

Gospel Doctrine Lesson 2: All Things According to His Will

LESSON GOAL: To help us see, through the examples of Lehi and Nephi, that safety and salvation come through obedience to the Lord.

Jeffrey R. Holland: "Joseph Smith once said that **the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion**. Why is the Book of Mormon the keystone of our religion? What is the Book of Mormon? Whatever else it is, **it is revelation**. In fact, **it is a revelation about revelation**. It is the basic document by which we would begin to testify to the world, with a copy in our hands, that **the heavens are opened and that God lives and that He speaks and that Jesus is the Christ**. That is a basic message of salvation. And the process by which that message comes is revelation. And Joseph Smith taught that that is the characteristic of this Church, a characteristic by which it will always be known and recognized." (BYU Devotional, 26 September 1976)

THE THEME OF THE ENTIRE BOOK OF MORMON, WHICH IS DECLARED BY NEPHI

1 Nephi 1:20: "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."

This message is reiterated in the very final chapter of the Book of Mormon by Moroni:

Moroni 10:3: "Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would **remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men**, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and **ponder it in your hearts**."

It is this grateful pondering that will lead one to the state of revelation desired by true seekers:

Moroni 10:4: "And when ye shall receive these things, **I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true**; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, **with real intent, having faith in Christ**, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. **And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things**."

The country was divided into two factions, pro-Egyptian and pro-Babylonian, existing with tension side by side.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO I NEPHI

609 B.C.	King Josiah	Twenty years prior to the Book of Mormon, the Kingdom of Judah was experiencing its last period of greatness. Josiah lost his life at the Battle of Megiddo in 609 B.C., leading his armies to stop the advance of the Egyptians, under Pharaoh Nechoh, toward the Euphrates. Nechoh gained control of Judah's political life.
609 B.C.	Jehoahaz	Son of Josiah. Became king at his father's death. Nechoh took him away to Egypt and put his brother Eliakim on the throne. His name was changed to Jehoiakim. He reigned 11 years.
598 B.C.	Jehoiakim	Jehoiakim was bound and carried away to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar along with thousands of others.
	Jehoiachin	Jehoiakim's son allowed to rule as a vassal king of the Babylonians. He reigned only three months and then was summoned to Babylon along with "ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths."
598 B.C.	Zedekiah	Jehoiachin's uncle, Mattaniah began to reign in his stead. His name was changed to Zedekiah . Book of Mormon history begins in the first year of Zedekiah's reign. According to Bible chronology, that was in 598 or 597 B.C.
	The Prophets	Nephi wrote that "there came many prophets prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city of Jerusalem must be destroyed" (1 Nephi 1:4). Lehi's contemporaries included Jeremiah, Huldah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel, and Urijah of Kirjath-jearim.
	Lehi's Home	According to 1 Nephi 1:4 and 1:7, Lehi and his family were living at Jerusalem. The preposition "at" in this case could mean on, in, within, close by, or near. Lehi could have lived several miles away and still be considered living at Jerusalem. Any satellite towns or villages that surrounded larger population centers were regarded in ancient times as belonging to those larger centers. That Lehi and his family lived outside of Jerusalem proper is evidenced in the account of the sons' attempt to obtain the plates with their abandoned wealth: "We went down to the land of our inheritance, and we did gather together our gold, and our silver, and our precious things. And after we gathered these things together, we went up unto the house of Laban" (1 Nephi 3:22-23).

1. Lehi is a prophet.

1 Nephi 1:14: 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!

1 Nephi 1:20: . . . 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.

David A. Bednar: I testify that **the tender mercies of the Lord** are real and that they do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. The Lord's tender mercies are the very personal and individualized blessings, strength, protection, assurances, guidance, loving-kindnesses, consolation, support, and spiritual gifts which we receive from and because of and through the Lord Jesus Christ. The simpleness, the sweetness, and the constancy of the tender mercies of the Lord will do much to fortify and protect us in the troubled times in which we do now and will yet live. When words cannot provide the solace we need or express the joy we feel, when it is simply futile to attempt to explain that which is unexplainable, when logic and reason cannot yield adequate understanding about the injustices and inequities of life, when mortal experience and evaluation are insufficient to produce a desired outcome, and **when it seems that perhaps we are so totally alone, truly we are blessed by the tender mercies of the Lord and made mighty even unto the power of deliverance.** (David A. Bednar, Ensign, May 2005, 99-100)

2. Lehi leaves Jerusalem and takes his family into the wilderness.

1 Nephi 2:2-3: 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. And it came to pass that **he was obedient unto the word of the Lord**, wherefore **he did as the Lord commanded him.**

1 Nephi 2:6-7: 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. 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.**

3. Nephi and his brothers return to Jerusalem to obtain the plates of brass

1 Nephi 3:7: And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: **I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.**

1 Ne 4:10 I shrunk and would that I might not slay him

Jeffrey Holland: "A bitter test? A desire to shrink? Sound familiar? We don't know why those plates could not have been obtained some other way—perhaps accidentally left at the plate polishers one night, or maybe falling off the back of Laban's chariot on a Sabbath afternoon drive. For that matter, why didn't Nephi just leave this story out of the book altogether?... **It is not intended that either Nephi or we be spared the struggle of this account.**

"I believe that story was placed in the very opening verses of a 531-page book and then told in painfully specific detail to focus every reader of that record on the absolutely fundamental gospel issue of **obedience and submission to the communicated will of the Lord.** If Nephi cannot yield to this terribly painful command, if he cannot bring himself to obey, then it is entirely probable that he can never succeed or survive in the tasks that lie just ahead.

"'I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded.' (1 Nephi 3:7.) **I confess that I wince a little when I hear that promise quoted so casually among us.** Jesus knew what that kind of commitment would entail and so now does Nephi. And so will a host of others before it is over. That vow took Christ to the cross on Calvary and it remains at the heart of every Christian covenant. 'I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded'? Well, we shall see." (Jeffrey R. Holland and Patricia T. Holland, *On Earth As It Is in Heaven*, p. 139.)

Hugh Nibley: "We learn in passing that Laban commanded a garrison of fifty, that he met in full ceremonial armor with the elders of the Jews for secret consultations by night, that he was in charge of **the city police and governor** of the city, that he had **control of a treasury**, that he was of the old aristocracy, being a distant relative to Lehi himself, that he probably held his job because of his ancestors. . . that his house was the storing place of very old records, that he was a large man, short-tempered, **crafty and dangerous**, and to add to the bargain, **cruel, greedy**, unscrupulous, weak and given to drink" (*Lehi in the Deseert and the World of the Jaredites*, 111).

D. Kelly Ogden: We might ask at this point, why did the Lord wait until they were more than two hundred miles away from home to command Lehi to get the plates? **One more test!** The older brothers immediately protested, saying it was a hard thing. We usually suppose that their foremost excuse for not wanting to go was their fear of Laban; but there is no doubt that the **distance and topography** also had some bearing on their resistance.

The Book of Mormon itself and most Book of Mormon commentaries say little, if anything, about the distance and terrain involved. Professor Hugh Nibley refers to the two return trips as "quick visits" and "quick trips," noting that "Lehi's sons made a flying trip back to Jerusalem." This writer and accompanying friends learned by walking it that **the distance between Jerusalem and the Red Sea is 200 miles**. An agreeable pace for a group of people on camels would be between twenty and thirty miles a day. So **the journey was a minimum of seven or eight days**. Add to that **the three days they traveled after reaching the Red Sea**, and the figures are up to 260-290 miles in ten or eleven days. That is one direction only.

The **round-trip** that the Lord and Father Lehi were asking of the four sons was over **500 miles and at least three weeks** through some of the most rugged terrain in the Near East! And they had no clue as to how they were going to obtain the plates. And we, having the advantage of "knowing the end from the beginning," are amazed to think ahead and realize that Lehi, soon after his sons returned from their first assignment, would command them to go back again! That is **over a thousand miles and many weeks** on those desolate tracts of land—and we have often looked down on Laman and Lemuel for being chronic complainers. (D. Kelly Ogden, *Studies in Scripture*, 7:26-7).

The Prophet Joseph Smith: "God said, 'Thou shalt not kill;' at another time He said, 'Thou shalt utterly destroy.' This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. **Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire**" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 256).

NEPHI

1 Nephi 1:1 Knew he had "goodly parents"
1 Nephi 2:16 Believed all the words spoken by his father
1 Nephi 2:16,19 Went to the Lord for understanding
1 Nephi 3:7 Was willing to go & do what the Lord commanded

1 Nephi 3:15 Refused to return without records
1 Nephi 4:1,3 Knew that the Lord was "mightier than Laban"

LAMAN AND LEMUEL

1 Nephi 2:11 Murmured against their father
1 Nephi 2:13 Did not believe all Lehi's words
1 Nephi 2:12 "Knew not the dealings of ... God"
1 Nephi 3:5 Complained that the Lord had asked "a hard thing"
1 Nephi 3:14 Wanted to give up after one try
1 Nephi 3:31 Doubted that the Lord could deliver Laban to them

The murmuring of Laman and Lemuel is related to stiffneckedness and pride.

Elder H. Ross Workman: **Murmuring consists of three steps**, each leading to the next in a descending path to disobedience. **First**, when people murmur **they begin to question**. They question first in their own minds and then plant questions in the minds of others. **Second**, those who murmur **begin to rationalize and excuse themselves** from doing what they [have] been instructed to do. Thus, they [make] an excuse for disobedience. Their excuses lead to the **third step: slothfulness in following the commandment**. The Lord has spoken against this attitude in our day: 'But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned' (D&C 58:29).

"I invite you to focus on the commandment from living prophets that bothers you the most. Do you question whether the commandment is applicable to you? Do you find ready excuses why you cannot now comply with the commandment? Do you feel frustrated or irritated with those who remind you of the commandment? Are you slothful in keeping it? Beware of the deception of the adversary. **Beware of murmuring**" (Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 104-6).

Marvin J. Ashton: "Be free of criticism and murmuring. Build and lift in your words and conversations as you sustain and support. Murmuring and criticism lead to inactivity and apostasy from the Church. **Do not allow yourself the dangerous luxury of criticism and murmuring**. When I think of those who are prone to murmur, I think of Laman and Lemuel. '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.**' (1 Nephi 2:12.) **Often murmuring is an outward evidence of disobedience.**" (*Ye Are My Friends*, 3 - 4).

President Ezra Taft Benson: "**When obedience ceases to be an irritant and becomes our quest, in that moment God will endow us with power**" (Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 108)

Hugh Nibley: (speaking about Nephi's oath to Zoram)

1 Nephi 4:32-33: And . . . I spake with him, that if he would hearken unto my words, **as the Lord liveth, and as I live**, even so that if he would hearken unto our words, we would spare his life. And I spake unto him, **even with an oath**, that he need not fear; that he should be a free man like unto us if he would go down in the wilderness with us.

"What astonishes the western reader is the **miraculous effect of Nephi's oath on Zoram**, who upon hearing a few conventional words promptly becomes tractable [easily managed] . . . The reaction of both parties makes sense when one realizes that **the oath is the one thing that is most sacred and inviolable among the desert people and their descendants**. . . So we see that the only way that Nephi could possibly have pacified the struggling Zoram in an instant was to utter the one oath that no man would dream of breaking, the most solemn of all oaths: **'As the Lord liveth, and as I live!'**" (Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 103-5).

4. Nephi and his brothers bring the brass plates to their family.

LEHI PROPHESED THREE THINGS ABOUT THESE PLATES.

1. 1 Ne. 5:18: "these plates of brass **should go forth** unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people . . . of his seed."
2. 1 Ne. 5:19: "these plates of brass **should never perish**"
3. 1 Ne. 5:19: "**neither should they be dimmed any more by time.**"

Bruce R. McConkie: "When the Lord led Lehi and his colony out from Jerusalem, they were required to take with them the Brass Plates of which Laban had been the custodian. **These plates were a volume of sacred scripture.** They contained a record of God's dealings with men from the beginning down to that day. They were the record of the Jews, a record of many of the prophecies from the beginning down to and including part of those spoken by Jeremiah. **On them was the law of Moses, the five books of Moses, and the genealogy of the Nephite forebearers.**

"The value of the Brass Plates to the Nephites cannot be overestimated. **By means of them they were able to preserve the language, most of the civilization, and the religious knowledge of the people from whence they came.** By way of contrast, the Mulekites, who were led out of Jerusalem some 11 years after Lehi's departure, and **who had no record equivalent to the brass plates, soon dwindled in apostasy and unbelief and lost their language, civilization and religion.** (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 103).

5. 1 Nephi 6

(While 1 Nephi 6 is a break in the historical narrative, it is significant because it establishes the criteria Nephi and other Book of Mormon writers needed to select material for inclusion on the plates.)

1 Nephi 6:5-6: Wherefore, **the things which are pleasing unto the world I do not write, but the things which are pleasing unto God** and unto those who are not of the world. Wherefore, I shall give commandment unto my seed, that **they shall not occupy these plates with things which are not of worth unto the children of men.**

Neal A. Maxwell: "Naturally, some would like to have even more contextual material about the life, times, and culture of the peoples in the Book of Mormon. In fact, though, there is much more already given in the book than most of us have been able to assimilate and appreciate thus far. Nevertheless, **such supportive but ancillary data are not the purpose for which the book has been brought forward.**" "No wonder these scriptures fail to please or to impress the world. There are those who prefer details on ancient agriculture to the 'bread of life,' who prefer information on the rising of dynasties to insights on the rising of Jesus from the tomb. Perhaps this is so because the former type of data is very interesting without being very demanding. **The second type demands both faith and, thereafter, a certain behavior.**" (*But for a Small Moment*, p. 38)

6. Nephi and his brothers return to Jerusalem for Ishmael and his family.

Elder Erastus Snow: ". . . Lehi learned by searching the plates of brass, that **he was of the lineage of Manasseh.** The Prophet Joseph informed us that the record of Lehi, was contained on the 116 pages that were first translated and subsequently stolen, and of which an abridgment is given us in the first Book of Nephi, which is the record of Nephi individually, he himself being of the lineage of Manasseh; but that **Ishmael was of the lineage of Ephraim, and that his sons married into Lehi's family, and Lehi's sons married Ishmael's daughters. . . thus fulfilling the words of Jacob upon Ephraim and Manasseh** in the 48th chapter of Genesis, which says:

"And let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the land." **Thus these descendants of Manasseh and Ephraim grew together upon this American continent. . .**" (Erastus Snow, *Journal of Discourses* 23:184-185).

7. Conclusion

David E. Sorenson: **When we take the Book of Mormon into our hearts, we have more love for our Father in Heaven and His Only Begotten Son, our Savior.** This love of God can dispel the contentions that come into our personal life with family members, friends, loved ones, or neighbors: "And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people" (4 Nephi 1:15). A great Russian writer, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, said, "**Only the heart knows how to find what is precious**" (*The Brothers Karamazov*, II, Book VI:1, 346). (David E. Sorenson, BYU Devotional Address, Mar. 19, 2002).

Ed J. Pinegar: "Until we apply the words of the Book of Mormon to our lives, we will not delight in this book. We will not enjoy this feeling. We will not be enthusiastic about it. We'll say, 'Yeah, I read the book this morning.' But when we love it, we'll live it because we'll apply it.

Nephi understood this principle: 'For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them.' (2 Ne. 2:15). President Benson also understood: 'Reread the Book of Mormon so that we might more fully come unto Christ, be committed to Him, centered in Him, consumed in Him.' (*Ensign* Nov. 1987, 87). When Christ comes into our lives, we are born of God, and we'll also be strengthened through the Book of Mormon. **If we are conscientious of our study of the Book of Mormon, we will not be susceptible to Satan's enticings.** I promise you if you will earnestly and prayerfully ponder and steadfastly read the Book of Mormon and live it, the adversary will have no effect upon you. And unless you do that, you will not be strong. . . The test of mankind is always before us. Will we choose to obey the will of the Lord and receive the blessings of heaven or lose the blessings through disobedience? **The key is to learn vicariously from the scriptures"** (Ed. J. Pinegar and Richard J. Allen, *Teachings and Commentaries on the Book of Mormon*, 30, 34).

Gordon B. Hinckley: "I recall sitting in this Tabernacle when I was fourteen or fifteen – up in the balcony right behind the clock – and hearing President Heber J. Grant tell of his experience in reading the Book of Mormon when he was a boy. **He spoke of Nephi and of the great influence he had upon his life.** And then, with a voice ringing with a conviction that I shall never forget, he quoted those great words of Nephi: 'I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.' **There came into my young heart on that occasion a resolution to try to do what the Lord has commanded.**" (Address, October 1971).

Heber J. Grant: "I am thankful beyond expression that I did read the book in my boyhood days and that the assurance came into my heart that it was in very deed the truth, and that **I fell in love with the character of Nephi.** More than any other mortal man that we have any record of in the Bible, the Old, or the New Testaments, or in the Book of Mormon, more, I believe, than the influence of my friends and associates with whom I have lived, Nephi has made an impression upon my heart and my soul and has been one of the guiding stars of my life – **a man who endeavored upon all occasions never to become discouraged or disheartened, never to complain;** but who endeavored to the full extent of his ability to carry out his own wonderful words spoken to his father – 'I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded.' That remarkable declaration, exemplified through his entire life, has stayed with me, I am sure, now for fully fifty long years; and I rejoice in the fact of the impression that was made upon my heart and soul by that statement." (*Conference Report*, April 1924).

Jeffrey R. Holland: **The key to reading any book is staying awake.** That means, of course, that you will try to keep your eyes open and some reasonable portion of your blood circulating. But for real reading it means much more than that. **Reading which will give you any return on your investment will be an exercise in which your mental and spiritual muscles are stretched and strengthened forever.** This kind of reading means staying alert, attentive, and actively involved as you recreate the book in your own mind, page by page. Writing a good book is very hard work. Reading it well is not an easy thing either.

[In the Book of Mormon, you will find] words charged with meaning. Doctrines of salvation. Lengthy prophetic segments constructed like works of art. Book after book controlled and condensed into the "most correct book on earth," a book with just one message, that **Jesus is the Christ and there is no other way.** It is by every worthy standard a great book, a classic book, a book of books. It is the word of God and the keystone of our religion. **We ought to drink constantly at its fountain like the thirsty children we are.** ("Daddy, Donna, and Nephi," *Ensign*, September 1976).

Robert A. Rees: "I love the Book of Mormon most of all because it **has led me to a fuller understanding of the life and mission of Jesus Christ and has opened my heart wider to experience His love.** The Book of Mormon testifies of Christ from the very first chapter, where Lehi sees 'One descending out of the midst of heaven [whose] luster was above that of the sun at noon-day' (1 Nephi 1:9), to the very last chapter, where Moroni says, 'If ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot' (Moroni 10:33). Through the many testimonies of Book of Mormon prophets and through Christ's own words to the Nephites, I have come to exclaim, as does Nephi, 'I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell.' (2 Nephi 33:6)

"I love the Book of Mormon. And I love the Lord for sending it to bless our lives." (Robert A. Rees, *Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon*, 198).

All Things According to His Will"

1 Nephi 1-

