1 Nephi Chapter 4

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Chapter 4

{Original 1830 Chapter I – continued}

[Note: Verses 1-5 are a continuation of the themes being discussed in Chapter 3.]

~~~Nephi & His Brethren Go Up Again to Jerusalem~~~

1 And it came to pass that I [Nephi] spake unto my brethren saying

Let us go up again unto Jerusalem

and [Let us] be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord

for behold [If] He [the Lord] is Mightier Than ALL the Earth
then why not ______ mightier than Laban and his fifty

yea or even [mightier] than [Laban]
[and] his tens of thousands?

2 Therefore Let us go up [again] unto Jerusalem

Let us be strong like unto Moses
for he [Moses] truly spake

unto the waters of the Red Sea
and they [the waters of the Red Sea] divided

hither [to this side] (AL)

and thither [to that side]

and our fathers came through out of captivity
on dry ground

and the armies of Pharaoh did follow

and were drowned

in the waters of the Red Sea

3 Now behold

Ye [my brethren] know that this is true

and ye [my brethren] also know that an angel hath spoken unto you

Wherefore Can ye doubt?

[Heb. 01 – Metaphor/Epithet “Mightier than . . . ”]
[Par. aa – Antithetical If / then see 1 Ne 3:31]
[Heb. 02 – Hyperbole with numbers]
[Par. bb – Questions are used to make a point. See 1 Ne 3:31]
Let us go up unto Jerusalem.

and the Lord is able to deliver us even as our fathers.

Let us go up again unto Jerusalem.

and the Lord is able to destroy Laban even as our fathers.

Now when I had spoken these words they were yet wroth; but they did still continue to murmur. Nevertheless they did follow me up until we came without the walls of Jerusalem.

And it was by night in darkness. And I caused that they should hide themselves without the walls of Jerusalem. Nevertheless they did follow me up until we came without the walls of Jerusalem.

And as I came near unto the house of Laban I beheld a man and he had fallen to the earth before me for he was drunken with wine.
[Note: The words “fallen” and “drunken” as applied above to Laban symbolically indicate someone who has broken all his covenants with the Lord and will not repent. He is thus ripe for destruction.]

8 And when I [Nephi] came _______ to _______ him dd
and I [Nephi] found that it was _______ Laban [deleted in P]

9 And I [Nephi] beheld _______ his sword [covenant-related] 09
and I [Nephi] drew it _______ [his sword] forth from the sheath thereof 10

and the hilt _______ [of his sword] thereof was of pure gold [superlative #1] 11
and the workmanship [of his sword] thereof was exceedingly fine [superlative #2] [added]
and I [Nephi] saw that the blade _______ [of his sword] thereof was of the MOST precious steel [superlative. #3]

[Note: The word “thereof” refers to the antecedent noun (his sword), so in a sense I am being redundant by inserting the phrase “of his sword.” However I have done it because it accentuates better parallelism.]

[Note: Because the high quality of Laban’s sword is repeated three times it means “the very best.” Symbolically what this means is that the character and standards of the person who is the covenant record keeper for the tribe of Joseph must be “the very best.” But as the previous verses have recorded, Laban was in a “drunken” and “fallen” state indicating that Laban had not maintained those high standards. And thus as the verses that follow will show, Laban will suffer the covenant penalty by his own sword—symbolic of his oath to defend his covenant with his life.]

10 And it came to pass that I [Nephi] was constrained by the Spirit [The first time that this commandment is declared]
that I [Nephi] should _______ [him] Laban

but I [Nephi] said in my heart* NEVER at ANY time have
I [Nephi] shed the blood of man
And I [Nephi] _______ shrunk
and would that I [Nephi] might NOT _______ him [Laban] [or shed his blood]

[Note: The violations of the covenant by Laban are here listed by the Spirit of the Lord.]

11 And the Spirit said unto me. again the second time] [O = saith]
Behold the Lord [see v. 12, 17] ee

Yea and I [Nephi] also knew that

[Par. dd – Circular repetition] [Heb. 11 – Superlatives 3 times = the very best]
[Heb. 09 – Symbol “sword” = covenant defense] [Heb. 12 – Metaphor: one thing “heart” for another “Nephi”]
[Heb. 10 – Repetition of possessive pronouns] [Par. ee – Working out -- A List of reasons to slay Laban]
12 And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me [Nephi] again the third time [O = said = inconsistent?]

   Slay him [Laban]

   for the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands [see 1 Ne 3:29, 31]

13 Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth His righteous purposes

   It is better that one man should perish [duality – One Man]
   than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief

14 And now when [Nephi] had heard these words [covenant language]

   He [the Lord] spake unto me in the wilderness saying that

   Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep My commandments they [thy seed] shall prosper in the land of promise

15 Yea and [Nephi] also thought that they [my seed] could NOT keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses

   SAVE they [my seed] should have the law of Moses

16 And [Nephi] also knew that the law of Moses was engraven upon the plates of brass

17 And again [Nephi] knew that the Lord had delivered Laban into my hands for this cause that [in order that]

   I [Nephi] might obtain the records [engraven upon the plates of brass] according to His commandments

18 Therefore [Nephi] did obey the voice of the Spirit [did = inconsistent?] and [Nephi] took Laban by the hair of the head

   and [Nephi] smote off his *head with his own sword [Note: Cutting off the head (symbolic of power) is a covenant penalty for gross unrepentant disobedience.]

   [Heb. 13 – A warning repeated 3 times = the highest]
   [Heb. 15 – Separated prepositions]
   [Par. ff – Circular repetition “Nephi”]
   [Heb. 16 – Metaphor “head” implies the one in charge]
   [Heb. 14 – The use of the words “cause that”]
Laban’s Responsibility as Head Record Keeper for the Tribe of Joseph
Is Bestowed on Nephi – Covenant Words & Symbolism

Nephi Obtains the Covenant Record (The Plates of Brass)

19 And after [that] I [Nephi] had smote / smitten off his head with his own sword and I [Nephi] took the garments* of Laban and I [Nephi] put them upon mine own body yea even every whit [ALL of them]

[Note: In covenant terms, a person’s “garments” represent his calling, position or character. When an ancient covenant was made each participant exchanged robes indicating that “all he was or all he possessed” was offered to the other covenant person according to the terms of the covenant. The next step in the covenant process was to exchange “armor” (belts or sashes because that is where the sword was worn). The “armor” or the sword represented the idea that each covenant participant would defend the covenant with his life if necessary. Here, by putting on Laban’s garments “every whit” Nephi is symbolically assuming the covenant position of the caretaker of the records of Joseph (the brass plates). That the armor is placed “about the loins” is symbolic because the “loins” symbolically represent the person’s posterity or descendants. Laban, because of his gross disobedience to the Lord and to the covenant calling he held as caretaker of the records of the tribe of Joseph, had suffered his life to be taken. (See Raymond Treat’s taped lectures on "Covenants and Principles of the Book of Mormon.")

The story will now proceed in covenant imagery.]

20 And after [that] I [Nephi] had done this I [Nephi] went forth unto the treasury of Laban and as I [Nephi] went forth towards the treasury of Laban behold I [Nephi] saw the servant of Laban who had the keys of the treasury of Laban

[Note: Such a “servant” was very important, highly educated, and spiritually prepared.]

And I [Nephi] commanded him the servant in the voice of Laban

[Note: To speak “in the voice of Laban” can also mean to speak with the power and authority of the covenant record keeper of the tribe of Joseph.]

that he the servant should go_____ with me Nephi into the treasury of Laban

21 And he the servant supposing / supposed me Nephi to be his master Laban for he the servant beheld the garments [symbol of his calling] and also he the servant beheld the sword girded about my loins

[Par. gg – Circular repetition “Nephi”]
[Heb. 17 – Symbol “garments” = all one is or has]
[Heb. 18 – Symbol “loins” = one’s posterity/descendants]
22 And he [the servant] spake unto me [Nephi] concerning the elders of the Jews.

he [the servant] knowing that his master Laban had been out by night among them [the elders of the Jews].

23 And [Nephi] spake unto him [the servant] as if it [I Nephi] had been Laban.

24 And [Nephi] also spake unto him [the servant] that I [Nephi] should carry the engravings [symbolic?] which engravings were upon the plates of brass to my elder brethren which/who were without the walls of Jerusalem [in darkness].

[See the note at the end of the chapter]

25 And [Nephi] also bade unto him [the servant] that he [the servant] should follow me [Nephi].

26 And he [the servant] supposing that I [Nephi] spake of the elder brethren of the church.

And he [the servant] supposing that I [Nephi] was truly that Laban whom I had slain [O=slew]

Wherefore he [the servant] did follow me [Nephi].

27 And he [the servant] spake unto me [Nephi] MANY times concerning the elders of the Jews [who were in darkness].

as I [Nephi] went forth [with the engravings which engravings were upon the plates of brass]

unto my elder brethren which/who were without the walls of Jerusalem [in darkness]

[Heb. 20 – Simile Nephi’s calling is now compared] [Heb. 21 – Metaphor “to carry” is to “take responsibility for”]
28 And it came to pass that when Laman saw me Nephi, he was exceedingly frightened. And it came to pass that when Laman saw me Nephi, he was exceedingly frightened, and also Lemuel and Sam were exceedingly frightened. And they fled from before my presence because they supposed it was Laban, and they supposed that he had slain me and had sought to take away their lives also. [see v. 11]

29 And it came to pass that I called after them and they did hear me. Therefore they did cease to flee from my presence. Those Who Hearken to the Lord's Covenant Servant Will Have Place with Him

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

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

32 And it came to pass that I spake with him the servant that if he would hearken unto my words, [A] even so that if he would hearken unto our words, we would spare his life [a covenant oath]. [A] even so that if he would hearken unto our words, we would spare his life [a covenant oath].

[Heb. 22 – Compound preposition “from before”] [Heb. 23 – Idiom = strong in many areas] [Par. ii – Use of Omission “before” to accentuate] [Heb. 24 – Covenant Oath] [Par. jj – Downward gradation – sense of lowering] [Par. kk – Repeated alternating “lives” are involved]
And Nephi spake unto him the servant even with an covenant oath that he need not fear that he should be a free man like unto us if he would go down in the wilderness with us

And also spake unto him the servant saying Surely the Lord hath commanded us to do this thing and Shall we NOT be diligent in keeping the commandments of the Lord? Therefore if thou wilt go down into the wilderness to my father then thou shalt have place with us [duality]

And it came to pass that Zoram did take courage at the words which I spake Now Zoram was the name of the servant And he promised us would go down into the wilderness unto our father [~O/1837] [Yea] and he also made an oath unto us that he would tarry with us [in the wilderness] from that time forth

[Par. LL – Like endings “us”] [Par. oo – Circular repetition “Zoram”] [Heb. 25 – Compound prepositions “down” “into”] [Heb. 26 – Compound prepositions “down” “into”] [Par. mm – Question to make a point] [Heb. 26 – Use of “made an oath”] [Par. nn – Repetition “into the wilderness”]
[1 Nephi 4]

[Note: According to Greg Wright (1976:3) and Donald Parry (2007:10) 1 Nephi 4:33-35 is a good example of chiastic parallelism. The full outline is as follows:

33  A  And I spake unto him, even with an oath
     B  that he need not fear,
     C  that he should be a free man like unto us
     D  if he would go down into the wilderness with us.
34  E  And I also spake unto him, saying: Surely
     F  the Lord hath commanded
     F'  us to do this thing:
E  and shall we not be diligent
     D  Therefore, if thou wilt go down into the wilderness
     to my father
     C  thou shalt have place with us.
35  B  And it came to pass that Zoram did take courage
     A  at the words which I spake.

Now we were desirous
that he Zoram should tarry with us for this cause
that the Jews might NOT know concerning our flight into the wilderness
lest they [the Jews] should pursue us
and [should] destroy us

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

And it came to pass
that we took the plates of brass
and [we] took the servant of Laban
and [we] departed into the wilderness
and [we] journeyed unto the tent of our father.

[Note: According to biblestudytools.com, the Hebrew word for "tent" (‘ohel -- Genesis 9:21 Genesis 9:27) is also used for a dwelling or habitation (1 Kings 8:66; Isaiah 16:5; Jeremiah 4:20). Most significantly, however, it is also used for the temple (Ezekiel 41:1). The patriarchs ("our covenant fathers") were "dwellers in tents" (Genesis 9:21, Genesis 9:27, 12:8, 13:12, 26:17) and during their wilderness wanderings all Israel dwelt in tents (Exodus 16:16; Deuteronomy 33:18; Joshua 7:24 ). Thus there is a duality and symbolism in the words "tent of our father."]

[Heb. 28 – Use of “made an oath”]
[Heb. 29 – Symbolic “tent of our father”]
[1 Nephi 4]

(Note: Donald Parry (2007:8-9) views 1 Nephi 4:4-24 as a *lengthy chiasm*, however in a number of steps he passes over quite a bit of text from one simple element to the next. Nevertheless, his outline has all the elements corresponding in a nice manner. A brief outline of his parallel elements and their corresponding verse numbers is as follows:

4 . . . they did follow me up until we came without the walls of Jerusalem.
5  A  without the walls
   C  sword
12  E  the Lord hath delivered
13  F  [Perishing]
14  
15  
16  
17  E'  the Lord had delivered
18  D'  Spirit
19  
20  B'  treasury of Laban  treasury of Laban
24  A'  without the walls

[Note* John W. Welch would later add matching elements F— [Perishing] “It is better that one man should *perish* than that a nation should dwindle and *perish*” (v. 13), and F’— [Imperishable] “I also knew that the *law was engraven* upon the plates of brass” (v. 16). He would present this expanded chiasm in “Narrating Homicide Chiastically,” a paper presented at the Chiasmus Jubilee Conference, Provo, Utah, Aug. 16, 2017. (See theme #11 “The Law” in the section “Literary Forms” in my Introduction.)

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[Note: Donald Parry (2007:10-11) sees a *chiastic structuring* of the last verse of chapter 4 (v. 38) coupled with the first six verses of chapter 5. Because it is complex, I will only present the basic outline of parallel elements:

38  A  plates of brass
   B  the wilderness
   C  journeyed
1  D  our father  my mother, Sariah
2  E  we had perished in the wilderness
   F  complained against my father . . .
   
3  F  complained against my father
   
4  visionary man
   
6  E  had perished
   D  my father  my mother, Sariah
   C  journeyed
   B  the wilderness
   A  record of the Jews

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