

Book of Mormon Lesson #7
“I KNOW IN WHOM I HAVE TRUSTED”
(2 Nephi 3-5)
by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: Speaking of the new editions of the Scriptures, Elder Packer said:

The stick or record of Judah—the Old Testament and the New Testament, and the stick or record of Ephraim—the Book of Mormon, which is Another Testament of Jesus Christ—are now woven together in such a way that as you pore over one you are drawn to the other; as you learn from one you are enlightened by the other. They are indeed one in our hands. Ezekiel’s prophecy stands fulfilled.

With the passing of years these scriptures will produce successive generations of faithful Christians who know the Lord Jesus Christ and are disposed to obey his will.

The older generation has been raised without them, but there is another generation growing up. The revelations will be opened to them as to no other in the history of the world. Into their hands now are placed the sticks of Joseph and Judah. They will develop a gospel scholarship beyond that which their forbears could achieve. They will have the testimony that Jesus is the Christ and be competent to proclaim him and defend him. (Elder Boyd K. Packer, C.R., Oct. 1992, p. 75)

INTRODUCTION: After you have reviewed the material in 2 Nephi 3, find a copy of the Joseph Smith Translation and read Genesis 50 . You can read several verses in the Appendix to the LDS edition of the Bible if you cannot find the complete text. Compare the two chapters and you will once again see a witness to the significance of the contents of the brass plates, and even more you will sense the depth of the prophetic power of Joseph, the son of Israel.

I. LEHI TEACHES THAT HIS DESCENDANTS WILL BE BLESSED THROUGH THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH AND THE BOOK OF MORMON (2 Nephi 3)

Reflect on the things Lehi knew about Joseph Smith:

T God would raise him up as a seer to the descendants of Joseph (2

Nephi 3:6)

- T He would be a “choice seer” ((2 Nephi 3:7) Remember what Ammon taught Limhi about the role of a seer? He said, “. . . that a seer is a revelator and a prophet also; and a gift which is greater can no man have, except he should possess the power of God, which no man can; yet a man may have great power given him from God. But a seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them, and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known.” (Mosiah 8:16,17) But Joseph Smith would be more than a seer: he would be a *choice* seer. (2 Nephi 3:7)
- T This seer would be a descendant of Joseph of Egypt. (2 Nephi 3:7)
- T He would bring the descendants of Joseph to a knowledge of the covenants the Father made with the ancestors of Joseph. (2 Nephi 3:7)
- T He would be commanded to do only the work assigned by the father. (2 Nephi 3:8)
- T God would make him great. (2 Nephi 3:8)
- T He would be great like unto Moses. (2 Nephi 3:9)
- T He would have power to bring forth the word of God to the descendants of Joseph. (2 Nephi 3:11)
- T He would have power to convince the descendants of Joseph of the truth of the Bible—“my word, which shall already have gone forth among them.” (2 Nephi 3:11)
- T Out of weakness he would be made strong. (2 Nephi 3:13)
- T Those that seek to destroy him would be confounded. (2 Nephi 3:14)
- T His name and the name of his father would be Joseph also. (2 Nephi 3:15)
- T He would be the spokesman to declare the writings of the descendants of Joseph. (2 Nephi 3:18)
- T He would rise up mightily among the descendants of Lehi’s son, Joseph. (2 Nephi 3:22; see footnote 24a)

I have in the notes above identified Joseph Smith as the spokesman in 2 Nephi 3:18. Elder Bruce R. McConkie suggested that identification also:

. . . the Lord said to Joseph of old: "I will raise up unto the fruit of

thy loins; and I will make for him a spokesman." As Moses wrote and Aaron proclaimed the law given in the Old World, so someone in the New World, someone of the seed of Joseph, would write the Lord's law, and yet another, a spokesman, would declare it. In this case the writer and the spokesman are not identified by name; rather, we are left, based on our knowledge of what has transpired in this and previous dispensations, to identify those whose missions were of such import as to have them revealed thousands of years before the events transpired. Mormon wrote the Book of Mormon, quoting, condensing, and summarizing front many ancient records as the Spirit directed. And Joseph Smith translated the ancient word by the gift and power of God and proclaimed it to all men, and to the seed of Joseph in particular, as the mind and will and voice of Him by whom salvation comes.

With this in mind, note these words of the Lord: "And I, behold, I will give unto him [Mormon] that he shall write the writing of the fruit of thy loins [the Nephites], unto the fruit of thy loins [the Lamanites]; and the spokesman of thy loins Joseph Smith] shall declare it." [2 Nephi 3:18] That is, Mormon wrote the Book of Mormon, but what he wrote was taken from the writings of the Nephite prophets; and these writings, compiled into one book, were translated by Joseph Smith and sent forth by him unto the Lamanites unto whom, as the title page of the Book of Mormon attests, they were originally written. And further, they are sent forth to all the seed of Joseph, whether in the Lamanite branch of Israel or not. (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p.425 - p.426)

Note the content of 2 Nephi 3:12. This remarkable prophecy about the future of the sticks of Judah and Joseph is the inspiration behind the *Quote of the Week* above. Because of the new editions of the scriptures, the sticks of Judah and Ephraim have begun to "grow together," to the "confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions and establishing peace." This combination of sticks or books will also assist to bring the Lamanites to the knowledge of their fathers—their connection with the House of Israel and the covenant people—and to a knowledge of those very covenants.

2 Nephi 3:19 again testifies of the inspiration accompanying the selection of content for the Book of Mormon. We noted in Lesson 1 that Moroni had seen our day (Mormon 8:34,35) and that the Book of Mormon was written by the spirit of prophecy and revelation (see the Title Page). Now Lehi tells us this:

And the words which he shall write shall be the words which are expedient in my wisdom should go forth unto the fruit of thy loins. And it shall be as if the fruit of thy loins had cried unto them from the dust; for I know their faith. (2 Nephi 3:19)

II. NEPHI LAMENTS HIS SINFULNESS BUT GLORIES IN THE GOODNESS OF GOD (2 Nephi 4)

Lehi blessed the children of Laman and Lemuel, and he said something remarkable to them, for he declared, “I know if ye are brought up in the way ye should go ye will not depart from it.” (2 Nephi 4:5,9) This prophecy must be specific for the children of these two sons. Laman and Lemuel were certainly “brought up in the way [they] should go” and they departed from it rather dramatically. But Lehi offers this observation as a testimony. “I know . . .” One is left with the feeling that in conjunction with his many prayers for his oldest sons, he had prayed mightily over his grandchildren, the offspring of those sons, and the Lord had assured him that the sins of these children *would be visited* on the heads of their parents, for if these children were taught righteously, they would be righteous.

Wherefore, if ye are cursed, behold, I leave my blessing upon you, that the cursing may be taken from you and be answered upon the heads of your parents. (2 Nephi 4:6)

The promise of Lehi to his grandchildren requires an additional note here. Sometimes children, in spite of the purest love and the finest teaching parents can provide, seem to drift away, in somewhat the manner of Laman and Lemuel. But we have a promise:

Years ago President Joseph F. Smith gave us an answer and a promise when he said, “If you will gather your children around you once a week and instruct them in the gospel, they will not go astray” (David B. Haight, “A Foundation Whereon Men Cannot

Fall," Ensign, July 1972, 108).

Referring to this same promise of President Smith, in the October General Conference of 1970, Elder Boyd K. Packer taught:

In the Church, Monday night has been designated and set aside, Churchwide, for families to be at home together. Instruction has recently gone out, from which I quote:

"Those responsible for priesthood and auxiliary programs, including temple activities, youth athletic activities, student activities, etc., should take notice of this decision in order that Monday night will be uniformly observed throughout the Church and the families be left free from Church activities so that they can meet together in the family home evening." (Priesthood Bulletin, September 1970.)

With this program comes the promise from the prophets, the living prophets, that if parents will gather their children about them once a week and teach the gospel, those children in such families will not go astray (Improvement Era, Dec. 1970, p. 108)

In 1965, Harold B. Lee recalled a promise made by President Wilford Woodruff:

For over half a century, the leaders of this Church have counseled with parents in the home to gather their children around them in a weekly Home Evening and there teach the truths of salvation -- honesty, sobriety integrity, and chastity. One of our leaders has promised that if parents would do this, "ninety-nine out of every hundred children . . . will observe them through life." (The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff, pp. 267-268.) (Harold B. Lee, CR, April 1965, p. 15

Sometime after these final lessons, Lehi waxed old and died. Not many days later, his brothers were angry with Nephi again, "because of the admonitions of the Lord." Nothing these bitter and violent brothers had ever done has had even the smallest shadow of success in dissuading Nephi from telling the truth. What an example he sets for us. President Joseph F.

Smith spoke to parents about this kind of courage in our relationships with our children.

God forbid that there should be any of us so unwisely indulgent, so thoughtless and so shallow in our affection for our children that we dare not check them in a wayward course, in wrong-doing and in their foolish love for the things of the world more than for the things of righteousness, for fear of offending them. (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, p.286)

Nephi always dared to “check [his brothers] in a wayward course.” He never flinched, and his affection for them was not *shallow*. If they needed the admonitions of the Lord, they got them, even though such steadiness infuriated them and the outcome of his preaching was a forgone conclusion. And this time was no exception. Nephi was “constrained to speak unto them” (2 Nephi 4:14) and he did. God help all of us never to exercise *restraint* when under the influence of such *constraint*. We must reprove “betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy ghost . . .” (D&C 121:43)

2 Nephi 4:16-35 changed my life. At a time when I was desperate to know that in spite of my weaknesses the Lord loved me and needed me, the witness came. As I read these verses, I was healed and loved and lifted, soaring as on eagles wings to a whole new awareness of the goodness of the Father and the Son. The Son taught me how to say what Nephi said in 2 Nephi 4:21.

My gratitude to Nephi for including this psalm is enormous. He could have left it out. In his books, filled with page after page of portraits of his greatness, we would never have missed these few verses of windows into his weaknesses. But he allowed us to see how human he was, how much like us he was, how much need of the help of the Lord he had. I came to believe, reading these verses, that as he was in some ways like me, I could finally learn to be something like him.

The cause of his distress—his sin, his yielding to temptations—was anger. “Why am I angry . . .?” Angry at whom? His brothers, we suppose, who were angry at him and who would soon (in the next chapter) try to kill him again. But he knew that the anger (or any other sin) did not serve him or

hurt his brothers. It simply paved the way for Lucifer to attack. “Why am I angry *because of mine enemy*” “Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for *the enemy of my soul.*” (2 Nephi 4:27,28, emphasis added) Review the appeals Nephi makes in his prayer. He prays for wonderful things! (2 Nephi 4:31-34)

III. THE ANGER OF LAMAN AND LEMUEL INCREASES AGAINST NEPHI, AND THE LORD COMMANDS THE FOLLOWERS OF NEPHI TO SEPARATE FROM THE FOLLOWERS OF LAMAN. (2 Nephi 5)

As we mentioned in lesson #5, the hearts of Laman and Lemuel had become hard “like unto a flint” and the Lord seemed to have no way to soften them anymore. (See 2 Nephi 5:21) thus, Nephi and Zoram and Sam and their families, “and Jacob and Joseph [the] younger brethren, and also [his sisters], and all who would go with [him] . . . did journey in the wilderness for the space of many days.” (2 Nephi 5:6,7)

Notice the contrast in the lifestyles of these two groups:

The Nephites “lived after the manner of happiness” (2 Nephi 5:27). Since I want my family to live in the same way, I read 2nd Nephi 5 for insights into the way they lived, and the things that caused them to be happy. I found four things:

1. “And we did observe to *keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments* of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses” (2 Nephi 5:10, emphasis added). Wickedness never was happiness (alma 41:10), but obedience is. If we *observe*, that is watch carefully to insure that we are keeping the judgements and statutes and commandments, we will be much more likely to be happy.
2. And the Lord was with us; and we did prosper exceedingly; for we did sow seed, and we did *reap* again in abundance. And we began to *raise flocks, and herds, and animals of every kind* (2 Nephi 5:11, emphasis added).

“[The Nephites did learn to] *build buildings, and to work in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores, which*

were in great abundance . . . And it came to pass that *I, Nephi, did cause my people to be industrious, and to labor with their hands*” (2 Nephi 5:15, 17, emphasis added). Any truly happy person will be engaged in worthwhile enterprise of some kind. Work is a key to happiness.

Spencer W. Kimball said, “Work brings happiness, self-esteem, and prosperity. It is the means of all accomplishment; it is the opposite of idleness. We are commanded to work. (See Gen. 3:19.) Attempts to obtain our temporal, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being by means of a dole violate the divine mandate that we should work for what we receive. Work should be the ruling principle in the lives of our Church membership” (See D&C 42:42; D&C 56:17; D&C 68:30–32; D&C 75:29)(“Spencer W. Kimball, “And the Lord Called His People Zion,” Ensign, Aug. 1984, 4).

In contrast to this, the Lamanites

. . . did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey. (2 Nephi 5:24)

3. “And I, Nephi, had also brought *the records* which were engraven upon the plates of brass” (2 Nephi 5:12, emphasis added). Elder Nelson taught: “Happiness comes when scriptures are used in shaping our lives” (Russell M. Nelson, “A More Excellent Hope,” Ensign, Feb. 1997, 63).
4. “And *I, Nephi, did build a temple*; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land, wherefore, it could not be built like unto Solomon's temple. But the manner of the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon; and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine (2 Nephi 5:16, emphasis added).

Of course the Lamanites had been cursed. And they had been marked with a skin of blackness so that the Nephites would know they were cursed and stay away. Their cursing was a “sore cursing, because of their iniquity. (2

Nephi 5:20,21; see also 2 Nephi 1:17,18,22) They were cut off from the presence of the Lord. They had no scriptures. They had no priesthood. They had no revelations. They had little or no access to the Spirit. A sore cursing indeed! We would be astonished if we were told, given these descriptions, that the Lamanites were immersed in happiness.

CONCLUSION:

It seems to me that there is another reason for this separation, in addition to the danger faced by Nephi. It has to do with the influence that Laman and Lemuel and their lifestyle might have on the others who went with Nephi.

When my mother remarried after 19 years of widowhood, she married a man of steel and certainty. He was my old scoutmaster and he was rugged. She learned not long after their wedding that her new husband suffered from a chronically sore big toe. It pained him greatly, but it was just a sore toe and he was tough as saddle leather. However, she was tougher and she got him to the doctor. An examination revealed melanoma. The toe was amputated.

One might ask, "Why?" It was just a toe. The disease was serious but it was localized in an appendage a long way from the center of things. Why all the fuss? We all know the answer. Cancer doesn't secure a toehold (sorry!) And stay put. It is always looking for an opportunity to expand. When you find a cancer, you get it out. My stepfather had waited too long to do that very thing. Within a year of the surgery, he was bedridden and riddled with cancer. All that could be done was to make him comfortable and wait for him to die. Nephi leaving Laman and Lemuel is an act of killing the cancer. Nephi must have known the great need to get away from the disease. And so, with all those who feared the disease, he packed up and pulled out.

The Lord has warned us many times about the danger of allowing such a condition to remain where it can influence us. In Numbers 16, the Lord warned the congregation about those who had rebelled against Moses and Aaron. Moses counseled the people:

Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins. (Numbers 16:26)

That is exactly what Nephi did. He departed. In the October 1999 Conference, President Packer said it this way:

Young Latter-day Saints, shape up! Face up! Take hold of your lives! Take control of your mind, your thoughts! If you have friends that are not a good influence, make changes, even if you face loneliness, even rejection. (*Ensign*, Nov. 1999, p. 24)

If we do not depart from those who would lead us into wickedness, then what the Lord said to Israel may well become true unto us:

. . . they shall be [as thorns] in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. (Judges 2:3)

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