

BOOK OF MORMON LESSON #5
“HEARKEN TO THE TRUTH AND GIVE HEED
UNTO IT”

by Ted L. Gibbons
(1 Nephi 16-22)

QUOTE OF THE WEEK:

Believe in the Book of Mormon as another witness of the Son of God. This book has come forth as an added testimony to the world of the great truths concerning the Master as set forth in the Bible. The Bible is the testament of the Old World. The Book of Mormon is the testament of the New World, and they go hand in hand in testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I can't understand why those of other faiths cannot accept the Book of Mormon. One would think that they would be looking for additional witnesses to the great and solemn truths of the Bible. We have that witness, my brothers and sisters, this marvelous book of inspiration which affirms the validity and the truth of the divine nature of the Son of God. God be thanked for this precious and wonderful testimony. Let us read it. Let us dwell upon its truths. Let us learn its message and be blessed accordingly (meeting, Baltimore, Maryland, 15 Nov. 1998; quoted in "Recurring Themes of President Hinckley," *Ensign*, June 2000, 18-19).

INTRODUCTION: "Behold, I have refined thee, I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." (1 Nephi 20:10) The wilderness journey of the family of Lehi was a "furnace of affliction". In much the same way that the experiences of Palmyra and Kirtland and Missouri and Nauvoo refined the Church and distinguished between the faithful and the faltering members, the wilderness offered opportunities for colony members in Lehi's group to discover and to declare themselves and their commitment. The Lord has promised to prove us in all things (see D&C 98:14,15) to see if we will abide in his covenant regardless of the hazard or sacrifice involved. The eight year journey (1 Nephi 17:4) from Jerusalem to Bountiful was just such a proving ground. The divergent responses of Nephi (and Sam) and Laman (and Lemuel) to their experiences teach great lessons about submission and rebellion.

Nephi walks in a brighter and brighter light, while Laman and Lemuel, in order to compel their obedience, are larger clubs. In fact, an appropriate title for this lesson might be “Clubs and Lights.”

[Teaching Note: For you who are teaching these lessons in a Gospel Doctrine setting, the flow of this lesson will not follow exactly the lesson divisions of Lesson #5 in the *Book of Mormon Teacher’s Manual*. But it should be a simple matter to take the concepts discussed below and apply them in the appropriate locations in the manual if you desire to do so.]

1. CLUBS AND LIGHTS

As you consider the following descriptions of Laman and Lemuel, you might want to review Elder Neal A. Maxwell’s talk from October 1999 Conference: “Lessons from Laman and Lemuel.” (see *The Ensign*, November 1999, pp. 6-8)

As you review the following events in their chronological sequence, be sensitive to the increasing moral and spiritual distance between Laman and Lemuel and their two younger brothers

My guess is that Nephi and Laman were not too far apart at the beginning of 1st Nephi. But (as noted in Lesson #2) something significant happens in 1 Nephi 2.

A. LEAVING: Both sons were required to leave nearly everything behind and follow a dreaming dad into the wilderness. They left friends, relatives, activities, property, inheritances, and comforts and departed. *Both of them departed*. What Laman might have said when the announcement of the family’s exodus was made we do not know. But he went. At the Valley of Lemuel, we see the first signs of difference in the boys.

We are told that Laman and Lemuel were stiffnecked

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. 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. 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. (1 Nephi 2:11-13)

Nephi, however, had his heart softened.

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. (1 Nephi 2:16, emphasis added)

Take a look at 1 Nephi 2:14. What is required at this point in the story to soften the hearts of Laman and Lemuel and coerce them into obedience?

And it came to pass that my father did speak unto [Laman and Lemuel] 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.

Lehi took his oldest sons to task for their murmuring and they trembled and cowered and complied.

B. GETTING THE PLATES: In Lesson #2 we discussed this event at great length. But note again that Laman and Lemuel complain about the difficulty of the task (1 Nephi 3:5); that they are ready to return home at the first hint of failure (1 Nephi 3:14); and that they become violent to their little brothers after their second failure (1 Nephi 3:28).

Meanwhile, Nephi expresses his willingness to do anything the Lord commands (1 Nephi 3:7); he declares his determination to succeed or die in the attempt (1 Nephi 3:15); and accomplishes his objective while being led by the Spirit (1 Nephi 4:6)

What effort is required now to restrain Laman and Lemuel? An angel comes to warn and counsel (1 Nephi 3:29). This is a more dramatic rebuke than the spiritual declarations of a frustrated father.

C. GETTING THE FAMILY OF ISHMAEL During the return trip to the Valley of Lemuel, Laman and others rebelled and desired to return to Jerusalem (1 Nephi 7:6,7); they became angry at Nephi and tried to kill him (1 Nephi 7:16).

Nephi, assuming the role of leadership the angel had assigned to him in 1 Nephi 3:29, preached to the rebels (1 Nephi 7:8-15); he received strength according to his faith in Christ to free himself from the bands with which he was bound. (1 Nephi 7:17,18). Can you see how the distance between these two young men is increasing?

In this instance, Laman and Lemuel are subdued by the miracle of Nephi's escape and by the pleading of members of Ishmael's family (1 Nephi 7:20)

C. LEHI'S DREAM: Lehi received a warning in this dream about the character of his sons and their response to righteousness. Before and after describing the dream, he expressed his great fear for the welfare of Laman and Lemuel (1 Nephi 8:4,36). In the dream, Laman and Lemuel refused to come and partake of the fruit (1 Nephi 8:17,18); when Lehi preached to them as he had in 1 Nephi 2, it did not seem to be effective (1 Nephi 8:37,38); Laman and Lemuel "disputed" about the dream and its implications (1 Nephi 15:2,3); they did not inquire of the Lord (1 Nephi 15:8,9).

Nephi, however, gave his father reason to rejoice (1 Nephi 8:3); he came and partook of the fruit (1 Nephi 8:14-16) after hearing the explanation of his father, he wanted to see for himself (1 Nephi 10:17; 11:1); he was shown the images of his father's dream and given a divine explanation of their meanings (1 Nephi 11-15).

D. THE BROKEN BOW: After sufficient preparation and the appearance of the Liahona, the colony of Lehi left the valley and departed into the wilderness. During the journey, Nephi broke his bow. Laman and Lemuel were hungry and angry (1

Nephi 16:18,20); they hardened their hearts again and complained against the Lord (1 Nephi 16:22).

Nephi was hungry too, of course. All of them “did suffer much for the want of food.” (1 Nephi 16:19) And the bows of Laman and Lemuel were as useless as his (1 Nephi 16:21). But Nephi, instead of blaming and complaining, made a new bow and asked his murmuring father for directions (1 Nephi 16:21-25). He then procured food for the family (1 Nephi 16:30-32).

In this instance a *written message from the Lord* was required to humble Laman and Lemuel and the others.

And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord said unto him: Look upon the ball, and behold the things which are written. And it came to pass that when my father beheld the things which were written upon the ball, he did fear and tremble exceedingly, and also my brethren and the sons of Ishmael and our wives. (1 Nephi 16:26,27)

E. THE DEATH OF ISHMAEL: At a place called Nahom, Ishmael died and was buried. The daughters of Ishmael mourned and murmured against Lehi and Nephi (1 Nephi 16:34-36). Laman, however, did more than mourn and murmur. He plotted the murder of Lehi and Nephi (1 Nephi 16:37,38).

Laman and Lemuel had in the past been controlled by their father’s preaching, by the appearance of an angel, by the display of God’s power and the pleading of women, and by a written message from God. What happened this time soften their hearts and to restrain them from their murderous intentions?

And it came to pass that the Lord was with us, yea, even *the voice of the Lord came and did speak many words unto them, and did chasten them exceedingly*; and after they were chastened by the voice of the Lord they did turn away their anger, and did repent of their sins, insomuch that the Lord did bless us again with food, that we did not perish. (1 Nephi 16:39, emphasis added)

F. THE WILDERNESS: The journey from Jerusalem to Bountiful seems to have led this small group of Israelites through one of the most desolate sand deserts on

earth

The *Rubc al-Khali* means the "empty quarter" because it is empty. It's the worst desert in the world. The worst parts of the Sahara have Tuaregs and an occasional tree and some water in them. Not long ago they were quite wet. But not the "empty quarter." There is nothing in it, and yet they [Lehi's family] crossed that. And they had a journey of eight years in the desert. (Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon, Semester 1*, p.122)

The reaction of Laman and Lemuel to the experience was to say that they would have been better off dead.

. . . we have wandered in the wilderness for these many years; and our women have toiled, being big with child; and they have borne children in the wilderness and suffered all things, save it were death; and it would have been better that they had died before they came out of Jerusalem than to have suffered these afflictions. (1 Nephi 17:20)

But speaking of the same experiences, Nephi rejoices in the blessing of God upon him and his people:

AND it came to pass that we did again take our journey in the wilderness; and we did travel nearly eastward from that time forth. And we did travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness; and our women did bear children in the wilderness. And so great were the blessings of the Lord upon us, that while we did live upon raw meat in the wilderness, our women did give plenty of suck for their children, and were strong, yea, even like unto the men; and they began to bear their journeyings without murmurings. And thus we see that the commandments of God must be fulfilled. And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them; wherefore, he did provide means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness. (1 Nephi 17:1-3)

G. BUILDING A SHIP: It is not likely that anyone in Lehi's group had had any

experience with the building of ships. The derision of Laman and Lemuel upon hearing Nephi's announcement that he was going to build a boat and cross the ocean is not difficult to understand.

And when my brethren saw that I was about to build a ship, they began to murmur against me, saying: Our brother is a fool, for he thinketh that he can build a ship; yea, and he also thinketh that he can cross these great waters. (1 Nephi 17:17)

They complained against Nephi, did not want to labor, did not believe that Nephi could build a ship, and did not believe that he was inspired to do so (1 Nephi 17:18). When he preached to them (1 Nephi 17:23-47), they became angry with him and were about to kill him (1 Nephi 17:48).

Nephi, when commanded to build a ship, did not offer any excuses and asked only one question.

And I said: Lord, whither shall I go that I may find ore to molten, that I may make tools to construct the ship after the manner which thou hast shown unto me? (1 Nephi 17:9)

This is a beautiful insight into the character of this prophet. How he has grown from those first weeks in the Valley of Lemuel! How would you respond if the Lord commanded you to gather your immediate family together and build a temple? A motor home? A space ship? These assignments can be no less difficult for us than the ship-building was to be for Nephi.

When challenged and threatened by his brothers who did not want to help him, Nephi was filled with anguish and pain (1 Nephi 17:47); when they tried to kill him, he was filled with power (1 Nephi 17:48). For many days, his brothers were "confounded" and could not "contend" against Nephi and did not dare to touch him (1 Nephi 17:52).

Finally, at the Lord's command, Nephi touched them:

And it came to pass that I stretched forth my hand unto my brethren, and they did not wither before me; but the Lord did shake them, even

according to the word which he had spoken. And now, they said: We know of a surety that the Lord is with thee, for we know that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us. And they fell down before me, and were about to worship me, but I would not suffer them, saying: I am thy brother, yea, even thy younger brother; wherefore, worship the Lord thy God, and honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God shall give thee. (1 Nephi 17:54,55)

Can you see how large a club the Lord is using on Laman and Lemuel now to soften their hearts? This divine shaking is a much different thing than the sermon Lehi delivered in the Valley of Lemuel.

H. CROSSING THE OCEAN: Following the cooperation of his brothers and the completion of the ship, which even Laman and Lemuel acknowledged to be good, the voyage to the promised land began. But their commendable behavior did not last long.

And after we had been driven forth before the wind for the space of many days, behold, my brethren and the sons of Ishmael and also their wives began to make themselves merry, insomuch that they began to dance, and to sing, and to speak with much rudeness, yea, even that they did forget by what power they had been brought thither; yea, they were lifted up unto exceeding rudeness. And I, Nephi, began to fear exceedingly lest the Lord should be angry with us, and smite us because of our iniquity, that we should be swallowed up in the depths of the sea; wherefore, I, Nephi, began to speak to them with much soberness; but behold they were angry with me, saying: We will not that our younger brother shall be a ruler over us. And it came to pass that Laman and Lemuel did take me and bind me with cords, and they did treat me with much harshness . . . (1 Nephi 18:9-2)

Nephi preached (of course) (1 Nephi 18:10), and as usual, he paid for it. He remained bound tightly for four days (1 Nephi 18:14). “Behold [my wrists] had swollen exceedingly; and also mine ankles were much swollen, and great was the soreness thereof.” 1 Nephi 18:15) Finally, fear convinced Laman and Lemuel that they had made another grave mistake and Nephi was untied. But Nephi made no

recriminations and self-righteous warnings to his brothers here either.

I did look unto my God, and I did praise him all the day long; and I did not murmur against the Lord because of mine afflictions. (1 Nephi 18:16)

Nephi took the compass and it worked, and he prayed and the storm ceased (1 Nephi 18:21).

But Nephi gives us a compelling insight into what has happened to his older brothers since the left Jerusalem:

And there was nothing save it were the power of God, which threatened them with destruction, could soften their hearts; wherefore, when they saw that they were about to be swallowed up in the depths of the sea they repented of the thing which they had done, insomuch that they loosed me. (1 Nephi 18:20, emphasis added)

Now, we are told, only the fear of destruction could soften the hearts of Laman and Lemuel.

I. DEATH OF LEHI: Even though this event falls within the confines of a later lesson, it shows how far Laman and Lemuel have drifted from Nephi, and the final state of men who have hardened their hearts time after time, and who have ignored repeated attempts by loved ones and the Lord to change the course of their lives. When Lehi died (2 Nephi 4:12), Nephi tells us this:

And it came to pass that not many days after his death, Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael were angry with me because of the admonitions of the Lord. (2 Nephi 4:13)

They became so angry that they decided again (for at least the fourth time) to kill Nephi (2 Nephi 5:2,3) These two have always tried to blame others for their problems, never taking responsibility for themselves.

Nephi got angry too, because of his brothers (2 Nephi 4:27), but he knew it was a sin, and tried to control it, taking the responsibility upon himself for his weaknesses

(2 Nephi 4:17-35).

Because of the decision of Laman and Lemuel to kill Nephi, he departed into the wilderness with the righteous members of his family and the records. Why did the Lord warn Nephi to leave his brothers this time, rather than intervening again in these tumultuous events to soften the hearts of Laman and Lemuel? The answer is in 2 Nephi 5:21. “For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become *like unto a flint . . .*” (emphasis added) The Lord seems to be saying to Nephi and to us, *It is no longer possible to soften these hearts. They are too hard. You must leave them or I must destroy them.*

Remember that in 1 Nephi 2:16, Nephi cried unto the Lord and the Lord *softened his heart*. The softness of his heart enabled him to have a multitude of experiences that were incomprehensible to his big brothers, whose hearts, like multiplying layers of scar tissue, were growing harder and harder. I suppose many of us have some of the heart problems of Laman and Lemuel in us. Unless we have done what Nephi did, it may be difficult for us to hear the whisperings of the Spirit, and to submit cheerfully to the will of God. But one of the loveliest messages of the gospel is that the Lord can change our hearts if we will let him.

And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually. (Mosiah 5:2)

2. INSIGHTS FROM 1 NEPHI 19-22

And it came to pass that after we had sailed for the space of many days we did arrive at the promised land; and we went forth upon the land, and did pitch our tents; and we did call it the promised land. (1 Nephi 18:23)

What is the first recorded commandment given to these pioneers when they reached the land of promise (see 1 Nephi 19:1)? Nephi indicates in 1 Nephi 19 a number of reasons for keeping the records on the large and small plates, but he does tell us that he intends only to write things that he considers sacred (1 Nephi 19:6), and the

primary reason is in 1 Nephi 19:6.

And I, Nephi, have written these things unto my people, that perhaps I might persuade them that they would remember the Lord their Redeemer.

This desire of Nephi's is reflected in much of the content of the final four chapters of 1 Nephi. Those chapters provide some wonderful insights into the practice of true Christianity. Some observations follow:

- I. “And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men.” (1 Nephi 19:9) 600 years before the birth of Christ, Nephi knew how he would be received by the “world.” What evidence can you see that mankind considers Christ and his mission to be of little value? What activities would be like scourging him and smiting him and spitting on him in the year 2004? In 1 Nephi 19:7 Nephi tells us that “the very God of Israel do men trample under their feet.” What reactions to Christ and his gospel have you seen that would fit this description?
- II. “. . . and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself, according to the words of the angel, as a man, into the hands of wicked men, to be lifted up, according to the words of Zenock, and to be crucified, according to the words of Neum, and to be buried in a sepulchre, according to the words of Zenos, which he spake concerning the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of his death unto those who should inhabit the isles of the sea, more especially given unto those who are of the house of Israel.” (1 Nephi 19:10) This verse gives a wonderful example of the plain and precious things that have been removed from the Bible by the hands of wicked men. How many other clear and compelling prophecies of Christ have been removed from the scriptures to cause people to stumble?
- III. “The Lord God surely shall visit all the house of Israel at that day, some with his voice, because of their righteousness, unto their great joy and salvation, and others with the thunderings and the lightnings of his power, by tempest,

by fire, and by smoke, and vapor of darkness, and by the opening of the earth, and by mountains which shall be carried up.” (1 Nephi 19:11) The Lord means to get everyone in the House of Israel to listen. Some he will visit with his voice, and others with natural disasters (see also D&C 43:20-25; 88:89-91). You belong to the house of Israel. How will he get you to listen?

- IV. “And as for those who are at Jerusalem, saith the prophet, they shall be scourged by all people, because they crucify the God of Israel, and turn their hearts aside, rejecting signs and wonders, and the power and glory of the God of Israel. And because they turn their hearts aside, saith the prophet, and have despised the Holy One of Israel, they shall wander in the flesh, and perish, and become a hiss and a byword, and be hated among all nations” (1 Nephi 19:13,14) What are the two reasons given here for the suffering of the Jews? 1) They scourge and despise the Holy One of Israel; and 2) they “turn their hearts aside” from him. When will the Lord “remember the covenants which he made to their fathers”? (See 1 Nephi 19:15-17) I
- V. “And I did read many things unto [Laman and Lemuel] which were written in the books of Moses; but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah; for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning.” (1 Nephi 19:23) This verse is an aggressive endorsement of the writings of Isaiah. No Old Testament prophet bore a plainer or purer witness of Christ than Isaiah. As evidence of this, Nephi copies 2 chapters (48,49) from the writings of Isaiah onto the small plates at this location..
- VI. “Hearken and hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, or out of the waters of baptism, who swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, yet they swear not in truth nor in righteousness. Nevertheless, they call themselves of the holy city, but they do not stay themselves upon the God of Israel, who is the Lord of Hosts; yea, the Lord of Hosts is his name.” (1 Nephi 20:1,2) Israelites in these verses call themselves the covenant people (the house of Jacob), they have been baptized, they swear by the name of the Lord and speak of him a great deal; they claim to be of the “holy city” where the people of God dwell, and “yet they swear not in truth nor in

righteousness.” Their problem is that “they do not stay themselves upon the God of Israel.” (1 Nephi 20:2) What does the word “stay” mean in this context? In my dictionary the definition is given as follows:

Stay: [N] a heavy rope of cable, usually of wire, used as a brace or support, as for the masts of a ship. [V] to support, hold or prop up. To strengthen, comfort, or sustain in mind or spirit. To cause to rest on, upon, or in, for support.

Isaiah and Nephi are telling us that all pretensions of righteousness are meaningless unless we find our strength, our support, our rest, in Christ.

- VII. “Zion hath said: The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me--but he will show that he hath not. For can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee, O house of Israel. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.” (1 Nephi 21:14-16) I know that it is possible for a woman to forget her nursing child. My wife did. We left our 5-month-old child at the school where we had gone to register an older son for Little League. We were nearly home when my wife remembered, and screamed. I nearly rammed a school bus. Adam Kimball had slept through it all, but the simple truth is that Lydia had forgotten him, at least for a few moments. But the Lord will never forget us. We are engraved with the nails of crucifixion on the palms of his hands. Our walls—our defense, our safety, our welfare—are his continual concern.

When Nephi quotes Isaiah, he nearly always gives a commentary to assist us in understanding. 1 Nephi 22 is his commentary on the previous two chapters of Isaiah.

CONCLUSION:

In 1 Nephi 22, the Lord and Nephi make at least 7 wonderful statements about the righteous. As you reflect on the lessons of Laman and Lemuel and the teachings of

Isaiah, consider these promises:

1. “He will not suffer that the wicked shall destroy the righteous.” (22:16)
2. “He will preserve the righteous by his power.” (22:17)
3. “The righteous shall not perish.” (22:19)
4. “The righteousness need not fear.” (22:22)
5. “They are those who shall not be confounded.” (22:22)
6. “The righteous must be led up as calves of the stall.” (22:24)
7. “And because of the righteousness of his people, Satan has no power.” (22:26)

We have just begun a new millennium. Sometime near this time the seventh seal will be opened, and sometime after that, Christ will come in glory. In the meantime, we are told that “all things shall be in commotion; and surely, men's hearts shall fail them; for fear shall come upon all people.” (D&C 88:91) But with the promises of 1 Nephi 22 secured by our righteousness, we will understand why the Lord said to his disciples, “be not troubled.” (D&C 45:35; JS–M 1:23)

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