

Comments on 1 Nephi 2

This chapter presents three groups with three different reactions to the situation at hand: Lehi (v. 1-8), Laman and Lemuel (v. 9-14), and Nephi and Sam (v. 16-24).

With respect to this first leg of traveling into the wilderness the events covered in chapters 1-7 probably took two to four months. The distance from Jerusalem to the Red Sea is about 150 miles, or about 10-12 days journey. They traveled out once, and then two round trips were made (once for the plates and once for the wives). Of course, it is not clear how much time transpired between trips, but the text suggests things happened in fairly rapid succession. That Nephi would be measuring time in days (cf. 1 Ne. 2:6, 1 Ne. 16:13) suggests things are happening at the pace of days, as opposed to months. It isn't until 1 Ne. 16:15 and 1 Ne. 16:33 that Nephi starts glossing over time, and he skips entire years in 1 Ne. 17:1-5.

It is safe to assume once they had what they needed from Jerusalem they would leave quickly and keep moving so as to discourage Laman and Lemuel from heading back. However, once traveling started in earnest, there would have been interruptions for the Sabbath, Regalim, pauses for various ritual impurities, as well as childbearing.

1 For behold, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto my father, yea, even in a dream, and said unto him: Blessed art thou Lehi, because of the things which thou hast done; and because thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee, behold, they seek to take away thy life. 2 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness. 3 And it came to pass that he was obedient unto the word of the Lord, wherefore he did as the Lord commanded him. 4 And it came to pass that he departed into the wilderness. And he left his house, and the land of his inheritance, and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things, and took nothing with him, save it were his family, and provisions, and tents, and departed into the wilderness. 5 And he came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea; and he traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea; and he did travel in the wilderness with his family, which consisted of my mother, Sariah, and my elder brothers, who were Laman, Lemuel, and Sam. 6 And it came to pass that when he had traveled three days in the wilderness, he pitched his tent in a valley by the side of a river of water. 7 And it came to pass that he built an altar of stones, and made an offering unto the Lord, and gave thanks unto the Lord our God. 8 And it came to pass that he called the name of the river, Laman, and it emptied into the Red Sea; and the valley was in the borders near the mouth thereof.

v1-8 Lehi has another vision wherein the Lord blesses him for

his faithfulness, and warns him there are people out to kill him for it (v. 1). The Lord instructs him to move out into the wilderness (v. 2). Lehi does so (v. 3), abandoning all of his considerable wealth (v. 4), heading into the wilderness by the shores of the Red sea (v. 5). After three days of traveling they set up camp by a river (v. 6), and Lehi builds an altar and offers sacrifices (v. 7). He names the river "Laman" (v. 8) and the valley "Lemuel" (v. 14).

v2 "into the wilderness", given the local geography, the "wilderness" here is an arid scrubland with largely seasonal rain. The word is meant to describe an area that is unsettled and unpopulated, as opposed to a specific physical geography.

v4 Unlike the ancient Exodus (cf. Exod. 12:35-36), Lehi abandons all of his wealth when he leaves for the wilderness. This sets the stage for the later attempted purchase of the plates in ch. 3.

According to 3:16-18 Lehi foresaw their traveling to a destination where things such as this had no value, as is subsequently revealed to Nephi, and so he left it behind in favor of "provisions", i.e., things with utility.

This abandonment of material wealth becomes a point of contention with Laman and Lemuel in v. 11, and therefore serves to differentiate Lehi's spiritual view with their material view.

v5 "family", Nephi does not identify any sisters at this point, but later does in 2 Ne. 5:6. Perhaps they were born later along with Jacob and Joseph.

v7 Lehi's offering sacrifice was contrary to the custom among the Jews at that time, as it was generally prohibited to offer sacrifice anywhere except the Temple proper in order to avoid problems with idolatrous worship. However, Lehi has been sent off from Jerusalem by the Lord. Lehi clearly sees his departure from Jerusalem, and therefore the Temple, as permanent.

The nature of the offering is not clear. Usually, we would assume a sheep or something to that effect, but unless Lehi kept sheep and subsequently herded them out into the desert, he couldn't be offering one. Verse 4 says "provisions, and tents", no mention of flocks being driven, although no mention is made of camels either and they almost certainly had camels. But, 16:15-18 makes it clear they are hunting wild game as they go,

and end up going hungry when nothing is caught. If they had flocks, wouldn't they take from the herd in a pinch, but there is no suggestion of that. Rather, they go hungry. Thus, we would assume there were no sheep to sacrifice, so the offering was probably a grain offering or something to that effect.

9 And when my father saw that the waters of the river emptied into the fountain of the Red Sea, he spake unto Laman, saying: O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness! 10 And he also spake unto Lemuel: O that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord! 11 Now this he spake because of the stiffneckedness of Laman and Lemuel; for behold they did murmur in many things against their father, because he was a visionary man, and had led them out of the land of Jerusalem, to leave the land of their inheritance, and their gold, and their silver, and their precious things, to perish in the wilderness. And this they said he had done because of the foolish imaginations of his heart. 12 And thus Laman and Lemuel, being the eldest, did murmur against their father. And they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them. 13 Neither did they believe that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed according to the words of the prophets. And they were like unto the Jews who were at Jerusalem, who sought to take away the life of my father. 14 And it came to pass that my father did speak unto them in the valley of Lemuel, with power, being filled with the Spirit, until their frames did shake before him. And he did confound them, that they durst not utter against him; wherefore, they did as he commanded them. 15 And my father dwelt in a tent.

v9-14 Laman and Lemuel's less than enthusiastic response to abandoning the family estate is made manifest. Lehi exhorts them to be strong and firm in keeping the commandments (v. 9-10), because they are stiff-necked and murmuring against him (v. 11). Laman, being the eldest, would inherit a double portion of the wealth, and take over as family patriarch, and so he is particularly displeased (v. 12). Neither of them are particularly religious, and do not believe the prophecies spoken by Lehi and the other prophets concerning Jerusalem's destruction (v. 12-13). The situation deteriorates to the point that Lehi must confound them by the Spirit in order to silence their complaining and get them to go along with the plan (v. 14).

v9-10 Nibley, in [Lehi in the Desert](#), identifies these two statements by Lehi as [Quasida](#), Arabic motivational poetic devices which draw on natural features for emphasis.

v15 Nephi makes reference to it repeatedly in connection to living in this valley named after Lemuel, cf. 9:1, 10:16, 16:16.

He makes references to Lehi's tent ten times in addition to these. Living in the tent follows the Exodus theme, as discussed above. Additionally, Nephi's intent may be to draw parallels between Lehi and Abraham (note in v. 6-7 Lehi pitches the tent and then sacrifices on an altar, as did Abraham in Gen. 12:8).

16 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers. 17 And I spake unto Sam, making known unto him the things which the Lord had manifested unto me by his Holy Spirit. And it came to pass that he believed in my words. 18 But, behold, Laman and Lemuel would not hearken unto my words; and being grieved because of the hardness of their hearts I cried unto the Lord for them. 19 And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart. 20 And 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. 21 And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. 22 And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren. 23 For behold, in that day that they shall rebel against me, I will curse them even with a sore curse, and they shall have no power over thy seed except they shall rebel against me also. 24 And if it so be that they rebel against me, they shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in the ways of remembrance.

v16-24 Nephi's reaction is quite the opposite from Laman and Lemuel's. Being young, and therefore inexperienced as to the things of the world and the Spirit, Nephi he is not perceiving the import of the events, anymore than Laman or Lemuel are. But, Nephi's reaction is to humble himself and request enlightenment from the Lord rather than rebel (v. 16).

Nephi discusses the spiritual enlightenment he has received with Sam, and Sam believes as well (v. 17). But when he tries to discuss it with Laman and Lemuel they refuse to hear him, and so he leaves his brothers and appeals to the Lord on behalf of his brothers (v. 18).

The Lord blesses Nephi for his faithfulness, telling him about the land of promise (v. 19-20). As for his brothers, if they continue to rebel then they will be cut off from the Lord (v. 21). Nephi's view of events is then pushed from a short term (v. 22) to a long term perspective. It is not simply a matter of himself versus Laman and Lemuel, but a matter of their seed versus his seed (v. 23-24). This perspective is much

expanded upon in ch. 12-14.

v16 "being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature", I would take this to mean Nephi is saying he is physically mature, i.e., through puberty, but still quite naïve to the ways of the world, and therefore inexperienced, maybe 16 or 18 or so. We would assume he is of adult stature as he physically restrains Zoram in 4:31.

I wouldn't take this to mean Nephi is saying he is a big tough guy, or a linebacker or anything like that. He is contrasting his "being exceedingly young" with his being "large in stature". His intent is not to emphasize his physical stature, it is to indicate that he is young as far as age goes, and therefore a "child", but physically an adult. If Nephi said he was "exceedingly young" without saying he was "large in stature" we would probably assume Nephi was pre-adolescent.

Again in 4:31 Nephi refers to himself as a "man large in stature", but he receives "much strength of the Lord" in order to restrain Zoram. If Nephi were a linebacker, say 6' 5" and 240lbs of pure muscle, why would he need "much strength from the Lord"?

v19-24 Nephi apparently leaves the camp and makes his appeal to the Lord in solitude, as 3:1 informs us Nephi "return[s]...to the tent of [his] father".

v20 "inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper", this phrase in conjunction with the phrase "cut off" in the next verse becomes a well-used formula in the BofM, cp. 4:14, 2 Ne. 1:20, Jarom 1:9, Mosiah 2:22, Alma 9:13, Alma 36:1, Alma 50:2, Hela. 3:20. The only appearance of a similar statement elsewhere in Scripture is 1 Kings 2:3, and that lacks the negative "cut off" portion. This is one of those unique rhetorical cues for the BofM.

v21-24 These verses answer the question of "Why even bother to take Laman and Lemuel along in their first place? Why not just leave them too?" It is because the Lord's view of events is much longer than just the immediate family. The Lord is viewing things as a social engineer of generations.

Copyright © 2024 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurt.neumiller@gmail.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written

consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.