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## “We Might Have Enjoyed Our Possessions and the Land of Our Inheritance”: Hebrew yrš and 1 Nephi 17:21

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# “WE MIGHT HAVE ENJOYED OUR POSSESSIONS AND THE LAND OF OUR INHERITANCE”: HEBREW YRŠ AND 1 NEPHI 17:21

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Matthew L. Bowen

**ABSTRACT:** *The verbal expression “we might have enjoyed,” as used in a complaint that Nephi attributes to his brothers, “we might have enjoyed our possessions and the land of our inheritance” (1 Nephi 17:21), reflects a use of the Hebrew verb yrš in its progressive aspect, “to enjoy possession of.” This meaning is evident in several passages in the Hebrew Bible, and perhaps most visibly in the KJV translation of Numbers 36:8 (“And every daughter, that possesseth [Hebrew yōrešet] an inheritance [naḥālâ] in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may enjoy [yīršû] every man the inheritance [naḥālat] of his fathers”) and Joshua 1:15 (“then ye shall return unto the land of your possession [lě’ ereš yēruššatkem or, unto the land of your inheritance], and enjoy it [wīrištem ’ōtāh].” Examining Laman and Lemuel’s complaint in a legal context helps us better appreciate “land[s] of ... inheritance” as not just describing a family estate, but as also expressing a seminal Abrahamic Covenant concept in numerous Book of Mormon passages, including the covenant implications of the resettlement of the converted Lamanites and reconverted Zoramites as refugees in “the land of Jershon” (“place of inheritance”).*

**I**n 1 Nephi 17:20–22, Nephi recalls the gist of his brothers’ complaints<sup>1</sup> about leaving behind their family estate, “the land of ... inheritance”

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1. Nephi does not directly quote any of his brothers. He is paraphrasing or giving us the gist of their complaints as he notes in the next verse: “And after this manner of language did my brethren murmur and complain against us” (1 Nephi 17:22).

(1 Nephi 2:11; 3:22; 5:2; and 17:21), “at”<sup>2</sup> or near Jerusalem and the concomitant abandonment of considerable material possessions (e.g., 1 Nephi 2:4; 3:16, 22, 26). This recollection reflects several significant Hebraisms: “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**” (1 Nephi 17:21).<sup>3</sup>

In this study, I will examine how the complaint “we might have enjoyed our possessions in the land of our inheritance; yea, and we might have been happy” reflects the Hebraism “land of ... inheritance,” as well as a possible polyptoton<sup>4</sup> and an allusion to the tree of life in Lehi’s dream. I will further examine how the main verb in this complaint — enjoy — reflects a specific secondary meaning of the Hebrew verb *yrs̄*, “enjoy possession of.”<sup>5</sup> The meaning of this verb in its secondary, progressive (or continuous) aspect is reflected in several important passages in the Hebrew Bible, including Ezekiel 33:24–29, Psalms 37:9, 11, 22, 29, and Judges 2:6–10.<sup>6</sup> Additional support for this more nuanced meaning of *yrs̄* underlying the Book of Mormon translation at 1 Nephi 17:21 occurs in Numbers 36:8 as part of formal legislation regarding lands of inheritance remaining within tribes, and in Joshua 1:15. Early translators of the Bible into English — beginning with Tyndale<sup>7</sup> and including Miles Coverdale,<sup>8</sup>

2. Nephi describes his former dwelling place as being “at Jerusalem” in 1 Nephi 1:4, 7; 5:4; 2 Nephi 6:8 (quoting Jacob); 2 Nephi 9:5 (quoting Jacob); and 25:6.

3. Book of Mormon citations will generally follow Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

4. Polyptoton is a wordplay involving words deriving from the same root. Richard A. Lanham describes polyptoton as a wordplay involving a “repetition of words from the same root but with different endings.” Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 117.

5. Norbert Lohfink, “ירש, *yāraš*, ירשה *y’rēšā*; ירשה *y’ruššā*; מורש *mōrāš*; מורשה *mōrāšā*” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 6:391.

6. Joachim J. Krause, “lārešet ’et hā’āreš — ‘To Possess the Land, to Enjoy Possession of the Land’: A Lexicographic Proposal and Its Theological Ramifications,” *Vetus Testamentum* 71/4–5 (2021): 619–30, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685330-00001110>.

7. Tyndale rendered the purpose clause in Numbers 36:8, “that the childern of Israel maye enioy euery man the enheritaunce of his father.”

8. Miles Coverdale, evidently following Tyndale, rendered Joshua 1:15 thus: “tyll the LORDE haue broughte youre brethren to rest also as well as you: that they also maye take possession of the londe, which the LORDE yor God shal geue them:

Thomas Matthew (John Rogers),<sup>9</sup> the translators of the Geneva Bible<sup>10</sup> and the King James Version, all of whom followed Tyndale’s work to greater or lesser degrees — recognized or at least preserved the secondary, more nuanced meaning of *yrš* and lucidly rendered it in English with the verb, “enjoy” in these passages. Recognition of this lexical subtlety at work in 1 Nephi 17:21 helps us better understand the brothers’ attachment to the family estate and material wealth. It provides additional context for understanding the tenuous nature of their filial loyalty to Lehi as father and patriarch of the clan and their skepticism regarding his (and Nephi’s) spiritual guidance. It also provides additional context for these brothers’ temporal focus and consequent failure to find happiness in their lives.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, an examination of the brothers’ complaint helps us better appreciate *yrš* and “land[s] of ... inheritance” / “land[s] ... of possessions” as legal expressions within an Abrahamic covenant as used throughout the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon.

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Then shal ye turne agayne in to the londe of youre possession, that ye maye enioye it, which Moses the seruaunt of the LORDE hath geuen you on this syde Iordane towarde ye Easte.”

9. The Matthew Bible renders Joshua 1:15: “vntyll the Lorde haue geuen your brethren reast, as he hath you, and vntyll they also haue obtayned, the lande which the Lord youre God geueth them. And then retourne vnto the lande of youre possessyon and enioy it, which lande Moses the Lordes seruaunte gaue you on thys syde Iordan towarde the sunne rysynge.” See “Matthew’s Bible 1537,” *Textus Receptus Bibles*, <http://textusreceptusbibles.com/Matthews/6/1>.

10. The Geneva Bible hews close to Tyndale in the purpose clause of Numbers 36:8: “that the children of Israel may enioye eury man the inheritance of their fathers.” See “Geneva Bible 1560/1599,” *Textus Receptus Bibles*, <http://textusreceptusbibles.com/Geneva/4/36>.

11. President Russell M. Nelson stated, “My dear brothers and sisters, the joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives.” “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign*, November 2016, 82. Nephi and his brothers, Laman and Lemuel, shared many of the same circumstances, but not the same focus. Nephi’s faith in and focus on Jesus Christ led him to happiness and joy (cf. 2 Nephi 5:27), while Laman and Lemuel’s temporal focus and refusal to “look unto the Lord as they ought” (1 Nephi 15:3) did not lead them to joy.

### To Possess, Inherit, Enjoy Possession of: The Meanings of *yrš*

The basic meanings of the verb *yrš* as a covenant-legal term are “to take possession of,”<sup>12</sup> “to be heir to someone,”<sup>13</sup> or to “inherit, dispossess.”<sup>14</sup> This verb occurs first as a legal term in Genesis 15:3–4 where Abraham receives the promise of an heir (*yôreš*) of his own descent (i.e., seed) who would “inherit” (*yîrāšekā*) his possessions. It then occurs as a key Abrahamic covenant term a few verses later in Genesis 15:7–8, a text in which the Lord grants the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants: “And he [the Lord] said unto him [Abraham], I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land **to inherit it** [*lêrištāh*]. And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that **I shall inherit it** [*’îrāšennā*]?” (Genesis 15:7–8).<sup>15</sup> There follows a covenant-making ceremony (literally, a covenant-cutting<sup>16</sup> ceremony; cf. *kārat* ... *bērit* in Genesis 15:18), with the Lord ritually passing between the halves of the sacrificed animals (see Genesis 15:9–21).

Recently Joachim J. Krause,<sup>17</sup> following up on the earlier work of Norbert Lohfink,<sup>18</sup> and citing evidence from Ezekiel 33:24–29, Psalm 37, and Judges 2:6–10, has shown that *yrš*, more than “to take possession of” (ingressive aspect),<sup>19</sup> means “to enjoy possession of” (progressive or continuous aspect) in several instances. For example, in Ezekiel 33, the Lord instructs Ezekiel to pronounce divine judgment on

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12. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2001), 441 (hereafter cited as *HALOT*); Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 439 (hereafter cited as *BDB*).

13. *HALOT*, 441.

14. *BDB*, 439.

15. Forms of *yrš* continue as a key Abrahamic Covenant word in Genesis 22:17; 24:60; 28:4 (cf. 21:10).

16. See, e.g., Jared T. Parker, “Cutting Covenants,” in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*, The 38th Annual BYU Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, ed. D. Kelly Ogden et al., (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), 109–28.

17. Krause, “Enjoy Possession of the Land,” 619–30.

18. Lohfink, “*yāraš*,” 391.

19. Ingressive — i.e., to begin an action. Verbs with an ingressive aspect describe the beginning or initiation of a particular action, while verbs with a progressive aspect describe a particular action that is ongoing, continuing, or progressing rather than beginning. To “take possession of” the land describes the beginning of the action of inheriting the land, while “enjoy possession of” the land describes the continuous action of inheriting the land.

Judahite survivors of the Babylonian exile who remained in the land of Israel-Judah and continued in the sinful practices for which most Israelites and Judahites had been exiled from the land, all while claiming divine sanction for retaining inheritance or possession of the land:

Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and **he inherited the land** [*wayyîraš*]: but we are many; the land is given us for **inheritance** [*lēmôrâšâ*]. Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: **and shall ye possess the land** [*wēhā'āreš tîrâšû*]? Ye stand upon your sword, ye work abomination, and ye defile every one his neighbour's wife: **and shall ye possess the land** [*wēhā'āreš tîrâšû*]? Say thou thus unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; As I live, surely they that are in the wastes shall fall by the sword, and him that is in the open field will I give to the beasts to be devoured, and they that be in the forts and in the caves shall die of the pestilence. For I will lay the land most desolate, and the pomp of her strength shall cease; and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, that none shall pass through. Then shall they know that I am the Lord, when I have laid the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed. (Ezekiel 33:24–29)

The arguments of the Judahite survivors and the Lord's holding them accountable for their unrighteousness revolve around the covenant-legal use of *yrš*. Lohfink explains the logic of the survivors' claims and the Lord's counterclaims in terms of the survivors' and the prophet's respective uses of *yrš*:

They say: 'Abraham was only one man, yet he took possession of (*wayyîraš*) the land; but we are many — so the land is surely given to us to possess (*nittenâ hā'āreš lemôrâšâ*)' ... The argument *a fortiori* perverts the statement about Abraham. Its point is that Abraham did not receive the land by virtue of his own efforts — he was only a single individual — but through Yahweh. But the argument of those dwelling in the ruins boasts of their numbers and their own efforts. The prophet's response ... makes this perversion quite clear. It demolishes any claim to *yrš*: idolatry and bloodshed rule out any right



to possess the land. Here *yrš* should probably be translated ‘enjoy possession of.’<sup>20</sup>

Here we must bear in mind that the Abrahamic covenant, Israel-Judah’s covenant claims on the land as Abraham’s descendants, and the meaning of the Babylonian exile form the backdrop of this dispute. The translation of *yrš* in terms of its primary meaning “inherit” certainly best fits in the first instance with Abraham as its subject, while “enjoy possession of” would better fit the Lord’s twofold question: “and shall ye possess the land?” or further, “and shall ye enjoy possession of the land?”

In support of *yrš* as “enjoy possession of” in some contexts, Krause further cites Psalms 37, in which the Psalmist repeatedly uses the *yīršû-’āreṣ/lārešet ’āreṣ* idiom (Psalms 37:9, 11, 22, 29). In all these instances the sense of the verb *yrš* is not simply “inherit the earth” or “possess the land,” but to “enjoy possession of the land” or “enjoy the possession of” the earth. This is especially clear in Psalms 37:11, where the matching clause in the bicolon supports the idea that *yrš* in some contexts means, not just “to inherit” but to “enjoy possession of,” “enjoy inheritance of” — “But the meek **shall inherit** [*yīršû*] the earth [*’āreṣ*]; and **shall delight themselves** [*wēhit’annēgû*] in the abundance of peace.” The semantic “matching”<sup>21</sup> (or “parallelism”) of the paired verbs in bicolon makes much better sense if *yrš* here is understood to mean “[they] shall enjoy” or “they shall enjoy possession of.” Thus, “the meek shall enjoy the earth and delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (translation mine). Psalms 37:11, famously, is the text that Jesus quotes or paraphrases in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5) — in other words, “happy [Greek *makarioi* = Hebrew *’ašrê*] are the meek for they shall inherit [Greek *klēronomēsousin* = Hebrew *yīršû*] the earth.”<sup>22</sup> Here true happiness is causally linked to enjoying possession of the land in fulfillment of the divine covenant. Notably, it is the poor, meek, or humble — the *’ānāwīm* — whose circumstances have been adverse, but whose focus has been on

20. Lohfink, “*yāraš*,” 391.

21. On “matching” as a feature of biblical Hebrew poetry, see Michael P. O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 87–109.

22. See, e.g., Deuteronomy 1:21, 39; 2:24, 31; 3:12, 18, 20; 4:1, 5, 14, 22, 26, 38, 47; 5:31, 33; 6:1, 18; 7:1, 17; 8:1; 9:1, 3–6 (x4), 23; 10:11; 11:8, 10–11, 23, 29, 31; 12:1–2, 29; 15:4; 16:20; 19:1–2, 14; 21:1; 23:20; 25:19; 26:1; 28:21, 63; 30:5, 16, 18; 31:3, 13; 32:47; 33:23.

the Lord, who enjoy possession of the land and are “happy” (compare Nephi’s statement at the outset of his autobiography: “having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days,” 1 Nephi 1:1).

The Abrahamic covenant concept of inheriting the land of Canaan is central to Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic conquest narratives. The narrative description of Joshua’s dismissing the people to go home to their inheritances to take possession of them captures an important moment in the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant:

And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man **unto his inheritance** [*lěnaḥālātô*] **to possess** [*lārešet*] **the land** [*’et-hā’āreš*]. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord, that he did for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. (Judges 2:6–10)

Since Israel by this time had already taken formal possession of the land and they were returning to their inheritances, the meaning of *yrš* (*lārešet*) must be progressive: “the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to *enjoy possession* of the land” (adaptation of the KJV is mine).

### “That the Children of Israel May Enjoy Every Man the Inheritance of His Fathers”:

#### Additional Example #1 of *yrš* as “Enjoy”

Another illustrative example of *yrš* as not only “inherit” or “possess,” but also “enjoy possession of,” or “enjoy” occurs in a Mosaic decree requiring daughters who had inherited land to marry within their ancestral tribe, thus helping to retain the territorial integrity of tribal lands: “And every daughter, **that possesseth** [*yōrešet*] **an inheritance** [*naḥālâ*] in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel **may enjoy** [*yîršû*] every man **the**

**inheritance** [*naḥālat*] of his fathers” (Numbers 36:8).<sup>23</sup> William Tyndale rendered the purpose clause in this verse, “that the childern of Israel maye enjoy euery man the enheritaunce of his father” and subsequent translators followed suit. Tyndale deftly recognized that the land had already been taken possession of, rendering the feminine participial form *yōrešet* in its ingressive sense, and then rendering the second instance of the verb in its progressive sense, “enjoy.”

### “Then Shall Ye Return unto the Land of Your Possession and Enjoy It”: Additional Example #2 of *yrš* as “Enjoy”

The outset of the conquest narratives furnishes us with another lucid example in which the verb *yrš* extends beyond the sense of “inherit” or “possess” into the sense of “enjoy” or “rejoice in the possession of,” as the King James translators and earlier translators of the Bible into English recognized. In addressing the Transjordanian tribes (Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe Manasseh), Joshua instructed the men of the tribe to cross over Jordan, after settling their wives and children in the land, and to help the other tribes conquer the remainder of the land covenanted to Abraham and his descendants:

Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle, shall remain in the land which Moses gave you on this side Jordan; but ye shall pass before your brethren armed, all the mighty men of valour, and help them; Until the Lord have given your brethren rest, as he hath given you, and they also have **possessed** [*wěyārēšû*] **the land** [*’et-hā’āreš*] which the Lord your God giveth them: **then ye shall return unto the land of your possession** [*lē’eres yēruššatkem* or, **unto the land of your inheritance**], **and enjoy it** [*wīrištem ’ôtāh*], which Moses the Lord’s servant gave you on this side Jordan toward the sunrising. (Joshua 1:14–15)

In the first instance, the verb *yrš* — *wěyārēšû* — clearly has the sense of “possess” or “inherit.” However, in the second instance *yrš* — *wīrištem* — requires a sense that goes beyond the notion of merely possessing or inheriting, already present in the phrase “land of your possession/inheritance.” Whether or not this phrase represents a scribal

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23. This statute, which encouraged endogamy within tribes, has served to promote endogamy and marriage within narrow degrees of consanguinity (including cousin marriage) within Israel’s tribes from ancient days even into modern times.

gloss,<sup>24</sup> the KJV translators recognized that to render it "possess" would have been redundant. The translation's expression of the notion "enjoy the possession of it" — "and enjoy it" (i.e., be happy in the enjoyment of it) — obviates the potential redundancy.

**"We Might Have Enjoyed Our Possessions  
in the Land of Our Inheritance":**

**The Imprint of *yrš* as "Enjoy" in 1 Nephi 17:21**

The Deuteronomic legislation that received renewed emphasis during Lehi's lifetime (under king Josiah), predicates<sup>25</sup> Israel's continued inheritance or possession of the land under the Abrahamic covenant in terms of collective obedience to the "commandments," "statutes," and "judgments" in Deuteronomy:

But as for thee [Moses], stand thou here by me, and I will speak unto thee all the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which thou shalt teach them, that they may do them **in the land which I give them to possess it** [*l'ērištāh*] ... Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and **that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess** [*tīrāšūn*]. Deuteronomy 5:31, 33 (MT 28, 30)

Thus, the penalty for failure to observe the Deuteronomic legislation would be the loss of the land. Indeed, it would be said in a time to come: "And the Lord rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day" (Deuteronomy 29:28). The Lord reiterated the Abrahamic Covenant with Isaac (see Genesis 26:1–5) and Jacob (see Genesis 28:10–22; 35:9–15) in subsequent generations. Similarly, the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant could be gained or lost in every subsequent generation. Although the Abrahamic Covenant was unconditional to Abraham and his "seed" (posterity) across time and into eternity, the blessings of the covenant were conditional upon obedience to God's commandments for

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24. See, e.g., Jacob Weingreen, *From Bible to Mishna: The Continuity of Tradition* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1976), 34–35. Weingreen notes that the phrase intrudes awkwardly in the flow of the sentence and is missing in the Septuagint (LXX).

25. Robert Alter writes: "Israel's endurance on the land promised to it is constantly, dangerously, contingent on its faithfully hewing to all that God has commanded." *The Hebrew Bible, Volume 1: The Five Books of Moses, Torah* (New York: Norton, 2019), 640.

each individual Israelite and for the community as a whole — it was both everlasting and new (cf. the collocation “new and everlasting covenant”).<sup>26</sup> A century before Lehi, the northern kingdom of Israel had been exiled from enjoying possession of the promised land (see 2 Kings 17:1–23), the right to which it had long been forfeiting. During Lehi’s time Judah was in the process of being exiled from enjoying possession of the land for similar covenant dereliction (see 2 Kings 24). To be able to “live,” prosper in the land, and to prolong one’s days upon it — to “enjoy” possession of it — all constituted aspects of “happiness.” Laman and Lemuel never recognized that Israel and Judah had collectively lost that privilege — at least for that time — with respect to the land of Canaan. Nevertheless, they still could have the privilege of enjoying possession of and being happy in the new land of promise to which they were being led (which some of Lehi’s family, in fact, did. See 2 Nephi 5:27).

Lehi and Nephi recognized that the family’s departure from Jerusalem and “the land of [their] inheritance” represented a small part of an exile from covenant lands that had begun well over a century prior to their departure. Nephi stated as much even as he tried to help his brothers see how their family fit into the bigger picture: “And behold, there are many which are already lost from the knowledge of they which are at Jerusalem; yea, the more part of the tribes have been led away, and they are scattered to and fro upon the isles of the sea. And whither they are none of us knoweth, save that we know that they have been led away” (1 Nephi 22:4).

The collocation “land of our/your/his inheritance” or “land of our/your/his possession”<sup>27</sup> clearly represents a Hebraism in the Book of Mormon text (see, e.g., 1 Nephi 3:22; 5:2; 17:21; 2 Nephi 10:20; Jacob 3:4; Helaman 7:22; 3 Nephi 15:13; Mormon 3:17 and the excursus below).

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26. The collocation “new and everlasting covenant” occurs in D&C 131:2; 132:6, 19, 26–27, 41–42 in the context of the eternal covenant marriage relationship entered into by Abraham and Sarah and their successors.

27. Cf., e.g., Leviticus 14:34; 25:24; Joshua 1:15; 22:4, 9; Deuteronomy 2:12.

Numbers 36:8	Joshua 1:14–15	1 Nephi 17:21
And every daughter, that possesseth [yōrešet] an inheritance [nahālā] in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may enjoy [yiršū] every man the inheritance [nahālat] of his fathers.	Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle, shall remain in the land ... until the Lord have given your brethren rest, as he hath given you, and they also have possessed [wēyārēšū] the land [ʿet-hāʾāreṣ] which the Lord your God giveth them: then ye shall return unto the land of your possession [lēʿereṣ yēruššatkem] or, unto the land of your inheritance], and enjoy it [wirištem ʾôtāh], which Moses the Lord’s servant gave you on this side Jordan toward the sunrising.	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.

As the eldest sons in the family, Laman and Lemuel would have stood to benefit first and most with the division of the estate upon Lehi’s passing at which time they would “inherit” the land — that is, in Lohfink’s description, “take formal possession of real property acquired by virtue of basic rights.”<sup>28</sup> They would not be able to “enjoy the possession of” their possession (progressive) and the family estate until after taking formal possession of it (ingressive) — i.e., and thus be “happy.” Thus, Nephi seems to infer here that Laman and Lemuel wished that their father had been killed with the result that they had never left Jerusalem and that they would now be *enjoying possession of* the family wealth and estate. This is supported by his later equation of Laman and Lemuel with Lehi’s Judahite religious opponents: “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 they” (1 Nephi 17:44).

Indeed, Nephi’s recollection of his brothers’ complaints in the land Bountiful harks back to the beginning of his small plates record where he lays out the fundamental complaint that Laman and Lemuel had about leaving the family estate and property outside Jerusalem: “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 that he was a visionary man **and that he 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, and to perish in the wilderness.

28. Lohfink, “yāraš,” 379.

And this they said that he had done because of the foolish imaginations of his heart” (1 Nephi 2:11).

Nephi depicts his brothers as valuing the temporal “inheritance” — including their father’s estate in Jerusalem’s vicinity — much more than the “land of . . . inheritance” to which the Lord had been leading them. Moreover, Nephi’s repetition of the possessive suffix “their” here — “their inheritance,” “their gold and silver,” “their precious things” has the rhetorical effect of emphasizing the brothers’ attachment to the family estate and wealth. Nephi had used this same list earlier, emphasizing Lehi’s possession of and attachment to the family estate and wealth and his complete abandonment of all of it for the sake of the preservation of his family: “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 he departed into the wilderness” (1 Nephi 2:4). Lehi found the strength to leave or forsake the “land of his inheritance” in the land given by covenant to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants in the faith that the Lord had another land of inheritance in store for him and his family.

### **“We Might Have Been Happy”: The Unrealized Results of *yrš* for Laman, Lemuel, and the Sons of Ishmael**

Just as the second clause in the bicolon, “But the meek **shall inherit** [*yîršû*] the earth [*’āreš*]; and **shall delight themselves** [*wēhit’annēgû*] in the abundance of peace,” suggests that *yîršû* here means “enjoy possession of” (as noted above), the declaration “we might have been happy” suggests a use of *yrš* with the same sense in 1 Nephi 17:21: “[**W**]e **might have enjoyed our possessions** and the land of our inheritance; yea, and **we might have been happy**” (1 Nephi 17:21).

What’s more, the words that Nephi attributes to his brothers ironically recall the words of Lehi’s dream: “And it came to pass that I beheld a tree whose fruit was desirable **to make one happy**” (1 Nephi 8:10). Years ago Daniel C. Peterson noted the wordplay evident in *’šr/’ašrê* (“happy”), Asherah/the asherah, and the tree of life as also in Proverbs 3:13, 18.<sup>29</sup> Lehi, in recounting his dream-vision, states that Laman and Lemuel “would not come unto me and partake of the fruit” (1 Nephi 8:18).

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29. Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 24.

Despite having actually heard the voice of God (1 Nephi 16:39; 17:45), Laman and Lemuel persisted in the belief that forsaking their family estate, as part of Israel-Judah's broader Abrahamic covenant inheritance, had been unnecessary. Like the survivors of the Babylonian exile against whom Ezekiel prophesied, they believed that they were justified in their conduct. In fact, their next reported words aver that they "know" the people against whom their own father had preached and who sought his life (1 Nephi 1:20; 2:13; 7:14; 17:44), were justified or "righteous" in their conduct:

And we know that the people which were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people, for they keep the statutes and the 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 word; yea, and our brother is like unto him. And after this manner of language did my brethren murmur and complain against us. (1 Nephi 17:22)

In their lamenting the loss of "the land of [their] inheritance" and their justification of the Jerusalemites, Laman and Lemuel side with the very ones who had "driven [their father] out of the land" (1 Nephi 7:14).

Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael evidently had difficulty not only envisioning the complete temporal fulfillment of divine judgment against Jerusalem, but also recognizing the broader temporal and spiritual horizons of the Abrahamic Covenant and the Lord's promises to Israel. This narrow perspective is reflected in the question to Nephi regarding the words of Isaiah in Isaiah 48–49 (1 Nephi 20–21): "What mean these things which ye have read? Behold, are they to be understood according to things which are spiritual which shall come to pass according to the spirit and not the flesh?" (1 Nephi 22:1). For these brothers, rejoicing in the possession of temporal things — "enjoy[ing their] possessions and the land of [their] inheritance" (1 Nephi 17:21) — was the essence of finding happiness in mortal life. Thus, they did not enjoy their possession of the new land of promise or "live after the manner of happiness" (2 Nephi 5:27) with Nephi and those who "joyed with him in the promised land" (Helaman 7:7). They did not hold in view the bigger picture of rejoicing in their posterity as a true heritage and enjoying an eternal land of inheritance.

We should also note here that in addition to "enjoy" as representing the progressive aspect of *yrš*, if either of the Hebrew words *môrāšâ*



(“possession,”<sup>30</sup> “acquisition, property”<sup>31</sup>) or *yěruššâ* (“possession, inheritance”<sup>32</sup>) stand behind “possession[s]” and/or “inheritance” in 1 Nephi 17:21, we have an example of polyptoton on — or a play on cognate forms of — *yrš* that emphasizes the brothers’ attachment to the family’s material possessions and estate lands.

### **Excursus: “Land[s] of Their/Your/Our Inheritance” as an Abrahamic Covenant Term**

Nephi’s writings use the collocation “land[s] of . . . inheritance” early on to refer to Lehi’s family’s estate at or near Jerusalem (1 Nephi 2:4, 11; 3:22; 5:2; 17:21). Beginning in 1 Nephi 10:3 (“and after that they [the Jews] are brought back out of captivity, to possess again their land of inheritance”), Nephi and his successors use this collocation as an Abrahamic covenant term.

Originally referring back to the Lord’s original grant of the land of Canaan to Abraham,<sup>33</sup> Lehi, Nephi, et al. also reapply it to their new land of promise<sup>34</sup> “which is the land which the Lord God hath covenanted with thy father that his seed should have for the land of their inheritance” (1 Nephi 13:30), and to all lands which constitute the points of return: “Wherefore he will bring them [i.e., those of the house of Israel] again [cf. Hebrew *yôsîp*] out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their first inheritance” (1 Nephi 22:12). Nephi uses similar language elsewhere to describe the return of exiled Jews/Judahites: “And notwithstanding that they have been carried away, they shall return again and possess the land of Jerusalem. Wherefore they shall be restored again to the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 25:11).

Nephi also records that Lehi, in his final paraenesis or counsel to his sons, had predicated inheritance of the land on observance of divine commandments, similar to Deuteronomy: “And if it so be that they shall keep his commandments, they shall be blessed upon the face of this land. And there shall be none to molest them nor to take away the land of their inheritance, and they shall dwell safely forever” (2 Nephi 1:9). Lehi knew that the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant and the Lord’s

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30. *BDB*, 440.

31. *HALOT*, 561.

32. *BDB*, 440. *HALOT* glosses *yěruššâ* as “possession,” 442.

33. See Genesis 13:14–17; 15:18.

34. “Land of promise:” compare the Hebrew collocation *hâ’āreṣ ’āšer nišba’* (“the land which he swore,” Deuteronomy 1:8, 19:8–9; cf. Genesis 15:18–21, Exodus 23:31, Numbers 34:1–13).

covenants to him would be gained or lost individually and collectively by his descendants in each generation. Lehi resorts to similar language in his final counsel to and blessing upon his son Joseph, “And may the Lord consecrate also unto thee this land, which is a most precious land, for thine inheritance and the inheritance of thy seed with thy brethren, for thy security forever, if it so be that ye shall keep the commandments of the Holy One of Israel” (2 Nephi 3:2).

The idea of lands of inheritance constitutes an important theme within Jacob’s “covenant speech” (2 Nephi 6–10),<sup>35</sup> a sermon which expands on Isaiah 49:22 to Isaiah 52:2.<sup>36</sup> Although Israel and Judah had been and would be scattered from lands of inheritance granted by the Abrahamic covenant, the Lord would gather and restore them to multiple “lands of their inheritance”: “Nevertheless the Lord will be merciful unto them, that when they [the Jews] shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered together again to the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 6:11). Later, Jacob explains his reading of Isaiah 49:22 to Isaiah 52:2 — with its descriptions of gathering, covenant reinstatement, the Divine Warrior’s defeat of Israel’s enemies<sup>37</sup> (Rahab/Egypt, Yamm, Tannin), and resurrection — thusly:

And now my beloved brethren, I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord, that he hath covenanted with all the house of Israel, that he hath spoken unto the Jews by the mouth of his holy prophets, even from the beginning down from generation to generation until

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35. On 2 Nephi 6–10 as a “covenant speech,” see John S. Thompson, “Isaiah 50–51, the Israelite Autumn Festivals, and the Covenant Speech of Jacob in 2 Nephi 6–10,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 123–50. See especially the discussion at 125–27.

36. See Matthew L. Bowen, “‘The Messiah Will Set Himself Again’: Jacob’s Use of Isaiah 11:11 in 2 Nephi 6:14 and Jacob 6:2,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021): 287–306, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-messiah-will-set-himself-again-jacobs-use-of-isaiah-1111-in-2-nephi-614-and-jacob-62/>.

37. See Daniel Belnap, “‘I Will Contend with Them That Contendeth with Thee’: The Divine Warrior in Jacob’s Speech of 2 Nephi 6–10,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* 17/1–2 (2008): 20–39; see further Matthew L. Bowen, “Messengers of the Covenant: Mormon’s Doctrinal Use of Malachi 3:1 in Moroni 7:29–32,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 31 (2019): 111–38, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/messengers-of-the-covenant-mormons-doctrinal-use-of-malachi-31-in-moroni-729-32/>

the time cometh that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God, when they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance and shall be established in all their lands of promise. (2 Nephi 9:1–2)

The horizons of Jacob’s view of this restoration include not only the literal physical restoration of Israel and Judah to “lands of . . . inheritance,” but also, evidently, a restoration to those lands in connection with the resurrection of the dead (cf. Ezekiel 37:1–14): “But behold, thus saith the Lord God: When the day cometh that they shall believe in me, that I am Christ, then have I covenanted with their fathers that they shall be restored in the flesh upon the earth unto the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 10:7).

With prophetic authority, Jacob declared the land in the New World a divine “land grant” in Abrahamic Covenant terms, including a provision for the “Gentiles” (*gōyim*; cf. Abraham as “father of many nations/gentiles,” *’ab hāmôn gōyim*, Genesis 17:4–5). These Gentiles or “others” were then being incorporated into the people of Nephi (and thus into Israel)<sup>38</sup> and those who would be in the future: “But behold, this land, saith God, shall be a land of thine inheritance; and the Gentiles shall be blessed upon the land” (2 Nephi 10:10). Near the conclusion of his covenant sermon, Jacob reiterates the Lord’s granting of the land to the faithful descendants of Lehi and the Gentiles who would be “numbered” among them:

Wherefore I will consecrate this land unto thy seed — and they which shall be numbered among thy seed — forever, for the land of their inheritance . . . And now my beloved brethren, seeing that our merciful God hath given us so great knowledge concerning these things, let us remember him and lay aside our sins and not hang down our heads, for we are not cast off. Nevertheless we have been driven out of the

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38. See Brant Gardner, “A Social History of the Early Nephites,” (presented at the 2001 FairMormon Conference Provo, UT, August 2001), <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2001/a-social-history-of-the-early-nephites>; John Gee and Matthew Roper “I Did Liken All Scriptures unto Us’: Early Nephite Understandings of Isaiah and Implications for ‘Others’ in the Land,” in *Fullness of the Gospel: Foundational Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, The 32nd Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, ed. Camille Fronk et al., (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003), 51–65, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/rsc/id/30504/rec/10>

land of our inheritance, but we have been led to a better land.  
(2 Nephi 10:19–20)

In a temple sermon given later on in life (Jacob 1:17–19; 2:2), after the death of his brother Nephi (Jacob 1:12), Jacob again appealed to the Abrahamic Covenant language of “lands of ... inheritance” when he warned the Nephites against the burgeoning apostasy in their midst: “And the time speedily cometh that except ye repent, they [the Lamanites] shall possess the land of your inheritance and the Lord God will lead away the righteous out from among you” (Jacob 3:4). The Lamanites’ commitment to monogamy and family relationships qualified them as “more righteous than” the Nephites at this very early date (Jacob 3:5–7). Jacob’s prophecy eventually proved true: the Lamanites did take possession of the Nephites’ “land of ... inheritance” in the land of Nephi and the Lord did “lead away the righteous” from the wicked under the leadership of Mosiah I (see Omni 1:12–13).

One generation after the exodus of Mosiah I with the Nephite faithful, Amaleki, writing near the end of the small plates, uses covenant language very similar to that used by Jacob in Jacob 3:4 when he states that many Nephites wanted to re-inherit or repossess the land of Nephi that they had lost: “a large number [of Nephites] ... were desirous to possess the land of their inheritance” (Omni 1:27). The record of Zeniff confirms that these colonists viewed “the land of our fathers’ first inheritance” (Mosiah 9:1), as the land which they had a legal right to by covenant. Later in his record, Zeniff describes one of the traditional grievances of the Lamanites — who continually threatened the colonists’ tenuous possession of the land — against the Nephites as: “they were wronged while in the land of their first inheritance after they had crossed the sea” (Mosiah 10:13).

Also Mormon records that one generation after Mosiah I and his people’s relocation from the land of Nephi to Zarahemla, King Benjamin, the son of Mosiah I, and king in Zarahemla expelled the Lamanites who were attempting to dispossess the Nephites of the “lands of their inheritance”: “And in the strength of the Lord they did contend against their enemies until they had slain many thousands of the Lamanites. And it came to pass that they did contend against the Lamanites until they had driven them out of all the lands of their inheritance” (Words of Mormon 1:14). The Nephites under King Benjamin were living faithful to the covenant, and thus received the “strength of the Lord” in maintaining their “lands of ... inheritance.”

The Lamanite conversion narratives (Alma 17–27) — one of the most significant covenant restoration accounts in the Book of Mormon — begin in the land Ishmael (see Alma 17), which Mormon characterizes as a “land of ... inheritance”: “And it came to pass that Ammon and Lamoni returned from the land of Middoni to the land of Ishmael, which was the land of their inheritance” (Alma 21:18). The Lamanite conversion narratives conclude with introduction of the toponym (place name) called Jershon (a name which, in accordance with the rules of Hebrew name formation means “place of inheritance”)<sup>39</sup> and the clear correlation<sup>40</sup> and juxtaposition of the name Jershon within the text,<sup>41</sup> with *yrš*/inherit language, creating a lucid wordplay: “And this land **Jershon** [place-of-inheritance/possession] is the land which we will give unto our brethren **for an inheritance**” (Alma 27:22). This wordplay includes the apparent use of the verb *yrš* in its ingressive sense, “inherit,” “take possession of”: “And now behold, this will we do unto our brethren **that they may inherit** the land **Jershon**. ... And it came to pass that that they went down into the land of **Jershon and took possession** of the land of **Jershon**” (Alma 27:24, 26). The granting and reception of *lands of inheritance* in *Jershon* at the end of the Lamanite conversion narrative stands as a powerful symbol of their restoration to the Abrahamic covenant and reintegration into the house of Israel.

Mormon takes pains to show that one generation later, the converted, covenant-restored Lamanites provide the same inheritance in Jershon to the reconverted Zoramite poor, symbolic of the latter’s reinstatement

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39. Stephen D. Ricks and John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Origin of Some Book of Mormon Place Names,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/2 (1997): 257–258. See also “Jershon,” *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies, last modified 21 November 2015, <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/JERSHON>.

40. Robert F. Smith, unpublished manuscript. In an October 2015 personal communication to me he indicated that he first noticed the correlation of Jershon and “inheritance” in the late 1960s. Paul Hoskisson suggested in an August 2015 conversation with me that John W. Welch “came up with his ideas while learning Hebrew in L[os] A[ngeles].”

41. Zvi Hirsch Müller’s 1922 Hebrew translation of the Book of Mormon properly renders Jershon as *yēršôn*, and reconstructs the wordplay in Alma 27:24 (*yīršû*), but misses it in verse 22, and at 35:14. The several iterations of this wordplay are explored at length in Matthew L. Bowen, “‘They Were Moved with Compassion’ (Alma 27:4; 53:13): Toponymic Wordplay on Zarahemla and Jershon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 233–53, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/they-were-moved-with-compassion-alma-274-5313-toponymic-wordplay-on-zarahemla-and-jershon/>.

to the covenant: “And they [the people of Ammon] did nourish them [the Zoramite poor] and did clothe them and did give unto them **lands for their inheritance**” (Alma 35:9). Preserving the verb tense of his source, he further writes, “And as many [Zoramites] as were brought to repentance were driven out of their land; but **they have lands for their inheritance in the land of Jershon**” (Alma 35:14). Mormon’s narrative illustrates the great truth and promise, noted earlier, as articulated in Psalms 37:11, “But the meek [the poor] shall inherit the earth,” or “but the poor shall enjoy the inheritance of the earth.”<sup>42</sup> It is worth noting, the Nephites continued to grant lands of inheritance to the Lamanite converts even after many of them migrated out of Jershon in the second generation: “And the Nephites would not suffer that they [the people of Ammon] should be destroyed; therefore **they gave them lands for their inheritance**” (Alma 43:12). The socio-religious importance of lands of inheritance receives attention later in the book of Alma as well.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps one motivating reason Mormon uses the events surrounding Jershon and the granting of lands of inheritance as evidence of the Lord’s special concern for converted Lamanites and reconverted Zoramites and their restoration to the covenant is Jesus’s emphasis on “land[s] of inheritance” as a covenant concept in his Sermon at the Temple to the Nephites and Lamanites. What he had taught in the Sermon on the Mount, he also taught there: “And blessed [happy] are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth [land]” (3 Nephi 12:5). Later on the same day he

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42. On the implications of the poor Zoramites as the Lord’s *‘ānāwīm/‘āniyyīm*, see Matthew L. Bowen, “He Knows My Affliction: The Hill Onidah as Narrative Counterpart to the Rameumptom,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 34 (2020): 195–220, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/he-knows-my-affliction-the-hill-onidah-as-narrative-counterpart-to-the-rameumptom/>.

43. In a pointed letter to the Lamanite king, Ammaron, who was also a Nephite-Zoramite dissenter, Moroni writes:

And behold, if ye do not this [i.e., exchange prisoners on the terms Moroni had just laid down] I will come against you with my armies, yea, even I will arm my women and my children; and I will come against you, and I will follow you even unto your own land, which is the land of our first inheritance. Yea, and it shall be blood for blood, yea, life for life. And I will give you battle, even until you are destroyed from off the face of the earth. Behold, I am in my anger — and also my people. Ye have sought to murder us, and we have only sought to defend our lives. But behold, if ye seek to destroy us more, we will seek to destroy you. Yea, and we will seek our lands, the lands of our first inheritance. (Alma 54:12–13)

reiterated the covenantal grant of the land, “And behold, this is the land of your inheritance, and the Father hath given it unto you” (3 Nephi 15:13).

As part of his teaching at the temple in Bountiful on the second day — teaching in which he interwove even more of the writings of Isaiah — Jesus reaffirmed the covenant promise that Jerusalem and its vicinity would serve as a future, eschatological “land of ... inheritance” for the Lord’s people at the time of their gathering: “Verily verily I say unto you: All these things shall surely come, even as the Father hath commanded me. And then shall this covenant which the Father hath covenanted with his people be fulfilled. And then shall Jerusalem be inhabited again with my people, and it shall be the land of their inheritance” (3 Nephi 20:46). The latter-day restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in its fullness would serve as the Father’s means of preparing the way for this gathering to lands of inheritance: “Yea, and then shall the work commence with the Father among all nations in preparing the way whereby his people may be gathered home to the land of their inheritance” (3 Nephi 21:28). Later, Mormon adds his own summation of what Jesus had articulated in his covenant temple teachings: “And now behold, I say unto you that when the Lord shall see fit in his wisdom that these sayings shall come unto the Gentiles according to his word, then ye may know that the covenant which the Father hath made with the children of Israel concerning their restoration to the lands of their inheritance is already beginning to be fulfilled” (3 Nephi 29:1).

In his personal account of his own life and times, Mormon details the loss of covenant “lands of ... inheritance” concomitant with the Nephites’ apostasy then afoot. The Nephites first lost, but then regained, the lands of their inheritance: “But behold, we did go forth against the Lamanites and the robbers of Gaddianton until we had again taken possession of the lands of our inheritance” (Mormon 2:27). However, this victory proved fleeting. The Nephites’ strength would continue to erode and Mormon reports, “we made a treaty with the Lamanites and the robbers of Gaddianton, in the which we did get the lands of our inheritance divided” (Mormon 2:28). The Nephites would eventually lose everything. Yet Mormon had hope for the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant among Lehi’s descendants in the future.

Like his predecessors and Jesus himself, Mormon prophesied that the future restoration of the gospel would signal Israel’s gathering and “return” to lands of inheritance: “Therefore I write unto you Gentiles, and also unto you house of Israel, when the work shall commence, that ye shall be about to prepare to return to the land of your inheritance”

(Mormon 3:17). The preserved writings of Mormon, Moroni, and their predecessors would serve a vital role in this gathering and return to covenant lands of inheritance:

And for this intent shall they [the writings in the Book of Mormon] go, that they may be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, that the Father may bring about through his Most Beloved his great and eternal purpose in the restoring the Jews or all the house of Israel to the land of their inheritance, which the Lord their God hath given them, unto the fulfilling of his covenant. (Mormon 5:14)

Alma the Younger articulates the bigger picture that Nephi and other righteous men and women understood what Laman and Lemuel did not: all covenant lands of inheritance symbolized “a far better land of promise” (Alma 37:45) — i.e., the celestial kingdom. Abraham and Sarah and their successors saw the bigger, eternal picture too, as noted by the author of Hebrews: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

Moroni near the end of the Book of Mormon continues to use the “lands of inheritance” idiom in Ether 7:16; 9:13 and 13:8. In the latter passage, Moroni describes the new world land of promise as a land of inheritance for all the descendants — the remnant — of Joseph: “Wherefore the remnant of the house of Joseph shall be built up upon this land, and it shall be a land of their inheritance” (Ether 13:8).

Given the foregoing evidence, Laman and Lemuel rightly saw their family estate as “the land of their inheritance” within the framework under the Abrahamic Covenant and the law of Moses (including Deuteronomy). However, the brothers — unlike Lehi and Nephi — could never fully grasp the bigger picture of the Abrahamic Covenant, the scattering of Israel (and their family’s place in it), nor did they grasp the importance of the Abrahamic Covenant and the scattering of Israel within the Lord’s broader plan of salvation for the human family, including the exaltation of the righteous as joint-heirs with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — and with the Savior himself — of the celestial kingdom.



## Conclusion

The verbal phrase “we might have enjoyed” in Laman and Lemuel’s reported complaint, “**we might have enjoyed our possessions and the land of our inheritance**” (1 Nephi 17:21), reflects a use of the Hebrew verb *yrš* in its progressive aspect “to enjoy possession of.” This is evident in several passages in the Hebrew Bible, and perhaps most visibly in Numbers 36:8 (“And every daughter, **that possesseth** [*yōrešet*] **an inheritance** [*naḥālâ*] in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel **may enjoy** [*yîršû*] every man the inheritance [*naḥālat*] of his fathers”) and Joshua 1:15 (“then ye shall return unto **the land of your possession** [*l’ēreṣ yēruššatkem*; or, unto the land of your inheritance], **and enjoy it** [*wîrištem ’ôtāh*].” Examining Laman and Lemuel’s complaint in a legal context helps us better appreciate “land[s] of ... inheritance” as expressing a seminal Abrahamic Covenant concept. Moreover, we can better appreciate how Laman and Lemuel’s close association of their temporal inheritance with what they saw as happiness, and their failure to see the bigger eternal covenant picture of *yrš*/inherit, prevented them from “enjoying” their new land of inheritance. This limited and limiting perspective deterred them from their living after the manner of happiness, rejoicing in their posterity, and looking forward in faith to the celestial kingdom, the true land of eternal inheritance, of which all other lands of promise constitute but a type.

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