# --The BOOKof MORMON made easier

STUDY GUIDE

PART ONE: 1 NEPHI THROUGH WORDS OF MORMON

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# David J. Ridges

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

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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.

#### DECEMBER 30-JANUARY 5

# Introductory Pages of the Book of Mormon

"Another Testament of Jesus Christ"

As you study the introductory pages that come before First Nephi in your Book of Mormon, you will find a rich treasury of inspiring background information that will greatly enhance your study of the Book of Mormon. Some interesting facts as you begin your study of these inspired introductory pages include that "Another Testament of Jesus Christ" was added as a subtitle in 1982. Also, it is helpful to know that the title page (which comes just before the introduction) is a literal translation of Moroni's last statement, last page, left-hand side of the gold plates. (See *History of the Church*, volume 1, p. 71.)

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, it is addressed 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.

#### NOTES

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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. NOTES

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# 1 Nephi 1–7

"I Will Go and Do"

As you will see in the heading to First Nephi, chapter 1, in this study guide, Nephi is likely somewhere between forty-five and fifty years old as he is writing First Nephi. He is recalling back to his younger years as his family, led by his father, Lehi, left wicked Jerusalem behind as they journeyed to the promised land. It is easy to see that Nephi, as a mature man, a great teacher and prophet of God, is selecting things to include in his record that will teach us key gospel principles that will help us stay on the covenant path. Or, if we are not currently on that "strait and narrow path" (1 Nephi 8:20), his inspired writings can help us get back on it, if we so choose. The chapters in this section contain much of real life for both believers and complainers and allow us to choose for ourselves which we want to be.

### **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

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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

rusalem, King Zedekiah will be captured by King Nebuchadnezzar's ut 587 B.C. Zedekiah's sons (except for Mulek) will be killed before blinded and carried as a prisoner to Babylon (see 2 Kings 25).	NOTES
the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, her, Lehi, having dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days); and in ame many prophets [ <i>including Jeremiah, Nahum, Habakkuk,</i> esying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city royed.	
p pass that my father, Lehi, as he went forth prayed unto the l his heart, in behalf of his people.	
line in your own Book of Mormon several words and phrases from hich point out to us that Lehi, himself, was indeed a great prophet. <b>bold</b> some of them now, and then return to these verses for some	
as he prayed unto the Lord, <u>there came a pillar of fire and</u> fore him; and <u>he saw and heard much</u> ; and because of the ad heard he did quake and tremble exceedingly.	
that he returned to his own house at Jerusalem; and he cast being <b>overcome with the Spirit</b> and the things which he had	
come with the Spirit, he was <u>carried away in a vision</u> , even <u>ens open</u> , and he thought he <u>saw God sitting upon his</u> <u>vith numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of</u> <u>their God</u> .	
nat <u>he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and</u> ter was above that of the sun at noon-day <u>.</u>	
<b>relve others following him</b> , and their brightness did exceed firmament.	
vn and went forth upon the face of the earth; and <u>the first</u> e my father, and gave unto him a book, and bade him that	
that as he read, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord.	
Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations! did my father read concerning Jerusalem—that it should inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword, and ed away captive into Babylon.	
s that when <b>my father had read and seen many great and</b> did exclaim many things unto the Lord; such as: Great and as, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, odness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that	

his family have fled Jer forces of Babylon abou his eyes, and he will be

4 For it came to pass in king of Judah, (my fatl that same year there ca and Zephaniah], prophe Jerusalem must be dest

5 Wherefore it came to Lord, yea, even with all

You may wish to under verses 6 through 16, w We will underline and additional teaching.

6 And it came to pass dwelt upon a rock be things which he saw an

7 And it came to pass himself upon his bed, b seen.

8 And being thus overc that he saw the heave throne, surrounded w singing and praising t

9 And it came to pass th he beheld that his lus

10 And he also **saw tw** that of the stars in the

11 And they came dow came and stood before he should read.

12 And it came to pass

13 And he read, saying Yea, and many things be destroyed, and the many should be carrie

14 And it came to pass marvelous things, he marvelous are thy work and thy power, and go and, because thou art n they shall perish!

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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 <u>he saw in visions</u> and in <u>dreams</u>; and he also hath written many things which he <u>prophesied</u> 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

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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.

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## **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**.

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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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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.

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