



Type: Magazine Article

Characters and Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Lesson 9—Preparation for the Journey

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Source: *Relief Society Magazine*, Vol. 39, No. 7 (July 1952), pp. 475–479

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 9—Preparation for the Journey

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: 1 Nephi, Chapters 1—16)

For Tuesday, October 7, 1952

Objective: To show that “if . . . the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them” (1 Nephi 17:3).

HAVING studied the life of Lehi, we are now ready to relate and examine the incidents connected with the preparation which Lehi made for the long and hazardous journey to the land of promise.

As a result of the vision in which Lehi saw a pillar of fire and was overcome by the spirit and shown many marvelous things, Lehi went among the Jews in Jerusalem, prophesying of the future appearance of the Messiah, and testifying of the wickedness and abominations of the Jews, and the destruction of Jerusalem, except the people repented.

The Jews were stirred to anger by Lehi’s criticism and his prophecies, and therefore sought his life as they did the prophets before him.

But God protects his prophets until their missions are completed, though they may be called upon to suffer, as was Joseph Smith. Joseph, suffering in Liberty Jail, was told that “all these things shall give

thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D. & C. 122:7). Furthermore, he was instructed as follows. “For there is a time appointed for every man, according as his works shall be” (D. & C. 121:25). “Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and forever” (D. & C. 122:9).

Nephi, recounting the events of his father’s life, adopted much the same point of view:

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

The Lord directed Lehi to take his family and depart into the wilderness. Lehi left his house and the land of his inheritance and, with his family, made a three days’ journey into the wilderness, taking only provisions and tents. At the close of this period of travel, he

pitched his tent in a valley near the mouth of a river which emptied into the Red Sea. Here he built an altar of stones and made an offering unto the Lord and gave thanks.

The family of Lehi was comprised of Sariah, his wife, and Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi, his sons. In this valley Lehi was given instructions regarding the preparations to be made before continuing the journey.

The Brass Plates

Lehi had not been long in this valley of Lemuel, for so he named it, until Laman and Lemuel began to murmur against their father for his having taken them away from Jerusalem. But Nephi sought the Lord in faith and was told that they should be led to a land of promise. Lehi was instructed by the Lord, in a dream, to send his sons back to Jerusalem to get from Laban, a keeper of Jewish records, the record of the Jews, including a genealogy of their forefathers. This record was engraved on plates of brass (I Nephi 3:3).

Lehi went first to his two older sons and told them of the mission the Lord required at their hands. Disobedient and recalcitrant, these two boys murmured because of the difficulty of the task which had been assigned them. To Nephi, however, Lehi said, "Go, my son, and thou shalt be favored of the Lord, because thou hast not murmured."

Nephi answered this request:

I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them (I Nephi 3:7).

When Lehi heard the words of Nephi he was "exceeding glad," for he knew that Nephi had been blessed of the Lord.

Transmuting gospel principles into terms of daily living, Nephi grew up to be a natural leader, a man of God.

Having supplied themselves with necessary equipment and supplies, the four brothers set out for Jerusalem for the purpose of obtaining the brass plates. When they arrived at Jerusalem they consulted with each other and cast lots to see who should go into the house of Laban. The lot fell to Laman. Laman went into the house of Laban, the keeper of the records, and made known his desires to have the plates of brass. Laban was angry and thrust Laman out, accusing him of being a robber and threatening to slay him. Laman fled to his brothers and reported what had happened, and they were exceedingly sorrowful.

Laman and Lemuel were about to return to their father, but Nephi sought to persuade them to continue their efforts to secure the brass plates, saying:

As the Lord liveth, and as we live, we will not go down unto our father in the wilderness until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord hath commanded us" (I Nephi 3:15).

He then urged his brothers to be faithful in keeping the commandments of God:

It is wisdom in God that we should obtain these records, that we may preserve unto our children the language of our fathers; And also that we may preserve unto them the words which have been spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets . . . since the world began,

even down unto this present time (1 Nephi 3:19, 20).

As a means of obtaining the plates, Nephi suggested that they return to the land of their inheritance and gather together the gold, silver, and precious things which they had left behind, and offer them to Laban in exchange for the brass plates. This plan was followed, but they met with failure. Not only did Laban refuse the exchange, but also he robbed them of their wealth. The boys fled into the wilderness and hid themselves in the cavity of a rock.

Angered at Nephi and their father, Laman and Lemuel spoke many hard words and smote Nephi and Sam with a rod. As they smote them with a rod, an angel of the Lord came and stood before them saying:

Why do ye smite your younger brother with a rod? Know ye not that the Lord hath chosen him to be a ruler over you, and this because of your iniquities? Behold ye shall go up to Jerusalem again, and the Lord will deliver Laban into your hands (1 Nephi 3:29).

In spite of this divine manifestation, Laman and Lemuel continued to murmur, questioning how Laban could be delivered into their hands. Nephi sought to build their faith and to point out that the Lord was mightier than all the earth. When darkness fell about them, Nephi had them hide outside the city walls, while he stealthily crept into the city. He was led by the Spirit towards the house of Laban, not knowing beforehand the things he should do. As he came near the house, Nephi found Laban on the ground in a drunken stupor.

He saw Laban's sword and drew it from the sheath. The hilt was of pure gold and the workmanship thereof was exceeding fine. The blade was made of "the most precious steel." Nephi wrote, "I was constrained by the Spirit that I should kill Laban, but . . . never at any time have I shed the blood of man. And I shrunk and would that I might not slay him" (1 Nephi 4:10).

However, the Spirit continued to tell Nephi to slay Laban, saying:

Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief" (1 Nephi 4:13).

Nephi then obeyed the voice of the Spirit and took Laban by the hair of the head and smote off his head with his own sword. Then Nephi dressed himself in Laban's clothes and armor, and went towards the treasury where the records were kept. In the voice of Laban, Nephi commanded the servant who had the keys of the treasury, to give him the plates of brass and to follow him outside the walls of Jerusalem. The servant supposed Nephi to be Laban and did as instructed.

When the brothers saw Nephi dressed in the clothes and armor of Laban, and with his sword, they fled, for they thought it was Laban. After, however, Nephi called to them, they ceased to flee. Nephi, large in stature, and strong, seized the servant, Zoram, while he explained to him the purpose of their mission and promised they would spare his life and he would be a free man if he accompanied them.

Zoram agreed to go into the wilderness and tarry with them from that time forth. He took an oath to that effect, after which Nephi says, "our fears did cease concerning him" (1 Nephi 4:37).

The faith and persistence of Nephi had resulted in their obtaining the brass plates. Then they returned to the tent of their father.

In the meantime, Sariah had complained against Lehi, saying that he was a visionary man. Lehi had comforted her, telling her that the Lord would deliver their sons from Laban. After the return of their sons, Sariah, with increased devotion, rejoiced with the others, and they offered sacrifices and burnt offerings unto the Lord in thankfulness.

From the brass plates, Lehi learned that he was a descendant of Joseph who was sold into Egypt, and as such was entitled to all of the blessings of Joseph, which were many. He also learned that the record contained the five books of Moses, which gave an account of the creation of the world and of Adam and Eve, and a record of the Jews from the beginning down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah. It also contained the prophecies of the holy prophets from the beginning down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, and also many prophecies of Jeremiah.

Ishmael and His Family

But this was only part of the preparation for the journey. Lehi was also instructed of the Lord to send his sons back to Jerusalem to get the family of Ishmael. They gained favor in the sight of Ish-

mael, and he and his family took their journey down unto the wilderness with the brothers to the tent of Lehi.

On their journey, Laman and Lemuel, and two of the daughters of Ishmael, and the two sons of Ishmael and their families, rebelled against the others. Nephi chided his brethren and tried to increase their faith by revealing to them the great blessings of the Lord, but in vain. Because of their anger, they bound Nephi with cords, and planned to leave him in the wilderness to be devoured by wild beasts (Hugh Nibley, "Lehi in the Desert," *Improvement Era*, March, 1950, p. 201).

Nephi prayed that according to his faith in the Lord he might be given strength to burst the bonds. The bonds were loosed from his hands and feet, and Nephi stood before his brethren a free man. They were determined to bind him again, but their hearts were softened by the pleadings of one of the daughters of Ishmael, her mother, and a son of Ishmael. The brethren were sorrowful because of their wickedness, and bowed down before Nephi and pleaded for forgiveness which he frankly gave. Nephi exhorted them to pray to the Lord for forgiveness which they did.

After praying they came on down to the tent of Lehi. There they offered sacrifices and burnt offerings to the Lord as an expression of gratitude for blessings they had received. Later the sons of Lehi could take the daughters of Ishmael to wife that they might raise up seed unto the Lord in the land of promise.

Spiritual Preparation

Even with the colony fully assembled, and with the brass plates on hand, still there was more instruction needed to prepare this little colony for the journey to the promised land. Lehi was instructed more fully by means of his vision of the tree, the river, and the rod of iron. (See Lesson 8.)

Nephi was strengthened in his faith by the vision he sought and received of the things his father had seen. This vision interpreted for him his father's dream and gave him a foreknowledge of Christ's ministry in the flesh and his future appearance on the land of promise. Furthermore, it permitted Nephi to see the rise and the decline of his own people, the future coming of the Gentiles to the land of promise, and the condition of the people upon that land in the last days when the Lord should bring forth the record to the Gentiles.

The Lord prepared the colony of Lehi spiritually with visions of

striking significance to them. They knew that their new destination was to be a land of promise only so long as they kept the commandments.

The sons of Lehi, and Zoram were married to the daughters of Ishmael. Lehi was commanded of the Lord by night to take his journey unto the wilderness. On the morning of his departure, Lehi found on the ground by his tent door a brass ball with two spindles (the Liahona), a compass which was to point the way through the wilderness.

Questions on the Lesson

1. What does the Lord mean by "a time appointed for every man, according as his works shall be?"
2. Why did the Lord want Lehi and his colony to have the brass plates?
3. What characteristics of the members of Lehi's family are highlighted by Nephi's account of these trips back to Jerusalem?
4. Why did the Lord give visions to Lehi and Nephi?

Visiting Teacher Messages

Book of Mormon Gems of Truth

Lesson 9—"Wherefore, Do Not Spend Money for That Which Is of No Worth, Nor Your Labor for That Which Cannot Satisfy" (2 Nephi 9:51).

Leone O. Jacobs

For Tuesday, October 7, 1952

Objective: To encourage women to seek after true values in life.

EACH of us is responsible for the wise stewardship of his time and means while here on earth. Each of us will be called to give an accounting of himself to determine

whether or not he has been a worthy and profitable servant. This accounting is in the making each day of our lives.

A phrase sometimes used by