

CHAPTER 2

1 Nephi 1–5

Introduction

In 1995 the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles described the family as “central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.” They declared that “happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102). Nephi wrote about the family of Lehi and Sariah, his parents. These “goodly parents” (1 Nephi 1:1) sought to raise and guide their family with the Lord’s teachings, even during challenging times. Father Lehi experienced visions of heaven as well as attempts on his life. Family members found safety in fleeing from Jerusalem, only to be sent back on the dangerous and difficult assignment to retrieve the brass plates. Faithful sons supported their parents and followed the Lord while other sons rebelled. As you read these early Book of Mormon chapters, observe this family’s efforts to follow the Lord and see how their example can direct you to do the same.

Commentary

The First Book of Nephi: His Reign and Ministry

- The heading to 1 Nephi is a summary of the book and is part of the original text. All headings in the Book of Mormon are part of the original record given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, including the inserts preceding individual chapters (for example, see Mosiah 9 and Alma 21). The brief summaries at the head of each chapter are later additions to help the reader better understand the chapter.

- As compiler of the Book of Mormon, Mormon faced difficult challenges in determining what to include in the abridged record. At least two directives guided his selections. First, the Lord told Mormon to “write the things which have been commanded” (3 Nephi 26:12). Second, Mormon saw our day and the conditions that would exist (see Mormon 8:34–35). We understand, then, that when Mormon made editorial decisions, these two factors were his governing concerns.

It may be instructive to compare the length of books in the Book of Mormon and the time periods they

covered. Refer to the chart “Book of Mormon Pages and Time Periods” in the appendix (p. 411).

1 Nephi 1:1. Many Afflictions, Yet Highly Favored

- Nephi wrote of “many afflictions” yet also acknowledged many blessings from the Lord. His record recounts numerous trials he and others of his family endured while staying faithful and grateful to the Lord. Nephi felt highly favored because he had come to a great knowledge of the goodness of God (see 1 Nephi 2:16), and relying on His strength became Nephi’s support (see 2 Nephi 4:19–26). The understanding of God’s plan gave context to the afflictions Nephi experienced (see Boyd K. Packer, “Conversation with Teachers” [an evening with President Boyd K. Packer, Feb. 29, 2008], 7, www.ldsces.org).

In contrast, we also see that Laman and Lemuel, as well as many others in the Book of Mormon, required frequent afflictions to remind them of the Lord’s blessings. This principle is sadly reaffirmed by the prophet Mormon: “And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him” (Helaman 12:3).

1 Nephi 1:2. “The Language of the Egyptians”

- Verse 2 of 1 Nephi 1 indicates that Lehi and Nephi used “the language of the Egyptians” to record their history onto gold plates. Four hundred and seventy years later, King Benjamin taught his sons “the language of the Egyptians,” which was not only the language of the gold plates but the language of the brass plates as well (Mosiah 1:1–4). The term “reformed Egyptian” only appears in the Book of Mormon in Mormon 9:32. Reformed Egyptian appears to be a term that reflects a variation in the language used by Lehi and Nephi. In Mormon 9:32–33 Moroni indicated that by his day, approximately a thousand years from the time of Lehi and Nephi, both the Egyptian and Hebrew had been altered from that used by Lehi and Nephi.

1 Nephi 1:4. Prophets Warn the People

- Babylonian world domination took control of the kingdom of Judah about 605 B.C. when Jehoiakim was king of Judah. Jehoiakim attempted a revolt against Babylon. Babylonian forces put Jerusalem under siege. Jehoiakim was either killed or captured. Zedekiah, the uncle of Jehoiakim, was appointed by Babylon to the throne. It was a time of great wickedness among the people of Judah—immorality and corruption were rampant. This is the setting of Lehi’s day. Shortly after Lehi’s departure from the area, Zedekiah attempted another revolt against Babylon, resulting in a much greater destruction of Jerusalem in about 587 B.C. Many people were killed, and most of the rest of the Jews were taken captive into Babylon for the next 70 years. This fulfilled Lehi’s prophecies to Judah that if they did not repent they would be destroyed.



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- Nephi said that “many prophets” came among the people. We know Jeremiah, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah were all contemporary prophets who testified in the kingdom of Judah. Jeremiah 35:15 includes a similar comment about numerous prophets being sent by the Lord to warn the people (see also 2 Chronicles 36:15–16).

1 Nephi 1:16–17. Two Sets of Records

- Nephi wrote his record about 30 years after Lehi’s family left Jerusalem and journeyed to the promised land (see 1 Nephi 19:1–5; 2 Nephi 5:28–31). The record begins with an abridgment of his father’s record,

comprising 1 Nephi 1–8. Mormon’s abridgment of Lehi’s record was in the lost 116 manuscript pages. It was a translation from a portion of the plates called the “Book of Lehi” (see D&C 10 heading; 10:42, footnote *a*; commentary for 1 Nephi 19:1–6 on p. 42).

1 Nephi 1:20. “Tender Mercies of the Lord”

- Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles described the “tender mercies of the Lord”:

“I testify that the tender mercies of the Lord are real and that they do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Often the Lord’s timing of His tender mercies helps us to both discern and acknowledge them.

“. . . The Lord’s tender mercies are the very personal and individualized blessings, strength, protection, assurances, guidance, loving-kindness, consolation, support, and spiritual gifts which we receive from and because of and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Truly the Lord suits ‘his mercies according to the conditions of the children of men’ (D&C 46:15).

“. . . One of the ways whereby the Savior comes to each of us is through His abundant and tender mercies. For instance, as you and I face challenges and tests in our lives, the gift of faith and an appropriate sense of personal confidence that reaches beyond our own capacity are two examples of the tender mercies of the Lord. Repentance and forgiveness of sins and peace of conscience are examples of the tender mercies of the Lord. And the persistence and the fortitude that enable us to press forward with cheerfulness through physical limitations and spiritual difficulties are examples of the tender mercies of the Lord” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2005, 105; or *Ensign*, May 2005, 99–100).

From 1 Nephi 1:20 we learn that through the rest of his writings Nephi is intent on showing us how the Lord will deliver the righteous. Watch for this repeating theme throughout 1 Nephi.

1 Nephi 3:15. “As the Lord Liveth”

- Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gave this explanation: “Nephi made God his partner. If he failed to get the plates, it

meant God had failed. And because God does not fail, it was incumbent upon Nephi to get the plates or lay down his life in the attempt” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1982, 49–50; or *Ensign*, May 1982, 33).

1 Nephi 2:5–10. Lehi Traveled from Jerusalem to the Shores of the Red Sea

- The distance from Jerusalem to the Red Sea is approximately 180 miles through hot, barren country infested anciently by many marauders. Lehi and his family “traveled three days” beyond this point (see 1 Nephi 2:5–6). This meant at least a 12- to 14-day trip one way from Jerusalem to their temporary home in the valley of Lemuel. (Refer to the map “Possible Route Taken by Lehi’s Family” in the appendix, p. 410.)



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1 Nephi 2:6–10. Showing Gratitude to the Lord

- Lehi’s appreciation for the Lord’s guidance and protection is demonstrated by his first act after pitching his tent: “He built an altar of stones, and made an offering unto the Lord, and gave thanks unto the Lord our God” (1 Nephi 2:7). This is the first of several instances in the Book of Mormon where faithful followers of Christ offered sacrifices and burnt offerings to express thanks to God (see 1 Nephi 7:22; Mosiah 2:3–4).

Lehi followed the offering by teaching his sons the importance of staying firm in keeping the Lord’s commandments. Sincere expressions of gratitude and obedience to Heavenly Father are necessary for all His

children if they are to please Him. The Lord taught, “And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments” (D&C 59:21).

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles counseled us to make sure our prayers are filled with humility and thankfulness: “I often hear people say ‘I told the Lord’ this or ‘I told the Lord’ that. Be careful not to ‘tell’ Him but, rather, to humbly seek and ask your Heavenly Father for guidance and direction. Prayer should be yearning and filled with gratitude” (“Be Strong in the Lord, and in the Power of His Might” [CES fireside for young adults, Mar. 3, 2002], 3, www.ldsces.org).

1 Nephi 2:11–15. Murmuring

- One reason Satan encourages murmuring is to prevent us from following living prophets, inspired leaders, and parents. Elder H. Ross Workman of the Seventy explained that “murmuring consists of three steps, each leading to the next in a descending path to disobedience.” First, when people murmur they begin to question. They question “first in their own minds and then [plant] questions in the minds of others.” Second, those who murmur begin to “rationalize and excuse themselves from doing what they [have] been instructed to do. . . . Thus, they [make] an excuse for disobedience.” Their excuses lead to the third step: “Slothfulness in following the commandment.”

“The Lord has spoken against this attitude in our day: ‘But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned’ (D&C 58:29). . . .

“I invite you to focus on the commandment from living prophets that bothers you the most. Do you question whether the commandment is applicable to you? Do you find ready excuses why you cannot now comply with the commandment? Do you feel frustrated or irritated with those who remind you of the commandment? Are you slothful in keeping it? Beware of the deception of the adversary. Beware of murmuring” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 104–6; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 85–86).

1 NEPHI 2:16

Although Nephi did not murmur, what evidence does this verse provide that leaving Jerusalem may have also been a challenge for him?

1 Nephi 2:20. Keep the Commandments and Prosper

- Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles observed that the scriptures promise “thirty-four times—that people will prosper in the land only if they obey the commandments of God” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1985, 15; or *Ensign*, May 1985, 13). In the scriptures, the meaning of the word *prosperity* may also have other meanings not restricted to financial benefits. Further, prospering doesn’t mean that life will be free from trials. Lehi and his faithful family members kept the commandments, but they still suffered many afflictions (see 1 Nephi 15:5; 18:15–17; 2 Nephi 2:1–2).

President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) taught that a person who keeps the commandments will be sustained and prospered by the Lord: “The man who stays with the kingdom of God, the man who is true to this people, the man who keeps himself pure and unspotted from the world, is the man that God will accept, that God will uphold, that he will sustain, and that will prosper in the land, whether he be in the enjoyment of his liberty or be confined in prison cells, it makes no difference where he is, he will come out all right” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], 257).

1 Nephi 3:7.  “I Will Go and Do”

- Commenting on 1 Nephi 3:7, Elder Russell M. Nelson taught, “I have learned not to put question marks but to use exclamation points when calls are issued through inspired channels of priesthood government” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1984, 76–77; or *Ensign*, May 1984, 52).
- Elder Donald L. Staheli of the Seventy quoted President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) in order to teach about the power that comes through obedience:

“Regardless of our age and stage in life, daily obedience to gospel principles is the only sure way to eternal happiness. President Ezra Taft Benson put it most poignantly when he said, ‘When obedience ceases to be an irritant and becomes our quest, in that moment God will endow us with power’” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 108; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 82).

- President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency acknowledged the need for prayer and faith to obey the Lord’s commandments:

“Whoever we are, however difficult our circumstances, we can know that what our Father commands we do to qualify for the blessings of eternal life will not be beyond us. . . .

“We may have to pray with faith to know what we are to do and we must pray with a determination to obey, but we can know what to do and be sure that the way has been prepared for us by the Lord” (“The Family” [CES fireside for young adults, Nov. 5, 1995], 1, www.ldscs.org).

1 NEPHI 3:19–20; 5:11–14

What did the brass plates contain that made them so important to Lehi’s family and descendants?

1 Nephi 4:6. “Led by the Spirit”

- Sometimes it takes courage to be led by the Spirit. There will be times when the world’s logic and reasoning will suggest a course of action that is contrary to the Lord’s teaching. Elder John H. Groberg of the Seventy challenged us:

“Be willing to take reasonable risks. We live in an age of reason, logic, facts, and figures. These can be useful if kept in subjection to faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ. But if they ever take precedence over faith in Him, then they are not useful and can be very harmful. I have found in my life that most of the good decisions I have made may not have been made if they were based solely on logic or reason. . . .

“. . . Nephi was determined to do what God wanted him to do even with logic to the contrary. The scriptures tell us in 1 Nephi 4:6 that he went forth not knowing beforehand what he should do but knowing he should obey God and get the plates. . . .

“I suspect had he listened only to reason, Nephi and his brethren would still be waiting outside the walls of Jerusalem. I sometimes wonder if by our listening to reason and logic too much, and not trusting God enough, we may find ourselves waiting outside the walls of His holy city” (“Trust in the Lord” [CES fireside for young adults, May 1, 1994], 3, www.ldsces.org).

1 Nephi 4:10. Nephi Commanded to Kill Laban

- What justification is there for a righteous man like Nephi to take the life of another person? The Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44) taught that it is the Lord who sets the standard of right and wrong: “God said, ‘Thou shalt not kill;’ at another time He said ‘Thou shalt utterly destroy.’ This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire. If we seek first the kingdom of God, all good things will be added. So with Solomon: first he asked wisdom, and God gave it him, and with it every desire of his heart, even things which might be considered abominable to all who understand the order of heaven only in part, but which in reality were right because God gave and sanctioned by special revelation” (*History of the Church*, 5:135).

- Some people have incorrectly felt that the Spirit of the Lord has prompted them to do something contrary to what the Lord has already commanded, such as was the case with Nephi. Today we need not worry that the Lord might prompt us to do something that runs contrary to current commandments. President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) has taught us who the Lord will give such promptings to: “When there is to be anything different from that which the Lord has told us already, He will reveal it to His prophet and no one else” (*Stand Ye in Holy Places* [1974], 159).

- It should be remembered that the Lord gave Laban at least two chances to part with the brass plates without requiring his life. Laban was a liar, a robber, and he had at least twice sought to murder. Stealing and attempted murder could both be punishable by death (see Exodus 21:14; 22:2; Deuteronomy 24:7). The Lord wanted Lehi and his descendants to have the scriptural record even if “one man should perish” (1 Nephi 4:13) for it to happen. The brass plates blessed not only the NepHITE and Mulekite nations, but they led to some of the written portions of the gold plates as well (such as Isaiah quotations and the allegory of Zenos). The Book of Mormon has blessed and will bless the lives of millions of people and nations. Ultimately, all this was at stake when Nephi stood over Laban and followed the voice of the Spirit.



Walter Platte, Courtesy of Museum of Church History and Art

1 Nephi 4:30–37. The Integrity of One’s Word

- When Zoram realized that he was with Nephi and not with his master Laban, “he began to tremble, and was about to flee” (1 Nephi 4:30). His fears ceased, however, when Nephi promised the servant that he would not be harmed and could be a free man if he went to the wilderness with Lehi’s sons. When Zoram returned an oath that he would stay with Nephi and his brothers, their “fears did cease concerning him” (v. 37). Both Zoram and Nephi illustrate the potential power of a person’s integrity.

- Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles observed the need for integrity as a foundation for spiritual strength: “The bedrock of character is integrity. Worthy character will strengthen your capacity to respond obediently to the direction of the Spirit. Righteous character is what you are becoming. It is more important than what you own, what you have learned, or what goals you have accomplished. It allows you to be trusted. Righteous character provides the foundation of spiritual strength.

It enables you in times of trial and testing to make difficult, extremely important decisions correctly even when they seem overpowering” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2003, 80; or *Ensign*, May 2003, 77).

1 Nephi 4:33. Oath Making

- The Book of Mormon contains a number of instances where oaths were taken. Oath making was taken very seriously in Nephi’s day and culture. “The principle on which an oath is held to be binding is incidentally laid down in [Hebrews 6:16] as an ultimate appeal to divine authority to ratify an assertion. There the Almighty is represented as promising or denouncing with an oath, *i.e.* doing so in the most positive and solemn manner. On the same principle, that oath has always been held most binding which appealed to the highest authority, both as regards individuals and communities. As a consequence of this principle, appeals to God’s name on the one hand, and to heathen deities on the other, are treated in Scripture as tests of allegiance” (William Smith, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible* [n.d.], “Oath,” 467; see also commentary for 1 Nephi 4:30–37 on p. 16).

- One scholar explained the power of oath making in ancient times:

“What astonishes the western reader is the miraculous effect of Nephi’s oath on Zoram, who upon hearing a few conventional words promptly becomes tractable, while as for the brothers, as soon as Zoram ‘made an oath unto us that he would tarry with us from that time forth . . . our fears did cease concerning him.’ (1 Ne. 4:35, 37.)

“The reaction of both parties make sense when one realizes that the oath is the one thing that is most sacred and inviolable among the desert people and their descendants: ‘Hardly will an Arab break his oath, even if his life be in jeopardy,’ for ‘there is nothing stronger, and nothing more sacred than the oath among the nomads,’ and even the city Arabs, if it be exacted under special conditions. ‘The taking of an oath is a holy thing with the Bedouins,’ says one authority. ‘Wo to him who swears falsely; his social standing will be damaged and his reputation ruined. No one will receive his testimony, and he must also pay a money fine.’

“But not every oath will do. To be most binding and solemn an oath should be by the *life* of something, even if it be but a blade of grass. The only oath more awful than that ‘by my life’ or (less commonly) ‘by the life of my head’ is the *wa hayat Allah* ‘by the life of God,’ or ‘as the Lord Liveth,’ the exact Arabic equivalent of the ancient Hebrew *hai Elohim*. Today it is glibly employed by the city riff raff, but anciently it was an awful thing, as it still is among the desert people. ‘I confirmed my answer in the Bedouin wise,’ says [Charles M.] Doughty. ‘By his life . . . he said, . . . “Well, swear by the life of Ullah” (God)! . . . I answered and thus even the nomads use, in a greater occasion, but they say *by the life of thee* in a little matter.’ Among both Arabs and Jews, says [Samuel] Rosenblatt, ‘an oath without God’s name is no oath,’ while ‘both in Jewish and Mohammedan societies oaths by “the life of God” are frequent.’

“So we see that the only way that Nephi could possibly have pacified the struggling Zoram in an instant was to utter the one oath that no man would dream of breaking, the most solemn of all oaths to the Semite: ‘As the Lord liveth, and as I live!’ (1 Ne. 4:32.)” (Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed. [1964], 104–5).

1 NEPHI 5:9–10, 17

What did Lehi do when he received the sacred record, and how did it affect him? How could this example improve your scripture study?

1 Nephi 5:10–22. The Plates of Brass

- The plates of brass were a volume of ancient scripture. They were valuable to Lehi’s family and the future inhabitants in the Americas just as the Bible and latter-day scriptures are to us. Elder Bruce R. McConkie used Book of Mormon scriptures to describe the plates of brass and their importance. He explained that the plates of brass “were ‘the record of the Jews’ (1 Ne. 3:3), a record of many of the prophecies from the beginning down to and including part of those spoken by Jeremiah. On them was the law of Moses, the five

books of Moses, and the genealogy of the Nephite forbears. (1 Ne. 3:3, 20; 4:15–16; 5:11–14.)

“There was more on them than there is in the Old Testament as we now have it. (1 Ne. 13:23.) The prophecies of Zenock, Neum, Zenos, Joseph the son of Jacob, and probably many other prophets were preserved by them, and many of these writings foretold matters pertaining to the Nephites. (1 Ne. 19:10, 21; 2 Ne. 4:2, 15; 3 Ne. 10:17.)

“The value of the Brass Plates to the Nephites cannot be overestimated. By means of them they were able to preserve the language (1 Ne. 3:19), most of the civilization, and the religious knowledge of the people from whence they came. (1 Ne. 22:30.) By way of contrast, the Mulekites, who were led out of Jerusalem



some 11 years after Lehi's departure, and who had no record equivalent to the Brass Plates, soon dwindled in apostasy and unbelief and lost their language, civilization, and religion. (Omni 14–18.)

“From prophet to prophet and generation to generation the Brass Plates were handed down and preserved by the Nephites. (Mosiah 1:16; 28:20; 3 Ne. 1:2.) At some future date the Lord has promised to bring them forth, undimmed by time and retaining their original brightness, and the scriptural accounts recorded on them are to ‘go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.’ (Alma 37:3–5; 1 Ne. 5:18–19.)” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. [1966], 103).



Points to Ponder

- Why do you think Laman and Lemuel murmured? (see 1 Nephi 2:11–13). Why did Nephi support his father? (see vv. 16, 19). What determines whether you are a murmurer or a supporter of the Lord's servants?
- What evidence is there that Nephi had great faith? How do you think he obtained such faith?

Suggested Assignments

- Consider the sacrifices Lehi's family made to obtain the brass plates. Compare this to the sacrifices required to bring forth the Book of Mormon in our day (see D&C 135:6). Discuss with a friend or family member the value of the scriptures and what you are willing to do to utilize these precious records.