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## Characters and Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Lesson 8—Lehi, Man of Visions

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## *Theology*—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

### Lesson 8—Lehi, Man of Visions

*Elder Leland H. Monson*

(Text: The Book of Mormon: I Nephi, chapters 1-8.)

For Tuesday, May 6, 1952

Objective: To show that “the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (I Nephi 1:20).

**I**T was in the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, ruler of the kingdom of Judah, that many prophets came into Jerusalem to warn the people of the impending destruction of Jerusalem unless the people repented of their sins.

Even earlier than the reign of Zedekiah in Jerusalem, the Hebrews had heard the warning voice of a great Old Testament prophet. Isaiah preached political and ecclesiastical reform near the end of the eighth century B.C. He could see the approaching downfall of Jerusalem. Time after time, he addressed the people who thronged the streets of Jerusalem. The Assyrians, he insisted, had been permitted to waste and plunder Palestine because of the wrongdoing of the people of the kingdom of Israel.

Another prophet, this one living within the reign of Zedekiah, was Jeremiah. Reform was the one thing needful for the salvation of Israel. But his message went un-

heeded. He was persecuted and imprisoned.

Ezekiel, another Old Testament prophet of the period, did much of his preaching between 592 B.C. and 586 B.C. Like Jeremiah, he predicted the utter destruction of Jerusalem unless the people repented. He taught that men were individually accountable to God, and called upon each one to examine his own heart.

The great patriarch of The Book of Mormon, Lehi, felt as these other prophets, that the crying need of Jerusalem was for individual repentance. Called by God as one of the great prophets of this twilight period of Jewish nationalism, he felt his responsibility keenly. He prayed to the Lord with a sincere heart in behalf of his people.

In answer to his prayer “there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard much” (I Nephi 1:6). Quaking and trembling with fear, he re-

turned to his house in Jerusalem, cast himself upon his bed,

. . . and was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God. . . . He saw one descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day. And he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament (I Nephi 1:8, 9).

The first one came and stood before Lehi, handed him a book, and bade him read. He was filled with the Spirit of the Lord, and he read, "Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations!" (I Nephi 1:13). Many things did Lehi read concerning Jerusalem, that it should be destroyed, and that many of the people should perish by the sword, and that many others should be taken into captivity in Babylon.

Lehi went forth among the Jews and prophesied concerning those things which he had both seen and heard. To them he testified of their wickedness and abominations. The Jews mocked him and sought to take his life, but, as Nephi wrote: "The tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he has chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance" (I Nephi 1:20).

The Lord commanded Lehi in a dream that he should depart with his family into the wilderness. Obedient to this commandment, Lehi took his family, provisions, and tents, and departed into the wilderness, leaving his house, his gold, sil-

ver, and precious things in Jerusalem. His family comprised his wife, Sariah, and sons Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi. He traveled three days in the wilderness in the borders near the Red Sea, and then pitched his tent in a valley by the side of a river of water.

There he built an altar of stones, and made an offering unto the Lord, and gave thanks.

His solicitous nature for the welfare of his family is implicit in what he said as he gazed around the little valley in which they were encamped. Observing that the river emptied into the Red Sea, he turned to his oldest son, Laman, and said:

O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness (I Nephi 1:9).

And then he said to Lemuel:

O that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord (I Nephi 1:10).

It was from the depths of a sorrowing heart that these words came, for these two wayward sons had been complaining that their father was a visionary man who had led them out of Jerusalem to perish in the wilderness, because of the foolish imaginations of his heart. The same spirit which possessed the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem was in these two sons. They did not believe the words of the prophets that Jerusalem was in danger of imminent destruction. Lehi, however, being filled with the Spirit of the Lord, confounded them that they did not dare to speak against him, and they did as he commanded. Nephi, however, desiring to know

the mysteries of God, cried unto the Lord and was visited by the Lord so Nephi believed the words which Lehi had spoken and Sam believed on Nephi's words.

Lehi spoke to his youngest son, Nephi, telling him that the Lord had commanded him in a dream to send Nephi and his brothers back to Jerusalem to the house of Laban for the record of the Jews and also a genealogy of Lehi's ancestors, engraven upon plates of brass. Nephi did not murmur but accepted the assignment willingly. "For I know," he said to his father, "that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them" (I Nephi 3:7). After many trying experiences, Nephi, the real leader of the group, brought his brothers back into camp with the records.

During the long absence of their sons on this sacred mission, Sariah, fearing that her sons had perished, accused Lehi of being a visionary man, saying, "Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness" (I Nephi 5:2).

Lehi comforted Sariah telling her that he knew the Lord would deliver their sons out of the hands of Laban and bring them down again into the wilderness. When they returned she agreed, "Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness" (I Nephi 5:8).

Speaking again to Lehi, the Lord commanded him that his sons should again return to Jerusalem to bring down Ishmael and his family,

to join them in the wilderness, that they might raise up seed unto the Lord in the land of promise. Ishmael's family consisted of his wife, their five daughters, two sons, and their families.

Lehi's sons were successful in persuading Ishmael and his family to accompany them into the wilderness. After a short rebellion as they journeyed in the wilderness, they arrived at the tent of Lehi, ready to go to the land of promise.

Shortly after the arrival of Ishmael and his family, Lehi announced that he had "dreamed a dream or, in other words," had seen a vision. As a result of this vision, he said, he had reason to rejoice over Sam and Nephi, for he felt that they and their seed would be righteous. But he said that he had cause to mourn because of Laman and Lemuel. He feared lest they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord.

In his dream he saw a dark and dreary wilderness. Walking through this wilderness, he prayed to the Lord. Soon he saw a large and spacious field, in which grew a tree, the fruit of which was desirable to make one happy. Lehi tasted the fruit and was filled with joy. Casting his eyes round about to discover his family, he beheld a river running along near the tree. Not far off, he saw at the head of the stream, Sariah, Sam, and Nephi standing as if they knew not whither they should go. Lehi beckoned to them. They came to him and partook of the fruit.

After locating Laman and Lemuel, Lehi invited them to partake of the fruit, but they would not come to him.

Lehi then observed that a rod of iron extended along the river bank to the tree. He also beheld a straight and narrow path which came along by the rod of iron even to the tree. It also led by the head of the fountain unto a large and spacious field as if it had been the world. Innumerable people were pressing forward, endeavoring to follow the path to the tree. Because of a mist of darkness, however, many who started on the path lost their way. Others caught hold of the end of the rod of iron, and pressed forward through the mist to the tree, clinging to the rod of iron.

When they had partaken of the fruit, they observed across the river a spacious building filled with people, dressed in a manner exceeding fine. The people were mocking and ridiculing those who were eating the fruit. And, afterwards, those who had enjoyed the fruit were ashamed and fell away into forbidden paths and were lost. They did not feel the import of the message and say with Paul, that loyal and devoted follower of Christ in a later day:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto

salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16).

Laman and Lemuel were numbered among those who did not partake of the fruit, and Lehi feared concerning their welfare. Lehi, with all the feeling of a tender, loving parent, pleaded with them to hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and to keep the commandments of God.

Nephi later was given an interpretation of this vision, recording that the tree was "the love of God . . . the rod of iron . . . was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living water, or to the tree of life."

All these visions were given to Lehi during the time of his residence in Jerusalem and his encampment in the valley of Lemuel, by the river of Laman. Truly he was a man of visions.

#### *Suggested Readings*

MONSON, LELAND H.: *Life in Ancient America*, chapters 2, and 4-6 inclusive.

#### *Questions for Discussion*

1. How does God rule among the nations?
2. How can we escape the mists of darkness which Lehi saw?

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### *Storm - Bent Pine*

Iris W. Schow

Hold, while the rock remains where you are clinging;  
 Bend, if you must, before the baleful blast,  
 But never yield, no matter what its fury,  
 And you shall see it waste itself at last.

Though nearly spent, though torn of limb, though shaken,  
 Stand by your sacred, self-planned regimen;  
 If you survive, the hour will come to offer  
 A nesting place where hope can build again.