

Book of Mormon Lesson #6

“FREE TO CHOOSE LIBERTY AND ETERNAL LIFE”

2 Nephi 1,2
by Ted L. Gibbons

Quote of the week: “I feel certain that if, in our homes, parents will read from the Book of Mormon prayerfully and regularly, both by themselves and with their children the spirit of that great book will come to permeate our homes and all who dwell therein. The spirit of reverence will increase, mutual respect and consideration for each other will grow. The spirit of contention will depart. Parents will counsel their children in greater love and wisdom. Children will be more responsive and submissive to that counsel. Righteousness will increase. Faith, hope, and charity -- the pure love of Christ -- will abound in our homes and lives, bringing in their wake peace, joy, and happiness.” (Marion G. Romney, Conference Report, April 1960, p.112 - p.113)

INTRODUCTION: One of the messages that the Book of Mormon sends to us across the years is that parents (particularly fathers) have a great obligation to bless their children and to teach their children and to bear testimony to them. The Book of Mormon contains several chapters in which Lehi, Alma, Helaman, and others are engaged in this. When we read such things in this book, we must do more than believe the doctrine: we must follow the example. This lesson and the next will focus on what seem to be Lehi’s *final admonitions* to his children. Nephi tells us this of these teachings:

And it came to pass after my father, Lehi, had spoken unto all his household, according to the feelings of his heart and the Spirit of the Lord which was in him, he waxed old. And it came to pass that he died, and was buried. (2 Nephi 4:12)

There are lessons here for all of us. Many families have both wonderful and worrisome children, but few families have offspring as far apart as Nephi

and Laman. There are lessons in these chapters for every family in the Church.

You might ask yourself as you study what you would say to each of your children if it were the last thing you would ever say to them. As you consider this, reflect on the topics of which Lehi speaks, testifies, and prophesies.

1. LEHI EXHORTS HIS SONS TO REPENT, OBEY THE LORD'S COMMAND-MENTS, AND PUT ON THE ARMOR OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (2 Nephi 1)

The concept of mercy suggests receiving something we do not deserve. Anything that we receive that we have earned comes as a result of justice. Lehi begins his lessons to his offspring by speaking to Laman and Lemuel. He tells them that they are only alive because of “the mercies of God is sparing their lives” during their “rebellions upon the waters.” By rights and by the demands of justice, they should have been “swallowed up in the sea.” (2 Nephi 1:2)

He speaks of the mercies of God in warning them to flee from Jerusalem (1 Nephi 2:2) (which he knows by a vision has been destroyed [2 Nephi 1:4]), and in giving them a land of promise (2 Nephi 1:3,5)

Lehi says six things about this land of promise that you ought to mark in your scriptures. They are:

1. It is “a land which is choice above all other lands.” (2 Nephi 1:5)
2. The Lord God . . . covenanted with [Lehi, that it] should be a land for the inheritance of [his] seed. “ (2 Nephi 1:6)
3. It is also a land for “all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord.” (2 Nephi 1:6)
4. “There shall none come unto this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord.” ((2 Nephi 1:6)
5. If the inhabitants serve the Lord, “it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore they shall never be brought down into captivity.” (2 Nephi 1:7)

6. "This land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations."
(2 Nephi 1:8)

Notice the penalty pronounced upon the people of this land if they should "dwindle in unbelief."

He will bring other nations unto them, and he will give unto them power, and he will take away from them the lands of their possessions, and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten. (2 Nephi 1:11)

This will come as a result of dwindling in unbelief. Notice the areas of dwindling mentioned in 2 Nephi 1:10. Wherever you live, you might try to give a grade to your society in each of these areas for the first decade of this millennium. Especially, try to give a grade to the people of this continent, since it is of the Gentiles here that Lehi speaks. Has this nation *dwindled* since the days of our ancestors?

People who dwindle, lose their belief in

1. The creation by God of the earth and all men
2. The scriptural record of the "great and marvelous works of the Lord."
3. The possibility and ability to do things by faith
4. The commandments
5. The infinite goodness of the Lord
6. The Messiah

In how many of these beliefs is America (not the Church) still solid?

The warning given by Lehi here to his oldest sons might well be given to all of Western Society.

O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf

of misery and woe. (2 Nephi 1:13)

In the next verse:

Awake! and arise from the dust . . . (2 Nephi 1:14)

And in verse 23:

Awake, my sons; put on the armor of righteousness. Shake off the chains with which ye are bound, and come forth out of obscurity, and arise from the dust. (2 Nephi 1:23)

How is sin like sleep? What is there about the condition of Laman and Lemuel that is like *sleep*? like a *deep sleep*? like *the sleep of hell*? How is sin like groveling in the dust and dirt? What precisely does Lehi mean when he uses the words “awake” and “arise”? Lehi is certainly comparing wickedness to sleep. And the fact that he calls it *the sleep of hell* makes it pretty clear who is dispensing the sleeping pills. The comparison is intriguing. People who are in a deep sleep are hard to arouse. They are unaware of their surroundings. Danger can approach unobserved. It is impossible for them to make good decisions or to think clearly.

Twice in 2 Nephi 1 Lehi uses another image related to sleeping. 2N1:13—“Shake off the awful chains by which you are bound.” 2 Nephi 1:23—“Shake off the chains with which you are bound.” Each of their journeys into iniquity has increased the holding power of Satan over these boys. He did not start off with chains, of course. In the beginning, “he [led] them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he [bound] them with his strong cords [his chains] forever.” (2Nephi 26:22) This approach works very well because no one fears a flaxen thread. If an enemy approached with an extensive chain forged with great links, even the bravest among us would run like an antelope. But when we see that he is only carrying a small, fragile, nearly invisible thread made of weakest of all natural fibers, we hold our place and trust in our strength. We can break a flaxen thread anytime we want to. With such insignificant restraint he will never be able to take us any place we do not want to go.

And so he takes us to the movies to watch sex and violence and to hear profanity. And he takes us to the TV for more of the same. And all the while he is singing **lullabies** and giving us the old **pacifier** and telling us that we are safe and that **all is well**.

And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well--and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. (2 Nephi 28:21)

And all the while, the amount of profanity is increasing and the intensity of the sex is expanding and the degree of violence is multiplying. In the language of D&C 82:5, “the adversary spreadeth his dominions, and darkness reigneth . . .” Lucifer is building a mighty cord from tiny flaxen threads; one that, if we allow him enough time to work on it, will be nearly impossible to break. But we are having a nap and do not notice. He is so **careful** about it.

In 2Nephi 1:21, Lehi says it this way:

Arise from the dust, my sons, and be men . . .

In a very real sense, Laman and Lemuel are babies, crawling in the dirt. They blame every-thing on somebody else. 440 years after this, their descendants will still be complaining that “they were wronged in the wilderness by their brethren.” (Mosiah 10:12)

Let me create a hypothetical conversation between Lehi and his sons, with a few scriptural inserts.

Lehi: Sons, why did you try to kill Nephi?

L&L: He sought power and authority over us (see 2 Nephi 1:25)

Lehi: No, “he sought the glory of God, and your own eternal welfare” (2 Nephi 1:25) Now tell me, why do you murmur so much about Nephi?

L&L: He spoke plainly to us and he was sharp with us and he got angry at us” (2 Nephi 1:26)

Lehi: Let me see if I understand this: You have tried to kill him at least three times, and you are upset that he got angry and spoke sharply and plainly to you? His sharpness was the sharpness of the word of God, and his anger was the truth, which he could not restrain. (2 Nephi 1:26)

By the way, Lehi told Laman and Lemuel to wake up because Satan had power over them. Nephi once discovered that because of his anger at his brothers, he had given place for “the enemy of [his] soul.” (2 Nephi 4:27) Notice who told Nephi to wake up.

Can you see why Lehi tells his boys to be men? And in the verses following this injunction, Lehi gives some wonderful clues about what true manhood really is. There is nothing here about slam dunks or beer commercials or fast cars or movie stars. Here are some of the things suggested by this chapter that comprise manhood:

- T be determined (2 Nephi 1:21)
- T be in one mind and in one heart (2 Nephi 1:21)
- T put on the armor of righteousness (2 Nephi 1:23)
- T shake off the chains (2 Nephi 1:23)
- T arise from the dust (2 Nephi 1:23)
- T rebel no more (2 Nephi 1:24)
- T be an instrument in the hands of God (2 Nephi 1:24)
- T don't seek for authority or power (2 Nephi 1:25)
- T speak plainly and truthfully (2 Nephi 1:26)

One final note, also related to manhood. Lehi tells Zoram that he has been a “true friend” to Nephi. Consider the implications of true friendship.

Many years ago I taught the gospel to a wonderful man in Sorocaba, Brazil. He was a mechanic who had recently left his place of employment and had begun to repair cars in his garage. But following his baptism, the family came on hard times and he returned to his former workplace in order to

sustain his financial solvency. Not long after, I found that he had started smoking again.

“Why?” I wanted to know. “What happened?”

He told me something like this: “All my old friends work there and they all smoke. They keep offering me cigarettes and trying to get me to smoke. It is really hard to say no all the time.”

He and I had a sincere visit about what constitutes a real (a true) friend. True friends help you reach your righteous goals. They direct you to Christ. They stand by you in your struggles and trials. When a true friend sees you walking a tightrope over a towering waterfall, he does not stand on the side and throw rocks at you.

2. LEHI TESTIFIES OF THE ATONEMENT OF JESUS CHRIST (2 Nephi 2:1-10)

The promise Lehi makes to his 5th son in 2 Nephi 2:2 is so sweet that it is worth writing on your fridge in black marker:

And he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain.

This sounds suspiciously like the promise made in D&C 90:24:

Search diligently, pray always, and be believing, and *all things shall work together for your good*, if ye walk uprightly and remember the covenant wherewith ye have covenanted one with another (*emphasis added*).

D&C 100:15 says:

Therefore, let your hearts be comforted; *for all things shall work together for good to them that walk uprightly*, and to the sanctification of the church (*emphasis added*).

Lehi's testimony of the atonement in these verses is one of the clearest witnesses of grace in all of the standard works. Lehi says to Jacob, "I know that thou art redeemed, because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer" (2 Nephi 2:3) I wonder how long you would have to read in the standard works to find a man more consistently righteous than Jacob. But Jacob will not be saved because of *his* righteousness. He will be saved because of the righteousness of Christ. To put this in other words, no amount of obedience and righteousness can earn us entrance into the Celestial Kingdom. Paul taught this with great clarity in Romans.

For by the law is the knowledge of sin; therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight. (JST Romans 3:20)

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus . . . (Romans 3:23,24)

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. (Romans 3:31)

Or, as Lehi said it with startling simplicity: you can't earn exaltation, because "Salvation is free." (2 Nephi 2:4) This being true, we have a great responsibility.

Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise. (2 Nephi 2:8)

The merits of Christ are synonymous with his grace and are mentioned several times in the scriptures. They are worth a scripture chain, beginning with the verse above.

2 Nephi 31:19

And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, ***relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.*** (emphasis added)

Alma 24:10

And I also thank my God, yea, my great God, that he hath granted unto us that we might repent of these things, and also that ***he hath forgiven us*** of those our many sins and murders which we have committed, ***and taken away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son.*** (emphasis added)

Helaman 14:13

And if ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby ***ye may have a remission of them through his merits.*** (emphasis added)

Moroni 6:4

4 And after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, ***relying alone upon the merits of Christ,*** who was the author and the finisher of their faith. (emphasis added)

D&C 3:20

20 And that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers, and that they might know the promises of the Lord, and ***that they may believe the gospel and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ,*** and be glorified through faith in his name, and that through their repentance they might be saved. Amen. (emphasis added)

LEHI TEACHES THE IMPORTANCE OF OPPOSITION AND THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE GOOD FROM EVIL (2 Nephi 2:11-30)

I have three spectacular sisters. One of them wrote me recently as follows:

For me perhaps the hardest chapter in the B of M (excusing Isaiah) is 2 Nephi 2, especially verses 11,12, the antecedents for words "it" and "this thing" - I also struggle over the meaning of "compound in one." I feel I understand the overall meaning but it troubles me to keep stumbling over these words.

Can you help me?

This is what I wrote back to her:

Kahil Gibran in his book *The Prophet* said (something like) this: "We drink sorrow and happiness out of the same cup." I haven't read the book in 20 years, but I think of that idea often when I read these verses. If we have never experienced misery, we cannot know what happiness is. We can only understand things in the context of things they are not. Thus, if there is no wickedness, then there is no such thing as happiness. No corruption? Then no incorruption. Thus (in the language of verse 10) you must have something opposite of happiness, or no one can ever experience happiness. This is the problem with an Edenic existence like the one alluded to in 2 Nephi 2:23. Without the Fall, Adam and Eve "would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin."

OK. So everything, to be experienced and understood "must needs be a compound in one" (2 Nephi 2:11). The only way you can know how good it feels when the pain stops is if the pain somehow, somewhere starts. Pain and less pain and no pain are all

locations on the same continuum, as are wickedness and holiness, good and bad, even sense and insensibility. In such a case, the world would have “been created for a thing of naught; wherefore there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation” (2 Nephi 2:12). A world that remains a Garden of Eden forever is a wasted world.

To put it another way, the last thing you would expect a fish to discover is water.

It seems to me that there are 5 great conditions discussed in this chapter, four of which make agency possible, the fifth being agency itself. Together they make agency possible and make us accountable for the choices we make within the framework of this freedom God has given us. As I reviewed the significant scriptures in 2 Nephi 2 and tried to outline them, I found that I had made an acronym, one that has helped me remember and teach the attributes and requirements of agency for several years. The acronym derived from these verses is P-O-L-K-A. Much of this chapter is about the PROBATIONARY POLKA.

P: —Power to choose—“Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other.” (2 Nephi 2:16)

O: God placed man in an environment of **O**pposition; that is, in a place where there was an **O**ppportunity to choose. “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my first-born in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility.” (2 Nephi 2:11)

L: God gave unto man **L**aws, so that he would know what God wanted him

to choose. “And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin . . .” (2 Nephi 2:13)

K: God gave man Knowledge and taught all men sufficiently that they would **Know** the difference between good and evil, that is, between obeying a law, and breaking it. “And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. . .” (2 Nephi 2:5)

A: These conditions, taken together (Power to choose, the Opportunity to choose, the Laws that help us know what to choose, the Knowledge of what is good and what is evil) comprise what we call **Agency**, or freedom of choice: “Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.” (2 Nephi 2:27)

The key to our agency was the action of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Lehi’s comments about this seem to be paraphrase of Moses 5:10-11, and give clear evidence that the book of Moses as we now have it in the Pearl of Great Price was in fact engraven on the Plates of Brass. Lehi wrote

And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. (2 Nephi 2:22,23)

The comparable text in Moses says

And in that day Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying:
Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression

my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God. And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient. (Moses 5:10,11)

CONCLUSION:

Lehi's lessons are all Christ-centered teaching, especially when he is instructing sons bound tightly in the locks and chains of Lucifer. Christ has in fact even given them keys to their chains

In the battle of life, the adversary takes enormous numbers of prisoners, and many who know of no way to escape and are pressed into his service. Every soul confined to a concentration camp of sin and guilt has a key to the gate. The adversary cannot hold them if they know how to use it. The key is labeled Repentance. The twin principles of repentance and forgiveness exceed in strength the awesome power of the adversary. (Boyd K. Packer, "Our Moral Environment," Ensign, May 1992, 68)

He has also given Lehi the land of promise. He has set the perfect example of true manhood and true friendship. And he has provided the blessing of an infinite and eternal atonement. Without his merits, his mercy, his grace, the effects of the fall would be irreversible. Lehi was correct: "How great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth." (2 Nephi 2:8)

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