

General Comments on 1 Nephi

Nephi deliberately draws rhetorical cues from Israel's ancient Exodus from Egypt to parallel this present mini-Exodus. He repeatedly makes explicit reference to the Exodus during their journey (cf. 4:2-3, 5:14-15, 17:23-42), and consider the numerous parallels in the text:

Deliverance of chosen	1:20	Exod 3:6-8
Obtaining the Law	4:15	Exod. 20
Altar and sacrifice	2:7	Exod. 24:4-5
Complainers who don't want to leave/want to return	2:11, 7:6-7	Exod. 16:1-3 Num. 11:4-6 Num. 14:2-4
Dwelling in tents	2:15	Num. 9:17-20
Wandering in wilderness near Red Sea	2:2-5	Exod. 13:18-20
Power struggles	7:16, 18:10	Exod. 32:1-4
Fearing man, not God	3:31	Num. 13:26-33
Hunger and murmuring	16:19	Exod. 16:3
Miraculously supplied food	16:30-31	Exod. 16:12-15
Miraculous water crossing	17:1	Exod. 14:21-22
Land of promise	2:20, 18:23	Exod. 12:25 Deut. 19:8

Why the parallels? Lehi's family is fleeing Egypt again. The contemporary political and religious leaders at Jerusalem are favoring alliance with Egypt, something the Lord has consistently forbidden ever since the Exodus (cf. Deut. 17:16, Isa. 30:1-5, Jer. 2:18).

And, Nephi is writing this account well afterwards, so this affords him considerable editorial oversight when writing his more spiritual account of the events. Nephi uses these events to build a theological narrative that explains why the Lord brought this small group of people out of Jerusalem and over to

the New World, to keep His covenant with Abraham

Aside from the religious symbolism in the parallels, the more practical use of the Exodus theme serves to expose human nature. Anciently, the Israelites were a mixed bag: some faithful, some rebellious. It is the same with Lehi's and Ishmael's families. The same hassles the Lord had to deal with in the original Exodus, He must address in this group. And, thus, Israel's macro-history repeats itself in the microcosm of two families traveling to the New World.

As such, there are parallels to the book of Numbers, which Nephi explicitly references (cf. 17:28, 17:41), where the conflict and reconciliation plays out in practical ways. Also note the numerous times the phrase "in the wilderness" is used in the text (cf. 4:14, 4:33, 5:2-6, 5:22, 7:6, 7:16, 16:14-20, 16:35, 17:1-4, 17:12-13, 17:20-21, 2 Ne. 2:1, 2 Ne. 3:1), which is the Hebrew name of the same book, bamidbar.

What can we take away from this today? Under similar circumstances, we would behave the same today as they did anciently. Adversity polarizes, and human nature being what it is, conflict arises, so the Lord steps in to make sure His goals are ultimately achieved, working with those who will listen to Him, and against those who do not. The Lord's interests overall are guided by Him keeping His side of the Abrahamic Covenant.

General Comments on 1 Nephi 1-7

These chapters serve as an introduction to the book by casting the main characters against a backdrop. The immediate setting is the same historical setting as that of the era of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (see Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 10, Chapter 7, sections 2-6). A time where false prophets have firmly entrenched themselves in Jerusalem's politics, and are extremely hostile to the Lord's true prophets. The political scene is dangerous, as the false prophets are encouraging the king to ally with Egypt against the occupying Babylonians. While the imminent confrontation with Babylon threatens all at Jerusalem, Lehi faces a more specific and immediate threat from the false prophets who want him disposed of. As Lehi is an outsider, not being of the tribe of Judah, and apparently without any political or religious allies, disposing of him wouldn't be a problem.

They need to leave the specific area immediately to avoid

hostile religious and political leaders, and the general area relatively soon to avoid being caught up in the Babylonian siege. The result is a mini-Exodus of Lehi's family, Ishamel's family, and Zoram.

Comments on 1 Nephi 1

1 I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days. 2 Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians. 3 And I know that the record which I make is true; and I make it with mine own hand; and I make it according to my knowledge.

v1-3 The author identifies himself, says he has seen many things both good and bad, and acknowledges the hand of providence in his life (v. 1). The record is composed of Jewish learning in Egyptian writing (v. 2). The record is an autograph, not a composition, compilation, or redaction of someone else's words (v. 3).

These verses form a [colophon](#), an ancient literary device identifying the author and when the text was written. The title page of the Book of Mormon is also a colophon.

4 For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, (my father, Lehi, having dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days); and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed.

v4 In the kingdom of Judea, at Jerusalem, during the first year of the reign of [Zedekiah](#), prophets warned the people if they didn't repent they would be destroyed by Babylon.

This very tersely establishes the setting, focusing mainly on spiritual things. Why such a brief introduction to the historical context? It is one the author knows is well documented elsewhere, so he sees no need to elaborate. Instead, he emphasizes the spiritual aspect: prophets are warning that Jerusalem is to be destroyed.

5 Wherefore it came to pass that my father, Lehi, as he went forth prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people. 6 And it came to pass as he prayed unto the Lord, there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard much; and because of the things which he saw and heard he did quake and tremble exceedingly.

7 And it came to pass that he returned to his own house at Jerusalem; and he cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen. 8 And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God. 9 And it came to pass that he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day. 10 And he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament.

11 And they came down and went forth upon the face of the earth; and the first came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a book, and bade him that he should read. 12 And it came to pass that as he read, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord. 13 And he read, saying: Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations! Yea, and many things did my father read concerning Jerusalem—that it should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon.

14 And it came to pass that when my father had read and seen many great and marvelous things, he did exclaim many things unto the Lord; such as: Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth, and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish! 15 And after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God; for his soul did rejoice, and his whole heart was filled, because of the things which he had seen, yea, which the Lord had shown unto him.

v5-15 Lehi, Nephi's father, believes the prophetic warnings of Jerusalem's destruction and so pleads with the Lord on behalf of the people (v. 5). While pleading with the Lord he apparently sees an angel, who reveals many things to him, and he is overwhelmed (v. 6).

Lehi returns home to Jerusalem exhausted (v. 7). As he is laying in bed he has a theophany, wherein he sees the Holiness of the Lord (v. 9-10), the wickedness of Jerusalem and the Lord's Judgement against her (v. 11-13).

After the vision, Lehi praises the Lord for His mercy, in that He will spare those who will resort to Him (v. 14-15).

v5-6 Where Lehi was at this time was unclear. What we do know is that he was not at home at Jerusalem, although he must have been relatively close as he appears to return that same day exhausted by the experience, cf. v. 7. Nephi says of Lehi "as he went forth", but "went forth" where? It is intuitively obvious to Nephi where he was going, but he fails to inform the reader. Or, perhaps, in Lehi's record it is made explicit and Nephi doesn't include it because it is in that account.

If Lehi was a merchant, then he was probably out in the wilderness somewhere on a journey. Wherever it was, the location was remote as the pillar of fire comes and dwells on a rock, so we would assume it occurred outdoors, and there apparently wasn't anyone else around to witness it.

v6 The pillar of fire is a classic Old Testament figure of the presence of the Lord, but might also be representative of the presence of an angel, the Lord's messenger (cf. Exod. 3:2, Exod. 13:21-22, Judges 6:21, Ps. 104:4, Acts 12:7).

v8-11 In v. 8 there is God, sitting upon the throne surrounded by many angels. Then one particular angel descends (v. 9), with twelve other angels descending with him (v. 10). The twelve other angels "went forth upon the face of the earth", but the one particular angel gives Lehi a scroll to read.

The straightforward reading would be God the Father sitting on the throne, the pre-mortal Jesus Christ is the particular angel, and the pre-mortal twelve apostles are the twelve others, or angels representing them vicariously, cf. 12:6-10. The twelve angels go forth upon the face of the earth (v. 11) to judge the twelve tribes of Israel, cf. 12:9, Mormon 3:18.

v8 For similar theophanies, cp. Exod. 24:10, 2 Chron. 18:18, Isa. 6, Ezek. 1-10, Acts 7:55, Rev. 4:2.

v9-10 A Christian reading of these two verses would be of Jesus Christ and the Twelve Apostles, cf. Matt. 10:1. Lehi would have interpreted this imagery as the Lord's Messiah and Twelve Judges of Israel, cp. Deut. 1:23, Josh. 4:2-9, 1 Ki. 7:25, 1 Ki. 18:31, Ezra 6:17.

Lehi's view would not have been the same as a modern Christian view. He would have seen these twelve as guiltless witnesses against the wickedness of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, and therefore deserving of the Lord's Judgements against them,

per Lev. 26 and Deut. 28.

v11 "a book", i.e., a scroll. The "book" is a translation holdover from the language of the KJV. As Smith kept the language of the Book of Mormon consistent with that of the KJV, we can safely make conclusions such as this.

v13 "thine abominations", both Jeremiah and Ezekiel discuss Jerusalem's abominations at length, cf. Jer. 7, Ezek. 5.

v14-15 After reading about the sins and abominations those at Jerusalem were guilty of in the preceding verses, Lehi here praises the Lord for offering mercy to those who will repent and return to Him. This is Lehi's motivation when he goes to preach to the people in v. 18-19.

Lehi sees Judgement is about to be unleashed on the rebellious at Jerusalem as the Lord is permitting them to bring about their own destruction in making alliance with Egypt against Babylon. But, even though they have been rebellious, the Lord is willing to accept them if they return to Him. Thus, Lehi rejoices in the Lord's mercy despite the affront those at Jerusalem have caused Him.

This also explains why the Lord comes off as so merciless, judgmental, and angry in a lot of the material in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The Lord offered them mercy via prophets like Lehi and they spurned him, and plan to murder him. As such, they are exposed to the full force of the Lord's justice.

v14 This verse also prepares Lehi for the subsequent call to leave Jerusalem and visions he experiences, in ch. 2-8. Lehi understands the larger theological context for the necessity of the imminent invasion of Jerusalem by Babylon, and the Lord's willingness to protect the righteous by getting them out of harm's way.

16 And now I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written, for he hath written many things which he saw in visions and in dreams; and he also hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children, of which I shall not make a full account. 17 But I shall make an account of my proceedings in my days. Behold, I make an abridgment of the record of my father, upon plates which I have made with mine own hands; wherefore, after I have abridged the record of my father then will I make an account of mine own life.

v16-17 Nephi makes a parenthetical comment informing the reader he is only selectively excerpting his father's writings (v. 16). He is doing this to put into context what Nephi is going to write of his own personal experiences (v. 17).

In this case it is only natural to include this portion of his father's ministry as it is what precipitates the subsequent events Nephi does go into. Nephi's abridgement of his father's material stops, and his original material starts in 10:1.

18 Therefore, I would that ye should know, that after the Lord had shown so many marvelous things unto my father, Lehi, yea, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, behold he went forth among the people, and began to prophesy and to declare unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard. 19 And it came to pass that the Jews did mock him because of the things which he testified of them; for he truly testified of their wickedness and their abominations; and he testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book, manifested plainly of the coming of the Messiah, and also the redemption of the world.

20 And when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him; yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away. But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.

v18-20 Lehi goes and preaches to the people at Jerusalem, joining ranks with the other prophets warning against the alliance with Egypt and rebellion against Babylon (v. 18). He testifies of their wickedness, and for this they mock him. He tells them concerning the messiah, and presents him as a spiritual figure (v. 19). The people reject him, just as they rejected the other prophets, and they seek to have him disposed of as well. But, the Lord delivers Lehi because he is chosen (v. 20).

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