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## Lehi and Nephi: Faith unto Salvation

Author(s): Monte S. Nyman

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# 5

## LEHI AND NEPHI: FAITH UNTO SALVATION

Monte S. Nyman

As Nephi began to make an abridgment of his father's record, he stated that his objective was to show "that 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" (1 Nephi 1:20; italics added). The events described by Nephi in the abridgment certainly do illustrate his objective. However, the element of faith may not be fully understood by the reader. This is not a problem unique to the reading of the Book of Mormon. Faith has been described as the most talked about and yet the least understood principle of the gospel, probably because there are at least three different principles of faith and people often do not differentiate among them.

The different principles of faith were spoken of by the Prophet Joseph Smith in the *Lectures on Faith*.<sup>1</sup> In these lectures he identified the first as the principle of *action*. Said Joseph, "faith is the assurance which men have of the existence of things

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Monte S. Nyman is Associate Dean of Religious Education and Professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University.

which they have not seen, and the principle of action in all intelligent beings."<sup>2</sup>

The second principle of faith is one of *power*. The Prophet declared, "But faith is not only the principle of action, but of power also, in all intelligent beings, whether in heaven or on earth." He said further, "It is the principle by which Jehovah works, and through which he exercises power over all temporal as well as eternal things."<sup>3</sup>

The third principle of faith was defined by Joseph Smith as *faith unto life and salvation*. The Prophet said that three things were necessary for any rational and intelligent being to obtain this third principle of faith:

First, the idea that he [God] actually exists.

Secondly, a *correct* idea of his character, perfections, and attributes.

Thirdly, an actual knowledge that the course of life which he is pursuing is according to his will.<sup>4</sup>

A study of the events that Nephi records as examples of the power of the Lord's delivering his people reveals each of the above principles of faith. The attributes that developed each principle of faith are also shown in many instances. To analyze and comprehend these principles and developmental attributes should be helpful towards one's own attainment of these principles and attributes.

## Faith as a Principle of Action

Lehi was concerned for his people because of the warning of destruction given by the many prophets who visited the land of Jerusalem. This concern caused him to pray for his people, a principle of action (1 Nephi 1:4–5). Lehi was rewarded for his faith with a series of visions and dreams. With this added assurance, Lehi took further action by also prophesying of the destruction of Jerusalem as had the other prophets (1 Nephi 1:18).

Having faith in his father's experience, Nephi desired to know for himself of the things of which Lehi had testified. His action of prayer was rewarded by a visit of the Lord because of his faith. (1 Nephi 2:16, 19.) This experience plus the assurance of his father's faith enabled Nephi to demonstrate his faith in contrast to his brothers' lack of it by leading the return to Jerusalem to obtain the plates of brass as the Lord had commanded (1

Nephi 3:1–6). His statement of faith is one of the best-known passages in the Book of Mormon. In answer to his father's request, Nephi said: "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" (1 Nephi 3:7).

Nephi further exemplified faith as a principle of action to his brothers as he overcame each difficulty in obtaining the plates after they arrived back at Jerusalem. In response to Laman and Lemuel's threat to return without the plates, Nephi firmly decreed: "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. Wherefore, let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord." (1 Nephi 3:15, 16.) Nephi further assured his brethren by presenting another approach to obtaining the plates from Laban and reminding them of the reasons they had come upon this important mission. He used the example of his father's knowledge as well as his own reasoning to try to convince them. (1 Nephi 3:16–20.) His reasoning with his brethren further illustrates how this kind of faith is attained, being "faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord" (1 Nephi 3:16). When we keep the commandments, we can be assured of the Lord's help, for he has declared to this generation, "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise" (D&C 82:10).

After a second failure to obtain the records, Nephi's faith was still undaunted. In response to Laman and Lemuel's objections, Nephi cited the example of Moses and of their visitation by an angel to assure his brothers that the Lord would provide a way for them to obtain the plates (1 Nephi 4:1–3). Although Moses had lived many years earlier, Nephi knew about him from his parents' teachings or from his own reading. This illustrates another way to develop faith—the reading of the scriptures, which show us examples of the Lord's dealings with others.

Another example of faith as a principle of action is shown by Zoram, the servant of Laban. When he recognized that Nephi was not Laban as he had supposed, he decided to follow Nephi and his brethren into the wilderness after Nephi's oath assured him that the Lord had commanded them to go. (1 Nephi 4:31–35.)

The second return to Jerusalem by Lehi's sons is another example of faith as a principle of action. However, the purpose of obtaining wives for themselves may have been a more motivating force for Laman and Lemuel than faith was. We have no record of hesitancy on their part in this account. (1 Nephi 7:1–3.) A more pronounced principle of faith as action is shown by the family of Ishmael. After hearing the word of the Lord, they willingly accompanied Nephi and his brethren to the valley of Lemuel, the base camp of Lehi. Although two of the daughters and two of the sons did rebel on that journey, Ishmael, his wife, and his three other daughters were firm in their faith. Of course, as the text says, "the Lord did soften the heart of Ishmael." (1 Nephi 7:4–6.) Without the blessing of the Lord, such faith would never have been attained.

Other examples of Lehi's and Nephi's faith appear throughout Nephi's writings. These include Lehi's willingness to continue on into the wilderness (1 Nephi 16:9–11); Nephi's willingness to build a ship under the direction of the Lord (1 Nephi 17:7–10); and the entire group's willingness to set forth upon the waters to travel to the land of promise (1 Nephi 18:5–8). The rest of the Book of Mormon also contains many more examples of faith, but the above incidents certainly illustrate faith as a principle of action. They also show that faithfully keeping the commandments of God, reading the scriptures, and gaining the outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord are the ingredients for turning this kind of faith into action. The Book of Mormon also illustrates the other principles of faith.

### Faith as a Principle of Power

Implementing the principle of power through faith, Lehi and Nephi were able to accomplish the purpose of the Lord—to bring a remnant of Joseph to the promised land. This faith-unto-power principle is illustrated in several instances.

After arriving in the valley of Lemuel, Lehi confounded his murmuring sons with a speech, "being filled with the Spirit." The power of this speech caused the two rebellious sons' frames to "shake before him" and made them obey his commandments. (1 Nephi 2:14.) Undoubtedly this was a blessing bestowed upon Lehi because of his faith.

Nephi was also blessed with the presence of an angel to rebuke his brothers for their anger in smiting him and his brother

Sam with a rod (1 Nephi 3:28–29). While the text makes no mention of Nephi's faith at this time, he had continually expressed his own faith and urged his brothers to be faithful. This episode illustrates that when a person has done all he can, then his faith is rewarded with power from the Lord.

One of the best examples of faith as a power principle is Nephi's encounter with Zoram, the servant of Laban. Nephi was so convincing in speaking in the voice of Laban that the servant obediently followed him. He also conversed freely with Nephi as he carried the plates of brass outside the walls of Jerusalem. The time involved and the distance covered could have been quite extensive. Therefore, this was no temporary misidentity but illustrates how completely convinced the servant was that Nephi was Laban. Furthermore, it is logical that Zoram knew Laban's voice well. It was not until Nephi spoke in his own voice to his frightened brothers who had also mistaken Nephi for Laban that the servant realized that Nephi was not Laban (1 Nephi 4:28–30). Apparently Nephi's large stature was similar to that of Laban and in the darkness of night the probable significant difference in age could not be recognized. What was the secret to Nephi's voice change? Was it not a gift of the Spirit, a form of the gift of tongues, a power poured out on him because of his faith? While such an explanation may not satisfy the learned of the world, remember that Nephi did not write the things pleasing to the world but the things pleasing to God (1 Nephi 6:5). It was God's will that Nephi obtain the plates of brass and there is no question that he was pleased with the faith of his young servant Nephi. I believe that the Lord blessed Nephi because of his faith with the power to speak as Laban.

Another great example of faith as a power principle is shown when Nephi was bound with cords by his brothers who intended to leave him "in the wilderness to be devoured by wild beasts." Through Nephi's prayer of faith, he was given strength to burst the bands from his hands and feet and obtain his freedom. (1 Nephi 7:16–18.) From this example, we can see that such power comes only through faith. Nephi prayed for strength, "according to [his] faith." The natural man would ask the Lord to break the bands or send an angel or someone to loose him. Nephi, the spiritual giant that he was, sought the power through his faith. What a great example to follow!

Another example is shown later in 1 Nephi when Nephi was so filled with the Spirit of God as he preached to his brethren

with such power that they durst not “lay their hands upon [him] nor touch [him] with their fingers, even for the space of many days” (1 Nephi 17:48–52). Following these days, the Lord instructed Nephi to stretch forth his hand to his brethren and he would shock them as a witness of the power of God within him. Nephi’s compliance with this instruction caused his brothers to shake before him and acknowledge the power of God (1 Nephi 17:53–55). Such power is irrefutable even to the wicked, and it is available to those who exercise faith.

After the ship was completed and the group departed for the land of promise, Laman and Lemuel again bound Nephi as they sailed upon the mighty deep. After he was bound, “the compass, which had been prepared of the Lord, did cease to work.” (1 Nephi 18:11–12.) Nephi acknowledged that the judgments of God were upon them, which once more demonstrated faith unto divine power. The compass (Liahona) which operated upon faith did not work again until Nephi’s brethren loosed his bands. That this power from the Lord was a result of Nephi’s faith is shown by the fact that Nephi praised the Lord for his actions and did not murmur because of his afflictions. Only the power of God could refute the faithless Laman and Lemuel. (1 Nephi 18:11–21.) A positive note to this incident could well be stated—only the faith of Nephi brought his people to the promised land.

There are many other examples of the principle of power through faith in the rest of the Book of Mormon. In the *Lectures on Faith*, the Prophet Joseph cites the instance of the prison holding Alma and Amulek being tumbled to the ground (Alma 14:25–28) and the conversion of the Lamanites (Helaman 5:40–45) as examples of this power.<sup>9</sup> Other examples could be cited, but suffice it to say that this power comes through the Spirit of God giving strength and power to man to accomplish things beyond his natural abilities. One would do well to seek for such faith.

### Faith unto Life and Salvation

The third principle of faith is almost an extension of the first principle, the moving cause of action, though the difference between the two is significant. The first is the cause of people’s doing things, while the latter is a definite knowledge that what they are doing is the expressed mind and will of the Lord regard-

less of their own reasoning or prior understanding. To attain this principle of faith, we must follow the principle of sacrifice.

Let us here observe, that a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation; for, from the first existence of man, the faith necessary unto the enjoyment of life and salvation never could be obtained without the sacrifice of all earthly things. It was through this sacrifice, and this only, that God has ordained that men should enjoy eternal life; and it is through the medium of the sacrifice of all earthly things that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are well pleasing in the sight of God. When a man has offered in sacrifice all that he has for the truth's sake, not even withholding his life, and believing before God that he has been called to make this sacrifice because he seeks to do his will, he does know, most assuredly, that God does and will accept his sacrifice and offering, and that he has not, nor will not seek his face in vain. Under these circumstances, then, he can obtain the faith necessary for him to lay hold on eternal life.<sup>6</sup>

This principle of faith also is exemplified a few times in the book of 1 Nephi. The initial example is Lehi's call to take his family and leave Jerusalem, departing into the wilderness. He was not told his destination nor the extent of his journey. He received this call because of his previous faith unto action. It was based upon the principle of sacrifice. "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." (1 Nephi 2:1-4.)

Although his temporal salvation was endangered, since the Jews sought to take away his life, his eternal salvation was also at stake. The subsequent chapters show that Lehi fully understood this. Sometime later his wife Sariah complained over the feared loss of her sons and she accused her husband of being a visionary man. Lehi testified that he was just that, for if he had not "seen the things of God in a vision [he would] not have known the goodness of God, but [would have] tarried at Jerusalem, and [would have] perished with [his] brethren." But because of his faith he had "obtained a land of promise" and he knew that the Lord would deliver his sons out of the hands of Laban. (1 Nephi 5:4-5.) Lehi knew that the course he was pursuing was the will of the Lord. This assurance through faith also came to Sariah upon the return of her sons (1 Nephi 5:8-9).

Lehi's experience verifies the teachings of Joseph Smith regarding the principle of faith unto life and salvation. Joseph said those who do sacrifice will know that the course they pursue is the will of the Lord.<sup>7</sup> Lehi's knowledge of his sons' safety came because of his previous sacrifices. Joseph also taught that this principle was what enabled men to endure afflictions, persecutions, the spoiling of their goods, and even suffer death.<sup>8</sup> Lehi had gone through these very things and thus had faith unto life and salvation. Lehi later testified that the Lord had redeemed his soul from hell, that he had beheld his glory, and that he was "encircled about eternally in the arms of his love" (2 Nephi 1:15).

Nephi is a second example of the principle of faith unto life and salvation. Because of his faith and diligence, the Lord visited him and assured him that they were all being led to a land of promise and that Nephi was to play a leadership role in this great endeavor (1 Nephi 2:19–24). Thus he knew that the course he was pursuing was the will of the Lord.

Upon returning to Jerusalem to obtain the plates of brass from Laban, Nephi again exemplified faith unto life and salvation. Being reluctantly followed by his rebellious brothers and Sam, Nephi left them outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem and "crept into the city and went forth towards the house of Laban" being "led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which [he] should do" (1 Nephi 4:4–6).

Finding Laban in a state of drunkenness, Nephi "was constrained by the Spirit that [he] should kill Laban" (1 Nephi 4:10). But Nephi could not think of taking a man's life. The Spirit commanded him a second time to slay Laban, but his heart and his mind still hesitated to follow this commandment. After giving the reasons why Laban had been delivered into Nephi's hands, the Spirit a third time commanded and gave the Lord's justification for taking Laban's life. (1 Nephi 4:11–13.) With this explanation, Nephi's mind now gave him the broader perspective of the Lord and his heart gave him knowledge of the course he was to pursue. Therefore, he followed the Spirit's command and smote off Laban's head. (1 Nephi 4:14–18.)

This incident often troubles readers of the Book of Mormon, but it wouldn't if they understood the principle of faith unto life and salvation. Nephi was being led by the Spirit and was being instructed to act according to a law of the Lord. This law had been revealed anciently, but apparently Nephi was not aware

of it or had not comprehended its appropriateness. Probably no one would until the situation was presented by the Spirit. Nephi later illustrated this law to his brothers in regard to the people being driven out of the land of Canaan by the Israelites under Joshua. Nephi asked if these people who had been destroyed were righteous and then answered his own question with a resounding nay. He then asked if the people in Jerusalem who were destined to be destroyed were righteous. Again he answered no. (1 Nephi 17:33–34.) Nephi further taught that the Lord destroys only the nations of the wicked (1 Nephi 17:37). Laban was a wicked person, and thus the Lord commanded that he be destroyed.

The law that was revealed was the law of retaliation. As the Spirit pointed out to Nephi, Laban had offended the Lord three times (1 Nephi 4:11); therefore, the Lord had delivered him into Nephi's hand. The Lord, also knowing the eternal perspective of a nation about to be conceived, issued the decree to take Laban's life. This ancient law has been revealed anew in this last dispensation of the fulness of times and verifies the action commanded by the Spirit. It even verifies that this law had been revealed to Nephi. (D&C 98:23–32.) A careful study of these verses and of 1 Nephi 3:11–4:18 will show that Nephi's actions correlate with the revealed law of the Lord.

Laban had refused to heed the commandments of the Lord relayed by Lehi's sons to give them the plates. This was the first offense. After the sons had attempted to purchase the records, Laban had robbed them of their gold and silver, and precious things which they had offered for the plates, a second offense. Following this bartering session, Laban had sent his servants to slay Nephi and his brothers. After these three offenses, the Lord had delivered Laban into Nephi's hands and justified his demise because of the future destiny of Lehi and his colony.

God is a God of law. Similar incidents are recorded in the stick of Judah. Samuel's slaying of Agag (1 Samuel 15) and Elijah's slaying of the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18) are two biblical examples.

The Prophet Joseph Smith revealed a further dimension applicable to the Laban situation.

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.<sup>9</sup>

Some may reason from this statement that truth is relative, but such reasoning is faulty. God understands the eternal and long-range effects of every situation and will always reveal the absolute truth. If all the variables are the same, the same directions will be given, but man is not able to comprehend the variables as is God. Thorough study of God's word verifies his eternal nature of righteousness (Helaman 13:38) and that "the course of the Lord is one eternal round" not varying "from that which he hath said" (1 Nephi 10:19 and Alma 7:20).

After the death of Lehi, Nephi again sacrificed all and led "those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God" into the wilderness to avoid war with Laman and his followers (2 Nephi 5:5-6). Undoubtedly Nephi's life continued to follow the will of the Lord. This is evidenced by one of the closing remarks he wrote upon the plates. He stated that he gloried in Jesus who had redeemed his soul from hell (2 Nephi 33:6). His calling and election had been made sure; his faith had led him to salvation.

As Nephi taught, the Lord "leadeth away the righteous into precious lands, and the wicked he destroyeth" (1 Nephi 17:38). Mosiah, king of Zarahemla, led a group out from the wicked (Omni 1:12). Alma baptized the repentant and led them from among the wicked (Mosiah 18 and 23). The people of Ammon (converted Lamanites) followed the will of the Lord and were reestablished in the land of Jershon (Alma 27). All of these movements are other examples of faith unto life and salvation, knowing that the course they pursued was the will of the Lord. These examples within the Book of Mormon should inspire its readers to seek to know the will of the Lord concerning the course they should follow.

## Conclusion

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared that by learning and abiding by the precepts of the Book of Mormon, a man would come nearer to God than by following any other book (Introduction). One of the precepts taught by Nephi was that through faith the Lord would make those whom he had chosen mighty "even unto the power of deliverance" (1 Nephi 1:20). Those who study

the scriptures and faithfully keep the commandments will be blessed with the Lord's spirit and be motivated to action. Those who are motivated to action because of their faith will have the principle of power in their lives to accomplish what they endeavor to do in righteousness beyond the natural abilities of man. Those who will sacrifice sufficiently will be led unto life and salvation by knowing that the course they pursue is the will of the Lord. Of these principles of faith, the Book of Mormon bears repeated testimony.

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. There are those who question Joseph Smith as the author of *Lectures on Faith*. This paper will not discuss that issue but will treat them as written by the Prophet.

2. *Ibid.*, 1:9.

3. *Ibid.*, 1:13, 16.

4. *Ibid.*, 3:2-5.

5. *Ibid.*, 1:19.

6. *Ibid.*, 6:7.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, 6:2-3.

9. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976), p. 256.