

—THE BOOK—  
OF MORMON  
MADE EASIER

STUDY GUIDE

PART ONE: 1 NEPHI THROUGH WORDS OF MORMON



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MADE EASIER

STUDY GUIDE

PART ONE: 1 NEPHI THROUGH WORDS OF MORMON

COME,  
FOLLOW  
ME  
EDITION

DAVID J. RIDGES

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

CFI  
AN IMPRINT OF CEDAR FORT, INC.  
SPRINGVILLE, UTAH

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ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-2354-4 (set)

Published by CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc.  
2373 W. 700 S., Springville, UT, 84663  
Distributed by Cedar Fort, Inc., [www.cedarfort.com](http://www.cedarfort.com)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019953264

Cover design by Shawnda T. Craig  
Cover design © 2019 Cedar Fort, Inc.  
Typeset by Heather Holm

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed on acid-free paper

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# 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.

















## NOTES

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



NOTES

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.**

NOTES

Horizontal lines for taking notes.

## NOTES

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*].

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Horizontal lines for taking notes.

## NOTES

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.

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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.

Horizontal lines for taking notes.