

# 1 NEPHI 16–22

John W. Welch Notes



## 1 Nephi 16

### 1 Nephi 16:2–5 — How to Keep the Commandments

Nephi's brothers, unwilling to listen to what he has told them, complained that he had "declared unto us hard things, more than we are able to bear" (1 Nephi 16:1). In essence, Nephi said back to them, "Well, the guilty take the truth to be hard, so it is not surprising that you think these are hard to bear." It cut them to the very center. But then Nephi got more positive. Obviously, he had diagnosed their problem, which is that most people who are in some kind of spiritual duress already know that they are in that state, and do not want to be told how hard-hearted they are.

Nephi gave them three very helpful steps. He began, "Now my brethren..." Nephi was shifting his tone away from a warning and condemning tone. "Now my brethren, if ye were righteous and were willing to hearken to the truth, and give heed unto it, that ye might walk uprightly before God, then ye would not murmur because of the truth" (1 Nephi 16:3). This statement can be broken down into the following three components:

1. **Hearken to the Truth:** To hearken means more than just to listen. It also means "to obey."
2. **Give Heed to the Truth:** To heed something is to give diligent and meticulous attention to it. Perhaps it involves the semantic notion of heeding instructions because there are consequences if you do not. A servant *heeds* the master.
3. **Walk Uprightly:** When we are obedient, we are confident and walk uprightly, knowing that we are righteous and that the Lord knows we are righteous. We have confidence that we are in good standing. The footnote points to "walking

with God” in the Topical Guide. There is the idea of the “daily walk” (see D&C 19:32), meaning letting our daily walk be righteous. The Psalms often talk about how we may walk with the Lord that He may be our constant companion (see, for example, Psalms 84:11; 86:11; 89:15; 119:1). Wherever we go, He can go with us. Our daily walk should be righteous, should be good. Thus, it is not only a matter of knowing the truth, but of doing, and of adhering to a pattern or habit in which we characteristically walk in this way. We do not wander around; we *walk with God*.

Nephi gave us all here a formula for success, a way in which we can help ourselves and others to avoid ending up where Laman and Lemuel did.

### **Further Reading**

Matthew L. Bowen, “‘If Ye Will Hearken’: Lehi’s Rhetorical Wordplay on Ishmael in 2 Nephi 1:28–29 and Its Implications,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 25 (2017): 157–189.

### **1 Nephi 16:7–8 — Lehi’s Sons Marry Ishmael’s Daughters**

Nephi mentioned himself first, which is appropriate: “It came to pass that I, Nephi, took one of the daughters of Ishmael to wife” (1 Nephi 16:7). It sounds as though he chose one of them. More likely though, is that Lehi and Ishmael had already figured out who was going to go with whom, and Nephi married the daughter that he was told to take. Recall that in 1 Nephi 7:19 there was one of the daughters of Ishmael who objected when Nephi was tied up. We may hope that this daughter was the one that Nephi deserved. We do not know that, though. It would have been nice if Nephi and his wife had some say in the matter and if Nephi had said more about it.

Nephi explained that his “brethren took of the daughters of Ishmael to wife; and Zoram took the eldest daughter of Ishmael to wife” (1 Nephi 16:7). Zoram is probably the oldest, so it makes some sense that he would marry Ishmael’s eldest daughter. But think about verse 8: “and thus my father had fulfilled all the commandments of the Lord which had been given unto him.” What commandment was Nephi referring to? This surely refers, at least in part, to 1 Nephi 7:1, where the Lord commanded Lehi’s sons to “take daughters to wife, that they might raise up seed unto the Lord in the land of promise.” In addition, it was a general responsibility of fathers in the ancient world to see that their children were married.

How might this story pertain to us today? Do we as parents or grandparents have any kind of obligation to help our children get married? Or can we just sit back and say, “Well, we have this 32-year-old son who likes playing his video games, and that is

okay.” What does the Doctrine and Covenants say about baptism? What does it say that parents need to do regarding that ordinance? It says that our children should all be baptized (see D&C 18:42; 68:27–28). And what happens if parents fail to teach that doctrine? “The sin be upon the head of the parents” (see D&C 68:25; cf. 93:40, 50).

Obviously, helping children keep *any* of the commandments, especially those involving entering into covenants, is part of a parent’s obligation. Parental responsibility involves helping our children choose good companions. To the best of our ability, we should see that they are raised around other children whose values are the same; hopefully that is what they will look for in a mate.

In our day, it has to be our children’s choice. We have responsibility to see that children are baptized, but they still have the choice. They must have “arrived at the years of accountability” (D&C 68:42), indicating that we ought not to take away their agency. The same principle even more strongly applies to the decision of whom they will marry and when.

In his conclusion of this segment, at the end of verse 8, Nephi says, “And also, I Nephi had been blessed of the Lord exceedingly.” That was his comment about his state of marriage. He saw it as a state of great blessedness. I think it is important for us to be a good example, and to talk positively about marriage and the blessings it can bring.

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can the Book of Mormon Strengthen Marriages and Families?](#) (Jacob 3:7),” *KnoWhy* 302 (April 19, 2017).

John L. Sorenson, “[The Composition of Lehi’s Family](#),” in *Nephite Culture and Society: Collected Papers* (Salt Lake City, UT: New Sage Books, 1997), 1–24.

### **1 Nephi 16:12–13 – Lehi Knows How to Travel in the Wilderness**

We do not know exactly what sort of caravanning Lehi might have done. He seems to have known how to get around in the wilderness. When he packed up his tents, it does not say that he had to first go and obtain tents, so he apparently had tents. Why would he own tents if he was not somehow involved in the caravan trade? He understands Egyptian too. Probably, at least some of the time, he went back and forth between Egypt and Judea. What might he have taken back and forth? Usually merchants took whatever was produced in one area to another location to sell it. They would then bring back something that was not available at home and sell it there

There is good reason to believe, as we have seen recent scholarship information about the mines of Timna, that Lehi might have picked up metal ore, and then carried it up to

blacksmiths who would have used it for making things like tools, weapons, or cooking tripods. He might have even been in the blacksmith's business himself. There was a very close connection in the ancient world between caravanners and blacksmiths because not only would someone have to travel to places where ore was available, but that person would have to have known which ore would have been most useful to him. Was that how Nephi knew how to make the plates? He had to be shown by the Lord how to build a ship, but he did not have to be told how to make tools, suggesting he already had some knowledge of blacksmithing.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Did Ancient Israelites Write in Egyptian?](#) (1 Nephi 1:2)," *KnoWhy* 4 (January 5, 2016).

Neal Rappleye, "[Lehi the Smelter: New Light on Lehi's Profession](#)," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scripture* 14 (2015): 223–225.

John A. Tvedtnes, "[Was Lehi a Caravaneer?](#)" in *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar*, 1st ed. (Salt Lake City, UT: Cornerstone Publishing, 1999), 76–98.

### 1 Nephi 16:23 — Nephi Asks His Father Where to Hunt

At the end of verse 20, Nephi mentioned how his father—even his father!—began to “murmur against the Lord his God,” and shortly afterwards Nephi made a new bow. Nephi did not sit and complain; he just went to work. However, he first went to his father, even though his father had murmured against the Lord. Nephi asked Lehi—being the proper order of things in families then for children to honor their parents—where he should go to obtain food (v. 23). Nephi could have sought for such a revelation himself, and he may have known perfectly well where to go. But he showed respect to his father, giving him a chance to lead again in righteousness. What a great lesson this is for all of us of all ages.

There is always some subtext involved in Nephi's selection of subject matter in 1 Nephi, as he consistently strove to establish that he was the proper successor to his father's priesthood, prophetic stature, and paternal authority over the family. Nephi always succeeded where his brothers failed, and of course, his brothers liked to rub that in any time Nephi appeared to be falling short. It should be remembered that Nephi was writing all of this after his people had separated from Laman and Lemuel and their followers. The Nephites had fled up into the land where they built the city of Nephi. Nephi's people had made him their king. They had built a temple. They had the brass plates, the Liahona, and the sword of Laban. When telling his story, Nephi wanted his people to know that he was the legitimate leader, and that he knew the will of the Lord.

He was not trying to be boastful. He just wanted to instill confidence in his people so that they would follow him as their appointed ruler.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Nephi Include the Story of the Broken Bow?](#) (1 Nephi 16:23)," *KnoWhy* 421 (April 3, 2018).

### 1 Nephi 16:23 — Nephi Uses Sonship Names for Christ

In his writings, Nephi uses ten names for Christ that no one else uses. This list provides an interesting reflection of his religious sensitivities. For example, Nephi calls Jesus “the Son of the Most High God,” “the Son of the Everlasting Father,” “the Son of Righteousness,” “the Beloved Son,” “the Very God of Israel” and “the Mighty One of Israel.” Here is a whole cluster of *son* names that only Nephi uses, in all the Book of Mormon. I have wondered if this use of *son* names is because Nephi had a unique understanding of what it means to be an obedient son, to show ultimate respect to his father. He has been there and done that, and so he would have appreciated, of all things, the son-ship of Jesus Christ. Even though Jesus was a God and had descended from heaven, He still was an obedient son.

In contrast, when Benjamin talked about the Messiah, he refers to the “Heavenly King.” He calls him “the Lord God Omnipotent.” Well, who was Benjamin? He saw himself predominantly as a king. So naturally, he would see attributes of kingship much more readily because they were personally meaningful to him. While Nephi also was a king, he was a reluctant king. He was prepared to do what he could to help his people, but he was not eager to extend himself into the mold of ancient demi-god kings. Instead, I see the element of son-ship going deep into the heart of Nephi, into his spirit, his soul, and his very being.

I wonder what it would be like to have some of these Nephite prophets come and speak at a BYU Devotional? How would you describe some of these men if you were asked to introduce them to an audience of 20,000? More than that, how might they introduce themselves? I thought in particular of how Nephi might introduce himself. “I Nephi, having been born of goodly parents,” he would have said, “I am the *son* of Lehi.” That was who he was. I think we see this coming through in the story of the broken bow, even when his father was in a weakened position and his faith was pushed to the limit. Nephi was still there, the faithful son.

### Further Reading

John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, “Names Used for Christ by Major Book of Mormon Authors” in *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 44.

### 1 Nephi 16:26–29 — How Did the Liahona Work?

Interestingly, this first recorded use of the Liahona was not a case of its being used to help Lehi’s family learn the direction in which they should travel, but rather to help them find food. The Liahona should serve us, therefore, as a life-sustaining symbol, not just as a direction-giving instrument. It symbolizes the Lord’s willingness to direct us towards physical and spiritual sustenance or nourishment. Yet, if harmony and peace are absent, the Spirit of the Lord and this instrument cannot function.

Recall the time when Joseph Smith was translating the Book of Mormon and quarreled with Emma about a domestic matter. Without making any effort to repair their relationship, Joseph attempted to resume the translation, but the words of the Book of Mormon would not appear on his translation device. He had to retire to the woods in prayer for about an hour and then seek for Emma’s forgiveness before he was able to translate again. The main point is that the Liahona was used for more than just helping wandering travelers stay on the right path. It functioned as a multi-purpose revelatory device. And just like Joseph Smith’s *Urim and Thummim*, the Liahona only worked when those using it were sufficiently worthy. Likewise, we must have peace and harmony for the Spirit to fully function in our lives (see Alma 37:41–47).

Also, some writing appeared on the Liahona, which could change from time to time (1 Nephi 16:29), but we do not know exactly how it appeared or functioned. In some ways, it may have been like the biblical *Urim and Thummim*. Those are plural words which, in the Hebrew text of the Bible, appropriately translate as *lights* and *perfections* (or *truths*). People later described the Urim and Thummim as twelve stones. These stones were worn on the breastplate of the high priest. These stones reportedly had letters on them. Some people have speculated that the stones could be cast, like rolling dice, and the resulting words or messages that appeared would then provide a way for the Lord to send messages to the high priest or to his people. Unfortunately, we have little direct evidence for how the Urim and Thummim functioned. But such traditional understandings do somewhat connect this ancient Israelite relic with the Liahona, which similarly featured divinely revealed words or letters on spindles that somehow moved around. Remember that vowels were not written out in ancient Hebrew, so just a few consonants could make up a variety of divinely revealed words or sentences that would need to be interpreted.

In any event, 1 Nephi 16:29 states, “And there was also written upon them a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord; and it was written and changed from time to time.” It probably said more than just *here is where you are to go*. It was probably not just a matter of teaching people to have *the right attitude about this*. It gave instructions that were meant to teach and to give them further “understanding of the ways of the Lord,” as when angels appear to give further light and knowledge.

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[Were Joseph Smith’s Translation Instruments Like the Israelite Urim and Thummim?](#) (Alma 37:24),” *KnoWhy* 417 (March 20, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Were the Three Witnesses Shown the Liahona?](#) (Alma 37:38),” *KnoWhy* 405 (February 6, 2018).

### **1 Nephi 16:34 — Ishmael Dies at Nahom**

Ishmael died and was buried at a place that Nephi says “was called Nahom”—suggesting it already had a name. A location with a similar name has been located in Yemen, right on the path that Lehi and his party seems to have been following. Much has been written about this solid archaeological evidence that now confirms that this place indeed “was called NHM” (variously rendered in English as Nahm, Nehem, and Nehm) dating back as far as the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. This is widely recognized as strong archaeological corroboration of this detail in Nephi’s account.

But, more than that, how are you affected by the account that Nephi gives surrounding the death of Ishmael, Nephi’s father-in-law? What pathos! Imagine the emotions. The remarkable film, [Journey of Faith](#), shows the agony of burying someone and leaving them on the trail. Many Latter-day Saints have pioneer ancestors who suffered similar experiences, burying loved ones in shallow graves and knowing that their bodies would probably not be left in peace. How painful that must have been, knowing you had to move on, with the hardships of the heat, uncertainty, and dangers of many kinds. So, think of the hardships endured by Lehi and his party. A lot of you are going through hard times in your life and in your families. Does it help you to know that there was a land of fruit and honey (which they called Bountiful) at the end of that hardship; that the Lord knew where He was taking these people; that they followed; and that they were in the hand of the Lord, trusting that He would watch over them however things would turn out? By small means the Lord provides those things that we need the most. Too often we overlook the little things.

**Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, "[Who Called Ishmael's Burial Place Nahom?](#) (1 Nephi 16:34)," *KnoWhy* 19 (January 26, 2016).

Warren P. Aston, "[A History of NaHoM](#)," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012): 79–98.

Warren P. Aston, "[Newly Found Altars from Nahom](#)," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 57–61.

## 1 Nephi 17

### 1 Nephi 17:1–3 — Desperately Eating Raw Meat

In 1 Nephi 17, we have a comment about how they had to eat raw meat. Why did Nephi include that detail? They were apparently crossing the Empty Quarter (or, at least, the borders of the Empty Quarter), traveling nearly eastward through modern day Yemen to the coast of the Indian Ocean. What is out there? Virtually nothing. What can they burn? Very little. So, maybe they just could not cook anything at all. Perhaps they did not light fires because the smoke would have sent smoke signals, inviting others to attack them or to steal from them.

But more than that, the idea of eating raw meat must have been even more shocking and a reflection of extreme circumstances in another way, in light of the kosher law prohibiting the eating of blood found in raw meat. Under ancient Israelite law, one could not eat blood. To make meat kosher, they had to drain the blood as much as possible. Cooking it also helped get rid of the juices and the remaining blood, so for Nephi and his party to have eaten raw meat, they were likely in a truly desperate situation, perhaps on the brink of starvation. Saving life took precedence over obedience to lesser laws in the Torah.

I think what Nephi learned from their survival was not how self-sufficient they had become—*Are we not clever? Look how we were able to get all the way down the coast of the Red Sea! I was able to fix my bow!* No, he gave full credit to the Lord. *Look at the things the Lord has done for us: "So great were the blessings of the Lord upon us"* (1 Nephi 17:3).

**Further Reading**

Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "[An Archeologist's View](#)," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 74.

Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 5 (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1988), 64–67.

### **1 Nephi 17:3 — Echoes of Nephi’s Famous “I will go and do . . .”**

Most readers of the Book of Mormon can repeat Nephi’s familiar statement, “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded.” It has a good rhythm to it. It’s beautifully memorable. In English it works wonderfully. It is a real gem of confession and profession of faith and faithfulness. But readers should not forget this verse’s almost-always-overlooked partner: 1 Nephi 17:3 is a structural counterpart and an echo of Nephi’s original statement in 1 Nephi 3:7.

Now out in the wilderness with his entire family, Nephi states, “And thus we see that the commandments of God must be filled. And if it be so that the children of men keep the *commandments of God*, he doth nourish and provide strength and strengthen them and *provide a means* [compare prepare a way] *whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them*” (1 Nephi 17:3). A similar expression also shows up in Sariah’s words as well: “I know of a surety that the Lord hath . . . hath given them power *whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them*” (see 1 Nephi 5:8). These strongly affirming words were a standard watchword for Nephi and his faithful family members throughout their arduous experiences in the desert.

#### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Nephi Believe the Lord Would Prepare a Way? \(1 Nephi 3:7\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 263 (January 18, 2017).

### **1 Nephi 17:5–6 — Has Nephi’s Land Bountiful Been Located?**

Good candidates for the location that Lehi’s party called “Bountiful” can be found in the Dhofar region of southern Oman. One such spot, called Khor Kharfot, complies with twelve requirements that can be derived from Nephi’s account. Such locations along the southern coast of Arabia are so tropical, especially in contrast to the barrenness of the surrounding desert, that I can imagine Laman and Lemuel saying something like, “Forget about going back to Jerusalem. Let us just stay right here.”

Interestingly, the very first account of this verdant region written by Westerners comes from 1850 when a British ship got caught in the monsoons and was blown into the coastland. They skirted along the southern coast of Oman and when they got to India, they wrote about what they had seen along the way. Their finding was newsworthy enough that it was then reported in a Calcutta newspaper. They were astonished at

these lush regions along the Arabian coast that did not look like they came out of Lawrence of Arabia's backyard.

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, "[Has the Location of Nephi's Bountiful Been Discovered?](#) (1 Nephi 17:5)," *KnoWhy* 259 (January 9, 2017).

### **1 Nephi 17:7–10 — Nephi Is Commanded to Build a Ship**

Imagine that you are in a fertile place with delicious food, but no workshops and no factories. Then the Lord tells you to build a ship! When the Lord commanded Nephi to build a ship under such circumstances, what is the first thing out of Nephi's mouth? He asked: "Where do I go to get the ore?" I can almost hear his mind going, "*Okay, we're going to need this, that, and this, but I don't know where to get that, and where do I go to get this.*" Then he was off and running to do the part he knew how to do. Nephi just seemed to have this great sense of what he can accomplish through his own abilities and when he had reached his limits and needed to ask the Lord for help. For example, back when his steel bow broke, Nephi made a new bow out of wood, and then said, "*Where should I go to get food?*"

Then we sense Nephi saying, "*I am going to build the ship, but it won't be after the manner of men.*" It sounds like he had an idea of how he might approach the task. He was a smart guy. Maybe he was aware that the Lord was going to want it to be done differently than he would have done it, or perhaps even differently than *anyone* would have done it. And who knows? If Nephi had done it his way, it probably wouldn't have worked so well.

### **1 Nephi 17:13 — The Lord Leads Them to the Promised Land**

The Lord never lets us down when we step into the unknown at His command. Notice how many times Nephi referred to the "land of promise" or the "promised land." He mentions the "promised land" seven times and "land of promise" seventeen times. Except for Ether, every other reference in the entire Book of Mormon to the Promised Land or the Land of Promise, comes from Nephi. If it is not directly from Nephi himself, it is a quotation or reference back to something that he wrote.

I have such a testimony that the Lord is generous with prophecy. Because of His revelations, we know what will be found at the end of the road, and we know it is going to turn out okay if we keep our heart on the goal. We know that. As King Benjamin said, all that the Lord requires of you is to keep the commandments (Mosiah 2:22). He does not say, "Guess what is in my head." He tells us. We have a living prophet, and we have scriptures. We have personal revelation, which, according to Nephi, are commandments (he uses these words in tandem). Whether the Lord tells you to do something through

the prophet or the scriptures or the Holy Ghost, either way it is a commandment and will safely guide us through.

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Do Commandments Bring Us Peace and Happiness? \(2 Nephi 5:10\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 347 (August 2, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Does it Really Mean to be Blessed For Keeping the Commandments? \(Mosiah 2:41\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 367 (September 26, 2017).

### **1 Nephi 17:19–22 — Nephi’s Brothers Mock Him for Building a Ship**

How easy it would have been for Nephi to get angry at his brothers? Perhaps he did get angry, but we never hear about it. He wrote the book and therefore had control over his own portrayal, but I think Nephi probably kept his cool most if not all of the time. There would have been very little for him to have gained by getting mad. His brothers obviously were ridiculing and pushing him pretty hard, and they were older than he, yet Nephi’s longsuffering was incredible—his willingness to forgive his brothers and his willingness to say, in effect, “I don’t have a dog in this fight. We are going to pull together. If we are going to succeed, it is going to take all of us. The cause, the mission, the purpose is much bigger than any of our personal interests.” There are valuable lessons in Nephi’s attitude for all of us—for leaders in the church, for wards, for families, and for individuals. It is so easy to get offended or to want to assert yourself, but that is not Nephi’s way.

Chapter 17 is a very rich and long doctrinal chapter. We usually focus on the stories, but what we have in this chapter is less about what they were doing than what they were arguing over. Something like 45 verses tell about the arguments that Nephi’s brothers raised against him, and then his rebuttal of those arguments. Verses 19 to 22 contain three arguments that Nephi’s brothers raised about why he should not build the ship.

1. The first argument begins in the middle of verse 19: “They rejoiced over me,” saying, “We knew you could not do it. You do not have good judgment.” Then in verse 20, “You are foolish.” This normally is the first criticism of naysayers. “You do not have good judgment. You cannot do this. It is too hard. This is impossible.” Imagine if somebody were to have said to Joseph Smith, “You think you can start a church? You think you can get this book published? Who’s going to want to buy the Book of Mormon? There are no printers around here. Foolish imaginations. You are just making all this stuff up.” Imagine someone saying to Brigham Young, “You are going to send people where? To St. George? To Hole in the Rock? This is foolishness.” Last Tuesday we went to the funeral of a friend of ours—quite an unusual, dynamic Canadian—and the thing that

drove him more than anything else was that if somebody said it was impossible, he did it, and he lived an amazing life as a result of that. Nephi was like that. His brothers say this is impossible, and Nephi does not wither. He says, “I will do it just because it is impossible.”

2. The second argument of naysayers is found in verse 20. “Well, we would be better off dead,” or “We would be happier elsewhere. We ought to go back to Jerusalem. You know, we have had to suffer all these things, and it would have been better if we had died before we came out of Jerusalem.” Well, this type of complaint is really not much of an argument. The grass always seems greener somewhere else! But that, in and of itself, doesn’t necessarily make it so.

3. The third argument is in verse 22: “We know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord ... wherefore, we know that they are a righteous people; and our father hath judged them.” In other words, “You and Lehi are judgmental and, therefore, we are off the hook. We do not have to do anything,” and so on, justifying themselves. This argument works, unless, of course, you stop to think about it. Laman and Lemuel are calling Lehi and Nephi *judgmental*. Of course, the very act of labeling someone as being judgmental is itself an act of passing judgment. And in this particular case, it was the pot calling the kettle black.

We have these three arguments. They are the sorts of raw objections that people often raise in desperate situations. Thinking about them can help us improve our own thinking. They say a lot about human nature, which the Book of Mormon carefully and helpfully exposes.

### **Further Reading**

John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, “Murmurings of Laman and Lemuel” in *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 77.

Alan Goff, “Boats, Beginnings, and Repetitions,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 67–84.

### **1 Nephi 17:23–47 — Nephi Chastises His Brethren and Praises the Lord**

We have 24 verses in which Nephi took Laman and Lemuel’s arguments apart, and did so in very powerful ways, which ended with them being overwrought by the realization of how wrong they had been. They, of course, tried to grab him to throw him into the sea, but Nephi was so filled with the Spirit that they are shocked by what they feel. You

may want to study those 24 verses in more detail, and see how he responded. Hint, the way I see it, he responded to argument 1, then to argument 2, then to argument 3.

And then in the middle (verses 36 to 40), Nephi proclaims a spontaneous hymn of praise about God being in control of all of things:

**A:** “Behold, the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited” (v. 36)—meaning we should go and inhabit some far-away place.

“He hath created his children that they should possess it” (v. 36)—he will give us a land of possession.

**B:** “He raiseth up a righteous nation” (v. 37)—us.

“And destroyeth the nations of the wicked” (v. 37)—the nations that are being destroyed and conquered at that time, including Jerusalem.

**B:** “He leadeth away the righteous into precious lands” (v. 38)—us.

“And the wicked he destroyeth, and curseth the land unto them for their sakes” (v. 38)—the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

**A:** “He ruleth high in the heavens, for it is his throne, and this earth is his footstool.” (v. 39)—meaning God deals with us lowly creatures on earth, but He still reigns in heaven.

“And he loveth those who will have him to be their God” (v. 40) —referring back to us, His children whom He loves.

This is beautiful parallelistic poetry. Indeed, Nephi uses it wisely, probably knowing that “a soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools pureth out foolishness” (Proverbs 15:1-2).

And notice that Nephi’s testimonial hymn has an overall A-B-B-A structure. It begins and ends with praising the Lord, and the two middle verses are about how the righteous and the wicked will be treated. So, this very elegant little chiastic hymn stands at the middle of Nephi’s response to his brothers, and its inverted structure helps to reverse the direction this very troublesome situation was headed in.

Nephi then continues, answering again argument 3 in verse 41, answering argument 2 in verse 42, and answering argument 1 in verse 44. So, altogether, he goes through arguments 1, 2, 3—gives his central hymn—and then answers arguments 3, 2, 1 in reverse order. Persuasive and eloquently done, he persuasively answers all of the questions twice-fold.

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Is the Presence of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Significant? \(Mosiah 5:10–12\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 166 (August 16, 2016).

### 1 Nephi 17:35 — The Difference between God’s Love and God’s Favor

Nephi said to his brothers, “Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God.” We know that God is no respecter of persons, that all men are saved by obedience to the same laws and ordinances of the gospel. And yet, there is a corollary that Nephi rightly points out: “he that is righteous is favored of God.” In 1 Samuel 2:30, the Lord said, “them that honour me I will honour,” and in John 14:21, he said: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him”. We believe that God loves all of His children, but we also believe, with Nephi, that “he that is righteous is *favored* of God.” Although this truth bothers some people, to think that God could favor those that follow him, believe him, love him, and serve him, Nephi teaches clear doctrine here to us and to his brothers, once again establishing his announced opening thesis that the tender mercies (or the favors) of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith and faithfulness (see 1 Nephi 1:20).

#### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Samuel Say the Lord ‘Hated’ The Lamanites? \(Helaman 15:4\),” \*KnoWhy\* 186 \(September 13, 2016\).](#)

Book of Mormon Central, [“How Can We Be Delivered through the Lord’s Tender Mercies? \(1 Nephi 1:20\),” \*KnoWhy\* 447 \(July 5, 2018\).](#)

### 1 Nephi 17:36 — Purpose of the Creation

Nephi also shared with his brothers his important understanding of the purpose of the creation of the earth and the blessings that come from righteousness and obedience. “Behold, the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited.” There was a clear purpose behind the creation. The earth was created so that it could be inhabited by the sons and daughters of God. To Moses the Lord said, “And worlds without number have I created; and I also created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten” (Moses 1:33). And the Lord explained to Enoch, “And were it possible that man could number the particles of the earth, yea, millions of earths like this, it would not be a beginning to the number of thy creations; and thy curtains are stretched out still” (Moses 7:30).

In the Doctrine and Covenants Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon declared: “For we saw him”—meaning Jesus Christ—“even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God.” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:23–24). As a part

of their ministry and calling, many prophets have been blessed with this vision of the God's creations and His purpose in providing it as a place for our life and progression. Nephi understands the importance of this foundational truth for his brothers. He attempts to share this knowledge with them even knowing what he has seen in vision of them and of their likely future.

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, "[Where Can You Best Learn about God's Plan of Salvation? \(Alma 24:14\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 272 (February 8, 2017).

## 1 Nephi 18

### **1 Nephi 18:3–4 — Similarities in the Stories of Building a Ship and Retrieving the Plates**

There are two main stories in 1 Nephi and they have certain similarities in common: the story of Nephi building a ship in 1 Nephi 17–18, and the story of retrieving the brass plates back in 1 Nephi 3–5. The stories are both about the same length, and in each case, Nephi succeeds where Laman and Lemuel say it cannot be done. The angel of the Lord or the power of the Lord is manifest in both stories, and in both stories, Nephi mentions Moses in his arguments about how the Lord will deliver them, particularly how the Lord brought Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt just like He brought Lehi's family out of Jerusalem.

These stories are not identical, but they make a matched pair. We might call them a *doublet*. We see doublets in the scriptures fairly often, for instance, in the parallels between Hannah giving Samuel to the priest, and John the Baptist being born to Elizabeth and Zacharias. It seems that the authors of the scriptures wanted to have these narrative echoes come to mind so we can recognize the hand of the Lord operating consistently in similar contexts.

### **1 Nephi 18:3 — Revelation Comes through Constant Prayer**

Clearly, Nephi did not receive just one revelation at the beginning on how to build the ship. He went many times into the mountain to pray, and the Lord showed him many things, more things than just about the ship. The mountain was a place of revelation and inspiration. Nephi was a man who believed in prayer. At the end of his narrative he will affirm: "But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy

performance may be for the welfare of thy soul” (2 Nephi 32:9). He learned that lesson at the beginning and never forgot, as it was reinforced through his experiences that he must pray always and over everything.

He said in 2 Nephi 4:25: “And upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains. And mine eyes have beheld great things, yea, even too great for man; therefore, I was bidden that I should not write them.” We do not have all of the great and marvelous things that Nephi beheld when he was on the mountain and carried away by the Spirit, but we know that these revelations were facilitated through Nephi’s diligent prayers.

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Must One Pray Always to Endure to the End?](#) (2 Nephi 32:8–9),” *KnoWhy* 298 (April 10, 2017).

### **1 Nephi 18:5–6 — The Lord Commands Lehi to Leave Bountiful**

Note that Nephi said “the voice of the Lord came unto my *father*” (v. 5). Who is the prophet? Lehi is still the prophet. The voice of the Lord does not come to Nephi and say, “It is time to go. Get your father and family and depart.” The voice of the Lord came unto the prophet Lehi and told him that it was time to enter the ship. Verse 6 begins with “on the morrow.” The Lord said it was time, and they went the next day. They obeyed immediately as daunting as that might have seemed.

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[Has the Location of Nephi’s Bountiful Been Discovered?](#) (1 Nephi 17:5),” *KnoWhy* 259 (January 19, 2017).

### **1 Nephi 18:7 — Jacob and Joseph are Mentioned**

Verse 7 talks about the two sons that were born in the wilderness. The elder was called Jacob and the younger was called Joseph. What is the significance of naming their last two sons Jacob and Joseph? Jacob surely comes from the famous patriarch of the Old Testament, whose father was Isaac, whose grandfather was Abraham, and whose sons became the twelve tribes of Israel. And Joseph? Lehi’s noteworthy discourse in 2 Nephi 3, which is all about the prophecies of Joseph who was sold into Egypt, indicates his admiration for his recently discovered ancestor who also left Israel so that his family might eventually prosper.

### **Further Reading**

Matthew Bowen, “[‘And There Wrestled a Man with Him’ \(Genesis 32:24\): Enos’s Adaptations of the Onomastic Wordplay of Genesis,](#)” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 10 (2014): 151–159.

### **1 Nephi 18:8 — The Ship Is Led by God**

In whatever manner the ship was constructed, they were not going to have to row it to get to their destination. They had to get out into the currents of the sea and into the winds, and the Lord would guide them to the Promised Land. We read that they were driven by the wind, but they still needed the Liahona to work. This suggests their ship may have had sails or rudders or something so that enabled it to be guided.

Thus, they still needed the Liahona. They could not just sit back and allow the wind to blow them to the Promised Land. There was a purpose to have the compass working on their ocean voyage. When they were sailing, they had to use the compass. Thus, it says they had to steer the ship, and they needed the Liahona to know where to steer it. It also said that the wind blew them back and they were back-tracking for days. It was a combination of the Lord providing the means and them following the path.

### **1 Nephi 18:9–12 — Laman and Lemuel Bind Nephi**

In verse 9 the sons of Ishmael and Laman and Lemuel and their wives began to be merry and to dance and to speak with much rudeness. When Nephi tried to get them to refrain, they would not listen to him and in verse 11, Laman and Lemuel “bind [Nephi] with cords,” and in verse 12 “the compass, which had been prepared of the Lord, did cease to work.” This Liahona is different from a compass that points north. The Liahona pointed the direction that they are to go, and it has writing on it that gave instructions. Yet as soon as Nephi’s brothers tied him up, the compass stopped working.

#### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Can Wickedness Never Bring Happiness?](#) (Alma 41:10),” *KnoWhy* 329 (June 21, 2017).

### **1 Nephi 18:23 — They Arrive at the Promised Land**

In verse 23 they arrived at the Land of Promise. This is about 11 years after they had left Jerusalem. They were in the wilderness for 8 years. It likely took them a couple of years to build the ship, and then there was the time needed for the ocean voyage. We do not know where they landed. Many people believe they arrived on the western coast of Central America, perhaps in Guatemala. But there are no definitive answers. Many Book of Mormon scholars believe most of the Book of Mormon story took place in what is called Mesoamerica, which is mostly made up of Guatemala and southern Mexico. Other people believe it took place in other locations. Wherever it was, the important thing is that they arrived at a Promised Land which the Lord had prepared for them.

The Lord told Nephi right at the beginning that “inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land

which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands" (1 Nephi 2:20). Joseph Smith and other early church leaders and members interpreted the "promised land" as a reference to *all* of America, meaning all of North America and South America. So, for several reasons, we know that wherever they landed, it was in the Western Hemisphere.

We also know that the Lord described this land as "choice above all other lands" (Ether 2:7) and promised that "whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ" (Ether 2:12). That is what happened with the Jaredites. That is what happened with the family of Lehi. When they served the God of the land, they prospered in the land.

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, "[Where is the Land of Promise?](#) (2 Nephi 1:5)," *KnoWhy* 497 (January 8, 2019).

### **1 Nephi 18:25–19:1 — Metal Plates in Antiquity**

The plates of the Book of Mormon may have had the appearance of gold, but they were surely not 24 carat gold. In places like Oaxaca, Mexico and also among the Inca ruins, we have evidence of the inhabitants using an alloy of mostly copper, but with some gold also mixed in. With the copper and gold together, they could make a nice foil that was really quite rigid. They then rinsed it in a light citric or vinegar acid. That leached out the top molecules of copper, leaving, in effect, a very thin but pure exterior of gold plating.

Those plates ended up with the rigidity of copper, but the color of gold. When they scratched the surface of the gold, it actually went through the gold down into the copper, making it much more legible because they had a different color for contrast, especially after the copper had oxidized. We find examples of this kind of gold-copper alloy, called Tumbaga, in Mesoamerica in that time period. This may have well have been the kind of metal that the Nephites used for the plates of the Book of Mormon.

Other metal plates can be found all over the ancient world, including the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean. For example, Brigham Young University owns a set of Roman brass plates dating from the first century AD. These plates were a military retirement diploma given to soldiers who had served for 25 years in the Roman Army as a retirement bonus for their service, and certified their award of Roman citizenship.

As you may know from the New Testament, Roman citizenship was worth an enormous amount, and the citizenship rights also extended to sons and daughters of the soldier as

well. The interesting thing about these plates is that on the outside, there is the full text of the grant by the Roman Emperor, and on the back, there are seven names. These are the Roman officials whose seals would have been put on the back. And through two holes in the middle, they would wrap and twist a wire to seal the two plates shut. Should the outside become damaged, a judge could break the seal and open it up. What he would find inside is a duplicate copy of the outside text. It is called the *interior* or *sealed* portion. There are many examples of plates just like these in museums all over Europe. Similar sealed documents with inside and outside information have also been found on papyrus, on parchment, and on clay going back into the middle of the second millennium BC. It was a fairly standard, legal way of formalizing and protecting documents.

How hard would it have been to make metal plates of any kind? First of all, the creator would need some substantial metallurgical training and skill. Such records needed to be made of the right material and in the right way to remain durable. The brass plates, for instance, made it across the ocean, and Lehi prophesied that they “should never perish; neither should they be dimmed any more by time” (1 Nephi 5:19). In contrast, papyrus would not likely have survived the waves dashing over the sides of the ship in a storm—how would you keep *anything* dry in a boat like the one Nephi’s family must have built? But metal would survive and it had to be some kind of metal that would not rust. Even silver will corrode. But gold will not rust, and brass will not rust.

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[Is the Book of Mormon Like Other Ancient Metal Documents?](#) (Jacob 4:2),” *KnoWhy* 512 (April 25, 2019).

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Kind of Ore did Nephi Use to Make the Plates?](#) (1 Nephi 19:1),” *KnoWhy* 22 (January 29, 2016).

## 1 Nephi 19

### **1 Nephi 19:3 — Nephi Makes the Small Plates for a Wise Purpose**

Nephi made a large set of plates, upon which he engraved his father’s record, which is often called the “Book of Lehi.” What happened to the Book of Lehi? Why does the Book of Mormon not start with Lehi chapter 1? Well, the translation of contents from the Book of Lehi was lost with the 116 pages that Martin Harris borrowed to show to his wife and family. Will we ever have the Book of Lehi? Yes, some day. Will we have the brass

plates? Yes. We will eventually have all of the important records of the Nephites, including the two-thirds portion of the Book of Mormon that was sealed.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Does the 'Mosiah-First' Translation Sequence Strengthen Faith?](#) (Words of Mormon 1:5)," *KnoWhy* 503 (February 22, 2019).

### 1 Nephi 19:6 — Nephi Writes That Which Is Sacred

We often say that the large plates of Nephi contained a secular history, and the small plates a spiritual history. Is that completely accurate? Let us look at 1 Nephi 19:6. What is the key point there? Nephi said it is *all* sacred: "Nevertheless, I do not write anything upon plates save it be that I think it be sacred." I think to Nephi all history was sacred because the hand of the Lord, His providence, was involved in guiding and directing the affairs of mankind. We might see a record as being more politically or economically focused, but Nephi never took God out of the situation. To put it in modern terms, whether the people prosper or perish has less to do with how the stock market is doing and more to do with their collective righteousness. To Nephi, even what we would call secular was sacred.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Nephi Write His Small Plates?](#) (1 Nephi 9:4)," *KnoWhy* 11 (January 14, 2016).

### 1 Nephi 19:8 — Nephi Looks Forward to the Coming of Christ

In this verse, Nephi reports a prophecy given by an angel that the God of Israel (meaning Jesus Christ) would come in 600 years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem. Some revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants refer to timing of Christ's mortal ministry as the "meridian of time" (D&C 20:26; 39:3). He came approximately after 4,000 years of recorded history, and there has been a little more than 2,000 years since then. The scriptures say that Jesus will come a second time in the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> thousand years. We have finished 6 thousand, and so we are now in the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> thousand years. We do not know exactly when the Second Coming is, but it is getting closer.

There is a time set, and He is going to come when He is supposed to come. It is our duty to be ready and to watch for the signs. Some people say "the Lord delayeth his coming" (Matthew 24:8), but He is not delaying His coming, and we cannot make Him come faster just because of what we do. He is going to come when it is time for Him to come. So, we should watch and be ready because that is what He told us to do, to look for the signs and be ready for His Second Coming.

Do we know that he is coming again? Yes. Just as much as Nephi knew that he was coming the first time. Nephi was a great prophet. He believed in Christ, that he would come in 600 years after they left Jerusalem. We believe that Christ is coming again, maybe during this century. I do not know when, but it is getting closer. He is going to come in a day of wickedness. He is going to come in a day of wars and rumors of wars. That is happening. Earthquakes in diverse places—there are all kinds of signs of the times that are happening. In fact, if you just make a list of all the signs of the times, most of them have already happened because many of the signs had to do with the restoration of the gospel, including the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the establishment of Jesus Christ’s Church, the missionary program taking the gospel to the world, and the gathering of Israel. If you make a list, most of the things that need to happen before he comes have happened.

There is one verse in Matthew 24 that is my favorite verse pertaining to the timing of Christ’s return. Jesus said: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matthew 24:14). So just watch the missionary program and watch for this gospel to be preached in all the world, and it is probably going to happen in some ways that we are not expecting. When I was a bishop at Brigham Young University, I gave a fireside in 1988 and said to the BYU students in my ward, “You will see the day when missionaries go to Russia and behind the iron curtain, and you will see the day when we have churches and temples and stakes of Zion in what is now the Soviet Union.” And just a short time after that President Reagan said, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” Not because he said it, but because of what happened, the wall came down and the Soviet Union collapsed and missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints went into all those countries.

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does Prophecy Shape the Book of Mormon’s Content and Structure?](#) (Words of Mormon 1:4),” *KnoWhy* 498 (January 15, 2019).

### **1 Nephi 19:10–12 — Nephi Quotes Prophecies of Zenoch, Zenos, and Neum**

These verses introduce three Old Testament prophets who are not specifically mentioned in the Bible: Zenoch, Zenos, and Neum. Traditional English spellings of names in ancient languages are a little bit arbitrary because a single English letter can sometimes represent different sounds or the same sound can be represented by different letters. For instance, if an ancient name had what approximately the sound of a “k” in it, should a translator render it with a “k” or with a “c”? An additional challenge arises

when we do not have *any* letters or sounds in English that precisely match how scholars believe a particular ancient consonant or vowel (or combination of them) was uttered.

So, with that in mind, consider the name Neum. Nephi says that Christ will be “crucified, according to the words of Neum” (1 Nephi 19:10). While we don’t have anybody in the Bible by the name of Neum, we do have an Old Testament prophet named Nahum. Perhaps these were the same individual.

As for Zenock, his name sounds a bit like Enoch, and there is an ancient book called 1 Enoch (as well as books called 2 Enoch and 3 Enoch.) 1 Enoch is preserved in the Ethiopic tradition, and it has been translated and studied at great length in recent times. There was a translation of it that was done back in 1821, but even if Joseph Smith had access to it, that translation would not have given him some of the interesting information that modern scholars, such as George Nickelsburg, have uncovered in more recent translations of the text.

Interestingly, I was struck to find in 1 Enoch a list of what are called the twenty evil “watchers.” These are spirits or powers that are somewhere out there in the heavens. They participate in the cosmic and spiritual dramas that the Book of Enoch is all about, with Enoch seeing visions and being taken up into the heavens and so on. In the normal translations of 1 Enoch, what we get is just a list of the names of these so-called spirits or watchers. Samyaza is one of them, and Arakiel is another—names that will not mean anything to you unless you are told that these proper names have meanings. When translated they are things like *the star of God*, **thunder** of God, *shooting star of God*, *the one of the mountain*, *the earth is power*, *vein of God*, *the cloud of God*, *the winter of God*, *the perfection of God*, *the sea of God*, and *God will guide*. Now why is that significant? As you read down the list of cataclysms in 1 Nephi 19:11–16 you find the **opening of the earth**. We find volcanic **clouds** mentioned, and one of the names deals with the **smoke** apparently of volcanic eruption. One of them, as I have said, is called *the thunder of God*. **Thunderings** are here. You go down this list in 1 Nephi 19, and most of the physical calamities line up closely with the names of these 20 watchers (or forces) mentioned in 1 Enoch.

Nephi also refers to Zenos as having spoken about these signs: “All these things must surely come, saith the prophet Zenos.” Many physical forces are going to be at play as a sign of the death of Christ: Thunderings, lightnings of his power, tempests, fire, smoke, vapor of darkness, opening of the earth, mountains which shall be carried up, the rocks of the earth must rend, groaning of the earth and so on. And does 3 Nephi report the complete fulfillment of this prophecy? It does! And almost precisely in Zenos’s order.

Nephi had spoken in some detail of the death of Jesus back in 1 Nephi 11. And Lehi did too, in 1 Nephi 10. Now Nephi is basically saying, “I am not the only one who saw this. I am not the only one who prophesied this.” These verses in 1 Nephi 19 offer a fairly specific prophetic explanation of what is going to happen when Christ comes to the earth and suffers the insults and eventually the death that he will be subjected to. Here in 1 Nephi 19, Nephi calls other witness to his side, using records on the brass plates to support the truth of the coming of the Messiah, which he saw in vision.

### **Further Reading**

John W. Welch, “Enoch Translated,” *FARMS Review* 16, no. 1 (2004): 413–417.

Book of Mormon Central, “Is Anything Known of the Prophet Zenos Outside of the Book of Mormon? (Jacob 5:1),” *KnoWhy* 67 (March 31, 2016).

### **1 Nephi 19:23–24 — Nephi Also Quotes from Isaiah**

Although Nephi says here that he had quoted and taught things from the Torah written in the books of Moses, he preferred to quote from Isaiah, and he particularly encouraged his family members and his readers to “liken all scriptures unto” themselves. Thus, for example, Nephi quoted a prophecy of Isaiah mentioning the “the isles” of the sea (Isaiah 49:1; 1 Nephi 21:1), and we can see how they would have seen the word “isles” pertinent to themselves. For, at the end of 1 Nephi, at the time, Lehi’s group had just recently arrived in the New World. Lehi had not died yet. They all must have been relieved to have arrived safely in the land of promise. They were rejoicing, and they now read in Isaiah that God will not forget even the people who are on the isles of the sea. Nephi knew that he was on land, but how would he have known then how big a land mass they were on? A few years later, Jacob would say, “we are upon an isle of the sea” (2 Nephi 10:20). They must have known by then that they were on a big island, but they had little idea yet that it was continental in scale. But there were also prophecies of Zenos (1 Nephi 19:16) about people on the islands of the sea, and Nephi could see how the words of the prophets Zenos and Isaiah could be likened to themselves. In these descriptions of how the Lord would remember the people of the isles of the sea, we can imagine how reassured the Nephites would have been on finding those prophetic words. We too can see how these great prophecies speak both about us and to us.

The next two chapters, 1 Nephi 20 and 21, are thus quotations by Nephi of Isaiah 48 and 49. Let me emphasize how accurate, how useful, and how really astonishing the words of Isaiah are in the Book of Mormon, and also how intricate and verbally detailed Nephi’s understanding of Isaiah is.

I have looked a fair amount at what people were saying about Isaiah in Bible commentaries being written in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, just to compare how they were interpreting these chapters. Actually, it appears that very little was being said in Joseph Smith's day about Isaiah, and what they were saying was quite sparse, not systematic, and not very sophisticated. For example, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the dominant reading for the passage in Isaiah about how kings and queens would be nursing mothers and fathers to the gentiles used these words to justify the divine right of kings and to support the monarch's privilege to speak authoritatively and to give the people an official state religion. Thus, as a divinely favored ruler, the king of England was seen as the nursing father of his people, and Isaiah's words were seen as justifying the Church of England. In America, Isaiah was likewise used to show that the church should be part of politics and government. The famous French visitor de Tocqueville once said it was impossible for a democracy to be a solid and good government and that America would never succeed. The Americans answered back, confidently, that democracy would succeed because there will be public virtue, and public virtue will be taught by the churches of our states and of this new nation, seeing this passage in Isaiah for local political purposes, to say that religion would become the nursing strength of the society.

But the Book of Mormon does not see this passage in that way. It talks instead about how the gospel will go into the hands of the Gentiles, but that the Gentiles will be nursing fathers and mothers, who will someday bring the gospel back to descendants of Lehi's people. Ironically, the Gentiles will help reestablish the house of Israel, fulfilling the covenants of the Lord. As obvious as I think this interpretation is in the text, that didn't seem so obvious to biblical scholars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But careful readers today see that this is what Isaiah must have meant. In this, Joseph Smith was ahead of his time, precisely because he had Nephi's help, and Nephi understood the words of Isaiah. Nephi grew up in Jerusalem, where Isaiah had lived. Isaiah ended his main prophecies around 701 BC, and Nephi left Jerusalem around 600 BC, so, there was only about a hundred years, only a couple generations, between them. Thus, when Joseph Smith quotes Isaiah at length, we can appreciate that Isaiah was the most important and venerated prophet of Lehi's time. This may offer yet another explanation of why Nephi used Isaiah so extensively and authoritatively.

In reading the words of Isaiah, Nephi saw particular words and phrases as being (1) relevant to his own world—we did “liken all scriptures unto us” (1 Nephi 19:23), temporally (1 Nephi 22:1, 3, 27). (2) In addition, Nephi relates Isaiah's prophecies to his own prophetic world view, informed by Nephi's great vision in 1 Nephi 11-14. I think this is what Nephi means when he speaks of reading these things not only temporally

but also spiritually (1 Nephi 22:1-3). And finally, (3) Nephi expects us and all of his readers to see these fruitful texts as being relevant to themselves and to read them “for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23). Getting through Isaiah is difficult, but it works better when readers try to get things out of Isaiah, not just to get through it. I recommend following Nephi’s model. By pondering each verse of Isaiah in his three ways has yielded rich rewards for me.

### **Further Reading**

See several chapters in Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), notably John W. Welch, “[Getting through Isaiah with the Help of the Nephite Prophetic View](#),” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 19–45.

## 1 Nephi 20

### **1 Nephi 20:1 — Isaiah Prophecies of the Scattering of Israel**

In chapter 19, Nephi has spoken of the coming of Christ. Chapter 20 (quoting Isaiah 48) then pertains to the rejection of Jesus Christ by certain Jews in Jerusalem and, consequently, the complete scattering of Israel. Thus, Isaiah 48 speaks of Israel’s condition in apostasy: “They swear not in truth, nor in righteousness” (v. 1), and they do not “stay themselves upon the God of Israel” (v. 2). This is because of their stiffneckedness, even after having been shown the truth (v. 4). Nevertheless, Isaiah says, God will defer his anger for His name’s sake and will refrain from cutting Israel off (v. 9), but will refine them in a furnace of affliction (v. 10) and lead them through the deserts (v. 21). They will be scattered and cast out, but the promise still stands that Israel will eventually come forth out of the world (v. 20). The chapter ends by seeing no peace for the wicked (v. 22). When you read this chapter in connection with stage 2 of the Nephite World View, you can spot each of these and several more points of relevance to the covenant House of Israel, to the situation of Lehi’s family, to the scattering and hardships suffered by Jesus’s early followers, and also as valuable instruction in your own personal life.

### **1 Nephi 20:2 — Stay Upon the Lord**

For example, 1 Nephi 20:1–2 tells us that the Israelites did not *stay themselves upon the Lord*. What does it mean to *stay oneself*? It means to hold in place, to steady, to really be faithful, to be enduring, to be supported. Where do we get real support? How can and do you *stay* yourself? You surround yourself with strong people, those with strong enduring ideas and with a full set of the strong foundational principles of life. Most of

all, we stay ourselves upon the Lord. It is hard to stay *yourself* just on your own. It is by having these *stays* around you that will help you stay faithful. Strive to say, “I have done everything I can, and I will stay with the Lord, and he will then strengthen us and as we go forward, *staying ourselves* together upon the Lord.”

## 1 Nephi 21

### 1 Nephi 21:1 — The Day of the People of All Nations

In 1 Nephi 21, Nephi then quotes Isaiah 49, speaking of the day of the gentiles (Nephi’s stage 3). The key verses are: “Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms,” describing how the gentiles will carry the sons of Israel—“in their arms and thy daughters shall be carried on their shoulders” (v. 22). And in verse 1, Isaiah mentions the isles of the sea, the widespread scattering of the House of Jacob. This chapter also tells how a particular servant will be raised up “for a light to the gentiles” (v. 6), that “kings shall see and arise,” (v. 7), while messengers will be sent “to them that sit in darkness” (v. 9).

### 1 Nephi 21:9 — Who is Sitting in Darkness?

These are the people who have been scattered—the covenant House of Israel. They are in the lands of darkness, broken off and driven out, afar off. Some of them are the remnants of the tribe of Lehi, and there is a promise that messengers will go out and will be sent to these people. That is also what Nephi has talked about in 1 Nephi 13. The Lord promises that He will comfort and not forget his people (vv. 13, 15). Again, we can see why Nephi would have been especially attracted, for many reasons, to these words of Isaiah.

### 1 Nephi 21:22 — The Victory of the Lord Jesus Christ

Verse 22 wraps up this prophecy with a strong declaration of the eventual victory of God: “And all flesh shall know that I, the Lord [Jehovah], am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Might One of Jacob.” There will be one shepherd who will reign in dominion and might and power and great glory. This final theme is introduced at the very end of 1 Nephi 21 (cf. Isaiah 49). Isaiah had prophesied that Israel will be restored and that they who oppress the righteous shall be “drunken with their own blood” (v. 26). We know, then, that the bad guys are going to be subdued. We know that God is going to win. That is where Isaiah leaves off in Isaiah 49, and Nephi thus picks right up with that optimistic point as he continues his own teachings and prophecy through the end in chapter 22, his closing chapter in 1 Nephi. And in the end, “all flesh shall know

that I, the Lord, am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob” (v. 26). That is the ultimate victory which, again, Nephi had prophesied about in 1 Nephi 14.

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, [“What is the Day of the Gentiles? \(1 Nephi 21:22\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 44 (March 1, 2016).

### **1 Nephi 21:14–16 — The Lord Will Not Forget His People**

Is it reassuring to you today to know that God will not forget you? You have made covenants with Him and while you may on occasion forget Him, He will never forget you. That thought must have been very reassuring to Nephi living now in a remote place, and feeling the weight of responsibility for his people. How heartening it would have been to read to all of them of the promise of God’s enduring love and covenant. “Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee” (v. 15). Just as we can be reassured by that, Nephi and his people must all have taken great comfort in those very words.

### **1 Nephi 21:18 — We Are as Gems in Christ’s Eyes**

The wedding garment is symbolic of the covenant that is made with the Lord: “Thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, . . . even as a bride” (21:18). All these people will be a part of that covenant, thereby being bound eternally with Him. The bride offers a powerful and beautiful image. What does a bride do with the ornament that she puts on her bridal gown? She wears and protects it as her most precious possession. The Lord is saying here that all these people, every one of them, will be that valuable.

### **1 Nephi 22:1 — What Do Isaiah’s Prophecies Mean?**

Laman and Lemuel ask, “What meaneth these things which ye have read? Behold, are they to be understood according to things which are spiritual, which shall come to pass according to the spirit and not the flesh?” (v. 1). In other words, they were asking if Isaiah was prophesying about things that are actually going to happen in history, for example when Isaiah talks about the gentiles, the nursing fathers, the isles of the sea, and so on. Are these things to be understood as events in history, or are these abstract spiritual concepts that can apply to any person anywhere? Nephi’s answer is that it is both, as can be seen in how Nephi himself interprets and applies these teaching, both temporally and spiritually. Nephi answers in verse 2 by saying that these things “were manifest unto the prophet by the voice of the Spirit; for by the Spirit are all things made known unto the prophets,” so they are spiritual. In verse 3, he explains that “the house of Israel, sooner or later, will be scattered upon all the face of the earth, and also among all nations,” so they are temporal. And in verse 4 he states that: “the more part of all the tribes have been led away; and they are scattered to and fro upon the isles of the sea,” and so they are also physical or material. All things are known unto the Lord.

**Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, "[Where Did Joseph Smith Get His Ideas about the Physical and Spiritual Gathering of Israel?](#) (2 Nephi 21:11)," *KnowWhy* 290 (March 22, 2017).

**1 Nephi 22:3–5 — Where and How Are the Lost Tribes Lost?**

We know the lost tribes are lost. We say, they are lost, but they are not in some hidden valley or someplace under the earth's crust or on some distant star. The lost tribes are "scattered" among every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In what senses are they lost? They are lost to the lands of their inheritance. They are lost to the gospel and the saving ordinances. They are lost to the priesthood and the blessings that flow from it. They are lost in the sense that many do not even know that they are of the house of Israel. One of the reasons we send our missionaries to the four corners of the earth is to find, gather and expand the house of Israel.

Then how can they know that they are Israel? They come into the church. Passing through "the waters of baptism" (1 Nephi 20:1), they can next receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. They can receive a patriarchal blessing from an ordained patriarch who declares to them that they are of one of the lineages of House of Israel, and these days patriarchs have pronounced lineages of all of the twelve tribes. Historically, the majority of the members of the Church have been declared to be of the tribes of Ephraim or Manasseh, but now there are members of the Church from all of the different tribes of Israel.

In verse 5, Nephi states that Israel will be scattered among all nations. He knew that the northern ten tribes were conquered by the Assyrians in 721 BC and taken into the north and then scattered. The southern kingdom of Judah was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 587 BC. Then some were allowed to return so at the time of Christ there were Jews in Judah, but Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews were scattered by the Romans in AD 70, and Israel was further scattered all over the world. Nephi saw this as the result of their hardening their hearts "against the Holy One of Israel" (22:5). We would say that Israel was scattered, dispersed and disorganized because of apostasy. Nephi also states that ultimately the seed of Lehi will likewise be scattered (22:7) and "dwindle in unbelief" (as Nephi had seen in 1 Nephi 12:20-22).

**1 Nephi 22:8–12 — The Restoration Will Bless All People**

In verse 8 we read that to remedy all this "the Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles." And He has. The gospel was restored, and the Book of Mormon was translated. It is indeed a marvelous work and a wonder. Verses 11-12 then state that the Lord will bring "about his covenants and his gospel unto those who are of the house of Israel, wherefore, he will bring them again out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought out of

obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel.”

Joseph Smith commented on the extent of these missionary efforts to reach out into all the world: “The Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing;...the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Role Does the Book of Mormon Play in Missionary Work?](#) (2 Nephi 30:3),” *KnoWhy* 288 (March 17, 2017).

### **1 Nephi 22:15–19 — The Millennium Will Be a Time of Peace**

In verse 15 the prophet Zenos says that “the time cometh speedily that Satan shall have no more power over the hearts of the children of men.” The Lord is going to bind Satan before the Millennium can begin, and the Millennium will be ushered in by the power of God. Satan will be bound and become powerless by the power of God as well as by the righteousness of the members of the Church. In verses 16–26, Nephi talks about the word *righteous* and *righteousness*. These words appear here ten times (vv. 16, 17, 17, 17, 19, 21, 21, 24, 26, 26), pointing to a complete righteousness.

### **1 Nephi 22:20–26 — Nephi Looks Forward to Christ**

Verse 20 quotes the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15: “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, like unto me.” Who was the prophet that was like unto Moses that the Lord raised up? First, in the meridian of times, Jesus Christ fulfilled this prophecy. This is the most often quoted messianic prophecy in scripture, and has been quoted by Nephi, Peter, Stephen, Moroni and Jesus Christ himself. As Moses was a miracle worker, a redeemer, a deliverer, a liberator, a mediator of the covenant, a law-giver, a revelator, a prophet, priest and king—in each of these ways and in many others—the Lord Jesus Christ is even a greater prophet than was Moses.

In verse 21 Nephi declares that “this prophet of whom Moses spake was the Holy One of Israel.” In verse 22 we read that the “righteous need not fear.” Verse 24 says that “the righteous must be led up as calves of the stall, and the Holy One of Israel must reign in dominion, and might, and power, and great glory.” That is really going to happen in the Millennium, when Jesus reigns as king of kings and lord of lords.

Verse 25 states that “he gathereth his children from the four quarters of the earth.” In other words, all of Israel will be gathered, including any remnants of the Ten Tribes.

Israel is scattered among all nations; Israel will be gathered from all nations. And verse 26 notes that it is “because of the righteousness of his people” that “Satan has no power.” This will be during the millennium, and Satan “cannot be loosed for the space of many years.” He is bound by the power of God so that the Millennium can begin. Then the people are righteous and Satan is bound by the righteousness of the people and by the power of the priesthood. Then, when the thousand years of the Millennium is ended, he is loosed for a little season.

### **1 Nephi 22:30–31 — Nephi Exhorts All to Keep the Commandments**

Once again, remember Nephi’s statements about going and doing the Lord’s commandments in 1 Nephi 3:7 and 17:3. These concluding words here in verses 30–31, encouraging all to be obedient to the commandments and to endure to the end, are clearly related to Nephi’s earlier declarations of commitment that reverberate throughout the book of 1 Nephi and consistently draw the book of 1 Nephi together.

In sum, I testify that Nephi was truly a great prophet. There are so many things that we can learn about him and from him. I bear witness that Nephi saw the Lord Jesus Christ. He testified in 2 Nephi 11 that he had seen him, that Isaiah had seen him, that Jacob had seen him, just as Lehi had also seen him. We have here eyewitnesses of the premortal Christ. Throughout his life, Nephi was a great preacher of righteousness, not only in word but also in deed: “And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ and we write according to our prophecies that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26).

#### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Do Commandments Bring Us Peace and Happiness?](#) (2 Nephi 5:10),” *KnoWhy* 347 (August 2, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Does it Really Mean to be Blessed For Keeping the Commandments?](#) (Mosiah 2:41),” *KnoWhy* 367 (September 26, 2017).

### **1 Nephi 22:31 — Why Did Nephi Divide His Writings into Two Books?**

1 Nephi can be seen as the book of Lehi and his son Nephi. It even ends, “Wherefore, ye need not suppose that I and my father are the only ones that have testified” that the Holy One will reign and only those who are obedient to the commandments will dwell safely with him (22:24, 28, 31). But 2 Nephi continues on with the history of Nephi without his father. It begins with the final testament and death of Lehi, and then continues as Nephi, with the priestly help of his much younger brother Jacob, successfully establishes his people in the land of promise.

But this is the only place in the Book of Mormon where we have two books named after one person. We do not have a book of 1 Alma and another of 2 Alma, even though the book of Alma goes on for 63 chapters. The book of Alma could logically have been divided at the place in which Helaman became the leader of the church in chapter 45, but it was not. Here, in the case of Nephi, we have a single author, one man, who interrupted his record at the end of where chapter 22 now ends, suggesting that somehow the 22 chapters of 1 Nephi were intended to be read as a complete or unified record. Indeed, that composition has a coherent structure to it, drawing largely on certain repeated themes or motifs. At that point, Nephi carries on and creates the book of 2 Nephi, which has a very different purpose. In his first book, Nephi is getting out of the Old World, and in the second, he is getting established in the New. And there are other differences as well.

As we study the overall structures of these two books, the most important part of each book becomes clear. The crucial theme is often found at the center, and at the middle of 1 Nephi we find Nephi's great vision, beginning in chapter 11, where he sees the birth of Christ, the condescension of Christ, the love of God. This is where Nephi says he does not "know the meaning of all things," but he does "know that [the Lord] loveth his children" (1 Nephi 11:17). I see this as the structural center of 1 Nephi. That is the main theme and message of this book. The center of 2 Nephi is the long quotation of Isaiah 2-14 as the third witness, together with Nephi and Jacob, of the testimony of Christ.

Then are other oft-repeated themes. In 1 Nephi, sometimes Nephi reinforces the idea of being his father's successor. At the same time, we see the repeated struggles and spiritual degeneration of Laman and Lemuel. The similarities and contrasts in these stories help us see their underlying purposes, the main messages that Nephi wants us to get out of this. Notice how many things happened or are mentioned twice in 1 Nephi: (a) Nephi was tied up twice—once in the first half of the book when he and his brothers were returning from Jerusalem with Ishmael's family, and later, a second time, on the ship, during their voyage to the promised land. (b) The daughters of Ishmael are mentioned twice, once in 1 Nephi 7 and again, later, when they marry the sons of Lehi and Zoram in 1 Nephi 16. (c) Brass is mentioned two times—plates of brass, and then the ball made of brass, called the Liahona. Both of these brass objects functioned as guides. (d) We also encounter two objects made of steel—Laban's steel sword, and the steel bow that broke. The steel bow would not have been a bow made completely out of steel, but rather probably had steel strips or straps to reinforce or strengthen a wooden bow, giving it a little more spring. Such bows are called composite bows. Likewise, Laban's sword was not completely made of steel either. It had a hilt made of gold, so both items were likely composites. Both were weapons; both functioned in the hand of the Lord to

accomplish, in one case, life through death, and in the other case, life through hunting; and both became symbols of the divine right to lead or rule. And so on.

Although every element in 1 Nephi does not fit into a rigorously inverted or chiasmic structure, many of its features counterbalance each other. Noticing these interconnections can help in seeing this book as a unified and purposeful narrative. Remember, 1 Nephi was not written as a journal that Nephi wrote as these events were going on. It is a purposefully selective, organized, coherent, and memorable retrospective account of what happened in his life. It looks back on how Lehi and his posterity reached the Promised Land, and it provides the backstory for why the Nephites ended up separating from their brethren, the Lamanites. Readers are then in a position to see how the hand of the Lord was involved in these people's lives and how He will continue to give guidance and blessings to all who will come unto Him.

### **Further Reading**

For a chiasmic arrangement of 1 Nephi, see John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim, Germany: Gerstenberg, 1981), 199–200; see further, Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephi’s Outline,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982), 53–74.