

# 2 NEPHI 1-5 – S03E06

“We lived after the manner of happiness”

Like Moses before him, Lehi gave his people a series of warnings before they entered the promised land. And like Moses before him, Lehi knew exactly how many of these warnings would be listened to, or ignored.

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

Welcome to Gospel Talktrine, your favourite Come Follow Me podcast, even when it comes out on Saturday night. I’m Mark Holt, so glad to have you with me, and for those of you who are just joining me, if you have a question you’d like to ask the program, please send me an email, at gt@gospeltalktrine.com.

## Listener questions

Our first question this week comes from Jason, who asks, “I was just wondering, why are 1st and 2nd Nephi separated into two books?”

My guess on that… well I can’t say exactly Jason, but the beginning of the Book of Mormon explains that anything in italics was inserted later, so when you see a chapter heading that’s written in italics you can know that was a modern innovation. And so therefore, when we see, at the first page of 2 Nephi, the big type across the top of the page says “THE SECOND BOOK OF NEPHI”, and then “An account of the death of Lehi…” et cetera, that is all in block text, and not italics, and therefore we know it was on the original plates that Joseph Smith translated.

So it wasn’t a choice by the modern editors, or even by Joseph Smith the translator, this was a choice of Nephi. So we can only guess why it was separated into two books.

My guess as to the reason is that now they’ve arrived in the promised land and it felt like thematically that a new chapter was unfolding, if you will. And so that’s my answer to your question, thank you for that question, Jason.

Bella asks; “I was reading 1 Nephi 22, and I began thinking of the promises given to Abraham and the blessings promised to his posterity the House of Israel. I’m a little confused; is the Abrahamic Covenant the actual promise that his seed will be blessed, but not what his children have to do to be blessed? Not sure if that makes sense. Essentially, I’m trying to figure out how will the blessings be received by the House of Israel? Is it through the Abrahamic Covenant, or by the making and keeping of our covenants? Also, is there any connection between the Abrahamic Covenant, and the new and everlasting covenant?

What a wonderful question Bella. So I’ll give you my opinion. First of all, if you read in… I think I misquoted this a couple of weeks ago, if you read in the Book of Genesis, and it’s [Genesis 15](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/ot/gen/15?lang=eng), and thinking back I think I said it was chapter 12, but you’ll notice that God promises Abraham certain blessings, and then he tells Abraham to divide some animals in half and lay them out on the ground, then Abraham falls into a deep sleep and has a vision. And in his vision he sees a lamp suspended in the air, and it travels between the two halves of the animals. And this was a way in ancient times of making a covenant The two parties to the covenant, or a treaty, would walk between animals that had been divided in half, the long way, nose to tail. And it seems like a bloody thing, but basically it was, if I break the covenant, I promise you can divide me in half like these animals have been divided in half.

So what God was doing, according to the custom of the time, he was making a covenant with Abraham. And yet in the dream, Abraham doesn’t travel between the animals. God make a one-sided covenant. My own personal take on this is that God made a one-sided covenant with Abraham because man was not a suitable covenant partner. And that is why Jesus Christ had to be born, and fulfil the other side of the covenants. So God had his side of the covenant that he upheld, and then Jesus Christ as man upheld man’s side of the covenant. So this is Jehovah on both sides of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Ok, but what was the covenant? The covenant was, to Abraham, that through thy seed all of the kindreds of the earth would be blessed.

Now, God did not make a covenant with you or me, God made a covenant with Abraham. So, in order for us to qualify for the blessings that God promised to Abraham, we have to join Abraham’s seed, and then we’re automatically part of the covenant. But if we don’t join Abraham’s seed, then we have no covenant, if that makes sense.

How do we join Abraham’s seed? Well, we have to join the new and everlasting covenant. And that’s the Gospel, that’s the modern Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, that is baptism and all of the other saving ordinances that are administered through the priesthood. When you do that, you are adopted into Abraham’s seed if you’re not already part of it, then through you, all of the kindreds of the earth will be blessed.

The other part was that he would have posterity as the stars in number, and that he would inherit certain lands, in Canaan specifically. So those promises additionally are extended, right, through eternal increase. And we don’t know exactly what form the prophesy about lands will take, when it will be fulfilled, but we can also count on the fact that we’re included in all of the parts of the covenant of Abraham, when we are part of the new and everlasting covenant. Thank you for that question Bella.

And we have a couple more questions we’ll get to as we go. They have to do with this week’s lesson.

## This week’s lesson material

So first of all, I want to talk about chapter 1, and I want to spend most of my time here, because this is the most fascinating chapter of our lesson today, in my opinion.

Last week we talked about how Nephi likened his people to the Children of Israel. He said, “I quoted the books of Moses to my brethren, but so that they might more fully believe in the Lord their redeemer I also quoted Isaiah to them.”

So what the five books of Moses are about are the Creation, the Exodus, and entering into the promised land. And then what the book of Isaiah is about mostly, is how Israel has strayed from the Mosaic covenant, and will be pushed into exile, but eventually redeemed by the Messiah and then gathered again, and brought into a new creation.

And it’s so interesting because that is the way that Nephi chose to teach his brethren. And then here is, in the very next week, in our very next lesson, here is Lehi, as his people are about to enter and establish a new life in the promised land, he’s giving his version of Deuteronomy.

If you remember, the book of Deuteronomy was Moses giving three basically what you might consider general conference talks, where he was giving a summary of every teaching that he’d taught the Children of Israel throughout all their wandering in the wilderness. Everything that he had been given of God to give to them from the time even before they left Egypt. He gave it all again, he repeated everything. Deuteronomy in fact means “Second Law.” This might be Lehi’s second time delivering a lot of these lessons. For sure some of them he’s delivered multiple times.

I find some more similarities as well, and this is so sad, but if you read the last part of Deuteronomy, what Moses is saying is, “I know you are all going to fall short of this covenant. All of these admonitions I’m giving you, I can see, I already know the future, and your all going to fall short of it. So if you should be judged by God and pushed into exile, please know that God will gather you again one day.”

So, Moses had been given a vision of exactly how all this would turn out, so it was very hard for him, but he had to admonish them all the same. And you can feel some of that same love and hope and desperation mixed together in this chapter 1. Just absolute heartbreak on the part of Lehi. And we’re going to go over it.

And so the entire middle part of the chapter, perhaps from [verse 7 to verse 23](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/1.7-23?lang=eng#p7), yeah I would say verse 23, is all poetry. We’ll go over a little bit about why I think that. First of all, there are five, in my opinion, five distinct metaphors that Lehi uses to get his sons to wake up. And waking up is one of those metaphors, it’s probably one of the most descriptive of the group.

So he says, “Awake my sons, awake and rise from the dust…” that’s another one, “…shake off the chains with which ye are bound,” and a couple more. So, these are repeated throughout the chapter, and it’s quite powerful because each of these admonitions is actually a reference into scripture. It’s a footnote, it’s a hyperlink into something that Lehi has taught his children, obviously, in the past.

But we’re getting a little bit ahead of ourselves. First of all, in the very first part of the chapter, what Lehi says is, “Now I know, we’ve been gone from Jerusalem long enough, I’ve had a vision that the people in Jerusalem have been killed or carried away captive. If we had stayed there, by this time we would have all perished.”

Then he gives the covenant. He starts talking about the covenant that God has made with him. And he says, “ No-one is ever going to come into this land…” he says, “…there will be other people brought here form Jerusalem…” he’s referring to specifically to the Mulekites, and doubtless Nephi has shared his visions of the future with this father and he’s talking also about modern people coming onto the American continent, he saying, “No one will be led to this land unless God is with them.”

And then, in verse 7, this is where, if you missed out special episode late last year, this is where we get “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.” So if you remember the Old Testament is the old covenant, it’s the Mosaic covenant. The New Testament, the new covenant, is the one that Christ made with his disciples when he instituted the sacrament at the Last Supper. And “Another Testament of Jesus Christ” so the question was why does the Book of Mormon have the word *Testament* in its subtitle, and the reason is because here is the covenant that governs this people. There is another covenant about the people of Jesus Christ, and it is precisely this, “That whoso shall obey the commandments of God will be prospered in this land, and if anybody does not obey these commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of God.”

So that’s the Lehite covenant, what you might call, and you can find it in verse 9:

“Wherefore, I, Lehi, have obtained a promise, that inasmuch as those whom the Lord God shall bring out of the land of Jerusalem shall keep his commandments, they shall prosper upon the face of this land.” *(*[2 Nephi 1:9](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/1?lang=eng&id=9#p9)*)*

And then he goes into his admonitions.

Now there is one verse in this chapter where all five admonishes come together and this is the culmination of the chapter. So rather than go through each of them, you can find them repeated throughout the chapter. And I’ll refer to some of those repetitions, because they make them a little more clear. But let’s go through these admonitions one by one.

First of all, “Awake my sons.” And you might think, awake is a pretty generic description of somebody who is just… they’re obviously sinning, they’re not paying attention, and they just need to wake up. True! But remember, this is the way the scriptures were taught. First of all, how many copies of the brass plates do they have? They have one version of the brass plates; they can’t make brass plates for every person. There was no such thing as a quad you could carry around. And so, the scriptures have to be memorised, and this is the way ancient people did it. They committed entire tracts of scrolls to memory, if not all of the scriptures.

So a man like Lehi would almost certainly have the Book of Genesis memorised, and perhaps the Book of Deuteronomy, perhaps the entire scroll of Isaiah he would have memorised. And even though they do have the brass plates, that is so they can teach, that is so every generation they don’t have to write it down on a new scroll. But he would have had it committed to memory. So when Lehi is saying these things, and presumably he’s educated his sons, and they have parts of this committed to memory as well, Nephi almost certainly would have. Perhaps Laman and Lemuel never put in the work to do it. But they would have had certain lessons repeated to them many, many times.

So when he says, “Awake my sons,” he’s not just saying, “wake up and stop making decisions where you’re not paying attention,” he’s also calling to their minds every scripture where it talks about waking up. And for me, the scripture that I think… So the point about all of these admonitions, is that they are unlocking an entire host of scriptural lessons that Lehi would doubtless have given his sons over the years that he’s been with them, the decades that he’s been teaching them and raising them.

So here’s a scripture about waking up. We’re in Isaiah chapter 29, and if you read [verse 10](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/ot/isa/29.10?lang=eng#p10), I’ll read a few more verses in just a minute, but this verse particularly said:

“For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep asleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered.”

And so sleep here is associated with blindness, and blindness means you’re not paying attention to the prophets and seers of Jehovah. So anyone who speaks for God, you’ve ignored them; that’s blindness and that’s sleep.

So when Lehi says to Laman and Lemuel, “Awake my sons,” what he means is, “start paying attention to the words of God.” It’s the same thing he was saying in his vision of the tree of life; he was saying, “Come and partake of the fruit,” and they turned around and would not. And that action, that choice that they made, was analogous to falling asleep, to choosing to sleep when they could wake up.

So that’s *awake*. And incidentally, chapter 29 of Isaiah, later on, Nephi make particular mention of the first part of this chapter and quotes it. And I won’t go into detail about that here, but what Nephi does in that chapter, is he adds more to Isaiah 29 to restore what I believe was an original chiasmus. We’ll talk a little bit more about chiasmus; we have a special episode on it coming up. The chiasmus in the Book of Mormon is even more dramatic than it is in the Old Testament. Now we’ve talked a little bit about what that is, and in case you missed it I’ll explain it briefly.

Parallelism is a manner of teaching among societies that have an oral tradition, where they repeat something with slightly different words, but with the same or very subtly changed idea so they can drive the point home or make it more memorable. And chiasmus is a form of parallelism where the order is reversed; something is taught first in one order and then taught in the reverse order.

So if I teach you principles A, B and C, then I would repeat them C, B, A. And the reason it’s called chiasmus is because the Greek letter *chi* is exactly equivalent to a modern capital X in appearance. And that left part of the chi would form a “greater than” symbol. And so it would indent as it goes in, and come back out as it goes out.

So that’s why it’s called chiasmus. It’s a form of parallelism, it’s a form of repetition. It’s all over in the book of Mormon. And it’s unmistakeable and it’s also undoubtably deliberate. So what Nephi does with this scripture, Isaiah 29, is he restores a chiasmus that’s actually missing in Isaiah. It’s fascinating, we’ll go over it when we reach that chapter, it’s 2 Nephi 27.

This is the original point from which that quotation comes. In verse 7 the multitude of the nations that fight against Ariel, or called Zion in the Book of Mormon:

“…even all that fight against her and her munition, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night vision. It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty.” ([Isaiah 29:7](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/ot/isa/29?lang=eng&id=7#p7))

So this is furthering the metaphor of somebody who is sleeping, and they’re not in touch with reality. So that is just one of the five admonitions. We’re going to go over all five. But the point I want to make here is if, now Lehi is undoubtably speaking in a calm voice, he’s an old man, but if you want to think about the psychic scream that this father is having, this is about as loud as he can make his voice, spiritually speaking, metaphorically speaking. He is trying to include every single possible lesson, every single possible reference, and he’s trying to intertwine them so that they will be so powerful so that his sons will actually snap out of this spiritual trance that they seem to be in, and stop sinning, and stop heading for the cliff that he’s been able to see for so long. This cliff of damnation and terrible choices, and instead just start making good choices, and be kind to their brother and start listening to him. It’s so simple; he can see exactly how they can change, and yet he knows that they won’t do it.

And so he’s crying out with all the energy of his soul. And this verse 23 is where they all culminate. For me, many of you have probably had the chance to eat a pomegranate. The thing that came to my mind, when I grew up in Las Vegas we had pomegranate trees in out backyard. And you can’t find pomegranates like this in the store. If you ignore the pomegranates long enough, in the late fall they so large they’re the size of a huge grapefruit or even bigger. And the pomegranates would split open, they’d have so much juice inside that they’d split open and you could see in and you’d see all the fruits and all the wonderful reward there is if you apply just a little bit of pressure, and then you could pick out all the seeds and eat that fruit when they’re at their absolute juiciest.

And that’s what this chapter and especially this verse feels like to me. Lehi has loaded this with so much meaning that it’s like an over-ripe pomegranate that’s actually bursting with meaning. And there’s one example of the five.

The second admonition that he gives them is, “Arise from the dust.” Now earlier in the chapter this admonition is repeated three times. Once in verse 14, once in verse 21. And in verse 21 the way that Lehi phrases it, he says:

“…in order that I might not be brought down with grief and sorrow to the grave, arise from the dust, my sons, and be men.” ([2 Nephi 1:21](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/1?lang=eng&id=21#p21))

Now this is fascinating, I’m going to explain this one, this is probably my favourite one. This is directly from… there’s no doubt about it, this is directly from Genesis 2. If we read in [Genesis 2:7](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/ot/gen/2?lang=eng&id=7#p7):

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

So this is how you *arise from the dust*. This is when Adam was created. God created a man out of the dust of the ground, and then he arose when God breathed into him his life.

The word for *man*, the word for *mankind,* in Hebrew is *adam*, and that is why Adam was given his name. He is a man. And so when God formed Adam… now Adam’s name is a very particular name, and there are actually two different correlations with Adam’s name. The first one is, you break Adam’s name up and the first part is the letter *Aleph*, which is sort of just a silent letter, and that letter alone has a meaning, it’s a word meaning *a teacher*. And the word *dam* means *blood*. The word *aleph* plus *dam* means a *teacher of blood*.

What does that mean: *teacher of blood*? Think about what God created before he created Man. He created the beasts of the field. And beasts are not regulated by reason; they’re just blood, they’re just flesh, they’re just dust. And what God did special with man, differently with man, the way man is unique, is that God breathed his spirit into him. The blood is ruled by God’s spirit. The blood is ruled by a conscience. And so the teacher of man is this ruarch, the breath of God that gave man his life, that inhabited the dust and created from that a living spirit.

So Adam, *adam*, means *man*, and *adama* is actually *earth*. So arise from the… and this is possibly, even the way that Lehi would have said it; he was certainly speaking Hebrew to his sons; he would have said, “come up from *adama* and become *adam*.” And he was trying to point them back to Genesis 2, and give them the lesson that they where acting like beasts. And we’ve given you tons, over the course of the last couple of years, we’ve given you tons of metaphors where men that are unruled by spirit are called beasts, especially in Daniel, the book of Daniel. But also by Jesus Christ. And in opposition to the beasts is the Son of Man.

And so what… the lesson that Lehi is here saying when he says, “Arise from the dust,” what he’s saying is, “Allow yourself to be ruled by the spirit of God which is in you, and don’t just be the beasts that you are, this unfettered selfishness and greed, and might makes right. Allow yourself to be ruled by the gentleness and sweetness of the Holy Spirit, and the voice of God that is within you. It’s what gave you breath, it’s what created you, and so allow it to rule. Allow it to teach your blood how to be a man.” It’s such a powerful lesson.

So “Awake” means, “Get out of a deep sleep, listen to the prophet.”

“Arise from the dust my sons, and be men,” means, “Allow this breath of God to rule your flesh.”

Two powerful lessons, right out of the Old Testament in one sentence; it’s fantastic!

“Shake of the chains,” that’s the third… Here we are back in [2 Nephi 1:23](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/1.23?lang=eng#p23); “Shake of the chains with which ye are bound.” Now this one we have to guess a little bit. I kinda think this is a reference to the 68th Psalm. So if you read [verse 6](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/ot/ps/68.6?lang=eng#p6):

“God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.”

Now if you start earlier in this Psalm, it starts in verse 1 like this, “Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him.” And it goes on this way, that the enemies of God will be scattered, and those who are rebellious will be set in a dry land, and those who believe in God will be rewarded and bought to a comfortable place.

The shaking off of chains, this is a song of justice, of final justice and judgement. So what this means is that God is going to bring… and this is a common theme throughout the entire Book of Mormon, that God will restore, the word restoration means that God will restore good to those who have chosen good, and evil to those who have chosen evil.

So when Lehi says, to Laman and Lemuel, “Shake of the chains with which you are bound,” what he means is, “There will come a time for final justice. And it’s not something you would want to be on the wrong side of. Please, now, now is the time when you can choose which direction you’re going to go in, because you’re not going to enjoy what happens if you don’t shake of these chains. The rebellious will dwell in a dry land,” as the 68th Psalm says.

And so another one of Lehi’s admonitions, it’s the second one but we’ll handle it fourth, “Put on the armor of righteousness.” This is a clear reference to Isaiah 59, and I’m going to read you that verse, it’s verse 17. Just for your information, the entire first part of this chapter is the prophet talking about how God looked on Israel to find one righteous person, anyone he could trust to bring judgement and righteousness. So *sedaka* meant right relationships, right judgement, the ability to treat the poor correctly, rather than to give preference to the rich people because they could… it’s righteousness in government, right? So the rich people could reward you, and so you give them preferential treatment. It’s a sort of corruption that he finds everywhere, and wickedness spiritually among the priests, and procedurally among the kings and rulers. There was just corruption everywhere, instead of righteousness.

So that’s what righteousness means, is right acting, right relationships. And he spends the entire first part of the chapter talking about that, and then Isaiah shifts and starts talking about what God will do because he has found no righteous man.

In verse 16 he says:

“And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.” ([Isaiah 59:16](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/ot/isa/59?lang=eng&id=16#p16))

So in other words, God is going to step in, because there is no righteous person in all Israel, God has to step in and be that righteous person.

Verse 17:

“For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.” ([Isaiah 59:17](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/ot/isa/59?lang=eng&id=17#p17))

So God will put on him, he will wear, all of the proper attributes that he wanted man to have, and they will imbue him with power from on high. This is a very messianic scripture, by the way. It’s a perfect prophesy of Jesus Christ. And it goes right in line with what I was saying earlier about how God kept his part of the Abrahamic covenant as God, and then he will be born into earth, he will condescend to come to earth to fulfil the other part of the covenant as man.

And that is exactly what this is prophesying, “He put on righteousness as a breastplate.”

So when Lehi says to Laman and Lemuel, “Put on the armour of righteousness,” what he means is, “You do not want to have a corrupt society. You don’t want to be both spiritually and governmentally corrupt. Because God can’t find any righteousness among you. You’ve got to have righteousness or he will have to do it. And if he has to do it, again, like we found out with the chains, you’re not going to like the result when final justice comes, when judgement arrives, it’s too late to be the one that was righteous all along.”

And he’s just saying, “Please listen to Nephi. Nephi has actually figured this one out, if you will just pay attention to him, he can lead you in the right way.”

The final admonition that I’ll talk about, I’m taking them out of order, is, “Come forth out of obscurity.” Now *obscurity*, the modern meaning of it means that somebody is unknown. If they live in obscurity it means that nobody really knows about them. But what it used to mean is darkness. If something is obscured it’s covered over and left in darkness underneath a shroud or a covering. And that’s the way it was used in the Old Testament, and doubtless that’s the way Joseph Smith translated it.

And so along with the verse that we already read in Isaiah 29 about blindness being the act of not listening to the prophet, that would go along with somebody who is in darkness.

But I found this reference, and I think this might have been… first of all, we already believe, or I believe that I know, but you can take my opinion if you like, that Lehi was referring to Isaiah 59. One chapter before that, Isaiah 58, you may remember that chapter, it’s where Isaiah teaches about fasting. And what does he say? He says, “Fasting isn’t for the purpose of you feeling miserable, and it’s not for the purpose of showing how spiritual you are, it’s for the purpose of breaking every bond, for helping the poor, and if you extend an arm of fellowship and charity to the poor, then you have accomplished the fast that I have ordained.”

And one of the promises if you do it right, if you truly extend charity to the poor and bless the lives of the poor and if you’re generous, then the blessing is, in [Isaiah 58:10](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/ot/isa/58.10?lang=eng#p10),

“And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday.”

This is a promise when Lehi says, to Laman and Lemuel, “Come forth out of obscurity,” he’s begging them to change their hearts and be gracious and generous with the people who are less fortunate than them. Now Laman and Lemuel are still the rulers. If there was a political organisation, Laman and Lemuel are the strongest. And so the reason they keep getting upset with Nephi is that he’s bucking the established order of the strongest ruling. Laman and Lemuel are the ones supposed to be making the decisions.

And so it’s doubtful that Nephi was the one making most of the decisions. He was allowing Laman and Lemuel to make the bulk of the decisions. But when it got really important and they disagreed, God had to back Nephi up, and that’s why they kept having friction. This is just a guess, but that may be the reason why Lehi was talking about justice and righteousness, and now he’s talking about generosity. He’s saying, “You can’t use your power for evil, and you can’t be corrupt rulers. You have to be generous and if you will do these things then you will be blessed.”

So you can see, how in this one verse, I’m going to read the verse now, and hopefully it will have a little bit more meaning to you, this [2 Nephi 1:23](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/1?lang=eng&id=23#p23):

“Awake, my sons; put on the armour of righteousness. Shake off the chains with which ye are bound, and come forth out of obscurity, and arise from the dust.”

Now you can hear the volume, metaphorically speaking, that Lehi is screaming this lesson, he’s telling his sons with all the energy he can possibly have, “Please, avert this dreadful fate that I’ve foreseen for you.” He even says, this is verse 17, [2 Nephi 1:17](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/1.17-19?lang=eng#p17):

“My heart hath been weighed down with sorrow from time to time, for I have feared, lest for the hardness of your hearts the Lord your God should come out in the fulness of his wrath upon you, that ye be cut off and destroyed forever;

18 Or, that a cursing should come upon you for the space of many generations; and ye are visited by sword, and by famine, and are hated, and are led according to the will and captivity of the devil.

19 O my sons, that these things might not come upon you, but that ye might be a choice and a favoured people of the Lord. But behold, his will be done; for his ways are righteousness forever.”

So this is Lehi saying, either “I’ve had it explained to me in detail by Nephi,” or “I’ve had the vison of Nephi myself, but I already know what happens to our people, and it’s terrible. So please try to avoid it if you can. And then, also realising, I’ve already seen it.” This is the particular burden of a prophet who is given a vision of the future, is that there are certain things that… my guess is that God told him if they’ll repent they can still avoid this, but he kind of thought they wouldn’t. It must have been so difficult for a father to see this of his two beloved sons.

So that’s 2 Nephi 1, one of the most powerful chapters you’ll find anywhere. So think about this, here is the parallel with Deuteronomy, Moses giving the children of Israel his prophesy, “Go into the land of Canaan, and there you’re going to keep the statutes of the Lord, you’re going to keep these covenants, and if you do, here are the blessing you can receive. But if you don’t, and I kind of know that you won’t, then you’ll be exiled and eventually God will redeem you.”

And here is Lehi saying the same thing. “Here are the commandments of God. Please keep them. I’m going to reiterate the lessons I’ve been teaching you all along, and if you will keep them, you’ll be blessed. And if you don’t, here’s what will happen, and I kind of think you won’t.”

So similar to Deuteronomy, just as last week’s lesson was so similar to Exodus. It’s absolutely fascinating, it’s such a rich area for pondering and study. So if you care to do a comparison between 2 Nephi chapters 1, 2 and 3, and maybe 4, and the last few chapters of Deuteronomy. At the end of the chapter Lehi talks to Zoram as well. He says, “You’ve been loyal, your children will receive the same blessings as Nephi’s children will.”

So that takes us to chapter 2. Now he talks to Jacob, So remember, Laman, Lemuel, Sam and Nephi were the four sons of Lehi that leave Jerusalem; Jacob and Joseph born in the wilderness; Zoram the servant who accompanies them; the sons of Ishmael whose names we never find out; these are the people who he’s going to bless, and talk about, ok?

And so now we’re to Jacob; he’s been mostly talking to Laman and Lemuel, we can assume, even though he only named them at the end of chapter 1. But now Lehi’s talking to Jacob.

Now the first lesson that I take from this chapter, look at the difference a prophet is able to teach when he has an audience that is prepared in the Spirit. So one of the first things we learn about Jacob is that in his youth he has already been visited by Jesus Christ, he has seen the Saviour in a vision of some sort. And he knows his redeemer, he knows the Saviour. And therefore, he is a prophet already.

So the things that Lehi can teach Jacob in this chapter, as Nephi says, I believe it’s at the beginning of chapter 4, that’s in [2 Nephi 4:2](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/4.2?lang=eng):

“For behold, he truly prophesied concerning all his seed. And the prophecies which he wrote, there are not many greater.”

And here in chapter 2, this is an amazing philosophical treatise on the meaning of life, on God’s plan of salvation, and on mankind’s agency, our moral agency that we have.

And where the Bible is described as having the plain and precious things taken out of it, you will search hard in the Book of Mormon, or in any book of scripture, to find a chapter that has more plain and precious things than this one.

So 2 Nephi 2. Chapter 1, amazing parallel with the Book of Deuteronomy. Chapter 2, something that you don’t even have a parallel for anywhere in the Bible, because it answers all of those questions that the Bible sort of leaves out there unanswered. And it also answers some of life’s hardest questions, like for example, why do bad things happen to good people? The answer in verse 11, I’m going to read that, this is probably one of the most famous verses in this chapter.

“For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my firstborn in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one...”

What he’s saying is if there were no opposites there would only be one thing.

“…wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility.” ([2 Nephi 2:11](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/2?lang=eng&id=11#p11))

And by *sense* what he means is the ability to sense.

And that’s really powerful. It may not be as rigorous as some of the syllogisms that a modern philosopher would come up with, but this quite a profound idea that any philosopher would have to reckon with, if you’re thinking about why bad things happen to good people, or why good people have bad things happen to them.

If you didn’t have bad things, you wouldn’t even know that good things existed.

Now this is an important idea, and it’s irrefutable, right? Now he’s saying if there was no death then life would be meaningless. And he talks about this in the context specifically of the Fall. And we’re going to talk a little bit about the Fall. We’re not going to go into it too much, but we do have one of the questions that came in.

This is a question from Dana: “Adam and Eve could have children as a result of the Fall. They were commanded to multiply and replenish the earth whilst still in the garden. Was this a command that they couldn’t keep until they were fallen creatures? Why? I always took the commandment as one possible in the garden until Eve partook of the fruit and then would be separated from Adam, and thus couldn’t fulfil the commandment to multiply.”

So this is a totally natural conclusion to come to. However, here in the Book of Mormon what we read is, in [2 Nephi 2:22](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/2?lang=eng&id=22#p22):

“22 And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end.

23 And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin.”

His point was… let me back up a little bit. The mainstream view of the Fall is that Adam and Eve did something evil. What they did was that they substituted their own judgement of good and evil for God’s judgement of good and evil. And to some extent that’s what they did. They lost this constant communication with God, where they were getting God’s direction on what he wanted them to do. And because they lost that, they actually became able to choose and judge for themselves.

And part of that ability to choose is to use your own judgement, and you can’t get it perfect when you’re a fallen man. And because Adam and Eve fell the entire earth fell as well.

So the answer to your question Dana is that, no, Adam and Eve could not have children in the garden. This is why Eve approached Adam, and she said, “Look, I partook of the fruit, because you want to keep all of Father’s commandments,” and Adam says, “Yes, I do.” And Eve says, “Well, how are we going to keep the commandment to multiply and replenish the earth? I partook of this fruit so that we could keep that commandment. You’re keeping the commandment not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but by doing that we’re also not keeping the commandment to multiply. And that’s the one that’s important to me. And so I’ve partaken of the fruit, and if you don’t also partake of it then I’ll be cast out and you’ll be left alone here in the Garden of Eden.”

So that’s how that went down, and the doctrine is clearly taught here in the Book of Mormon, they could not have had children in the garden. In fact, if the entire earth had not fallen… and of course here in chapter 2 is where we have this marvellous verse, verse 25, the most famous verse probably in our lesson today:

“Adam fell that men might be...”

Adam had to fall in order for men to exist, and what is the purpose for men to exist?

“…and men are, that they might have joy.” ([2 Nephi 2:25](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/2?lang=eng&id=25#p25))

When you read this in translation, it’s men exist so that they will have joy. In other words, Adam had to fall so that we could exist, and we exist for the sole purpose, or for the main purpose of having joy, of creating joy in our lives, for ourselves and for others.

Now, if you want to understand a little bit more about the Fall, you can go back to the beginning of 2018, it’s probably I think the 3rd or 4th lesson in our Old Testament course of study, and some interesting insights there, especially what was the state of the earth outside of the garden? what about the dinosaurs? etc. I don’t have answers to all those questions, but I have my conjectures there. So if you’re interested in some more information about the Fall, feel free to download that old episode. They’re old episodes, but they’re still timeless, you might say.

So there are so many different lessons that might be taught, as I’ve hinted, from 2 Nephi 2. And rather than try and teach all of them, I’m going to pick one that I think is super important. First of all, this very idea of opposites is so crucial to agency. But there is one opposite that, I think, is more important than any other. And this is my opinion, so take it for what it’s worth.

But we find a particular phrase in a few places here in chapter 2. Verse 13, the last part of the verse:

“…if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away.”

So that phrase *acted upon*, we’re going to find it again in verse 14:

“And now, my sons, I speak unto you these things for your profit and learning; for there is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are, both things to act and things to be acted upon.”

In verse 16:

“Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other.”

So the Fall… we truly did not have agency until the Fall happened, and there were opposites introduced into the world. And one of my takes that I gave in my lesson on the Fall was that it was the Atonement that brought about the sway of mercy over man. But we weren’t under the sway of justice until the Fall. And some of the evidence for that is found in Alma 41. I wish I could go more into it but I totally recommend that lesson.

What we’re going to do is we’re going to skip forward to verse 26. We’re still in 2 Nephi 2.

“26 And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon…”

So, we have that phrase *acted upon* a few times here, and God created things both to act, and be acted upon. And he created man to act for himself. And now here in verse 26 we learn, “men were created to act for themselves, and *not* to be acted upon.”

Now this is the main contrast… and this is my interpretation that I’m imposing on these scriptures, but I think it’s so important. This is the main contrast between Nephi and Laman and Lemuel; the attitude of Nephi, the attitude of Laman and Lemuel.

They’re constantly complaining, “You have done this to us… you broke your bow… Nephi, you want to make yourself a ruler over us… we should kill you because you forced us to come out of Jerusalem.” Their attitude is constantly people who are being acted upon. And they don’t seem to realise that they have made choices all along the way that put them exactly where they are.

And what Nephi does is he says, “I have power in this situation; I broke my bow, I’m going to go find some wood and make some more. God, you’ve commanded me to build a ship, tell me where to find some ore so I can smelt that and make tools so that I can start cutting down wood and then eventually build a ship.”

And constantly Nephi… and then, you know, “I was tied up on a mast.” Nephi doesn’t even bemoan the fact that he’s been acted upon. As soon as he’s released, doubtless he was praying for three days, as soon as he’s released he kneels down and doesn’t say, “God, how could you keep me on that mast for three days?” What he says is, “Thank you. You have now answered my prayers. I’ve been praying for three days that you would release me, and you just did it. And so thank you God, thank you.”

And Nephi’s attitude is constantly someone who is acting. He’s never a victim to his circumstances. And that state of mind, where we’re not in control of our own choices, somebody else is, is exactly the state of mind that Satan wants to put us in. So if he can get us to believe that, he can take us from the children of goodly parents, as Laman and Lemuel were before they left Jerusalem, all the way down to where they would be murderers, would-be murderers, and founders of a people that completely lose their grasp on civilisation.

That is the power of this victim mindset, that we believe we’re only things to be acted upon, and not things to act. God gave us the power and the commandment to act, and not to be acted upon. And that, in my opinion, is the most powerful of all of the many, many lessons here in 2 Nephi 2.

Going on to chapter 3. I wish we could spend an entire lesson on chapter 3, but I’m going to cover it very briefly, and just say that this is the prophesy of Joseph of Egypt, about Moses, about Jesus Christ, about Joseph Smith, and it all comes about because Lehi’s youngest son has the name of Joseph.

There are people who have done analyses of this chapter and found that the entire chapter follows a chiasmic form. And the reason that Lehi would teach this way is because… and this would have been second nature to him, this would have been second nature to any of the people in the Book of Mormon, because they have an oral tradition. And when you teach in the way you that you repeat yourself, you have parallelism, and especially reverse parallelism like chiasmus, then you’re more likely to have your lesson be remembered, because you can only say it once; you’re going to speak once and then it’s going to be done.

So, if you have trained your brain to think in these terms, and to, “Oh, I just said A, B and C, well now I’m going to repeat myself and I’m going to do it in reverse order, I’m going to say C, B and A. And therefore, whoever is listening to me will take this lesson with them and remember it always.”

And so what Lehi is doing with Joseph is he’s giving him a lot of very complicated information, and he’s teaching it to him in the best way he knows how, that he might be able to keep it with him and remember it. And it may also be that Nephi, when he later recorded the preaching, the admonitions and the final message of Lehi, that he imposed upon it a chiasmic structure. So that’s also something that may have happened from the prophet Nephi, in his inspired recording of this event.

## Listener question: why are bloodlines important?

But that’s all I have time to say about chapter 3, except we have another question about this chapter. And this one comes from Charlie. She asks this question about 1 Nephi 13; she says, “It has the angel differentiating Nephi’s seed well before the coming of Christ. Why? Nephi’s seed is mixed and mingled and fallen away by this time and still the angel mentioned it. If God can take stones and raise up a people to Abraham, if any who accept Christ can become God’s people, if God supports adoption, and if God is no respecter of persons, then why are bloodlines important? Even today we are encouraged to seek out and preferentially bless our bloodline when it comes to temple work. Is it the blood that is important to God? Is it the blood that carries the covenant? How can this emphasis on bloodlines be in accordance with loving our neighbour, who presumably wouldn’t be of the same bloodline but different household as ourselves? Not to say we can’t love both family and neighbours, but to point out that Christ’s life doesn’t exemplify bloodline preferences.

So, this is a wonderful and important question, and I won’t claim to have all of the answer, but I will say in ancient Hebrew peoples, this is specifically true in the Book of Samuel. Samuel’s mother was in the temple praying, “I need to have a child, if you’ll give me children, if you’ll open my womb, God, then I will give the first-born to you.” And that is exactly what happens, she has a son, she names him Samuel, and she gives him to the Lord. And he becomes a great prophet in Israel.

Now the curse of a barren woman was… let me put it another way; the hope of every woman who had children was not only that she would have the means to carry on her husband’s name and have someone to take care of her in her old age, though they were important considerations. It was that, through her seed would eventually come the King, and then by extension, the Messiah. So this is why, at the end of the Book of Ruth for example, it gives the descendancy of Ruth all the way to the grandfather of David, showing that David the King was descended from Ruth. This was very prestigious, that she had a notable king, a ruler, come from her bloodline. Then it became even more important when David received the Davidic covenant, that one day there would come a king in his line that would rule forever.

And so, as glorious as David and Solomon were, there would be a king one day who would eventually be so powerful that the glory would be known everywhere. And a time of eternal peace, a New Jerusalem. The idea that this messiah would rise from my bloodline was very powerful in ancient Israel, and if you didn’t have any children, then you were totally put out of the running for that blessing.

Now, Lehi’s family, all of his descendants, they already know that this won’t happen for them. They’re not the tribe of Judah, they’re not even in Jerusalem anymore. They’re not going to go back to Jerusalem before the Messiah is born. They’ve been shown this in vision, and so, this isn’t why bloodlines are important to them, but that is the culture that they come from. So, that’s one reason.

The second reason, and this is my opinion, this is my interpretation that I have on the scriptures that I have read, That I believe that when we have ministering angels come to us, that those angels are either from our ancestors, or from our future descendants. First, the angels’ first priority or their first assignment is to look after their own descendants, and their own ancestors. And then with what time they have left over, they look after other people. This does feel like God is a respecter of persons, because more angels are going to be dedicated to those people that have more ancestors that receive the gospel while in this life, or have had their temple work done.

However, I suspect that when we see things from an eternal perspective, we’ll realise that God had done everything exactly right, and those people who don’t have any ancestors who ever accepted the gospel, it doesn’t mean they don’t have any angels watching over them, but it does mean they’re going to be the means to bless the majority of both their ancestors, and their descendants.

And to go back to an earlier question, to go back to Bella’s question, “How do we receive the blessings of the covenant of Abraham?” We receive it by being sealed in a chain, in an unbroken chain. All of mankind will be part of this unbroken chain going back to Abraham, and when that happens then Adam will take the entirety of mankind that is now sealed in one huge family and present it to Christ. This is the mission of Adam with the earth, is to take as many people as are willing to be sealed, and are willing to enter into this covenant, and present the entire family of man as a completed work to Jesus Christ. And when that happens then that’s when Jehovah can say, “The great work is done.”

This is the importance of bloodlines, that through our bloodlines we lay claim upon the promises, the covenant, the blessings of Abraham. I hope that answers your question, it’s as good as I can do. I don’t think it’s a perfect answer, but I also think that there is much more to be revealed along these lines. So that’s 2 Nephi 3.

Now in chapter 4, Lehi begins to give advice to the children of Laman and Lemuel. And then also, the children of Ishmael. And what he says is, “I bless you, that if you receive a cursing because you’re wicked, it won’t fall upon your own heads, but upon those who failed to teach you.” This is such an interesting lesson.

Now, it sounds hopeless. The way he says it, it’s like, “Look, I’m going to bless you that when you screw up it won’t be entirely your fault.” But I also think that this blessing and the way he delivered it – the way Lehi delivered it – actually worked. And I have some evidence for this. If we flip forward to [Jacob 1:13](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/jacob/1.13?lang=eng#p13), you can see that Jacob has now taken over and he’s describing the people of Nephi. He says, “We call the people of Laman that stayed behind, we call them Lamanites, and we call our people, the people who followed Nephi, we call them all Nephites, even though they’re made up of Nephites, and they’re made up of Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites, and Zoramites, and Jacobites, and Josephites.” So every single person has their followers as their family. And it’s kid of like a last name. So what we can tell from that is that there were children of Laman, and there were children of Lemuel, and there were children of the sons of Ismael that followed Nephi when they broke away.

What do I mean “broke away”? Well it happens in this chapter. But in any case, this admonition to his grandchildren, the sons of his wicked children, actually seems to have worked for some of them, Some of them followed Nephi. And that’s probably part of the reason why Laman and Lemuel stayed so angry with Nephi through the generations. Their anger was transmitted almost undiminished.

So Lehi finishes his words by talking to his grandchildren, and also to his son Sam and his children. Who’s missing? Do you notice, Lehi’s talked to Laman and Lemuel, he’s talked to Sam, he’s talked to Jacob and Joseph, and he’s talked to his sons-in-law. The people who are missing are Nephi and Sariah. Isn’t that interesting? What a patriarch would do before his death, he would take his eldest son, and he would say, “Son, it is now your duty to look after your mother. This is the reason why you have a birthright, is so that you can look after your mother and your sisters. You have an extra portion in your inheritance for exactly that reason.”

Now, the fact that he doesn’t mention Sariah at all to Laman and Lemuel tells me that Nephi was the one, and this is logical, that Nephi was the one who Lehi had chosen to receive the birthright. And the fact that Nephi doesn’t include that, remember this is Nephi’s plates, he is too modest to include the blessings that he receives from Lehi. They were probably wonderous blessings and he may not have wanted to brag about it, or he may not have considered it appropriate, or it may have been too sacred.

And we also don’t have the Book of Lehi. It may have been recorded there. And the Book of Lehi, as we’ve discussed, has been lost. In any case, we don’t have a mention of Lehi’s admonitions to his son Nephi. And there may have been none. And if there were none, he knew that Nephi could receive all of the wisdom he needed from the Lord directly.

And Lehi dies. And in this chapter Lehi finishes what he has to say, and goes the way of all the earth.

Now, we know that soon, Laman and Lemuel and Nephi are going to have a falling out. But before that happens, we learn the reason why. And in verses 13 and 14, Nephi says, “They were angry with me, because I spoke to them in the power of the Lord, and I felt constrained to speak to them, because I’m the prophet, and basically God is telling me, you don’t have the luxury of just letting them sin and not saying anything. You have to bring this kind of stuff up, because if you don’t, their blood is on your head. That is the way it works. If you’re a prophet, you have to speak up.” And that’s the burden of a prophet. It’s described as a burden all the way through the Old Testament.

So Nephi has to speak up, and before we learn about Laman and Lemuel’s reaction, we get this beautiful psalm. This is also poetry; so from verse 17 to the end of the chapter, verse 35, this is one long psalm.

It’s a wonderful, wonderful passage, and you should read it and study it. And without reading any particular part of it, what I will say about the psalms is this. David wrote his psalms, many of them at least, as a prayer to God for courage when he would have had otherwise despaired, because the King wanted to kill him.

So if you remember, when David was anointed King, it became obvious to Saul that he was going to be supplanted, in fact Samuel prophesied this to him. “Your line will be removed from kingship, and God will not allow you to have any progeny whatsoever. And there will be another to supplant you.” And David was the obvious choice.

And so there were times when Saul was very kind to David, and then there were times, years in fact, when Saul was hunting him all across Israel to kill him. And David despaired. In his psalms that he writes in his lows, he is vulnerable and raw, and his emotions are right on the surface. He is pouring out his heart to God, and sometimes he’s even a little angry and disappointed in God, and we get that very real emotion that come forth in the psalms.

And Nephi would have read every one of the psalms, he would have known them so well. And his situation mirrors David’s very closely, because Laman and Lemuel, probably Laman, they have the political power, they have the might, and they have the will, also, to enforce their might through force. And what that means is, Nephi is in danger for his life. We don’t know exactly. He may have spent some time living with them, trying to make things work, and it may have been just like David and Saul, where David despaired so many times, because he spent years living in the wilderness on the run from Saul, waiting for the blessing God had promised him, that he would eventually become king, to take effect.

And there were at least two times that I can remember, maybe three, where he had the drop on Saul, and he had to prove in the morning, that he could have killed him during the night. And he delivered to Saul, “Here’s your sword that I took from you in the middle of the night. Here’s the feather that I took, it was sitting right beside your bed. I was right there. I could have put my knife in your heart, I could have slit your throat. But I didn’t do it, because I will never raise my hand against the Lord’s anointed.”

And in spite of his righteousness, David was hunted and pursued and persecuted for years. And the despair that came, and the heartache, come out so clearly in the psalms. And now we Nephi lamenting the power that his enemies have over him.

So it hurts him so deeply. He says, “Sins do easily beset me,” and he says, “Do not be angry because of my enemies.” So what he’s saying is, “Don’t let the fact that my brothers hate me, and they’re trying to kill me, don’t let that please my soul, don’t let that cause me to sin.” What a powerful, powerful prayer! That even though someone is trying to kill me, I will not allow myself to sin in hating them.

Do you see the difference now between *acting*, and being *acted upon*? If Nephi had the attitude, “Oh, woe is me, I’m being acted upon, if he had the attitude of Laman and Lemuel, then he would have been a victim of circumstance, and he would have blamed everyone but himself. Instead he takes responsibility for his own attitude, and he prays to God that God will help him to change it. This is such a powerful lesson, and this is such a powerful passage of scripture. That’s [2 Nephi 4:17-35](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/4.17-35?lang=eng#p17).

Alright, so now we finally arrive in chapter 5, our final chapter. And in the beginning of this chapter, it starts out right in this verse:

“Behold, it came to pass that I, Nephi, did cry much unto the Lord my God, because of the anger of my brethren.”

That is his description of this psalm he has just delivered us.

“…their anger did increase against me, insomuch that they did seek to take away my life…Our younger brother thinks to rule over us… And it came to pass that the Lord did warn me, that I, Nephi, should depart from them and flee into the wilderness…

Wherefore, it came to pass that I, Nephi, did take my family, and also Zoram and his family, and Sam, mine elder brother and his family, and Jacob and Joseph, my younger brethren, and also my sisters, and all those who would go with me.” ([2 Nephi 5:1-6](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/5?lang=eng))

Now my question is this; who did they figure out who would go with them? Isn’t it so dangerous, to think about how you would ask that question, “Hey, we’re going to live in the wilderness. Do you want to come with us?”

What if the answer’s “No”? What if it’s one of the children of Laman, “Hey, you seem like you’ve been a righteous nephew, would you like to come with us into the wilderness?”

“No, I’m loyal to my Dad, and now I’m going to go and tell him you’re leaving, so he can kill you before you go.”

So I’m thinking about this, like, wow, what a movie that could be made of just this scene alone. Like, how secretive you’d have to be? There must have been a lot of revelation occurring. And the Lord would’ve had to protect them, because Laman for sure is going to travel faster than the slowest person in Nephi’s party, and he’s not going to leave the weak people behind. And so God must have covered their tracks so they could get safely away. It must have been quite scary and quite suspenseful.

But eventually they do, and they seem to be able to escape without incident. They travel:

“And we did take our tents and whatsoever things were possible for us, and did journey in the wilderness for the space of many days.” ([2 Nephi 5:7](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/2-ne/5?lang=eng&id=7#p7))

Now many days could be months, right? They travelled a far way away, they were hoping they’d never see their brothers again, because they’d brought them nothing but misery.

Now years later, generations later, what is the claim, what is the grievance, that the Lamanites have against the Nephites? The grievance is that, “You usurped the government that should have rightfully belonged to the older brethren.”

No, he didn’t, right? That is the story that Laman and Lemuel told their kids, that Nephi usurped the government. But all Nephi wanted to do was leave. He just wanted to be left alone. He didn’t want to govern Laman and Lemuel, and take their government over themselves. He just wanted the freedom to govern himself. But the grievance was, “You took the government away.”

Now think about that for a moment. “I want to kill you. You want to leave. And so when you leave, I’m angry with you, because you took the government away, you took away my government over you.”

So the grievance of Laman and Lemuel, that they passed onto their kids, and that makes them angry for generations is, and when you read in the Book of Mormon over and over again, “They stirred up their hearts to anger,” this is what they’re angry about, “You wouldn’t let me kill you.” That’s the grievance.

And so, think about that! And you can even make it metaphorical. You wouldn’t let me deprive me of your liberty.

Now, this has been Satan’s plan since the beginning of time! “I’m angry with you, because you wouldn’t let me enslave you. You wouldn’t let me have all power over you. You wanted to have some freedom, and I wanted to have rule over you forever. So therefore, I have a grievance against you.”

Now, the argument makes no sense. And yet you see it pop up over and over again. There are entire systems of government that are dedicated to this grievance. “I’m angry with you, because you wouldn’t let me take away your freedom.” And there are aspects to it in a lot of political ideas you’ll see on both sides of the political spectrum. In America, and I’m sure throughout the world, you’ll see it come up in plans that are proposed to do any number of things. But when you see evidence of this idea, but when you see it pop up, you can know that it is a manifestation of the plan of Satan. Which is, “I’m angry at you, because you wouldn’t let me take away your freedom.”

It is our job as children of God, to act, and not be acted upon. This is the plan of Jesus Christ, that he gave us our agency. That was the entire purpose of the Fall, and the Atonement, so that, number one, we would have two options to choose from; and number two, we would be redeemed from the transgression that was the Fall. So that then we would be truly free to choose.

We dance on a razor’s edge, this is the way I put it, God allows us to be tempted, he allows us to have difficulties in our lives, to the point where there really is just our choice between us and sin. That we really could choose either thing, and we just have to pick one. It’s almost to the point where we’re sort of neutral between one and the other, and we just have to decide, “What kind of world do I want to live in? Do I want to live in a world where I believe in God and all of his promises will one day come true? Or do I want to live in a world where there is no meaning to what I do?”

And we just get a pick, do we want to act, or do we want to be acted upon? Do we want the attitude of Laman and Lemuel? Or do we want the attitude of Nephi?

One is harder, right now. One requires work, one requires vulnerability, it requires trust in God, it requires faith. And one is easier; we get to blame everyone else for our problems, we get to be acted upon. But the invitation from God is, we will act.

So what does Nephi do? He carries away the Liahona. He carries away the plates of brass. He carries away the sword of Laban. And they walk many days away, and they build a temple. They build a lot of buildings, and they build a temple. And the blacksmith, Nephi, as I’ve called him, he makes a bunch of copies of the sword of Laban.

So I want to just talk about this. Oh, and one of the things that Nephi says in verse 20:

“Wherefore, the word of the Lord was fulfilled which he spake unto me, saying that: Inasmuch as they will not hearken unto thy words they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And behold, they were cut off from his presence.”

So this is a covenant that has already been fulfilled.

Now, in verse 27, Nephi says this:

“And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness.”

This is where we get the title for our lesson. What does that mean?

Well let’s look at the artefacts. In my opinion, we can learn what the manner of happiness is by looking at the artefacts that the Nephites enjoyed. First of all, they worked really hard, they built a lot of buildings, including a temple. They built this temple after the manner of the Temple of Solomon. So it would have had an outer court with an altar. It would have had a Holy place, and it would have had a Holy of Holies. And perhaps they even built a replica of the Ark.

And in the Ark they would have put, for sure, the brass plates, the Liahona, and maybe even the original sword of Laban. They would have put whatever holy things they had with them. So they have the Temple, that’s their first artefact. And it shows that the people of Nephi had hard work and industry.

Secondly, they have the Liahona. The Liahona only works when you pay attention to it and you have faith. It works according to the amount of heed and diligence that we gave unto it. So they’re led by the Spirit. They have hard work. They have a God-centred society, with all these buildings that are built around the temple. So they are also guided by the Spirit. They also have the plates of brass. So they’re willing to be led by the word of God.

And finally, they have the sword of Laban. They are people who are willing to defend themselves against anyone who would deprive them of their rights. These are the aspects, these are the artefacts that are necessary for us if we want to live after the manner of happiness.

We have to be willing to set boundaries that other people cannot cross. We have to be willing not to be acted upon, but instead, choose to act. We have to be willing to pay attention to the word of the Lord, and to the Spirit of the Lord, and to be willing to work hard, because that is the nature of the Fall. After the Fall, Adam was told, “It is by the sweat of thy brow, thou shall eat thy bread all the days of thy life.”

This is the manner of happiness. There is no laziness, there is no idleness in the manner of happiness. They worked hard, and they were willing to sacrifice.

And finally, they had this attitude Nephi took with him everywhere he went and doubtless taught to everyone he ruled over. And that attitude is; it is our choice, given a choice between acting and being acted upon, it is our choice to act. We get to choose our attitude. We get to choose that we have faith in God when things are difficult. And we get to choose to work hard, we get to choose to believe and to have heed and diligence towards the commandments of God, and to pay attention to the word of God. And then we get to choose that no-one else can take away our freedom.

And this is the manner of happiness, this is the invitation to all of us, today. I hope that we can receive that invitation that we will act and not be acted upon. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.