts, and also, because of the things which I had seen [*remember that he had seen the downfall of his own people*], and knew they must unavoidably come to pass because of the great wickedness of the children of men.

The phrase “children of men” as used in verse 4, above, is a term that is used often in the scriptures. It means “people here on earth.”

5 And it came to pass that I was overcome because of my afflictions, for I considered that mine afflictions were great above all, because of the

destruction of my people, for I had beheld their fall.

Next, we will watch Nephi try to help his brethren understand the things of God. When we get to verse 11, we will be given a formula for getting help and counsel from God. It is also a formula for getting a personal testimony.

6 And it came to pass that after I had received strength I spake unto my brethren, desiring to know of them the cause of their disputations [*the cause of their arguing among themselves*].

7 And they said: Behold, we cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken concerning the natural branches of the olive-tree, and also concerning the Gentiles.

8 And I said unto them: Have ye inquired of the Lord?

9 And they said unto me: We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us. [*It may be that there is a touch of sarcasm in their response, in effect saying, "The Lord doesn't talk to us like he does to you, holy little brother."*]

Next, we will use **bold** to emphasize Nephi's teachings about things which can prevent our being sensitive to the Holy Ghost and thus coming to understand the things of God.

10 Behold, I said unto them: How is it that **ye do not keep the commandments of the Lord** [*a major cause of not being sensitive to the Spirit of the Lord*]? How is it that ye will perish [*be destroyed spiritually, in other words, as far as spiritual things are concerned*], because of **the hardness of your hearts**?

11 [*Here is the formula for receiving help from the Spirit to understand the things of God which we mentioned in the note after verse 5, above. We will use **bold** for emphasis and teaching purposes.*] Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said?—**If ye will not harden your hearts, and ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you.**

Next, Nephi will teach and explain to his brethren the use of the olive-tree symbolism which was shown to Father Lehi. You may wish to review the notes given in 1 Nephi 10 regarding the olive tree. It deals with the gathering of Israel in the last days, and we have

the privilege of watching the fulfillment of this prophecy as it continues to gain momentum in our day. It is a powerful testimony of the truth of the book of Mormon.

12 Behold, I say unto you, that the house of Israel was compared unto an olive-tree, by the Spirit of the Lord which was in our father; and behold are we not broken off from the house of Israel [*symbolizing being scattered away from the rest of Israel*], and are we not a branch of the house of Israel [*don't we belong to Israel*]?

13 And now, the thing which our father meaneth concerning the grafting in [*being reattached to the main tree*] of the natural branches through the fulness of the Gentiles [*through the fulness of the gospel being restored among the Gentiles—Joseph Smith and the Restoration*], is, that in the latter days [*in the last days, before the Second Coming*], when our seed [*posterity*] shall have dwindled in unbelief [*will have gone into apostasy, fallen away from the gospel of Christ*], yea, for the space of many years, and many generations after the Messiah shall be manifested in body unto the children of men [*many generations after the mortal ministry of the Savior*], then shall the fulness of the gospel of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles [*the gospel and the true Church will be restored again, this time to the Gentiles, meaning Joseph Smith and the Restoration*], and from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed [*and the Lamanites will receive it from the members of the restored church*]—

It is vital that we know “who we are.” We must understand that we are children of God, that we have within us the potential to become like Him, to become gods. Knowing this is vital to our self-worth and to our developing righteous behaviors and deep internal commitment to the principles of Christ’s gospel. Next, Nephi will prophesy that this blessing of knowing who they are will be restored to the Lamanites in the last days.

Elder Spencer W. Kimball, of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, emphasized this fact as follows:

“Of immense importance to this work of gathering the scattered branches of the house of Israel is the work of carrying the blessings of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to the Lamanites, for the Lord’s work in these latter days can in no wise be complete until these children of great promise are brought back into the fold. The Lord said through his prophet Lehi, ‘Behold, I say unto you, Yea; they shall be remembered again among the house of Israel; they shall be grafted in, being a natural branch of the olive-tree, into the true olive-tree.’ (1 Ne. 15:16.) We are witnesses to these events.

“For a thousand years after the closing of the Book of Mormon record, these people wandered in spiritual darkness and were scattered upon the American continents and the isles of the sea. They lost their written language, their high culture, and, worst of all, their knowledge of the living God and his work. Faith was replaced by fear, rich language by crippled dialects, and an understanding of God and his ways by idolatry. . . . Only the most brazen soul could fail to weep when contemplating the fall of this people, and yet it was the decree of the Lord that the Lamanites should be preserved in the land, that this remnant of Joseph should again come into their promised inheritance.

“The Lord’s promises with regard to the Lamanites began to be fulfilled with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in this dispensation (see Ether 4:17).

“Truly our paths have met once more—we a mixed remnant of Israel, principally Ephraim, even referred to as gentiles, now come forth out of captivity (see, e.g., 1 Ne. 13:19, 39), . . . now only through the grace of Almighty God restored to the blessings of the gospel, that we in turn might be a blessing to the nations of the earth; and the Lamanites, also a people of disobedience now returned to the fold.

“The Lamanites must rise again in dignity and strength to fully join their brethren and sisters of the household of God in carrying forth his work in preparation for that day when the Lord Jesus Christ will return to lead his people” (Kimball, “Our Paths Have Met Again,” pp. 4–5, 7).

14 And at that day [*after the gospel has been restored among the Gentiles in the last days*] shall the remnant of our seed [*the Lamanites*] know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then shall they know and come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, **that they may know how to come unto him** and be saved.

The message at the end of verse 14, above is most important. It is not enough for people to want to be saved. They must know how to be saved. Perhaps many other Christian as well as non-Christian churches and individuals disagree with us on this. But that is most likely because they do not know what it is to “be saved.” They don’t realize nor do they accept the fact that, almost always in the scriptures, “being saved” means to become like God, and to become gods ourselves.

Thus, with their understanding limited by lack of knowledge (“points of his doctrine,” verse 14, above), they believe that to be “saved” one needs but to be good. This, in fact, is true in reference to obtaining terrestrial glory (see D&C 76:75). But in order to be “saved” in celestial exaltation, we need knowledge of the gospel. We need “points” of doctrine. We need priesthood authority and ordinances so that we can make and keep covenants. It is impossible for us to be saved in ignorance of the gospel (see D&C 131:6).

15 And then at that day will they [*the Lamanites*] not rejoice and give praise unto their everlasting God, their rock and their salvation? Yea, at that day, will they not receive the strength and nourishment from the true vine [*Christ; see John 15:1*]? Yea, will they not come unto the true fold [*the true Church; ultimately, celestial exaltation*] of God?

16 Behold, I say unto you, Yea; they shall be remembered again among the house of Israel; they shall be grafted in [*gathered in and reattached to the “olive tree,” to the “true vine”*], being a natural branch of the olive-tree [*being blood line descendants of Israel—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*], into the true olive-tree.

17 And this is what our father meaneth; and he meaneth that it will not come to pass until after they are scattered by the Gentiles; and he meaneth that it shall come by way of the Gentiles [*it will come to the Lamanites through the church that Joseph Smith will establish among the Gentiles (non-Jews)*], that the Lord may show his power unto the Gentiles, for the very cause that he shall be rejected of [*by*] the Jews, or of the house of Israel.

There may still be some confusion as to the difference between the words “Jews” and “Gentiles” as used in the Book of Mormon. A brief review may help. “Jews” in the Book of Mormon may have come from any or many of the tribes of Israel in the Holy Land. The point is that they were “geographically” from the Holy Land in relatively recent times. In the Book of Mormon usage, “Gentiles” are all of the people in the world who don’t come from the Holy Land. Many of the Gentiles have the blood of Israel in them, but are not “geographically” from the Holy Land in relatively recent times. Even today, the term ‘Jew’ basically refers to non-Arabic citizens of Israel, plus people elsewhere in the world whose ancestors came from the Holy Land in relatively modern times. Most “Jews” have blood from many of the twelve tribes of Israel in their veins.

Also, just a quick note about the term “house of Israel.” It means the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or, “the covenant people.” Abraham and Sarah had Isaac. Isaac and Rebekah had Jacob. Jacob and his wives had twelve sons. Jacob’s name was changed to “Israel.” Thus, we have the “house of Israel” or “the family of Israel.” The blessings of the gospel and priesthood covenants come to all the world through this lineage. In summary, we have Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God covenanted with Abraham and renewed it with Isaac and with Jacob that through them, all the world would be blessed (see Genesis 12:1–3, 17:4–8, Abraham 2:9–11; Genesis 26:2–5; Genesis 32:24–30.) Jacob’s name was changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28) which means “one who has power with God.” Israel had twelve sons, through whom the blood of Abraham and Isaac was perpetuated and multiplied out upon the face of the earth as they married and their

children married, and so on. It is the responsibility of Israel to carry the gospel and the blessings of the priesthood to all the world in our day.

That is one key reason the designation of lineage in your patriarchal blessing is so important. It reminds you of your responsibilities as a missionary all of your life. It also reminds you that you have the potential to become a god. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (and their wives) have all become gods already (see D&C 132:37).

18 Wherefore, our father hath not spoken of our seed [*posterity*] alone, but also of all the house of Israel [*all of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*], pointing to the covenant which should be fulfilled in the latter days; which covenant the Lord made to our father Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds [*people*] of the earth be blessed.

19 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, spake much unto them concerning these things; yea, I spake unto them concerning the restoration of the Jews in the latter days. [*The Jews will be gathered back to the Holy Land and become a nation. This has happened and is continuing to happen in our day. It is one of the signs of the times which will take place before the Second Coming. There is another “gathering” of the Jews which must yet take place. It is the gathering of them to Christ and to the true Church. Except for a few isolated cases, this appears to be a future occurrence.*]

20 And I did rehearse unto them the words of Isaiah, who spake concerning the restoration of the Jews, or of the house of Israel [*here, the term “Jews” is expanded to mean all the house of Israel, which would include all of us*]; and after they were restored they should no more be confounded [*confused; stopped in progressing toward celestial exaltation*], neither should they be scattered again. [*The Church will never go into apostasy again, after the Restoration through Joseph Smith. This is also in Daniel 2:35, 44–45.*] And it came to pass that I did speak many words unto my brethren, that they were pacified and did humble themselves before the Lord. [*This gives us hope, once again, for Laman and Lemuel and the others in the family who have been rebellious.*]

It is quite encouraging at this point to see these rebellious members of the group begin to ask sincere, intelligent questions. It must have done Nephi's heart good to see this happening. In fact, a very helpful question and answer session begins now, which will help us too. We will use **bold** for purposes of emphasis and teaching.

Question:

21 And it came to pass that they did speak unto me again, saying: **What meaneth this thing which our father saw in a dream? What meaneth the tree which he saw?**

Answer:

22 And I said unto them: **It was a representation of the tree of life.**

Question:

23 And they said unto me: **What meaneth the rod of iron which our father saw, that led to the tree?**

Answer:

24 And I said unto them that **it was the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish** [*this is a tremendous promise!*]; **neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction.**

25 Wherefore, I, Nephi, did exhort [*strongly urge*] them to give heed unto the word of the Lord; yea, I did exhort them with all the energies of my soul, and with all the faculty which I possessed, that they would give heed to [*pay careful attention to*] the word of God and remember to keep his commandments always in all things.

Question:

26 And they said unto me: **What meaneth the river of water which our father saw?**

Answer:

27 And I said unto them that **the water which my father saw was filthiness**; and so much was his mind swallowed up in other things that he beheld not the filthiness of the water.

28 And I said unto them that **it was an awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God.**

29 And I said unto them that **it was a representation of that awful hell, which the angel said unto me was prepared for the wicked.**

30 And I said unto them that our father also saw that **the justice of God did also divide the wicked from the righteous; and the brightness thereof was like unto the brightness of a flaming fire, which ascendeth up unto God forever and ever, and hath no end.**

Question:

31 And they said unto me: **Doth this thing mean the torment of the body in the days of probation** [*during our life on earth*], **or doth it mean the final state of the soul after the death of the temporal body** [*the physical body*], **or doth it speak of the things which are temporal** [*things which pertain to this mortal life*]?

Answer:

32 And it came to pass that I said unto them that **it was a representation of things both temporal and spiritual; for the day should come that they must be judged of their works, yea, even the works which were done by the temporal body in their days of probation.** [*In other words, we will all face Christ to answer for our choices during this testing period on earth.*]

It is important to keep the scriptures in context, and to consider major doctrines such as agency and judgment in the overall context of the scriptures and the words of modern prophets. In the above verses, Nephi has been talking to and answering questions for individuals who have had many obvious witnesses that there is a God and that Lehi and Nephi are teaching truth. They will yet have many more such witnesses that they are on the errand of God. If and when they reject the gospel, it will be against knowledge. Thus, how they choose to spend the “days of their probation,” in other words, their mortal lives, will constitute their final judgment. Nephi is clearly teaching this to them.

However, we know that many in this life do not get such a complete set of clear chances to understand and obey the laws of God. God is completely fair. Thus, for such individuals, the completion of their opportunities to understand and accept the gospel laws and covenants will come in the spirit world mission field, as taught in D&C 138.

We would do well not to judge one another as to who has and who has not had a complete set of fair chances here on earth, or during the days of their mortal or temporal probation or testing. However, we would no doubt do well to consider our temporal or mortal days to be the determining factor as to whether or not we will be allowed to continue progressing toward exaltation after we die.

We know from D&C 76:74 and 79 that those who do receive a complete set of fair chances to accept and live the gospel here during their mortal lives, and who do not live accordingly, will be limited to the terrestrial kingdom as far as how high they can go after the final Judgment Day.

33 Wherefore, if they should die in their wickedness they must be cast off also, as to the things which are spiritual, which are pertaining to righteousness; wherefore, they must be brought to stand before God [final Judgment Day], to be judged of their works; and if their works have been filthiness they must needs be filthy; and if they be filthy it must needs be [it has to be] that they cannot dwell in the kingdom of God; if so, the kingdom of God must be [would become] filthy also.

Next, Nephi continues explaining the logic and reasoning behind the fact that unworthy people cannot return to live forever with God. His brethren asked sincere questions, and he is an excellent teacher as he gives them a chance to understand.

34 But behold, I say unto you, the kingdom of God is not filthy, and there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God; wherefore [therefore] there must needs be a place of filthiness prepared for that which is filthy.

35 And there is a place prepared, yea, even that awful hell of which I have spoken, and the devil is the preparator [the preparer] of it; wherefore the final state of the souls of men is to dwell in the kingdom of God, or to be cast out because of that justice [the law of justice] of which I have spoken.

36 Wherefore [this is why], the wicked are rejected [ultimately separated] from the righteous, and also from that tree of life, whose fruit is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits; yea, and it [exaltation; see D&C 14:7] is the greatest of all the gifts of God. And thus I spake unto my brethren. Amen.

FIRST NEPHI 16

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Nephi's brethren have sincerely asked some insightful and searching questions in order to understand what Lehi taught them. Although they were apparently sincere, the answers to their questions are in stark contrast to their lifestyles up to now. Therefore, these answers about personal accountability, final judgment, filthiness, the requirements to be in the presence of God forever, etc., are quite hard for them to accept. It often requires time and patience to implement gospel standards of behavior into daily living when previous attitudes and goals have been much less than righteous. And unless one is diligent and willing to persevere, resolve is in danger of collapsing and people commonly revert back to previous attitudes and lifestyles.

Next, Nephi's brethren express their concern that what they have heard is hard. But tough stains generally can't be taken out by gentle soap. This is a lesson clearly taught now by Nephi, and his hopes are raised again by his brethren's responses. We will again use **bold** for emphasis and for teaching purposes.

1 AND now it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had made an end of speaking to my brethren, behold they said unto me: Thou hast declared unto us **hard things, more than we are able to bear.**

2 And it came to pass that I said unto them that I knew that I had spoken hard things against the wicked, according to the truth; and **the righteous have I justified** [*I have shown that righteousness will pay off eternally*], and testified that they should be lifted up [*exalted*] at the last day [*on Judgment Day*]; wherefore, **the guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center.**

3 And now my brethren, **if ye were righteous** and were **willing to hearken to the truth**, and give **heed** unto it, that ye might **walk uprightly** before God, **then ye would not murmur because of the truth**, and say: Thou speakest hard things against us.

4 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did exhort [*teach and urge*] my

brethren, with all diligence, to keep the commandments of the Lord.

5 And it came to pass that **they did humble themselves before the Lord**; insomuch that **I had joy and great hopes of them**, that they would walk in the paths of righteousness.

6 Now, all these things were said and done as my father dwelt in a tent in the valley which he called Lemuel.

7 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, took one of the daughters of Ishmael to wife; and also, my brethren took of the daughters of Ishmael to wife; and also Zoram took the eldest daughter of Ishmael to wife. [*This must have been quite a ceremony, and quite a time of celebrating and rejoicing!*]

Next, Nephi makes quite a statement about his father, which could be comforting to other parents whose children have not all followed the strait and narrow path.

8 And thus **my father had fulfilled all the commandments of the Lord which had been given unto him**. And also, I, Nephi, had been blessed of the Lord exceedingly.

It appears that Lehi and his little group of travelers have been camped in the Valley of Lemuel (see 1 Nephi 2:6, 14; 16:6) for some time. Lehi and Sariah waited there while their sons went back to get the brass plates. They remained there while the brothers went back to Jerusalem to get Ishmael and his family to join them so that they could have wives and families. They were camped in this valley when Lehi had his dream of the tree of life, and while Nephi had his “high mountain” experience wherein he saw all the things his father saw.

We don’t know how much of the eight years they spent in the wilderness had already passed when the Lord commanded Lehi to continue their journey into the wilderness. Whatever the case, they will now continue their journey and will eventually arrive at the ocean where they will build a ship and cross the waters to the promised land.

Many familiar scenes for those who have read and studied the Book of Mormon will take place next. Lehi will be given the Liahona. Nephi will break his bow. Ishmael will die and there will be a rebellion among some in the group. Laman will plot with others to take Lehi’s life and also to kill Nephi. These rebellious members of the group will have yet another chance to repent and change their attitudes and the direction of their lives when the Lord speaks directly to them and severely scolds them.

9 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord spake unto my father by night, and commanded him that on the morrow he should take his journey

into the wilderness.

10 And it came to pass that as my father arose in the morning, and went forth to the tent door, to his great astonishment he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship [*the Liahona; see Alma 37:38*]; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness.

From time to time, the Lord has provided his prophets with physical devices to assist and direct them and their people. We know that there was more than one Urim and Thummim (see Bible Dictionary, pp. 786–87.) Here, Lehi is given a marvelous device of very fine workmanship to assist him and his people as they travel through a dangerous wilderness.

Some symbolism here is quite obvious. Among other things, this earth can be a rather dangerous “wilderness” with the traps and decoys set up by the devil and his evil followers. We need constant guidance as we journey through life. We receive it through the scriptures and the counsel and teachings of our modern prophets and apostles, as well as from our local leaders. It might even be suggested that we have our “Liahonas” in the form of electronic access to the words and teachings of the Brethren. We can look to their counsels, electronically sort through and access many of their messages on specific topics, and so forth.

11 And it came to pass that we did gather together whatsoever things we should carry into the wilderness, and all the remainder of our provisions which the Lord had given unto us; and we did take seed of every kind that we might carry into the wilderness.

12 And it came to pass that we did take our tents and depart into the wilderness, across the river Laman.

13 And it came to pass that we traveled for the space of four days, nearly a south-southeast direction, and we did pitch our tents again; and we did call the name of the place Shazer.

14 And it came to pass that we did take our bows and our arrows, and go forth into the wilderness to slay food for our families; and after we had slain food for our families we did return again to our families in the wilderness, to the place of Shazer. And we did go forth again in the wilderness, following the same direction, keeping in the most fertile parts of the wilderness, which were in the borders near the Red Sea.

15 And it came to pass that we did travel for the space of many days, slaying food by the way, with our bows and our arrows and our stones and our slings.

16 And we did follow the directions of the ball, which led us in the more fertile parts of the wilderness.

Since Nephi tells us, in verse 28 of this chapter, that the pointers in the Liahona worked “according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them,” and since, according to verse 16 above, the “ball” was functioning to guide them, we are probably safe to think that, at this point, most, and hopefully all members of the company of travelers, were exercising faith and obedience, and thus, the Liahona worked for them.

17 And after we had traveled for the space of many days, we did pitch our tents for the space of a time, that we might again rest ourselves and obtain food for our families.

Perhaps you have noticed that things seem to go quite well as long as they are busy traveling. It seems to be when they have stopped and have extra time on their hands that those with a tendency to rebel do so.

It is during these rest stops that Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael murmur against Nephi. It is when they again stop for a while (verse 33) and Ishmael dies, that vicious rebellion flares up again. As they again take their journey (1 Nephi 17:1) and are kept busy with the work of traveling, they go without murmuring (chapter 17, verse 2, but when they finally reach the ocean where they stop for a while, rebellion breaks out again (1 Nephi 17:17–20).

Surely, there is a lesson in this for us. There is truth in the old saying, “An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.”

Next, Nephi will break his bow. It is sad that his brethren seem anxious to blame him for all their woes, when they themselves perhaps have not unstrung their own bows when they might have in order to preserve the spring in them. Whatever the case, it seems to be Satan’s way to find someone else to blame for one’s own inappropriate and sinful behavior.

18 And it came to pass that as I, Nephi, went forth to slay food, behold, I did break my bow, which was made of fine steel; and after I did break my bow, behold, my brethren were angry with me because of the loss of my bow, for we did obtain no food.

For many years, critics of the Book of Mormon found fault with the idea that Nephi could have a bow made of “fine steel.” They claimed that there was no such thing at the time

period claimed by the Book of Mormon for Nephi's journeying. Hugh Nibley had a word for such critics. A quote from his writings follows:

"Through the years critics of the Book of Mormon have constantly called attention to the mention of steel in that book as a gross anachronism (something which was way ahead of its time). But now we are being reminded that one cannot be dogmatic in dating the appearance of steel since there is more than one kind of steel with 'a whole series of variants in the combination of iron and steel components' in ancient times; and when a particularly fine combination was hit upon it would be kept secret in 'individual workshops' and 'passed on from father to son for many generations.' Hence it is not too surprising to learn that 'even in early European times' there is evidence for the production of steel 'of very high quality' and extreme hardness. Further east steel is attested even earlier" (Nibley, *Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in the Modern World*, p. 254).

19 And it came to pass that we did return without food to our families, and being much fatigued, because of their journeying, they did suffer much for the want of food.

20 And it came to pass that Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael did begin to murmur exceedingly, because of their sufferings and afflictions in the wilderness; and also my father began to murmur against the Lord his God; yea, and they were all exceedingly sorrowful, even that they did murmur against the Lord.

We have almost come to expect that Laman and Lemuel along with the sons of Ishmael will start to complain and become ugly when things become difficult. But to see Lehi also "murmur against the Lord his God" catches us off guard and can be very disappointing.

However, when we recall from 1 Nephi 1:20 that one of the purposes Nephi stated for writing the things he did was to show us "the tender mercies of the Lord," then we begin to see that perhaps one of the reasons he mentioned this especially difficult time for his father was to show us the kindness of the Lord even to those who definitely know better than to murmur.

21 Now it came to pass that I, Nephi, having been afflicted with my brethren because of the loss of my bow, and their bows having lost their springs [*probably because they neglected to unstring them when they were not in use*], it began to be exceedingly difficult, yea, insomuch that we could obtain no food.

22 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did speak much unto my brethren, because they had hardened their hearts again, even unto complaining

against the Lord their God.

23 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did make out of wood a bow, and out of a straight stick, an arrow; wherefore, I did arm myself with a bow and an arrow, with a sling and with stones. And I said unto my father: Whither shall I go to obtain food?

I had an interesting experience concerning the wood bow and the wooden arrow which Nephi made as mentioned above. Some years ago a good friend called me one evening and said, "Dave, do you know how true the Book of Mormon is?" I said, "Yes, I think I do." To which he responded, "Yes, but do you know *how* true?" I began to wonder where this was going, so I said, "Tell me. How true is it?" That was the response he had been waiting for.

He asked, "Do you know why Nephi made an arrow out of a stick to use with the wood bow he had just made? Why didn't he simply use one of the arrows he had for his steel bow, which he broke?" I replied that I hadn't ever even thought about that. He went on to say that he had become interested in archery, and upon reading this part of the Book of Mormon again, it occurred to him that the steel bow would use relatively short arrows, but the wooden bow would bend back much farther than a steel bow, thus, the wood bow would require considerably longer arrows.

He concluded our telephone conversation by expressing his testimony that Joseph Smith could not possibly have made the Book of Mormon up and that this passage about needing a new arrow for the wood bow was another testimony to the divine calling of the Prophet. He felt that there was no way that Joseph Smith could have even known about such things from practical experience in his day, in order to fabricate such an account.

I thanked my friend for sharing this information with me, and now I, too, marvel even more at the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon each time I read this account of Nephi's broken steel bow.

In verse 23, above, we find a major lesson, namely, that we should honor parents, even though they may not always live up to our hopes and expectations. The effect on Lehi when his son, Nephi, still honored him, despite his negative response to the hardships they were suffering, must have been extremely humbling, yet at the same time, redeeming.

24 And it came to pass that he did inquire of the Lord, for they had humbled themselves because of my words; for I did say many things unto them in the energy of my soul.

25 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came unto my father; and he was truly chastened [*scolded*] because of his murmuring against the

Lord, insomuch that he was brought down into the depths of sorrow.

There is a name for the kind of sorrow experienced by Lehi here. It is called “godly sorrow” and is the type of sorrow that causes deep change toward more personal righteousness and deeper strength in following God’s commandments. The Apostle Paul spoke of this “godly sorrow” in 2 Corinthians 7:8–11. We will now take a moment to review Paul’s teachings on this subject. We will include some teaching notes along with it.

2 Corinthians 7:8–11

8 For though I made you sorry with a letter [*even though I caused you sorrow when I scolded you in my last letter to you—First Corinthians*], I do not repent [*I don’t take back what I said because you needed it*], though I did repent [*though I did regret hurting your feelings*]: for I perceive that the same epistle [*that letter*] hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season [*even though you got over it after a while*].

9 Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry [*not because I caused you pain*], but that ye sorrowed to repentance [*but because you actually repented because of what I said to you*]: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner [*my letter caused you to have “godly sorrow” so that you truly repented*], that ye might receive damage by us in nothing [*so that, as it ultimately turned out, we did not hurt you in any way*].

Paul now defines “godly sorrow” which is a vital part of truly repenting.

10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance [*causes us to repent*] to salvation [*and thus obtain exaltation*] not to be repented of [*and leaves us with no regrets*]: but the sorrow of the world [*being sorry you got caught, or sorry because you are embarrassed, or sorry that your opportunity to continue committing that sin has been taken away, etc.*] worketh death [*leads to spiritual death*].

Now, Paul describes some components of “godly sorrow” which make it so effective in cleansing us from sin and leading to our truly changing and becoming more righteous.

11 For behold this selfsame thing [*this godly sorrow, the very thing I’m teaching you about, namely*], that ye sorrowed [*were sorry for sins*] after a godly sort [*in the way God wants you to be*], what carefulness [*sincerity, anxiety*] it wrought [*caused*] in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves [*eagerness to become clear of the sin*], yea, what indignation [*irritation, anger at yourself for committing the sin*], yea, what fear [*alarm*], yea, what vehement desire [*strong desire to change*], yea, what zeal [*enthusiasm to change*], yea, what revenge [*punishment; suffering whatever is necessary to make permanent change*]! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter [*in everything you have done you have demonstrated that you understand godly sorrow*].

26 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord said unto him [*Lehi*]: Look upon the ball, and behold the things which are written.

27 And it came to pass that when my father beheld the things which were written upon the ball, he did fear and tremble exceedingly, and also my brethren and the sons of Ishmael and our wives.

There are some strong parallels between how the Liahona worked for Lehi's company and how the Holy Ghost works for us. It has much to do with the "faith and diligence and heed" which we give to it.

28 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them.

29 And 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; [*The Lord is constantly striving to teach us if we will listen.*] and it was written and changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it. And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things.

There is much to learn from verse 29, above. For one thing, the value of obedience as a prerequisite for additional knowledge and revelation is taught. Nephi said that the things on the pointers were plain and were changed from time to time depending on his family's obedience to them.

One of the most basic principles for personal progress taught in the scriptures is that faith obedience precedes additional revelation.

A great example of how faithful, diligent obedience can lead to additional light and understanding is found in Moses 5:5–11. We will consider these verses here. Watch as Adam and Eve receive much additional light and knowledge because of simple faith obedience (**bold** added for emphasis):

Pearl of Great Price: Moses 5:5–11

5 And he gave unto them commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord. And **Adam was obedient** unto the commandments of the Lord.

6 And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: **Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord?** And Adam said unto him: **I know not, save the Lord commanded me** [*an example of pure, faith obedience*].

Watch, now, as the angel teaches Adam and gives him much additional knowledge and light as a result of his faithful obedience. We will continue to use **bold** for teaching emphasis.

7 And then the angel spake, saying: This thing [*offering sacrifice*] is a similitude of [*is symbolic of*] the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father [*Christ*], which is full of grace [*ability and desire to help us*] and truth.

8 Wherefore [*this is the reason that*], thou shalt **do all that thou doest in the name of the Son**, and **thou shalt repent** and **call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore**.

9 And in that day **the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam**, which beareth record of the Father and the Son, saying [*bearing testimony of Christ*]: I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, henceforth and forever, that as thou hast fallen **thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will** [*all those who desire it*].

Now watch as both Adam and Eve summarize the tremendous insights and testimony they have received from the angel and from the Holy Ghost, all because of their simple faith obedience.

10 And in that day **Adam** blessed God and **was filled** [*with the Holy Ghost*], and **began to prophesy** concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of God, for **because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy**, and again in the flesh I shall see God.

11 And **Eve**, his wife, heard all these things and **was glad**, saying: **Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed** [*children*], and **never should have known good and evil**, and the **joy** of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all **the obedient**.

In summary, the basic principle is this: First, we obey, with faith in God and Christ. Then we receive more light and knowledge. If we then obey that, we receive more. If we obey that, we receive yet more, and on and on until, someday, we get to the point that we “shall comprehend even God” (D&C 88:49).

Thus, in this portion of the Book of Mormon, Nephi is teaching us the power and potential of simple faith obedience.

30 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did go forth up into the top of the mountain, according to the directions which were given upon the ball.

31 And it came to pass that I did slay wild beasts, insomuch that I did obtain food for our families.

32 And it came to pass that I did return to our tents, bearing the beasts which I had slain; and now when they beheld that I had obtained food, how

great was their joy! And it came to pass that they did humble themselves before the Lord, and did give thanks unto him. [*Here, again, they humble themselves, and Nephi's hopes for them are raised.*]

33 And it came to pass that we did again take our journey, traveling nearly the same course as in the beginning; and after we had traveled for the space of many days we did pitch our tents again, that we might tarry [*stop; stay in the same place*] for the space of a time.

Perhaps, by now, it makes you a bit nervous when they stop traveling and thus have time on their hands. Sure enough, there will be trouble, and this time things will get extremely ugly. And this time, Nephi specifically mentions the murmuring of some of the women in the group. It is sometimes said that Satan often has a rather easy time of it when it comes to getting men to turn to evil and wickedness. But as long as women remain true to gospel principles, society remains relatively stable. But when the devil succeeds in getting women to succumb also to evil, watch out!

We will use **bold** to emphasize things in the next verses.

34 And it came to pass that **Ishmael died**, and was buried in the place which was called Nahom.

35 And it came to pass that **the daughters of Ishmael did mourn exceedingly, because of the loss of their father**, and because of their **afflictions in the wilderness**; and **they did murmur against my father**, because he had brought them out of the land of Jerusalem, saying: Our father is dead; yea, and we have wandered much in the wilderness, and we have suffered much affliction, hunger, thirst, and fatigue; and after all these sufferings we must perish in the wilderness with hunger.

36 And **thus they did murmur against my father, and also against me**; and they were **desirous to return again to Jerusalem**. [*Remember that several prophets had already prophesied that Jerusalem would be destroyed. Therefore, in expressing a desire to return to Jerusalem, they were overtly expressing lack of faith and openly rebelling.*]

We have already seen the mercies and patience of God many times so far with respect to rebellious members of Lehi's company. We appreciate this because we need it ourselves. As stated previously, Laman and Lemuel as well as the sons of Ishmael have had many chances up to now to know of God, to gain wisdom and personal testimonies, and to be faithful and obedient to principles which lead to exaltation. Our hopes for them have been

raised several times, but now we will see why the scriptures constantly counsel us to “endure to the end.”

Satan seems to work hard to mold people into being “fair weather friends.” Fair weather friends are those who are loyal when things go well and their immediate needs and self-centered desires are being met. But as soon as the obvious “rewards” slow down or stop coming for a while, they withdraw their loyalty.

These brothers and brothers-in-law do not seem to want to endure to the next hour, let alone “endure to the end.” One of Lucifer’s traps is to condition people to expect instant gratification, with instant rewards. He thus weakens their resolve to be faithful between obvious rewards for good behavior.

Another lesson we might learn from what happens next is that when individuals and groups rebel time and again against obvious truth and righteousness, they seem to need to get more vicious to sustain their rebellion and blindness. In short, they become more like the devil.

37 And Laman said unto Lemuel and also unto the sons of Ishmael: Behold, let us slay our father, and also our brother Nephi, who has taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren. [*Pride is gaining a stranglehold on these men now.*]

38 Now, he says that the Lord has talked with him, and also that angels have ministered unto him. But behold, we know that he lies unto us; and he tells us these things, and he worketh many things by his cunning arts, that he may deceive our eyes, thinking, perhaps, that he may lead us away into some strange wilderness; and after he has led us away, he has thought to make himself a king and a ruler over us, that he may do with us according to his will and pleasure. And after this manner did my brother Laman stir up their hearts to anger.

Laman’s behavior is becoming more like Satan’s. He is now telling bold-faced lies in order to stir up his allies against Lehi and Nephi. We are inclined to recoil from him and say, “Wait a minute, he knows better than that!” And indeed he does. Or, perhaps we must begin to say, “And indeed he did.” In other words, what we are probably beginning to see is one of the ultimate deceptions of the Adversary in action. He toys with us until we begin to believe our own lies. This happened to Korihor (see Alma 30:53). We begin to demonstrate the fact that wickedness does not promote rational thought. Reality and truth are distorted in our minds to the point that we don’t think like righteous people do. This is one of the reasons that wickedness is so dangerous to our souls. It destroys our ability to think like God thinks. If we find ourselves on the path of rebellion against light and truth, at all, we would do well to turn around immediately, and flee in the opposite direction.

Next, Laman and his allies will be given yet another chance to repent and act in accordance with gospel principles. This is another reminder to us of the unfathomable patience and love of a kind Father and a Savior who have infinite love. You may notice that as Laman and Lemuel and their confederates become more hardened and insensitive, the methods of the Lord, as He tries to reach them, while still respecting their agency, necessarily become stronger and tougher.

39 And it came to pass that the Lord was with us, yea, even the voice of the Lord came and did speak many words unto them, and did chasten [*scold*] them exceedingly; and after they were chastened by the voice of the Lord they did turn away their anger, and did repent of their sins, insomuch that the Lord did bless us again with food, that we did not perish. [*They respond positively to this stronger approach by a loving God, and our hopes for them are once again raised.*]

FIRST NEPHI 17

As we begin chapter 17, we note that the company of emigrants is again underway, and traveling nearly eastward. Most Book of Mormon scholars tend to believe that at this point Lehi and his people are traveling eastward along the bottom of the Saudi Arabian Peninsula. Once again, we see that repentance plus being kept busy with daily travel seems to promote well being and harmony among the group. In fact, as Nephi points out in verse two, the blessings of the Lord are poured out generously and they continue the journey without murmuring.

There is a major message for us here. According to verses 1 and 2, there are still plenty of hardships. Yet, with the help and blessings of the Lord, their burdens seem light and thus, in effect, they are light. This is similar to Alma's colony of righteous Saints as mentioned in Mosiah 24:14–15. Likewise with us. You have no doubt met faithful members who are going through severe trials and who carry heavy burdens, yet are cheerful and happy. This is a direct blessing from the Lord.

1 AND it came to pass that we did again take our journey in the wilderness; and we did travel nearly eastward from that time forth. And we did travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness; and our women did

bear children in the wilderness.

2 And so great were the blessings of the Lord upon us, that while we did live upon raw meat in the wilderness, our women did give plenty of suck for their children, and were strong, yea, even like unto the men; and they began to bear their journeyings without murmurings.

3 And thus we see that the commandments of God must be fulfilled. And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them; wherefore, he did provide means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness.

4 And we did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even eight years in the wilderness.

Next, they finally arrive at the ocean.

5 And we did come to the land which we called Bountiful, because of its much fruit and also wild honey; and all these things were prepared of the Lord that we might not perish. And we beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum, which, being interpreted, is many waters.

6 And it came to pass that we did pitch our tents by the seashore; and notwithstanding we had suffered many afflictions and much difficulty, yea, even so much that we cannot write them all, we were exceedingly rejoiced when we came to the seashore; and we called the place Bountiful, because of its much fruit.

We again learn much about attitude and simple obedience from Nephi here. Watch his reaction as the Lord asks him to build a ship.

7 And it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had been in the land of Bountiful for the space of many days, the voice of the Lord came unto me, saying: Arise, and get thee into the mountain. And it came to pass that I arose and went up into the mountain, and cried unto the Lord.

Just a quick comment about some possible symbolism in going up into a mountain to commune with the Lord. It requires effort to climb up a mountain. Similarly, it requires

effort for us to live worthy of inspiration and guidance from God. Symbolically, climbing up into a mountain could also represent drawing closer to heaven, or closer to God.

8 And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Thou shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee, that I may carry thy people across these waters.

9 And I said: Lord, whither shall I go that I may find ore to molten, that I may make tools to construct the ship after the manner which thou hast shown unto me?

10 And it came to pass that the Lord told me whither I should go to find ore, that I might make tools.

We can learn much from Nephi's reaction to the commandment to build a ship. Think of how much work it would take to make a bellows of animal skins to blow on the fire to get it hot enough to melt ore in order to have metal with which to make tools for constructing the ship.

First, Nephi would have to go hunting. After a successful hunt, he would have to skin the animal or animals, tan the hides, cut them out, and sew the parts together to form a bellows. Then he would have to dig the ore which the Lord told him about, gather fuel, build a fire, melt the ore, and form the molten metal into tools. All this he did without one complaint. He is earning his exaltation!

11 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did make a bellows wherewith to blow the fire, of the skins of beasts; and after I had made a bellows, that I might have wherewith to blow the fire, I did smite two stones together that I might make fire.

12 For the Lord had not hitherto suffered that we should make much fire, as we journeyed in the wilderness; for he said: I will make thy food become sweet, that ye cook it not;

13 And I will also be your light in the wilderness; and I will prepare the way before you, if it so be that ye shall keep my commandments; wherefore, inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall be led towards the promised land [*also symbolic of heaven*]; and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led.

14 Yea, and the Lord said also that: After ye have arrived in the promised

land, ye shall know that I, the Lord, am God; and that I, the Lord, did deliver you from destruction; yea, that I did bring you out of the land of Jerusalem.

There is much symbolic teaching in verse 14, above. Right now, as we journey through our mortal lives, we do much on faith. But when we actually arrive in heaven (the “promised land”) we will then know positively that the Lord is God, that He exists, and we will become aware of the many times He intervened in our lives while here on earth. We will know that He delivered us from spiritual destruction and bondage through the Atonement of Christ. We will know that He brought us out of the world and worldliness and into heaven.

15 Wherefore, I, Nephi, did strive to keep the commandments of the Lord, and I did exhort my brethren to faithfulness and diligence.

16 And it came to pass that I did make tools of the ore which I did molten [*melt*] out of the rock [*ore*].

Sadly, in the next verses we will be given keen insights into some of Satan’s methodology for discouraging the righteous. As usual, we will use **bold** for emphasis and teaching. (Imagine what Noah and Nephi would have to say to each other as they chatted about how they were mocked when they set out to build their ships!)

17 And when my brethren saw that I was about to build a ship, they began to murmur against me, saying: **Our brother is a fool**, for he thinketh that he can build a ship; yea, and he also thinketh that he can cross these great waters.

18 And thus my brethren **did complain against me**, and were desirous that they might not labor, for they **did not believe that I could build a ship; neither would they believe that I was instructed of the Lord.**

The attitude of Nephi’s brethren caused Nephi much sadness. And, as is usually the case with others who mock the righteous, they took great pleasure in the sorrow they were causing him. This is similar to Satan’s behavior when he causes the destruction of the Lord’s children. An example of this is found in 3 Nephi 9:1–2 as follows (**bold** added for emphasis): “And it came to pass that there was a voice heard among all the inhabitants of the earth, upon all the face of this land, crying: Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for **the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people;** and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen!”

19 And now it came to pass that I, Nephi, was exceedingly sorrowful

because of the hardness of their hearts; and now **when they saw that I began to be sorrowful they were glad in their hearts, insomuch that they did rejoice over me**, saying: We knew that ye could not construct a ship, for we knew that ye were lacking in judgment; wherefore, thou canst not accomplish so great a work.

Satan's way is to blame others for our own shortcomings and follies. Next, Laman and Lemuel and the others try to lay the guilt for all their troubles on Lehi. They seem to have very quickly forgotten that when they themselves were faithful and obedient, they were blessed abundantly, even to the point that their women and children prospered and life was very good (see verse 2, above).

20 And thou art like unto our father, led away by the foolish imaginations of his heart; yea, he hath led us out of the land of Jerusalem, and we have wandered in the wilderness for these many years; and **our women have toiled, being big with child; and they have borne children in the wilderness and suffered all things, save it were death; and it would have been better that they had died** before they came out of Jerusalem than to have suffered these afflictions.

21 Behold, these many years we have suffered in the wilderness, which time we might have enjoyed our possessions and the land of our inheritance; yea, and we might have been happy.

It is somewhat shocking to see how far off the mark these rebellious men have gone and how quickly they reverted back to old spiritual blindness and irrational thought. In fact, you may have already noticed that they have not only reverted back, but they have sunk to new lows in lack of reason and lack of awareness of things as they really are. It is once again profoundly evident that wickedness does not promote rational thought!

In the next verse, they think back on Jerusalem and praise its inhabitants as righteous, God-fearing citizens and keepers of the commandments given by the Lord through Moses (remember that they were actually ripe in iniquity and ready for destruction). Nephi now teaches us a lesson in how quickly Satan can warp and corrupt the senses and sensibilities of willing students of wickedness. In a sad and rather startling way, Laman, Lemuel, and the others bear testimony that wickedness is actually righteousness. We fear that they believe their own lies.

22 And we know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord, and all his commandments, according to the law of Moses;

wherefore, **we know that they are a righteous people**; and our father hath judged them, and hath led us away because we would hearken unto his words; yea, and our brother is like unto him. And after this manner of language did my brethren murmur and complain against us.

Next, an inspired Nephi will skillfully teach his wayward and rebellious brethren, using scriptures familiar to them. And when he has finished, the Lord will add His testimony in ways which they cannot possibly miss. And once again, they will humble themselves and then will immediately begin helping Nephi build the ship.

There is a major message here, being repeated over and over. It is this: The Lord loves us. He loves to bless us. He even loves stinkers! And He gives them chance after chance after chance. Even when they rebel and reject Him and His messengers, He gives them additional opportunities to repent and return to Him. This is clearly taught elsewhere in the scriptures also. For example, in **Ezekiel 18:21–32**, we read (**bold** added for emphasis):

21 **But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live** [*he will be saved in heaven*] he shall not die [*spiritually*].

22 **All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him:** [*Compare with D&C 58:42–43.*] in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.

23 **Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?** saith the Lord GOD: *and* not that he should return from his ways, and live?

24 But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, *and* doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked *man* doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.

25 Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal?

26 When a righteous *man* turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die.

27 **Again, when the wicked *man* turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.**

28 **Because he considereth** [*considers his ways and repents*], **and turneth away from all his transgressions** that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

29 Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?

30 Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. **Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.**

31 Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and **make you a new heart and a new spirit:** for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

32 For **I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.**

So, now we will watch and learn as Nephi teaches his spiritually needy brethren from the scriptures. He will emphasize past blessings from the Lord and the importance of using those blessings as a basis for being loyal to the Lord now. There is much symbolism in the literal events Nephi uses to teach his people. We will point some of that out as we go along.

23 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, spake unto them, saying: Do ye believe that our fathers [*ancestors*], who were the children of Israel, would have been led away out of the hands of the Egyptians if they had not hearkened unto the words of the Lord? [*Symbolism: Do you think we would be rescued from the bondage of sin if we did not listen to the Lord?*]

24 Yea, do ye suppose that they would have been led out of bondage, if the Lord had not commanded Moses that he should lead them out of bondage? [*Symbolism: Do you think we would be led out from being slaves to sin if we refuse to listen to our current prophets?*]

25 Now ye know that the children of Israel were in bondage; and ye know that they were laden with tasks, which were grievous to be borne; wherefore, ye know that it must needs be a good thing for them, that they should be brought out of bondage. [*Symbolism: You know that sin is a terrible taskmaster or slave driver. You know that sin places heavy burdens upon you. So, you know that it is very good to be rescued from sin by the Lord.*]

26 Now ye know that Moses was commanded of the Lord to do that great work; and ye know that by his word the waters of the Red Sea were divided hither and thither, and they passed through on dry ground. [*Symbolism: Our prophets are guided and directed by the Lord, so if we follow them faithfully, we can get through our difficulties and escape the forces of evil*]

also.]

Just a quick comment about Bible critics who claim that the Red Sea did not really part. Rather, they say that Moses led the children of Israel through a “Reed Sea” (a very shallow marsh land that, luckily, had dried up because of constant dry winds. The critics are wrong, and the Book of Mormon comes to the rescue. This is another example of where the Book of Mormon substantiates the Bible. This would be just a bit of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Ezekiel wherein he saw the day when the Bible and Book of Mormon would come together and “become one in thine hand” (see Ezekiel 37:16–20).

27 But ye know that the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea, who were the armies of Pharaoh. [*Symbolism: The day will come when the wicked who persecute the work of the Lord, who refuse to repent, will be destroyed.*]

28 And ye also know that they were fed with manna in the wilderness. [*Symbolism: The Lord sustains His people with blessings from above.*]

29 Yea, and ye also know that Moses, by his word according to the power of God which was in him, smote the rock, and there came forth water, that the children of Israel might quench their thirst. [*Symbolism: Our thirst for the things of God is quenched by the “living water” which comes from Christ and His Atonement; see John 4:10, 14.*]

30 And notwithstanding they be-ing led, the Lord their God, their Redeemer, going before them, leading them by day and giving light unto them by night, and doing all things for them which were expedient for man to receive, they hardened their hearts and blinded their minds, and reviled against Moses and against the true and living God. [*Symbolism: Even though God does everything possible to bless His children, some of them still rebel.*]

Verse 30, above, is especially relevant to Laman and Lemuel and their cohorts in rebellion. It is a strong hint from Nephi that they are being just like the foolish children of Israel who, in the face of such obvious help and witnesses from God, still rebelled against their prophet leader as well as God.

31 And it came to pass that according to his word he did destroy them; and according to his word he did lead them; and according to his word he did do all things for them; and there was not any thing done save it were by his

word.

32 And after they had crossed the river Jordan he did make them mighty unto the driving out of the children of the land, yea, unto the scattering them to destruction.

Symbolism: One can find much symbolism in the crossing of the Jordan River into the promised land. For instance, we must pass through the “water” (baptism) to gain entrance into the “promised land” (celestial kingdom). Priesthood holders (the priests who carried the ark of the covenant; see Joshua 3:6) enabled the children of Israel to pass through the water (priesthood holders baptize us). Through the help of God, we can drive all “enemies” such as sin, bad habits, etc., out of our lives.

33 And now, do ye suppose that the children of this land [*the inhabitants of Palestine—Canaan—when Joshua led the children of Israel into it*], who were in the land of promise, who were driven out by our fathers, do ye suppose that they were righteous? Behold, I say unto you, Nay.

34 Do ye suppose that our fathers would have been more choice than they if they had been righteous? I say unto you, Nay. [*Symbolism: It is true that righteousness puts all people, regardless of race or other factors, on an equal footing with God as far as eternal blessings are concerned.*]

35 Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God. But behold, this people had rejected every word of God, and they were ripe in iniquity; and the fulness of the wrath of God was upon them; and the Lord did curse the land against them, and bless it unto our fathers [*ancestors*]; yea, he did curse it against them unto their destruction, and he did bless it unto our fathers unto their obtaining power over it.

36 Behold, the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited; and he hath created his children that they should possess it. [*Message: The purpose of this earth is to be a place where people can grow and develop, not to be a place where they come to be destroyed. Hint to Laman and Lemuel: If you get yourselves destroyed because of wickedness, you are wasting the purposes for being sent to earth.*]

37 And he raiseth up a righteous nation, and destroyeth the nations of the wicked.

38 And he leadeth away the righteous into precious lands, and the wicked he destroyeth, and curseth the land unto them for their sakes. [*Message: God manages things here on earth depending on how people use their agency.*]

39 He ruleth high in the heavens, for it is his throne, and this earth is his footstool. [*Symbolism: We are all subordinate to God. He has power over all things—including shipbuilding . . . hint, hint.*]

40 And he loveth those who will have him to be their God. Behold, he loved our fathers, and he covenanted with them, yea, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and he remembered the covenants which he had made; wherefore, he did bring them out of the land of Egypt.

The word “loveth,” as used in the context of verse 40, above, as well as numerous other scripture references, means, in effect, “is able to bless.”

41 And he did straiten [*discipline; punish*] them in the wilderness with his rod; for they hardened their hearts, even as ye have; and the Lord straitened them because of their iniquity [*wickedness*]. He sent fiery flying serpents among them; and after they were bitten he prepared a way that they might be healed; and the labor which they had to perform was to look; and because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished. [*Symbolism: The gospel way of life is actually the simplest way. Many consider it to be too simplistic or even simple-minded to believe in God and the Atonement of Christ, personal accountability, life after death, etc. Therefore, they refuse the gospel in their lives.*]

42 And they did harden their hearts from time to time, and they did revile against [*criticize; rebel against*] Moses, and also against God; nevertheless, ye know that they were led forth by his matchless power into the land of promise.

43 And now, after all these things, the time has come that they [*the Jews, meaning the descendants of the children of Israel who dwell in the Jerusalem area at the time of Lehi*] have become wicked, yea, nearly unto ripeness [*about ready for destruction*]; and I know not but they are at this day about to be destroyed; for I know that the day must surely come that

they must be destroyed, save [*except for*] a few only, who shall be led away into captivity.

44 Wherefore [*this is the reason that*], the Lord commanded my father that he should depart into the wilderness; and the Jews also sought to take away his life; yea, and ye also have sought to take away his life; wherefore, ye are murderers in your hearts and ye are like unto them.

This is strong language and helps explain why Nephi's rebellious brothers and the rebellious others are so insensitive to the Spirit. We are now coming to one of the more famous verses in the Book of Mormon, verse 45. It clearly explains that they have had marvelous manifestations which should have strengthened their testimonies and made them firm in the gospel. It explains what is wrong with them now and it tells why the Lord has to "turn up the volume" in order to try to retrieve some of His wayward children here on earth.

We will **bold** some of Nephi's words and phrases which seem to indicate that the accountability level of Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael is increasing.

45 Ye are swift to do iniquity but slow to remember the Lord your God. **Ye have seen an angel, and he spake unto you; yea, ye have heard his voice from time to time; and he hath spoken unto you in a still small voice,** but ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words; wherefore, **he has spoken unto you like unto the voice of thunder, which did cause the earth to shake** as if it were to divide asunder.

46 And **ye** also **know** that by the power of his almighty word he can cause the earth that it shall pass away; yea, and **ye know** that by his word he can cause the rough places to be made smooth, and smooth places shall be broken up. O, then, why is it, that ye can be so hard in your hearts?

47 Behold, my soul is rent [*torn*] with anguish because of you, and my heart is pained; I fear lest ye shall be cast off forever. Behold, I am full of the Spirit of God, insomuch that my frame has no strength.

Perhaps you've noticed that when the Spirit of the Lord is upon you, you have strong feelings of compassion and love for others. Thus, we understand somewhat why Nephi can care so strongly for his brethren, verse 47, above, in spite of such hateful treatment at their hands.

48 And now it came to pass that when I had spoken these words they were

angry with me, and were desirous to throw me into the depths of the sea; and as they came forth to lay their hands upon me I spake unto them, saying: In the name of the Almighty God, I command you that ye touch me not, for I am filled with the power of God, even unto the consuming of my flesh; and whoso shall lay his hands upon me shall wither even as a dried reed; and he shall be as naught [*nothing*] before the power of God, for God shall smite him.

49 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto them that they should murmur no more against their father; neither should they withhold their labor from me, for God had commanded me that I should build a ship.

50 And I said unto them: If God had commanded me to do all things I could do them. If he should command me that I should say unto this water, be thou earth, it should be earth; and if I should say it, it would be done.

51 And now, if the Lord has such great power, and has wrought so many miracles among the children of men, how is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship?

52 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said many things unto my brethren, insomuch that they were confounded and could not contend against me; neither durst they lay their hands upon me nor touch me with their fingers, even for the space of many days. Now they durst not do this lest they should wither before me, so powerful was the Spirit of God; and thus it had wrought upon them.

The gentle approach of the “still small voice” could not humble them. But the threat of physical destruction does. In many ways, such is the case in our day (see D&C 88:88–90). We understand this to be the root cause of so many natural disasters and upheavals in nature in the last days. It is a final attempt by the Lord to get people’s attention so that they can repent. Otherwise, they will be destroyed by the final wars, etc. or at the actual Second Coming.

Next, we see yet another opportunity given by a loving God for these rebellious ones to repent. While some may look at it as rather harsh, in the eternal scheme of things it is a wonderful kindness. (**Bold** used for emphasis.)

53 And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: Stretch forth thine hand again unto thy brethren, and they shall not wither before thee, but I will

shock them, saith the Lord, and **this will I do, that they may know that I am the Lord their God.**

54 And it came to pass that I stretched forth my hand unto my brethren, and they did not wither before me; but the Lord did shake them, even according to the word which he had spoken.

55 And **now**, they said: **We know of a surety** that the Lord is with thee, for **we know** that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us. And they fell down before me, and were about to worship me, but I would not suffer them [*allow them to do so*], saying: I am thy brother, yea, even thy younger brother; wherefore, worship the Lord thy God, and honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God shall give thee.

FIRST NEPHI 18

The work of building the ship now progresses rapidly, because they are working in harmony, as directed by the Lord as He communicates with Nephi from time to time. They are all busy, and things go well. There is perhaps some interesting and important symbolism, even in the construction of the ship. Notice that their goal is to cross the waters to get to the promised land. Again, water can symbolize baptism, and the promised land can symbolize heaven. The ship can symbolize the help of God to get us back to heaven. Without His help (the ship), we cannot make it. The fact that this ship is not “after the manner of men” (verse 2), could symbolize that we can’t get to the promised land by living the common lifestyle of the “natural man” (Mosiah 3:19). Finally, the fact that Nephi “did pray oft” (verse 3) can remind us of the need for constant prayer and communication with God throughout our lives. We will use **bold** just a bit to emphasize what was said in this note.

1 AND it came to pass that **they did worship the Lord, and did go forth with me**; and we did work timbers of curious [*usually means “skillful” or “fine”*] workmanship. And **the Lord did show me** from time to time after what manner I should work the timbers of the ship.

2 Now I, Nephi, did **not** work the timbers after the manner which was learned by men [*not according to men's knowledge*], neither did I build the ship **after the manner of men**; but I did build it after the manner which the Lord had shown unto me; wherefore, it was not after the manner of men.

3 And **I, Nephi, did go into the mount oft, and I did pray oft unto the Lord**; wherefore the Lord showed unto me great things. [*Symbolism: When we communicate with the Lord, we are shown great things of the gospel and eternal life, by the Holy Ghost.*]

4 And it came to pass that after I had finished the ship, according to the word of the Lord, my brethren beheld that it was good, and that the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine; wherefore, **they did humble themselves again** before the Lord.

5 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came unto my father, that we should arise and go down into the ship.

6 And it came to pass that on the morrow, after we had prepared all things, much fruits and meat from the wilderness, and honey in abundance, and provisions according to that which the Lord had commanded us, we did go down into the ship, with all our loading and our seeds, and whatsoever thing we had brought with us, every one according to his age; wherefore, we did all go down into the ship, with our wives and our children.

Next, Nephi tells us more about his parents' family. In addition to these two more sons, we are told also that Lehi and Sariah had daughters (see 2 Nephi 5:6).

7 And now, my father had begat [*fathered*] two sons in the wilderness [*during the eight years in the wilderness*]; the elder was called Jacob and the younger Joseph.

8 And it came to pass after we had all gone down into the ship, and had taken with us our provisions and things which had been commanded us, we did put forth into the sea and were driven forth before the wind towards the promised land. [*Perhaps "wind" in this verse could symbolize the help of the Lord. You can't see it but you can feel it. And if you use your agency to steer your life in the direction the wind is gently blowing you, you will end*

up in the “promised land.”]

Perhaps you are already getting a little bit apprehensive because, while they are aboard the ship, they have spare time on their hands. Perhaps one of our most difficult tests in this life is what we do with spare time.

9 And after we had been driven forth before the wind for the space of many days, behold, my brethren and the sons of Ishmael and also their wives began to make themselves merry [*we assume that the word “merry,” as used here, means “boisterous, loud, and inappropriate”*], insomuch that they began to dance, and to sing, and to speak with much rudeness, yea, even that they did forget by what power they had been brought thither; yea, they were lifted up unto exceeding rudeness. [*“Rudeness” and its accompanying crudeness are offensive to the Spirit. Unfortunately, our society and, in fact, the whole world have become and are continuing to become more rude and more crude as Satan plies his incessant wiles in an increased frenzy in the last days. We would do well to avoid these preliminary insensitivities which lead to grosser sins.*]

The singing and dancing mentioned in verse 9, above, had to be inappropriate singing and dancing of some sort, since the Lord obviously approves of appropriate music and dancing. In D&C 136:28, He said: “If thou art merry, praise the Lord with singing, with music, with dancing, and with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving.”

10 And I, Nephi, began to fear exceedingly lest the Lord should be angry with us, and smite us because of our iniquity, that we should be swallowed up in the depths of the sea; wherefore, I, Nephi, began to speak to them with much soberness; but behold they were angry with me, saying: We will not that our younger brother shall be a ruler over us.

11 And it came to pass that Laman and Lemuel did take me and bind me with cords, and they did treat me with much harshness; nevertheless, the Lord did suffer [*allow*] it that he might show forth his power, unto the fulfilling of his word which he had spoken concerning the wicked.

This (verse 11, above) is a very important explanation of some of the suffering which the righteous suffer at the hands of the wicked. Although the righteous often suffer much because of the evil acts of the wicked, they will be fine in eternity, which is what ultimately counts; whereas, the wicked will not “be fine” in the eternities, unless they repent. If the Lord were to stop every cruel act performed against the righteous, soon there would be no

real agency, and mortal life as a testing ground would be rendered nonfunctional.

12 And it came to pass that after they had bound me insomuch that I could not move, the compass [*the Liahona; symbolic of the Holy Ghost; compare with 1 Nephi 16:28*], which had been prepared of the Lord, did cease to work.

13 Wherefore, they knew not whither they should steer the ship, insomuch that there arose a great storm, yea, a great and terrible tempest, and we were driven back upon the waters for the space of three days [*symbolic of the fact that when we cease to follow the Spirit, we lose ground*]; and they began to be frightened exceedingly lest they should be drowned in the sea; nevertheless they did not loose me.

14 And on the fourth day, which we had been driven back, the tempest began to be exceedingly sore [*very bad*].

15 And it came to pass that we were about to be swallowed up in the depths of the sea. And after we had been driven back upon the waters for the space of four days, my brethren began to see that the judgments of God were upon them, and that they must perish save that they should [*unless they would*] repent of their iniquities; wherefore, they came unto me, and loosed the bands which were upon my wrists, and behold they had swollen exceedingly; and also mine ankles were much swollen, and great was the soreness thereof.

Nephi is a great example of what perspective and closeness to the Lord can do for a person under extreme trial and tribulation. Such sufferings and hardships are but a “moment in eternity”; yet while going through them, they are “an eternal moment.” But with the help of the Lord, they can be “endured well” (D&C 121:8). Next, Nephi gives clear counsel as to how to endure well. (**Bold** added for emphasis.)

16 Nevertheless, **I did look unto my God, and I did praise him all the day long; and I did not murmur against the Lord because of mine afflictions.**

17 Now my father, Lehi, had said many things unto them, and also unto the sons of Ishmael; but, behold, they did breathe out much threatenings against anyone that should speak for me; and my parents being stricken in years

[*being elderly*], and having suffered much grief because of their children, they were brought down, yea, even upon their sickbeds. [*The behavior of Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael almost killed Lehi and Sariah.*]

18 Because of their grief and much sorrow, and the iniquity of my brethren, they were brought near even to be carried out of this time to meet their God; yea, their grey hairs were about to be brought down to lie low in the dust; yea, even they were near to be cast with sorrow into a watery grave.

The wording in verse 18, above, is typical of near eastern language. Again, an internal evidence that the Book of Mormon account began in a near eastern setting.

19 And Jacob and Joseph also, being young [*neither could have been more than eight years of age*], having need of much nourishment, were grieved because of the afflictions of their mother; and also my wife with her tears and prayers, and also my children [*Nephi now has his own family*], did not soften the hearts of my brethren that they would loose me.

20 And there was nothing save it were the power of God, which threatened them with destruction, could soften their hearts; wherefore, when they saw that they were about to be swallowed up in the depths of the sea they repented of the thing which they had done, insomuch that they loosed me.

Once again, Laman and Lemuel and their rebellious in-laws repented, but only when their own lives were threatened. They seem to be continuing on a downward spiral. Every time they rebel against an earlier “testimony building experience,” it seems to require a more powerful and more personally threatening experience to bring them to their senses. Even in the raging tempest, the love of God was manifest to them, because it was given them to invite them to repent and have a happy, pleasant eternity.

21 And it came to pass after they had loosed me, behold, I took the compass, and it did work whither I desired it. And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord; and after I had prayed the winds did cease, and the storm did cease, and **there was a great calm**. [*Symbolic of what happens in our lives when we turn away from evil and return to God.*]

22 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did guide the ship, that we sailed again towards the promised land.

23 And it came to pass that after we had sailed for the space of many days

we did arrive at the promised land; and we went forth upon the land, and did pitch our tents; and we did call it the promised land.

24 And it came to pass that we did begin to till the earth, and we began to plant seeds; yea, we did put all our seeds into the earth, which we had brought from the land of Jerusalem. And it came to pass that they did grow exceedingly; wherefore, we were blessed in abundance.

25 And it came to pass that we did find upon the land of promise, as we journeyed in the wilderness, that there were beasts in the forests of every kind, both the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat and the wild goat, and all manner of wild animals, which were for the use of men. And we did find all manner of ore, both of gold, and of silver, and of copper.

Critics of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon have ridiculed the idea that there were horses in the New World. However, solid evidence has since surfaced that horses were indeed in America before Columbus arrived.

The following quote from page 19 of the 1996 *Book of Mormon Student Manual*, used at BYU and in the Institutes of Religion, eliminates the criticism. It reads as follows: "If Joseph Smith had been writing the Book of Mormon instead of translating it from ancient records, he would have been very foolish to have included references to horses on the American continent in Book of Mormon times (1 Nephi 18:25; Enos 21). In 1830, nearly all the historians and scholars were convinced there had been no horses on the American continent before the coming of Columbus. After the Book of Mormon was published, however, archaeological discoveries were made that clearly indicate that horses were in the Americas before Columbus arrived. In the asphalt deposits of Rancho LaBrea in southern California, numerous fossil remains of horses have been found that antedate (predate) Book of Mormon times. Although these discoveries do not absolutely prove horses were in the Americas in the time period covered by the Book of Mormon (about 2600 B.C. to A.D. 421), they do prove horses were there before Columbus" (Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*, p. 117).

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