

# 1 NEPHI 16-22 – S03E05

“I will prepare the way before you”

Like Moses before him, Nephi leads his people out of a decadent society, and into the promised land.

I’m Mark Holt, and this is Gospel Talktrine.

Welcome to Gospel Talktrine. I’m Mark Holt, and this is a podcast where we weekly go over the Sunday School lessons in the Come Follow Me curriculum of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

This week’s lesson is on 1 Nephi 16-22: “I Will Prepare the Way before You”.

As always, if you have a question, please email me at gt@gospeltalktrine.com, and your five star reviews on Facebook, Apple Podcast and iTunes and Soundcloud are always much appreciated and help us find new listeners.

## This week’s lesson material

So we begin in chapter 16, and first of all this one of the most fascinating sets of chapters in the entire Book of Mormon. As we mentioned last week, or the last couple of weeks, the vision of Lehi, among many other things, this is a vision that works on multiple levels, but one of the levels is that it compares a nomadic and wilderness dwelling people to the city dwelling people of Jerusalem.

And what we see in this set of chapters is, at least in the first part, is that Lehi’s family is becoming a family of nomads, they’re becoming Bedouins basically. They live in tents and they wander in the wilderness, and they’re leaving behind all of the trappings of their former civilisation. Now there are many aspects of today’s lesson that harken back to lessons from the Old Testament; specifically, as I already mentioned in the introduction, the Exodus. This is the Exodus of the Book of Mormon. It’s a story very powerfully told.

But it’s also more powerful if we understand the context in which it exists. So if you like, you can go back a couple of years ago and listen to… I actually did the Exodus in a couple of parts I think, in 2018, and there are some interesting lessons there. And also the lesson on Jeremiah, where he’s warning the inhabitants of Jerusalem that they will be destroyed. And one of the things I want to point out before we begin, about that is that: the inhabitants of Jerusalem thought that they were righteous. Some of them. I mean they probably had some sort of conscience, light of Christ problems, where they were trying to reconcile what they knew was right with what they were doing. But they did have a couple of things that allowed them to rationalise their behaviour more easily.

One of those is that in the past God had always saved them. They had the Temple of Jerusalem, so they knew that they worshipped the true God, even though they weren’t being righteous in his worship. At the time of Nephi, at the time Lehi left Jerusalem, they even mention that the prophet Jeremiah is busy prophesying. And some of those prophesies are on the plates of brass.

Now Jeremiah’s conflict was with false prophets who were saying that Jerusalem would be just fine, and the Babylonians would not prevail against it. Now if you remember, a hundred years before Jeremiah’s time, Isaiah had made exactly the opposite prophesy from Jeremiah. So Jeremiah was saying, “Don’t listen to all these false prophets, we’re going to be destroyed. We have to repent, we have to avoid entanglements with Egypt, that will bring the wrath of Babylon down upon us all the quicker. And having the temple of Jehovah in our midst won’t save us. Look at what happened to the former places where the Temple used to exist. They’ve all been destroyed. So it’s only righteousness that will save us.” This was Jeremiah’s message.

So what he was saying was very unpopular. He was saying we will be destroyed. And the citizens of Jerusalem hated this. They were saying “Why are you being such a nay-sayer, why don’t you get onboard with these other prophets who are telling us that what we are doing is just fine? We have the protection of God, we live near the Temple, and why are we going to listen to Jeremiah?” He was imprisoned, he was mistreated, and he was exiled for his trouble.

But a hundred years earlier, Isaiah had had exactly the opposite message. He said, “Don’t worry about a thing. The Syrians are coming down, they’ve already destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, but we don’t have to worry, they won’t even fire an arrow against our city.” And that’s exactly what happened. They did destroy other cities in Judah, but when they got to Jerusalem they camped there for the night, and in the morning they were going to attack, and the Jews woke up and looked out, and many of the Assyrians had been killed and the rest had gone and left, and they never had to fight them.

And so, this event was still very much in the forefront of their minds, and they had a hard time believing Jeremiah when he was telling them the opposite message. So that’s going to come into play in our lesson here, today.

In chapter 16 we find Lehi’s family in a tent in the Valley of Lemuel. And they’re preparing themselves in a number of ways to make this transition. Not only to travel in the wilderness, but to become the kind of people that travel in the wilderness. Those are two different things, and they’re both going on.

First of all, as was mentioned by Nephi in chapter 10, Lehi, he can’t report all of the visions of his father because his father’s having a ton of visions, and we can assume that these visions are in preparation for his family talking their journey, and so Lehi is being prepared as a prophet to lead his people of into the wilderness by themselves.

And so the consolidation that’s occurring in chapter 16 is spiritual, the people of Lehi are changing spiritually. It’s physical; they’re gathering food, and preparing themselves physically to go off into the desert. And it’s also social; they’re intermarrying and they’re becoming a unit. All of the unmarried family members are pairing up. So in those three ways they’ve prepared themselves to be a family, a group, a clan of nomads. And Nephi’s brothers are humbling themselves, repenting, and then the final event is that Lehi receives the word in a dream at night that he is to leave in the morning and when he gets up, he finds this curious artefact outside of his tent: the Liahona. It’s described as a ball of curious workmanship.

So, I want to make a couple of comments about the Liahona. We won’t spend much time on it, but the Liahona is unlike… it’s almost unique in scripture! It is a holy relic… I was going to say relic, but it is an artefact from God.

There is no explanation for the Liahona, how it works or what happened, or where it came from other than God delivered it to earth. God made it. There are a couple of other possible parallels to this; maybe the Urim and Thummim, not as described in the Old Testament but as described by Joseph Smith. In one place I found a reference that the Urim and Thummim was prepared by God for man, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that God made it physically. It might mean that God imbued it with power, after it had been made by man. Certainly, there is nothing in the Urim and Thummim, the way I’ve seen it described, that couldn’t be shaped… it’s just shaped rocks, put in two silver bows, as it’s described. It’s hard for me to even visualise what it even looks like. But there’s nothing in the workmanship that would be outside human technology.

On the contrary, the Liahona is totally beyond what humans can even do today. It’s seems to be… if people were to try and make the Liahona, they would try to put some sort of AI in this ball that would… Artificial Intelligence, that would tell you where to go in the wilderness and it would hook up to GPS satellites. But I the absence of those satellites the Liahona would be totally lost. There is no technology even today that could create something like the Liahona.

The Ark of the Covenant, for example, there was an artefact that was imbued with power from God, but made by man. The tablets of stone, on which God carved the Ten Commandments, perhaps, would be an analog: something that God made and delivered to man, but then all they were, were a listing of the commandments. There seems to have been no difference, except in their holiness, between the tablets carved by God, and equivalent tablets that were carved by man. They served as a reminder of what the Ten Commandments were, but otherwise we don’t read about them in the scriptures. So the Liahona is sort of unique.

We all have, maybe forty years ago we would not have had, but we all have, we carry with us, something that’s something to the Liahona, and that is a smart phone. The Liahona has a GPS app, and it even has a texting app. You’ll notice later on the God delivers messages through the Liahona to Lehi. And I think it’s interesting that we as a society, as a civilisation, our technology over the last two hundred years has progressed so rapidly, and I notice that the direction that technology takes, (this is just a personal insight, it has nothing to do with the scriptures, and it’s also just my opinion, so take it for what it’s worth), but the direction that advances in technology take are generally things that reverse the effect of the Fall.

So when we, when the earth fell, when we as humanity fell, we lost contact with God, we lost the ability to communicate with each other, we became subject to all kinds of hunger and disease and injuries. So we have medical science that advances, we have communication technology that advances, we have computers that can perform calculations and remember things for us. These are all things that we were able to do before the Fall without effort, and now we’re trying to make up for the fact that we live in a fallen world with technology. And I don’t want to say that it’s Satan’s counterfeit for the power of God, but it is man’s attempt to make up for what he lacks, because of our separation from God. That’s what our technology is.

And if you look at the Liahona, it is something that you and I… it fills a gap that you and I today would try and fill with technology. So, it’s an interesting artefact. In fact, later on, I think every time Nephi confronts Laman and Lemuel, and says, “Why do you doubt that God is behind us? Look at all the witnesses that you’ve had,’’ it seems to be the strongest argument that Nephi would have in any of those disputes would be to go over and pick up the Liahona and say, “Here is the Liahona. Explain this, and then I will let you deny the power of God, deny that God is behind us here in the wilderness.”

There is no explanation. The very presence of the Liahona is an irrefutable testimony to God everywhere that they go, everywhere that it’s carried. There is no explanation for it, no civilisation, no technology, that existed on the earth could possibly have created it. And I believe that’s why it has not been passed down to us, because it would be an irrefutable witness of the power of God and of the truth of the Book of Mormon. There would be no disputing it. Maybe I’m wrong about that.

Hugh Nibley had an interesting take on what would have happened had we had access to the plates today, had the golden plates not been taken away by Moroni after their translation. And he said there would have been just as much disputing. We would have had one more thing to fight about, and I think that’s an interesting take. So perhaps I’m wrong.

But anyway, that’s my insight on the Liahona and we’ll talk a little bit more about it as they pay attention to it.

So Lehi’s family in chapter 16 takes off into the wilderness, and the pattern of travel seem to be: they go for a little while, they stop in the desert, they hunt and gather food, and then they travel a little further. Now this is probably because there are weaker members of the group. So there are women who are used to dwelling in the city, and there are old people; Ishmael and his wife, presumably, Lehi and Sariah, are getting on in years. And so the group is not able to continuously travel, and hunt and gather as they go. They have to take frequent stops to rest.

At one of these stops, Nephi breaks his bow. And he says, “I broke my bow, which was of fine steel.” A quick word about this, I’m not going to spend very long on this but, there is actually some controversy about the steel bow of Nephi. And I actually recommend… there is a blog post on the Common Consent blog by Kevin Barney, you can google this if you want to read it. It’s called “[On Nephi’s Steel Bow](https://bycommonconsent.com/2006/02/20/on-nephis-steel-bow/).”

The controversy centres around the fact that in the Bible, in the King James Version of the Bible… and this is referenced in your Book of Mormon footnotes by the way, everywhere it says “steel,” not everywhere, but where it says a “steel bow,” modern translations render this as a “bronze bow.” And there is some question about whether they even mean bronze or copper or some other metal. There are disputations about what the ancient meaning of the modern words, or the words that we find, was, right? What metal were they actually referring to, because the meanings of these words have changed over the centuries.

So when Nephi says, “I broke my bow which was made of fine steel,” there are a number of reasons why we don’t know exactly if he meant that. And this brings up the question; was Joseph Smith, when he was translating the Book of Mormon, was he doing what is called a “tight” translation, or a “loose” translation? Now a tight translation would be what the default would be for most Latter-day Saints to believe. Given the stories that they’ve heard about Joseph Smith looking into the hat where the seer stone or the Urim and Thummim were, and then spelling… literally at times spelling out a word, or going from word to word, and only when that word had been written down could he proceed. Now that would lead us to believe that God was almost literally dictating every single word and letter that went into the Book of Mormon.

As we examine the text, however, most scholars find artefacts, I would say linguistic artefacts, from nineteenth century English. The most obvious and irrefutable example is the fact that the language of the King James Version of the Bible is present in our Book of Mormon. So if you believed therefore in a tight translation you would expect to find that Joseph is reading the ancient Hebrew version of the Bible, and doesn’t need to render it into King James English. He could render it into his own words. Or he could give us a more accurate translation. But instead what we get is the King James Version. So the assumption that we have to make is that Joseph Smith’s mind was very much involved in the process of rendering what he was reading into English, and therefore we get a fair amount of Joseph Smith as we’re reading the Book of Mormon.

There are people who come down on both sides of this issue, and they all have good reasons. And the “steel bow,” there are questions around it, because even though the ancient Israelites were an Iron Age society, the question is, did they have something like steel and why would they make a bow out of steel?

Without going any further into that controversy, I recommend that blog post to you. It’s on the Common Consent blog. “On Nephi’s Steel Bow” is the title. And just to give you my take on it, I do believe that the bow was actually made of steel. But I’ll explain why in just a few little episodes here.

This thing of metallic working and metallurgy technology come into play a couple more times.

So when Nephi breaks his bow, something interesting happens. First of all (this part isn’t that interesting, or isn’t that new), Laman and Lemuel are murmuring, and so is everyone else. Because they were depending… they probably had been traveling and eating up their food, and while they’re camped in this place in the wilderness, they have come to the end of their food. They basically don’t stop until they have to. So they are probably already hungry and the have a limited time to go and find food. And in that limited time, not only does Nephi break his bow, which it seems like everyone was really depending upon Nephi.

But also, Laman and Lemuel’s bows lose their springs. And this would seem to give credence to the idea that maybe they where in a humid place, and Nephi’s bow was perhaps getting corroded… hard to say. But that would certainly be almost necessary for a wooden bow to lose its spring. Otherwise, they might not have taken care of their bows. If you leave a bow strung for too long it will lose its elasticity. A bow needs to made of some sort of springy material, so it springs back to its original form. So that when you string it, and pull it, there is some tension there. And if you leave that string on the bow for too long, the wood can actually form to its new shape, the bent shape, and then you can’t get any sort of velocity out of the arrow.

So that may have been what happened. It may have been humidity; it may have been that Laman and Lemuel weren’t taking care of their bows. In any case, everybody blames Nephi for their troubles.

So in these chapters we have a very strong contrast between Nephi and everyone else. Nephi, what he does, is he doesn’t go through his emotional turmoil, how he dealt with each person individually; all he says is “People were murmuring.” It even gets to the point where Lehi is murmuring!

So the prophet himself is expressing his displeasure with the position in which God has put him and his family. Nephi, I think, out of respect for his… not only his father but his prophet, he doesn’t discuss this in any great detail. I feel he has to get across the basic idea that Lehi was murmuring, but I think it pains him greatly, and the evidence for that is how brief his treatment is of Lehi’s murmuring.

So what Nephi does, rather than murmur and rather than blame God, it seems like Nephi is the only person who is able to keep an optimistic outlook. And everyone else acts like they’re a victim of circumstance; God has put them in this position. And Nephi says… and this is the defining characteristic of Nephi’s personality; that he is never bitter over the things he doesn’t have. He’s always grateful for the things that he does.

And he has the wherewithal the knowledge, the materials, and the tools, to go out and build a new bow. It may not be as good as his steel bow, but he finds some wood that will work; it’s probably not the best; he’s in the middle of present-day Saudi Arabia we presume, so there aren’t a lot of tall trees. But he finds some wood that he can use, he shaves it down, creates a bow. Then he finds a straight stick, he makes an arrow, and then he goes to his father.

Now this is interesting. He doesn’t go out on his own and try to just go hunting. He’s already been hunting, he knows the area, presumably he could go out and kill some animals. But he goes to the prophet. The prophet that was recently murmuring against him, for something that was not his fault. So this also shows that Nephi had profound respect for the line of Priesthood authority.

And we have an interesting event that occurs here. Lehi is very much humbled when Nephi comes to him and asks him for advice, for him to enquire of the Lord. Because what does Lehi do? He looks… he has a tool, he has an implement that he can now use for revelation when he looks into it. We actually don’t know what it says, but this is where we get the idea that God can send not only physical directions, but he can also send what we might consider a text message. He can send written messages to the prophet. And Nephi never tells us… I don’t know if you noticed this, but Nephi never says what is written there. But he does say that something is written in the Liahona.

And what is there causes great distress to Lehi. And I’ll tell you in a chapter or so what I think was written there. But one of the things that was perhaps written there, were directions for where Nephi should go and hunt. So he goes, he finds animals, he brings them back, everyone rejoices.

At this point, again this is an oft repeated pattern, but Laman and Lemuel now repent of their evil treatment of Nephi, and he forgives them. So that’s the end of this episode; they have the food, they probably build up another supply and they move on their way.

At the next stop, Ishmael, the father-in-law of all of Lehi’s sons, and of Zoram, dies. And so think about, just try to imagine the distress that his children would have. So we know that Ishmael has some sons that are with them; they come into the story a little bit later. And all of Lehi’s sons have married his daughters. There are several children. Imagine how these daughters felt.

Now when the daughter of a Jewish family in Jerusalem had her father die, she’s surrounded by a society, she’s surrounded by uncles, and brothers, grandfathers, perhaps, and a husband, and she also has a society that protects her. Something that is predictable, that she can feel safe. But these women, what they had was... now they all had husbands, agreed, but their marriages are basically relatively new, and they are now without their protector, their one rock that they carried with them, that brought them along into the wilderness, and now they feel totally abandoned. And now they’re entirely at the mercy of their husband’s family. That would be very scary. That’s why they’re so distressed. So they mourn the loss of Ishmael. And Laman and Lemuel can now perceive some vulnerability.

One of the key indicators into the character of Laman and Lemuel is the fact that they don’t ever come against Nephi, they don’t ever attack him with facts or at a reasonable time, and try to prevail upon him with arguments. They come to him when he’s the most vulnerable.

And so Laman and Lemuel here, they perceive some vulnerability to the support that Nephi has. And specifically, the sons of Ishmael are very upset, because their father has died, and they’re feeling scared. Their sisters are scared. And Laman and Lemuel pounce on this vulnerability, to try now to take over control of the group from what they perceive as being this Lehi – Nephi alliance.

Now, God has to intervene again; God intervened once already in these chapters when he deposited the Liahona at the doorstep on the day the were about to leave; and now he intervenes again. And the scriptures report that they actually hear the voice of the Lord telling them that they better shape up. And this humbles them… they were in fear of death, and this humbles them to the point where they’re again willing to repent, and again to be forgiven by Nephi. So then they move on.

Now begins their long trek through the wilderness. You may have heard that this is another of the parallels between the journey of Lehi’s family and the ancient Exodus out of Egypt. You may have heard the old saying that it took just a few days to get the Israelites out of Egypt, but it took forty years to get Egypt out of the Israelites. Whatever the truth of that saying is, that seems to be what’s going on here. This is where they finally make the transition, fully, to a nomadic people, totally self-sufficient.

Now the women, over the next eight years, there’s eight years total, we don’t know how much of that had already gone by, by the time Ishmael dies, but we pass the next eight years in just a few verses of scripture. Basically, they’re wandering through the wilderness, and the women are becoming as strong as the men. So we can presume the women are assisting in tasks like hunting, gathering, building the camp each night, striking the camp. Everybody is working together, and the women… they’re eating raw meat by the way, which we’ll discover the reason for, in just another chapter, and they’re wandering in the wilderness, and now they’re all united.

This is just life; this becomes just life to them. They are no longer constantly bemoaning their afflictions. And that’s the state they’re in when the reach a place called Bountiful.

Now, Nephi describes their path and scholars believe that this took… he says it’s a south south-east direction until finally they reach a place where they head out straight east. And if you look on a map, if you go three days journey south from Jerusalem you end up on the shores of the Red Sea, on the eastern shore, and if you travel south south-east, you’re going along Saudi Arabia and then you end up in Yemen. They say they came to the place of many waters which they called Irreantum, and they named Bountiful, because there was plenty to eat there, they had lots of supplies. So this was their final outpost. And now, they’ve ben travelling for so long they start to, once again, prepare themselves for another journey.

But the idea, I think was, with Laman and Lemuel at least, that they would stay in Bountiful for ever. And why wouldn’t they? They’re far enough… they’re now eight years removed from Jerusalem, they’re far enough away they don’t have to worry about Babylon or any angry Jews following and bringing them back. There’s no question of retribution, there’s no question of pursuit. The only question is; where are we going to settle down? And Laman and Lemuel are probably very content in Bountiful. It doesn’t seem like there’s a ton of work to be done

The plans of God, however, are different. And Nephi at this point gets a revelation. “Arise and go up into the mountain.” Now, Nephi has been called into the mountain once before, when he asked about his father’s vision. And then this was a spiritual removal, where he found himself in an exceeding high mountain. In this case it seems to be a physical mountain, so he goes into the mountain to pray, and there God tells him he’s going to build a ship.

A couple of interesting things about this. First of all, notice it’s Nephi who now gets the vision that his people are going to move. And I think that most of us pass on that little detail totally unremarked. We get to this point in the story, and we figure “Oh yeah, Lehi and Nephi are both receiving revelations.” No, there is always a clear line of direction from God. God’s Kingdom is a kingdom of order.

So here’s where we go back to what was written on the Liahona. I don’t know whether this is true, this is just conjecture of mine, but I think the reason that Nephi wrote about that event was because emotionally it stuck out in his mind. My assumption is, that that was the point that God told Lehi “After this, Nephi’s going to be the prophet, and I want you to listen to him. He’s going to guide the people as you have up until now.” That was probably the reason why Laman and Lemuel were so upset with him, at the death of Ishmael, because now he literally is the leader, in name as well as in fact.

All of this is just my supposition, but it just seems very interesting that Nephi is the one now to receive the revelation that his people will build a ship and they’ll get on the ship and embark for who knows where.

So the insight that most people get from this experience that Nephi has, is that, rather than say “Oh God, I don’t know how to build a ship. Can you please help me? I don’t know the first step of what to do.” But no, he goes immediately to “Show me where I can find ore, that I can make tools, that I can then use to make the timbers, that will go into making the ship. None of which I know how to make.”

He doesn’t worry about the things he doesn’t know how to do; he worries about the thing he does know how to do. And so, here’s an interesting point, I want to bring this up about metallurgy. Nephi seems to be very familiar with the process of smelting ore into metal and making things out of metal. You’ll notice in this chapter they build a ship in way that he describes as “not being after the manner of men.”

In other words, the ship is totally different from any other ship he’s ever seen. And maybe Nephi has been down to the beach before, it would have been called Joppa at that time, and maybe he hasn’t. Maybe he’s seen a ship, and maybe he hasn’t, but he seems to know what they’re like a little bit at least, and he says, “We didn’t build it after the manner of men.” He doesn’t say, you know… and this is interesting, because I think I would, he doesn’t say, “I’ve seen ships with a square bottom, and I built it with a deep keel,” or, “I’ve seen ships with a square sail, and I made a triangular sail, even though I don’t know why I was doing that.” He doesn’t give us any of those details, he doesn’t go into detail at all, about how the ship is created.

What does he go into detail about? He talks about making the tools, and making the bellows that that is going to fire his forge. To me what this says is that Nephi actually was a blacksmith before he left Jerusalem. I know that’s a very random observation, but to me, I was reading this and I was thinking, “this guy is really enthusiastic about his metal working,” and I bet you that he was a blacksmith.

Now Lehi’s family wasn’t poor; in the first lesson when we talked about “born of goodly parents.” What that means is they’re rich enough that Nephi would have been instructed in the *learning* of his father. They were rich enough that he could have learning and an education. And presumably Laman and Lemuel as well. But it doesn’t mean they didn’t have to work. So I kind of think that that was Nephi’s trade.

That would also explain his steel bow. He would have taken pride in this bow if he made it himself. He also makes a little bit of a big deal about how he kindles his forge in the first place. He strikes two stones together to make fire. And he takes this opportunity to tell us that God hasn’t let us make fire in the wilderness.

Now I get a couple of things from that observation. Number one: the fact that God wanted them… and this is the explicit reason… God wanted them to know that he was the one who was guiding them through the wilderness. And so he wanted them to understand that they could not have done it without him. He made their meat sweet unto them. Now they were eating raw meat on their entire journey. Nephi even says our women got used to living on raw meat in the wilderness.

If you were traveling through the wilderness, living solely on raw meat, you would probably die without too much time going by, because it’s just not healthy for people to eat raw meat. So this is a testimony to the fact that God was watching over them and blessing their food. But also, another reason for it might have been they were traveling through… they weren’t the only nomadic people in this area, and it may have been that God was helping them avoid detection by what would have been hostile tribes or hostile clans of other nomads in the area. They were escaping… Nephi never says they encountered any other people in eight years. This was a peopled peninsular, so that might have been one of the big reasons why they couldn’t have fire. But finally, they’re in the land Bountiful and Nephi can build a fire.

So he’s really excited about his forge. He builds his tools, and then he builds the ship, and he doesn’t say a ton about that, except that Laman and Lemuel don’t want to help. And this is in chapter 17 and this is really the meat of our lesson today, is Nephi’s conflict here with Laman and Lemuel.

Now Laman and Lemuel at first are saying, “Nephi, you don’t know how to build a ship, why would you take such pride in thinking you know how to build a ship?” So you’ll notice that Laman and Lemuel are not saying at this point, “Nephi, we’re going to kill you.” They’re just saying, “we don’t want to build a ship and we don’t think you can do it.” That’s actually a reasonable, I think, a reasonable viewpoint for them to have. But we’ll get into how their viewpoint evolves over the course of this discussion.

I also might think… obviously they have a lot of testimony that God is guiding them, but I also might think “Hey, I don’t want to trust my life, my family, my kids to a ship that you might build. You’ve never built a ship in your life.” I might say “That idea is crazy.” And there are a lot of Sunday School lessons out there where the teacher, just to get you thinking in the framework of the story, they say, “Aren’t we all similar to Laman and Lemuel in this way?” It is true that you can find a lot of parallels between normal human behaviour and Laman and Lemuel, but remember, Laman and Lemuel are evil murderers, they’re would-be murderers, and they’re awful, awful people. You probably don’t have that many similarities with Laman and Lemuel. They’re terrible, terrible people and terrible brothers, especially.

So, at the beginning of the discussion, that’s their point. And Nephi begins now this very impassioned argument. And this is an argument with a lot of rich parallels in the scriptures. The first parallel, the most obvious, the one we’ve already made a couple of times, is Nephi is pointing out the similarities between what they’ve been going through and the Exodus from Egypt led by Moses.

So first of all, remember the Exodus began when the Israelites come out of Egypt. They encamp by the Res Sea and then there is a hostile force possibly behind them, they’re fleeing a place of great wickedness, and then God goes before them and shows them the way through supernatural means, through this pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And God leads them through the wilderness.

As they go, he provides food for them. When they don’t have enough meat and they complain, he brings animals to them. When they don’t have enough water, he tells the prophet how to find some, or how to bring it forth. And the prophet is the government to them, he is the guide, he is the provider, and God is basically giving them everything. He talks about, Nephi talks about the manna they have.

And it’s obvious if you read this, what Nephi is doing is, he is telling the story of the Exodus again, but the implicit parallel is: we are the people of Israel. I am in the role of Moses. You are in the role of the wicked Israelites who rebelled against Moses. And so that’s the point of view. If you pay attention, that is the point of view from which Nephi is telling this story. It’s a very provocative way to tell this story. It is not a peaceful, let me put it this way, it is not a peacemaker’s thing to do. He’s not trying to placate Laman and Lemuel. He’s trying to show them the wickedness of their ways and they are never going to take that well.

And so this conversation, it’s almost impossible for it to have a peaceful resolution, because the words that he is saying are so provocative.

Now I want to show you a couple of times in which this same tactic was used by prophets in the scriptures, in the Bible in fact. First is [Matthew chapter 23](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/nt/matt/23?lang=eng). What Jesus does in his final days in Jerusalem with the scribes and the Pharisees is he says, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” He points out all the ways in which they aren’t following the rules that they’re teaching. These rules are for everyone else, but they don’t believe they’re for themselves. Oh the showier parts, the parts that bring glory to obey, they’re fine with. But the parts that actually require work and quiet devotion, they’re not ok with.

So that’s the state of mind of the scribes and Pharisees, and Jesus points it out in a hundred ways and draws all these parallels. Between the scribes and the Pharisees and what he calls their fathers. Their fathers, to Jesus, are those wicked Israelites who killed the ancient prophets. And at the end, the culmination of this rebuke from Jesus to these Pharisees is, “Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers” [[Matthew 23:32](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/nt/matt/23.32?lang=eng#p31)] So Jesus tells them explicitly, “I know you’re trying to kill me. So go ahead, fill up the measure of your fathers. Do exactly what your fathers did.”

What Jesus is saying is: the great narrative of history, the story of the people of God, has two sides to it. There are those people who are the prophets and those who are willing to humbly follow them, and those people who constantly fight against them, even though, in name, they are the people of God. This is the great conflict that has existed throughout the centuries. “And I’m on one side,” Jesus is saying, “and you’re on the other. So then go ahead, and fill out your point in the story, unless you want to humble yourself and change, you’re going to act out what your role in the story is.” And they did. They crucified the Lord.

That’s Matthew 23. This happens again in [Acts chapter 7](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/nt/acts/7?lang=eng). Stephen is before the Sanhedrin, this is the same Jewish council that has condemned Jesus to death, and they ask him for his testimony, and he tells the entire story of the Old Testament. From the same perspective that I’ve just outlined. There is this real dichotomy going throughout Jewish history, of the prophets on one side, and the people who humbly follow them. And then there are those people who constantly rebel. And they can never quite seem to get onboard with God’s plan and get obedient enough that God’s blessings can really flow from heaven. Instead they would much rather persecute, and even cast out, and even kill, execute the prophets. And Stephen says, “That’s what you’re going to do with me. You are these wicked Israelites and I am the modern manifestation of these prophets. We are acting out our roles in an ancient story, and unless you want to change, humble yourself and change, then that is what you’re going to do.”

This was very provocative, in both cases. But is wasn’t wrong. We know that it wasn’t wrong because Jesus himself did it. It’s the prophet bearing powerful testimony, that you need to humble yourself, and if you choose, you can act out the role of a wicked person. But what’s going to happen is what’s always happened anytime anyone has ever acted out this role. The judgements of God will follow.

So now back to Nephi. This is actually hundreds of years, obviously, before Christ. Nephi has the same sort of dialogue with Laman and Lemuel. He says, “You *are* in the *role*. This is the role you are in. Let me tell you how this story has gone in the past. The Israelites are constantly rebelling against the prophet, and they have to be constantly chastised by the justice of God.” And he says, “It was righteousness that saved the Israelites. Look, when they arrived in Israel,” (this is Nephi talking, I’m paraphrasing,) “when the Israelites arrived in the Land of Canaan, what happened? They displaced the people who had been there. It wasn’t just because God liked them because they were Israelites. God liked them because they were righteous. Do you think that God would have cursed the Canaanites if they’d been righteous too?”

He says this, and says, “No, I tell you, that God is not a respecter of persons. He would have totally blessed the Canaanites if they’d been righteous, but they were ripened in iniquity, and that’s why he allowed the Israelites to cast them forth, to kick them out of their land and conquer them.”

Now, the point that Nephi is making is important, because it was the very point, I bought this up earlier, that Jeremiah was trying to make to the Jerusalem… the denizens of Jerusalem. He was saying, “Look, just because you’re Israelites, that’s not enough. You have to have the righteousness that goes along with it. You worship the true God of heaven, but that actually works to your condemnation when you break the commandments. What you have to do, is not only have the true commandments, and have the true form of worship, but you have to walk in those statutes. And if you will do that, then God can bless you. But if you won’t, God doesn’t care that you’re his people in name. He can find other people. He wants your obedience, and he doesn’t want your outward show.”

This was the message of Jeremiah to the people of Jerusalem, and we can see here that Laman and Lemuel have brought this attitude of the people of Jerusalem - the very people who sought to take Lehi’s life before he left - Lehi and Nephi have brought a contingent of those angry Jerusalem Jews with them into the wilderness. Laman and Lemuel have preserved this attitude through eight years in the wilderness, through constant repetitions of this wickedness, rebuke, repentance cycle, they’ve kept their attitude of, “We know what’s best, and we’re willing to kill, we’re willing to resist the will of God through his prophet, to the point where we’re willing to kill, to prevent ourselves from being under the sway of a prophet.”

And that is the attitude of the Jews in Jerusalem. That is why they were destroyed and exiled into Babylon. That’s the very reason for centuries God has said, through the prophets, “If you don’t repent, you will be destroyed.” They’re showing the very attitude. So Nephi bears a powerful testimony against it, and he cannot do otherwise, because he is the prophet.

And so they decide… Now at the end he shows some vulnerability. He says, “Behold the Spirit of the Lord has now overtaken my frame, to the point where I’m now physically weak.” And only then do Laman and Lemuel notice their attitude earlier, “We don’t feel like doing what you’re saying” and now their attitude is, “Oh, we feel like killing you, because we can see that you’re weak.”

This, again, this powerful insight into the character of Laman and Lemuel, they are cowards. They will strike when they think Nephi is weak. But what has been their choice all along? I mean there are 360 degrees on a compass, they could have taken any one of them, any one of the 359 other than the way Nephi was going. But instead they constantly stayed with Nephi and Lehi, rather than just go off on their own way.

They always had the freedom to do that. Nephi could have not have compelled them to follow him, all of these eight years. They could have snuck away, the way Nephi will later. They could have done any number of things. But instead they follow, and complain about it. Because they’re cowards. They don’t believe in their ability to lead themselves. They do need a leader, but they want the glory of being the leader. We’ll get into this a little bit more, I believe next week, when we talk about Nephi actually leaving the company of Laman and Lemuel. But for now, recognise, that Laman and Lemuel’s position is not consistent. They say they want the leadership, but they never actually lead. They only can complain, and threaten murder. They are the worst sort of followers you could possibly have. They’re absolute poison.

And now they’re going to grab Nephi and throw him into the sea. Now what happens to a body when you throw it into the sea, it’s not around anymore. They want to commit a secret murder. Not only do they want to kill Nephi, but doubtless they’re going to claim later, “Oh, we don’t know what happened to Nephi. His body isn’t here. He probably left.” Right? So they want to kill him, and they want to cover it up.

And luckily for Nephi, the power of God is with him. He threatens them. “The power of God is filling me. Anyone who touches me at this point will wither like a dry reed.” We can only assume it’s true. Nephi doesn’t say, “I was bluffing them,” or anything. He says, “I could feel the power of God inside me.” And I don’t know what it would look like to wither as a dry reed, but I’m sure it would have led to their death.

Now a few days go by and God tells Nephi, “Look, the height of that power I put within you, the edge has been taken off a little bit, but I want you to show Laman and Lemuel, the only thing they understand is force, so I want you to show them that you weren’t bluffing, and just touch them a little bit, and I will shock them.” There are two words used here. God says “…I will *shock them*.”

And then Nephi touches them, and the way Nephi describes it is, “The power of the Lord did shake them.” So we have two word: *shake* and *shock*. I don’t know why two words are used, and I don’t know exactly what form this took, some sort of physical manifestation to Laman and Lemuel, that this power was real, that they were in actual threat of physical annihilation. And this seems to motivate them to be willing to work to build the ship until it’s done. Once this happens, and they work together, their united efforts in short order, or at least in a few verses of scripture, lead to a completed ship. And the ship is done so well that everybody can look at it and see that it’s amazing.

And that’s all that Nephi says about it. He doesn’t describe it in any great detail. If it were I who had done this, I think I wouldn’t be able to resist describing a little bit of the workmanship of the ship, because it’s a miracle that the ship would be there on the shore of the Arabian Sea, part of the Indian Ocean! The idea that someone in this epoch of history could build a ship that would carry them not only across the Indian Ocean, but then across the Pacific, from the shores of Yemen to what we can presume are the shores of Ecuador or Chile, as most scholars believe is the landing place of the Lehites, is almost impossible. It’s an absolute miracle that Nephi was able to accomplish this and build this ship. But he doesn’t spend a lot of time on it. He just says, and he uses an interesting turn of phrase to describe sailing, instead of saying, “we sailed away,” he says “we were driven forth before the wind.” He says that a couple of times.

I think that’s interesting. It seems to me like something that wouldn’t occur to Joseph Smith if he were writing for himself, I would say. I’m sure there was a word for sailing, but instead he says, “We were driven forth before the wind.”

Now, he says, “Many days go by,” so, there is many days before this event and many days after this event. It would have taken months for this voyage, and we don’t have an account of the islands that they passed. They would have had to put into land at several points to take on water. There are a lot of… do they sail around the bottom of Indonesia and between New Guinea and Australia? Do they sail north through the Philippines? We don’t know any of those things we can’t put any of it together. We don’t have an account of any of it. We only know that they sailed for many days, and then Laman and Lemuel, the sons of Ishmael, their wives, they start to make merry.

This looks exactly like a drunken party, except that Nephi doesn’t report that they were drinking anything. There wouldn’t have been any problem with them carrying wine with them in skins. There was nothing against that in the Law of Moses. So they may well have had wine with them onboard, but Nephi does not report that they were drinking anything. But it looks exactly like a drunken party, and to the point where Nephi feels like there’s singing and dancing and carrying on, and probably what was happening was they were mocking sacred things. This is almost certainly, in my mind, what was going on, because Nephi feels like it’s imperative on him to intervene.

And he knows that it’s going to cause a conflict. He knows if he says a word they’re going to say, “Why are you trying to rule over us?” The whole point, the reason why they’re doing it, is to get under Nephi’s skin, and to show him they don’t have to obey his idea of what right and wrong is. So Nephi would have been wary of this; he’s not an idiot. He knows he’s going to frustrate and upset his brothers. But he cannot remain silent. That’s another indication to me that at this point Nephi is the prophet.

So he rebukes them. What do they do? They tie him up. And it doesn’t matter who asks them; Nephi’s wife, their own mother and father who are… and there’s a very poetic description of the toll this takes on Lehi and Sariah, in [1 Nephi 18:18](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/1-ne/18.18?lang=eng#p17). Normally, parallelism, (this is Hebrew poetry), parallelism is the same idea repeated twice. This is the same idea repeated three times, with different words each time, and they’re dramatically different. Three poetic and emotional, yet different, ways of describing Lehi and Sariah’s misery, so I recommend that verse to you, 1 Nephi 18:18. This is an example of Hebrew poetry. And we don’t have the Hebrew, but translated Hebrew poetry.

And eventually the only thing, again, that can prevail upon Lama and Lemuel is the threat of actual death. There is a storm. The minute they tie Nephi up, the Liahona ceases to work. Then a storm arises, and the storm blows for four days and it gets so fierce and so intense that the ship is about to founder. And only the imminent threat of death works to prevail upon Laman and Lemuel to the point where they’re willing to untie Nephi.

Now he’s been tied to a mast for three days. He’s been upright. You can imagine the loss of circulation in hi extremities, he even describes it a little bit. But here again we have an example of the fantastic character of Nephi. He says, “I didn’t waste time worrying about the problems that I had. I immediately gave thanks to God that I was now released.” And he immediately goes to the Liahona, and the Liahona instantly works for him. I’ll tell you something about that: if you had been tied up for three days, you would be so miserable and bitter – I shouldn’t say this, I would be – I would be so miserable and bitter I doubt I would be feeling the Spirit like that. But Nephi has probably been constantly praying and humbling himself before God, expressing the fact that he’s grateful his family is still safe. Whatever he had to do, to remain in the Spirit, he was doing it, so instantly he was released, he can go to the Liahona and it will provide him with the direction he needs. Isn’t that powerful?

And then, the second thing is, he’s not bemoaning his fate for the things that he’s just suffered. He’s grateful for the things he has. Lehi later on would admonish his children, “You are to go out into the world and act, rather than be acted upon.” And Laman and Lemuel never seem to grasp that very simple message. In fact, most people of the earth never grasp that simple message. We all feel like we’re being acted upon. Something happens in our lives, we blame God. But what Nephi does is he takes a step, he acts. He refuses to sit in a state where he believes he’s a victim of circumstance. Instead, he believes he is somebody called upon by God to act, rather than be acted upon. To be grateful, rather than to be bitter.

That is the character of Nephi. And incidentally, again, notice it is Nephi, and not Lehi, who looks into the Liahona to get directions about where everyone should go. Another indication that Nephi is now the spiritual lead, the prophet, of this group.

So again, they sail for many days and finally they land at the promised land. They pitch their tents; they plant their crops. They’ve carried seeds with them, they’ve bought a lot of supplies, perhaps even some livestock, and they’ve brought seeds. So they plant them and they immediately bear fruit. They’re in a very fertile place, they’re in a tropical climate, and they have no problem immediately beginning agriculture. Now the feel like they can settle down. Now there’s no danger, because they don’t believe there are any people around.

And it doesn’t seem like, as a group, they encounter any denizens of the land. So, wherever it was that they landed, whether there were other people there or not, at any point they don’t seem to encounter people that did not come from Jerusalem with them. Except for, as we will discover later, the Mulekites, another group that travelled from Jerusalem. And they discover evidence that there was yet another voyage from the old world much earlier. So the Mulekites and the Jaredites. But of actual natives of the land, they don’t encounter any, we don’t have any accounts of that in the Book of Mormon.

And so they feel like they have a lot of freedom to now begin agriculture, rather than be nomads. They can now settle down, and once again, begin the process of becoming city-dwellers.

Nephi now makes mention in chapter 19, that he makes plates of ore. So again, metallurgy and metal working on the part of Nephi, the blacksmith, as I have come to think of him.

Ok, I’m going to draw attention to one more controversy before we go into the Isaiah chapters. And our time is short, so I’m going to do it quickly. In chapter 22… and this has actually been a concern of mine in the past. I remember encountering these verses and having this question come up for me, and it was only in preparing for this lesson this week that I found what is to me is a very satisfactory resolution to the concern. But I’ll tell you about the concern. First of all, in chapter 19, now Nephi, he waxes spiritual, he’s been recounting events, but now he talks about the lessons, the spiritual lessons, that they’re getting from all of this. And I recommend this chapter to you. But he talks about the destructions that await the people of Nephi and the source of the prophesies that let him know these destructions are coming. Some of it is his own revelations. He says “The angel…” in chapter 19 verse 10, [[1 Nephi 19:10](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/1-ne/19.10?lang=eng#p10)] Nephi talks about a bunch of different sources. He says “The angel has this, the prophet Zenock has said this” and these are lost prophets, the prophets that he’s about to mention. They are from books that are presumably on the Brass Plates that we don’t currently have today. So they’re lost books of the Old Testament for us.

But he says, “The angel said this, the prophet Zenock said this, the prophet Neum said this,” (which is probably not the same as the prophet Nahum which we have in our current Old Testament) “and the prophet Zenos said this.” And he mentions Zenos last. So I want to go into that a little bit, because it will become important.

Zenos gives a certain description about what will happen when God has to bring judgement upon the wicked. And then for seven verses – 10 through 16 – Nephi talks about “the prophet has said this” and every time he’s talking about *the* prophet in those verses, he’s talking about Zenos. And we know that because it’s book-ended by mentions of Zenos by name. So verse 10 and 16 Nephi says specifically, “this is the prophet Zenos I’m talking about.” And in between there, he says “saith the prophet… saith the prophet… saith the prophet.” Alright.

That’s just a little bit of background as we go into what Nephi does next. So then he talks about how he’s teaching his brethren, they’re in the new world, and Nephi sees his brothers need to know where they fit in. “I gave them this story, before we left the old world, I gave them this story of the Exodus, where they’re the wicked people, and I was the prophet, but I want them now to have a new story, a new light to see themselves in. And so I’m going to tell them the story that Isaiah told.” And he even says at the end, this well-known verse at the end of chapter 19, it’s verse 23, [[1 Nephi 19:23](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/1-ne/19.23?lang=eng#p23)] where Nephi says, “I wanted them to understand God and the plan of God, so I taught them from the books of Moses; but that they might more fully understand Jesus Christ and the plan of their Redeemer, I also taught them from the book of Isaiah. And I also *likened the scriptures unto us*, so it could be for our profit and learning.”

Now to me, to most people, what they hear when they read that is, what he tried to is, he tried to see himself in the exploits of earlier people. We know that he did that, because he had just done it with Laman and Lemuel, when he talked to them about the Exodus, right? He cast them as characters in the Exodus.

But it goes beyond that for me. What I actually think is happening, Nephi is changing, not only is he reciting scripture to them, but he is changing the scriptures on purpose of Isaiah, in order to apply more fully to their circumstance.

Now one of the things he does is in chapter 20, which is analogous to… it almost a perfect transcription of Isaiah 48. There are little minor changes here and there. One of the major changes is in the first part where it says “those who are come out of the waters of Judah.” And in the Book of Mormon version it says “…or the waters of baptism.”

But in the Bible, in Isaiah 48, there’s no mention of baptism.

So a lot of people think, “Ok, what Nephi was reading was a more complete version of the Book of Isaiah,” and in Isaiah’s original it talked about the waters of Judah being equal to, equivalent to, the waters of baptism.

And I actually have a different take, What I think is, Nephi… this was Nephi “likening the scriptures” to his people.

So what do we know about the waters of Judah? I actually was curious. What did Isaiah mean when he talked about “come forth from the waters of Judah”? And the general consensus among scriptural scholars is, and I believe this, the “waters of Judah” means if you have come forth out of the *font* of Judah, the *fountain* of Judah, and remember we talked about a fountain being a source when we talked about the vision of Nephi. The source of water is its fountain, the spring where water comes forth.

So in other words, those of you who have come out of the “waters of Judah” are the tribe of Judah. Anyone descended from Judah. And what do we know about the Nephites? They are not the Lehites. They are descendant from the tribe of Joseph. They are not from the “waters of Judah”.

And so it would seem, from that pronouncement, that this scripture doesn’t apply to anyone Nephi is talking to. And in order to make these scriptures apply, what Nephi does is he adds another condition. He says, “if you’ve come out of the waters of Judah – if you are descendant from the tribe of Judah – or if you’ve come through the waters of baptism.” So to me, a lot of people think Joseph Smith added this, so that we would today feel like they had baptism in ancient times. These are detractors of the Book of Mormon. Not, obviously, this isn’t a Latter-day Saint viewpoint.

But what I think is, that Nephi… and what a lot of Latter-day Saint scholars think is that this particular reference to baptism was taken out at some point, from the original words of Isaiah, and what I personally think is that Nephi added these words to the words of Isaiah, so that he could “liken the scriptures” to his brothers.

He does it again in the next chapter. And this time it’s very explicit. The first part of chapter 21, the first half of the first verse, in not present in Isaiah’s original. And basically, he’s emphasising the fact that he’s talking to denizens of the isles of the sea. He and his brethren don’t understand the size of the continent they’ve landed on. They believe that they are denizen of it, now they live on an isle of the sea, and great are the promises of God to the isles of the sea. So now what Nephi wants to do, he wants to emphasise that this is us, so he adds this little half of a verse at the beginning of chapter 21.

The point of 1 Nephi 20 and 21, the original meaning of Isaiah 48 and 49, is to say that the Israelites have not been true to their covenants, and they must be refined. Their only way for God to get them to listen is in the furnace of affliction. Now does that sound familiar? This describes Laman and Lemuel to a tee. They haven’t been true to their covenants, and the only way that God can change them is to send them great threats of destruction. But the promises are: God will lead them from exile, just like he did in the Exodus, when the day comes that they are righteous.

So this is the promise of God, to people like Laman and Lemuel. Is there any wonder that Nephi would choose these chapters to share with his brethren?

Now in 21 he says, “the isles of the sea will hear the voice of Jehovah’s prophet.” So again, Nephi is the prophet, and he’s talking to the people who live on the isles of the sea. In chapter 21, or Isaiah 49, what Nephi is doing by reading this chapter is he’s saying, “I am this modern-day person” modern-day for them, “who is called upon to bring the word of God to you. I’m your current prophet. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and God is going to gather us from exile. We’re going to be brought back into the land of Jerusalem, and there is going to be so much abundance, there won’t be room for us to receive it. And those who oppressed us will in future times serve us.”

So these are the promises of God to those who have been scattered on the isles of the sea, and Nephi wants his brethren to feel the truth of those promises as a last ditch effort to avoid the fate that Nephi has seen in his vision, where he and his brothers and their posterity fight for a thousand years. He’s trying with everything he has to avoid that horrible fate.

So, what was the doubt that I had, what was the concern that I had in chapter 22? I wanted to go over 20 and 21 first. In chapter 22 Nephi spends about 14 verses summarising the teaching of Isaiah, and then he does something that a lot of people have a hard time understanding. He quotes a scripture, or he references an idea, as some people understand it. But what it appears to be, and this is very hard, it appears to be a quote of the prophet Malachi.

So Nephi says, specifically, that those who are proud, and those who do wickedly, will be like stubble, and in the coming day they shall be burned. Now this looks very much… this looks very similar to [Malachi 4:1](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/ot/mal/4.1?lang=eng). And later on in this chapter, that’s in [1 Nephi 22:15](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/1-ne/22.15?lang=eng#p14). Later on in this same chapter in verse 24, Nephi describes the joy of those who are righteous, and they will be “led up like calves of the stall.” Now this is a very specific phrase that occurs in the King James Version of Malachi 4:2. And you don’t find it anywhere else. And what does it mean to be a “calf of the stall”?

Now I had a hard time with this, because I thought, “That looks like a scriptural quote, I’m gonna look it up.” And then I found out it was in Malachi, and then I thought, “Wait a minute, Malachi is in the very last part of the Old Testament.” He may well have been the final prophet in the Old Testament; we know that he’s the final book, but chronologically, he may also have been last. And some scholars put his time frame around 400 BC, that’s close enough for what we’re talking about now.

It’s well after the time when Lehi’s family left Jerusalem. There’s no way that Nephi had Malachi’s writings in the Brass Plates. Not only because they were separated by thousands of miles, but they were separated by hundreds of years. It hadn’t been written yet. Nephi could not have quoted Malachi.

And so I had a tough time with this. I thought, “Wow. I don’t get it,” you know. I struggled with it, and I forgot it. This was a few years ago. And as I was researching it this time, I found an interesting blog post, and it was something that I had never thought of.

So Nephi does what appears to be, in verse 15, in verse 24, and later on in 2 Nephi as well, he does what appears to be quoting the prophet Malachi. So one of the explanations, and this explanation was never very satisfying for me, for what really happened there, was that Nephi wasn’t actually quoting Malachi, he just happened to expressing similar ideas. Because Joseph Smith was so steeped in the language of the King James Version, it came out using the same words.

Now that is possible, but the turn of phrase, and the ordering of words, and the proximity of words to each other was just so similar, that I thought these two passages have to be related. And, I still believe that. And so I found this interesting post, and I don’t know the man’s name who posted it, I do know it’s a man because he puts a picture of himself, his username is “Stisa”, and the title is “[What is Malachi doing in 1st and 2nd Nephi?](https://www.reddit.com/r/lds/comments/c9ydvl/what_is_malachi_doing_in_1st_and_2nd_nephi/)”. I won’t go into it too much. I’m going to give you a broad outline. I recommend if you’re interested in this, I recommend that you look that up. And there are plenty of other articles since that I’ve found since that talk about a similar idea, but this is where I found it first.

And basically, the idea… and there is substantial, the reason that I like it is there’s substantial support for this idea in the text of 1 Nephi itself. The idea is that Malachi and Nephi were both quoting from the same source. The source that they’re quoting from is the prophet Zenos. That’s why I spent so much time mentioning the prophet Zeno before. So in chapter 19, Nephi quotes Zenos extensively and he calls him *the* prophet. And then, here again, Nephi both of these times when he appears to be quoting Malachi, so now the original quotation of Zenos was in chapter 19, now we’re in chapter 22 where Nephi seems to be quoting Malachi, and close to both of those points at which Nephi uses language from Malachi, there is a call back to one of the concepts that he first introduced when he was quoting Zenos.

And he says, “saith the prophet,” in chapter 22. We already know that Nephi considers Zenos to be *the* prophet in a special way, because he called him that several times, when the others he mentioned only by name. And so it seems to be evident that, there is a thematic tie, he mentions the same prophesies that Zenos said before, and then he mentions something that looks like Malachi. And so there is a tie, each time Nephi appears to be quoting Malachi, there is a tie to chapter 19 where he is actually quoting Zenos. And they are found in close proximity to each other. It happens close to verse 15, and it happens close to verse 24.

That seems to me to be very strong evidence that Nephi was quoting the prophet Zenos, which he did have in the brass plates. And then later on, we don’t know exactly where Malachi got his turn of phrase from, but we can presume, if the prophet Zenos existed, if Nephi had that record, then Malachi might have had it as well, he may have read these same turns of phrase from Zenos, then included it in his writings without giving it attribution, which many prophets did. We have evidence of that happening all over the Old Testament. But sometimes, we can presume, if a book has been lost, and there is a quotation, we wouldn’t know the source, we would think it originated with Malachi.

This is quite fascinating, and it’s quite convincing, for me. But my real point is this; what happens when you come across something in the Book of Mormon, that you just don’t have an explanation for? For me, years ago, it was finding what appeared to be a quotation from Malachi in the book of First Nephi. I thought, “Wow, that’s impossible!” And I’m not satisfied by the explanation that he really wasn’t quoting Malachi. It does seem to me to be a quotation of Malachi. There’s no way that these two things don’t have the same source. And it’s impossible because Nephi is purported to have left Jerusalem in 600 BC, and Malachi didn’t live until 400 BC. And so I’m confused. I’m lost, and this doesn’t appear right.

So what did I do? Did I leave the Church because I had a concern about the book of Mormon? Did I start talking about how it’s impossible that Joseph Smith translated this book, but he probably wrote it? No, I didn’t do either of those things.

I relied upon the witness that I had already received, and Spirit that the Book of Mormon had already felt, and I relied upon the many evidences in the other direction. There are so many things that cannot be explained if Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, but there are, in my humble opinion, there are so many more that can’t be explained if Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon. There are so many evidences in favour of the Book of Mormon being an ancient work of scripture, rather than a modern work of fiction, that it would be absolutely unsupportable as a hypothesis that Joseph Smith wrote this book.

And so rather than jump straight from belief to unbelief, I allowed this doubt to sit, and I allowed myself to think about it, and to wonder about it, and actually to be ok with feeling like I didn’t have all the answers. And later on… now it occurs to me, in my opinion that was a good response. But later on, I realised that other people had found the answer to my question, and it occurred to me, if I had been more willing to have faith and say, “Ok, I decide that the Book of Mormon is 100% true and I’m going to find out how it’s possible that Nephi would have had this,” it’s possible I would have been the one writing this blog post and saying, “Look at this interesting insight. You know, Malachi and Nephi could’ve been quoting the same source, and here’s my idea what the source was, and here’s all this evidence to back it up.”

I wasn’t the person to find that. Now I don’t feel guilty about that. My point it, I think I responded well to having a concern in my mind about what God intended for me. But also, there was another level of response that I could have had. And you and I could be faced with this kind of doubt, and it could be that the doubt comes up about our own place in the Plan of Salvation. Or it could be that the doubt comes up about the reality of modern-day prophets, or the fact that God exists at all.

And when these doubts come up, we need to love God with our mind. Meaning, we need to find a reason why it’s easy to believe in God, rather than find all the reasons why it’s hard. Anyone can find a reason why it’s hard. Even Laman and Lemuel can do that. But there’s always some sort of Liahona that Nephi could go find and say, “Look, if God isn’t real, if God is not guiding us, then how do you explain this?”

Now I believe that all of you have some sort of Liahona in your life that you can pull out and say, “I can explain a lot of things, and I don’t like some of the things that are happening in my life, but here is something that absolutely cannot be explained, without the intervention of God in my life.” In this case it’s the Liahona. So, what is the Liahona for your life? How have you guaranteed that you’re going to love God with your mind? Remember that we’re called upon to love God with all our heart, mind and strength. How are you going to guarantee that you’re going to love God with your mind, when hard times come?

The main idea of these chapters is summarised in one very short verse, this is [1 Nephi 22:28](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/1-ne/22.28?lang=eng#p27). Nephi says, “But, behold, all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people shall dwell safely in the Holy One of Israel if it so be that they will repent.”

Now let’s not be like Laman and Lemuel, and be threatened with death and destruction, before we will humble ourselves and get on the side of God’s people and God’s prophets. Let’s be, as we look back at the story of the Exodus, and we cast ourselves in one of the two sides of that eternal conflict, let’s be on the side of the prophets of God and those who are humble enough to follow them, is the lesson of these chapters in the wonderful Book of Mormon. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.