
1 NEPHI 10-18

Book of Mormon, Adult Institute Class, Monday, 14 Sep 2009

David A. LeFevre

INTRODUCTION

1 NEPHI 10: LEHI TEACHES AND NEPHI LEARNS

10:1-16 LEHI TEACHES HIS FAMILY

In these verses, we get a hint that Lehi's vision in chapter 8 was much more than that text indicated. However, Nephi also informs us (v. 17) that at least some of Lehi's words came from other sources, such as reading the brass plates and the inspiration that came from such scripture study. Thus we learn from Lehi's example that the Lord can teach us through many methods and experiences.

10:1 **my proceedings**. Chapter 10 is a transition. Prior to this, Nephi is summarizing his father's story. From this point on, he is telling his own story. Of course, Lehi is still an essential part of the story, and even some of Lehi's prophecies and visions. But the point of view shifts—it's now from Nephi's perspective.

10:2-3 **he spake unto them concerning the Jews**. This is a message that Lehi had been preaching before they left and which nearly got him killed. But it could be that as a result of his dream, Lehi learned even more details about the Babylonian captivity and the return of the Jews later.

10:4 **six hundred years**. We don't know when Lehi left Jerusalem, except that it was sometime after the first year of Zedekiah (597 B.C.) and before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (586 B.C.). It was probably closer to the first date. We also don't know the year Jesus was born, but Herod died in 4 B.C., so it had to be just before that (perhaps as early as 6 B.C.). By any date in that range, though, it's not 600 years. I've heard many proposed solutions to this, including counting the years as lunar years and starting Zedekiah's reign sooner (by having him co-regent with another king). I do not have an answer, but tend to believe that the 600 years mentioned here is a rounded off number more than an exact calendrical date (though admittedly 3 Nephi 1:1 and 2:6 make it sound quite precise).

a Savior of the world. This is the first mention of "Savior" that is found 12 times total in the Book of Mormon (6 of those by Nephi). In the KJV, this is really an Isaiah term (used 8 times there out of 13 occurrences total in the Old Testament), which explains why Nephi may have used it, too, given his love of Isaiah. (The Hebrew word is *yasha'*, meaning deliverer, liberator, or the victor in battle, and is actually found 221 times, 57 times in Psalms and 29 in Isaiah. It doesn't always refer to God,

especially in the early chapters.) The term “Savior” is especially appropriate for Nephi, who has some of the most powerful teachings on the Atonement in scripture.

10:5 ***the prophets, how great a number had testified of these things.*** Though we can certainly find many Messianic prophecies in our current Old Testament, it’s clear that many great ones had been lost. At least some of these lost ones were on the brass plates, along with prophesies of the prophets we know about that were certainly more clear than our present version.

10:6 ***rely on this Redeemer.*** This is also the first occurrence of “Redeemer” in the Book of Mormon, a word that is never mentioned in the New Testament, though it occurs 41 times in the Book of Mormon and 18 times in the Old Testament (though the Hebrew root, *go’el*, is used a total of 117 times). A ‘redeemer’ in ancient Israel was one who freed another from prison or bondage, who purchased family land that had been lost, or who avenged the wrongs done to a family member. In other words, a redeemer does something that another person cannot do for himself. A redeemer is the ultimate expression of grace, because the person in trouble often got there through their own mistakes. But regardless of the reason, that person is powerless to get out of the mess they are in. So the redeemer, as a pure gift, solves the problem. Note also that redeemers are always kinsmen. In His case, Jesus is our kinsman in at least two ways. First, He is our elder brother from the pre-Earth life. Second, when we make covenants with Him, He becomes our ‘father’ and we are His children. Thus, under ancient Jewish law, He is then able to fully exercise redeemership and free us from the bondage we have fallen into because of our sins.

10:7-10 ***Bethabara.*** Some have considered this an anachronism, that Joseph Smith had Lehi give this so long before John. But the Hebrew word means with ‘house of the ford’ (referring to a crossing of the Jordan) or ‘house of pure water.’ Either name alludes to an appropriate place for John to baptize. There were actually several places along the Jordan with that name, making it likely that Lehi was speaking in more general terms.

10:11 ***concerning the gospel.*** Another first use here in the Book of Mormon. In the New Testament, Paul defines the *gospel* as the new that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose on the third day, and seen by many (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). This is very to Lehi’s declaration of what the ‘good news’ (gospel = Greek *euangelion*) is: Jesus slain, risen from the dead, and manifest unto the Gentiles by the Holy Ghost.

10:12-14 ***compared like unto an olive-tree.*** This motif comes from at least two sources: Isaiah 5 and the writings of Zenos, on the brass plates but lost to us today except as quoted in the Book of Mormon. These same teachings appear to be the source for 1 Nephi 15:12-18 and Jacob 5-6.

10:15 ***mine other book.*** Not 2 Nephi but the large plates. These “many more things” were likely on the lost 116 pages.

10:16 ***as my father dwelt in a tent.*** This loops back immediately to 1 Nephi 9:1 but also ties the entire narrative back to 1 Nephi 2:15.

1 NEPHI 10:17-22 NEPHI DESIRES TO KNOW FOR HIMSELF

10:17-22 ***that I might see, and hear, and know.*** This prepares us for Nephi’s vision in chapters 11-14.

1 NEPHI 11: NEPHI SEES THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

Nephi's vision began on a majestic note—his vision of the life, death, and resurrection of the Jesus. It started with him simply wanting to experience the things his father had experienced, but perhaps like Joseph Smith in the sacred grove, he got far more than he was expecting.

1 NEPHI 11:1-12 THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD AS GUIDE

11:1 ***desired...believing...pondering***. These are three important keys to understanding the process of receiving personal revelation, especially when we combine it with the knowledge that Nephi's experience had been preceded by careful searching of the scriptures.

I was caught away. Like Moses (Moses 1), John (Revelation 21:10), and Jesus (Matthew 4:8—see the JST change in the footnote) Nephi was taken to a high mountain to meet with the God. In Elijah's case, he seems to have walked to the top himself (1 Kings 19:11). This is an even more common pattern in apocryphal literature, with great visions often taking place as the prophet is caught up and taken to another location.

an exceedingly high mountain. It's impossible to know what mountain this is, but it's interesting that Nephi was in the Midian area at this time—close to a probable location for Mt. Sinai.

11:2-5 This establishes Nephi's humble desire—see what his father saw.

11:6-7 ***ye shall bear record***. This is Nephi's call to the apostleship. He will become a personal witness to Jesus' ministry and is called upon to testify of the things he will know.

11:8-11 ***To know the interpretation thereof***. It is one thing to see the same vision, but it is another thing to understand it. Nephi realized the tree represented something "precious above all" but knew there must be more to it, and sought to understand that.

11:12 ***I saw him not***. The Holy Ghost had been Nephi's personal guide up to this point, but at this point he left. This is the only instance in scripture where the Holy Ghost made a personal appearance to anyone.

1 NEPHI 11:13-23 NEPHI UNDERSTANDS THE MEANING OF THE VISION

Daniel Peterson asks the question: how did Nephi's question about the meaning of the tree get answered by seeing a young woman holding a baby? And yet Nephi immediately gets it. Why? It may have to do with the near-universal worship of Asherah in ancient Israel, the wife of El (the head god) and the mother of the sons of God.

11:13 ***I beheld a virgin***. Nephi asked to know the interpretation of the tree of life, and saw a young woman.

11:14 ***an angel***. Nephi's guide changed to an unnamed angel.

11:16-17 ***Knowest thou the condescension of God?*** Nephi knew that God loves us but isn't sure what point the angel is making.

11:19-20 Nephi saw the woman “carried away” and then holding a baby.

11:21-23 **Knowest thou the meaning of the tree.** The angel next asked Nephi the same question which Nephi asked the Spirit back in v. 11. And amazingly, after seeing a woman and a child, he did! It is “the love of God.” As expressed above, this could be because Nephi understood the image of Asherah, who was always represented by a tree and who was the mother of the sons of God.

11:24-25 **the rod of iron...was the word of God.** This is another interesting lesson. Nephi is shown a vision of Jesus going among men, and from that understands the meaning of the rod of iron, as well as the fountain of living waters and the tree of life.

11:26-33 **behold the condescension of God!** Next Nephi is shown a vision of Jesus’ ministry, how He is baptized by John, taught people, called twelve apostles, healed the sick, and finally judged by men and “slain for the sins of the world.”

11:34-36 **great and spacious building was the pride of the world.** Next Nephi is shown the apostasy in the early Church, and from that learns the meaning of the great and spacious building.

1 NEPHI 12: NEPHI’S SEED

This chapter gave Nephi a glimpse of the future of his seed and that of his brothers. It also gives further interpretation of some aspects of the tree of life vision.

12:1-3 Nephi saw his seed spreading out and contending in the land of promise.

12:4-5 The destruction before the coming of Christ to this continent.

12:6-10 The coming of Christ to the Americas and the calling of the twelve disciples here, as well as their roles in relation to the twelve apostles in Jerusalem.

12:11-12 The time of peace after the coming of Christ.

12:13-15 The gathering together of the armies for the final Nephite-Lamanite battle.

12:16-18 Given that context (a vision of the future of his seed), the angel now interprets the fountain of filthy water (the depths of hell), the mists of darkness (the temptations of the devil), and the large and spacious building (the vain imaginations and the pride of men).

12:19-23 The final battle, the end of Nephi’s seed, and the dwindling in unbelief of the seed of his brothers.

1 NEPHI 13: PLAIN AND PRECIOUS THINGS

The view shifts away from the Lamanite seed to the kingdoms of the Gentiles. Eventually the two come back together, but the key message of this chapter is the period of darkness that arises in the world as a result of the rejection of the apostles in chapter 11 and the (temporary) triumph of the devil discussed in chapter 12.

13:4-9 **a great church.** Read Stephen Robinson’s comments in the Institute manual (p. 27).

13:12-16 The settling of the Americas by the Gentiles, starting with Columbus. Note that they are portrayed as humble before the Lord.

13:17-19 The revolutionary war (and other battles for independence?).

13:20-25 The coming forth of the Bible, which initially contains the fullness of the gospel.

13:26-29 The “plain and most precious” things are removed from the Bible before it goes forth among the Gentiles. Based on textual studies of ancient manuscripts, such changes had to happen before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. for the Old Testament, and in the latter part of the first century for the New Testament.

13:30 *the mixture of thy seed*. Nephi’s seed was not completely destroyed in the final battles. Some of them survived, intermixed with the Lamanites.

13:35 *thy seed...shall write*. The writing and coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

13:39-40 *other books*. This is not the Bible or the Book of Mormon, which have already been called out. This includes the Doctrine & Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, the Joseph Smith Translation, and other teachings of living prophets and apostles. A primary purpose of all of this is to testify “that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true”—that the Bible is true. Latter-day Saints are perhaps the strongest believers in the Bible left in the world today—mainly because of our other scriptures.

1 NEPHI 14: TWO CHURCHES ONLY

14:7 *a great and a marvelous work*. The restoration of the gospel in the last days.

14:10-14 *two churches only*. Following the black and white imagery of the book of Revelation, Nephi described the epic battle between God and Satan, good and evil. Satan’s forces are large and strong, but God empowers his smaller covenant people scattered all over the world. Like John, Nephi’s key message is: ‘Don’t worry, God wins.’

14:18-28 JOHN THE BELOVED

14:18-28 *a man...one of the twelve apostles*. John’s unique mission not only lets him be here to help prepare the world for the second coming, but he was also called to write his vision of the last days. Nephi saw the same vision but it was left to John to spell it out in full detail.

14:29-30 THE CONCLUSION OF NEPHI’S VISION

14:29 *I saw the things which my father saw*. Nephi came full circle here, letting us know that his prayer was fully answered.

1 NEPHI 15: NEPHI TEACHES HIS BRETHREN

15:3 *hard to be understood, save a man should inquire of the Lord*. Nephi knew this firsthand.

15:4-5 ***grieved...because of the things which I had seen***. When Nephi saw his brothers, he was reminded of what he had learned about his seed and theirs, and “was overcome because of my afflictions.”

15:8-11 ***Have ye inquired of the Lord?*** See comments by Elder Dallin H. Oaks in the Institute Manual, p. 31.

15:12-36 NEPHI INTERPRETS THE VISION

15:21-22 ***the tree...tree of life***. It is interesting that Nephi did not need to (or chose not to) offer more explanation than that. Either that phrase explained it all or (more likely to me) he didn't waste time telling them something that would do them no good, but saved it for the real message for Laman and Lemuel—the need to repent.

15:23-25 ***rod of iron...word of God***.

15:26-36 ***river of water...place of filthiness***. The most lengthy explanation relates to the filthy water which is “a representation of that awful hell”. This is a sure call to repentance. In other words, the message of the vision to Nephi was quite different than how he delivered it to his brothers.

1 NEPHI 16: THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

16:1-6 Nephi's teachings had a positive short-term impact, and his brothers repented.

16:7 The marriages finally took place, with Zoram marrying the oldest.

16:9 ***on the morrow he should take his journey***. Clearly Lehi was prepared for this, because one day's notice is not much. Perhaps they were praying to know when to leave, since they now knew the valley of Lemuel wasn't the promised land.

16:10, 27-29 ***a round ball of curious workmanship***. The word *liahona* comes from Alma 37:38; otherwise it was just called a ball or director or compass. It has two “spindles” (arrows?), one pointing the direction to travel. What did the other one do? (see Bunker's article reference in Sources for a suggestion.) Elder David A. Bednar's comments in the Institute Manual are insightful (p. 34-35).

16:12 ***across the river Laman***. Since they headed south, this tells us they were camped on the north side of the river. It also indicates that the river was substantial enough to warrant mention in crossing it.

16:13-14a ***four days...south-southeast...Shazer***. Their first stop after four days was a place they named *Shazer*. Though not found in the Bible, this is a good Hebrew word with two meanings—twisting and trees. This tells us something about the place. It also took them four days to get there—about 100 miles by camel. V. 14 says it was a good place to hunt as well. They were here long enough to hunt, clean, and cure the meat. It also indicates that they may have been in the valley of Lemuel long enough after the marriages to have at least some children, because Nephi says the brothers out hunting “did return again to our families.” A good potential location for Shazer is Wadi Agharr, a fertile oasis along the Frankincense Trail (which Lehi and family had to follow since that is the only place with water) about 100 miles south of the valley of Lemuel.

16:14a-17 **most fertile parts...more fertile parts.** Their journey continued through areas full of game and wild fruit and other provisions, though those things appear to decrease as they go south. This matches perfectly with the northern section of the Frankincense Trail, going through the area between modern Dedan and Medina. In fact, the common name for this northern part today is still *most fertile parts*.

16:17 **did pitch our tents.** For perhaps a variety of reasons—the need to hunt more meat, women giving birth, etc.—they chose to stop again, but never named this place. We might call it ‘the broken bow camp’ because of what happened next. This is an area of decreased water supply and wild food.

16:18 **did break my bow...of fine steel.** Nephi’s bow is quite unusual but cannot last in those conditions. It must have rusted or cracked in some way. You would think this would be okay, but v. 21 tells us that all the other bows had “lost their springs.” So the group has no way to hunt big game and supply the needs of their growing family.

16:23 **did make out of wood a bow.** This is no trivial task. There are only a handful of trees in the world that are good for bow making, and only one in Arabia—the *atim* tree. The *atim* tree only grows at a high elevation in a certain part of Arabia (Bishah), at exactly the place where the party would have been in their journey, based on Nephi’s description.

16:33 **we did again take our journey.** The group continued south-southeast for “many days” before they again took a break.

16:34 **Ishmael died.** Though we don’t hear much from Ishmael, it was clearly a tragic blow to the group to lose him at this stage in their journey (see v. 35-36).

which was called Nahom. This is the only place in their journey that already had a name, which in Hebrew can mean both *consolation* and to *roar, complain, or be hungry* (all appropriate names for what happens there). This is thus a great test of the book—can such a place be found in southern Arabia? It has to be a place with some supplies, since they stopped there. Ishmael died there, so a burial place would be needed. And it has to be a turning point on the trail, since when they leave (17:1), they went eastward. In recent years, it was discovered that there is just such a land, called NHM anciently. This is even attributed by some stone altars found at nearby Marib by German archaeologists which refer to the tribe NHM and are dated to 600 B.C. (the inscription reads, “Bi’athar, son of Sawad, son of Naw’an, the Nihmite”). Additionally, a French team found a massive burial site in the same area, associated NHM with a cemetery.

16:37 **let us slay our father, and also our brother.** Using Ishmael’s death and their hard conditions, Laman and Lemuel rallied the sons of Ishmael to their murderous intent, that they might gain control of the camp and return to Jerusalem.

16:39 **the voice of the Lord came.** Nephi gives no details here, but the experience was sufficient to stop the rebellion and humble the group, that they could stock up on supplies and continue their journey.

1 NEPHI 17: ARRIVAL IN BOUNTIFUL

17:1 **nearly eastward.** The Frankincense Trail turns eastward at ancient Marib but also turns into the harshest part of the journey yet. Many Frankincense parties would go south instead and load

onto ships to go east to the coasts where the trees were found. But Lehi is directed to go inland and stay with the trail.

wade through much affliction...bear children. This gives us a hint that this part of the journey took a long time—2100 miles is far, but could have been done in a few months or even a couple years, but certainly didn't require eight years, as Nephi says (v. 4). A combination of later scriptures give us more clues—Mosiah 1:17, Alma 36:28-29, and especially Alma 9:9-13. From these scriptures, it could well be that the group suffered a period of slavery or servitude, as they were out of resources and had nothing left to barter with except their own time. This they would have had to have done in order to have access to wells and hunting groups owned by local tribes.

17:2-3 **live upon raw meat.** Many have speculated why the group couldn't have fires. It could certainly have been to hide their presence, though as indicated, local tribes owned the only water sources, so in order to survive, they couldn't always hide. It also could be that there simply wasn't anything to burn. Whatever the reason, Nephi saw this as a great blessing.

17:5 **the land which we called Bountiful.** Sometimes Joseph Smith translated the name (like here) but other times left it in Hebrew (like Shazer). Bountiful has at least 12 characteristics required (see Institute Manual, pp. 37-38). The amazing thing is not that we can find a place like that on the southern Arabia coastline, but that there are several good candidates that meet the requirements!

the sea, which we called Irreantum. This is not a Hebrew word, but an ancient South Semitic one from the language spoken in southern Arabia! It means *watering of abundance*, according to one analysis, very compatible with Nephi's translation of "many waters".

17:7 Perhaps the group thought they had arrived at the promised land (though Nephi's vision probably led him to believe it was 'across many waters'). But they seemed quite settled when the Lord calls Nephi to take the next step.

17:8 **Thou shalt construct a ship.** The southern Arabia coast was the ship-building capital of the entire region. But Nephi doesn't build his ship like other men, but "after the manner which I [the Lord] shall show thee."

17:9 **whither shall I go that I may find ore.** Another indication of Nephi's metal working expertise. He doesn't ask for help making the tools, just finding the ore. He knows what to do after that.

17:21 **we might have been happy.** Nephi found happiness and saw the hand of the Lord even in challenges. Laman and Lemuel saw only hardship and loss of possessions, which meant they were not happy.

17:23-47 NEPHI COMPARES THEIR JOURNEY TO THE EXODUS

This long discourse compares their experience to that of the children of Israel coming out of Egypt, and extols the virtues of the Lord.

17:45 **ye were past feeling.** Seeing an angel and hearing the voice of the Lord was not enough for the rebellious brothers. But lest we not see the lesson for ourselves, see Elder Wirthlin's comments in the Institute Manual, p. 39.

17:48-55 NEPHI'S WORDS AND THE POWER OF GOD CHASTEN THE BROTHERS

The Spirit is so strong, that Nephi is able to repel his brother's attempt to throw him off a cliff. Later, he touches them to show that the situation isn't permanent, that they are forgiven, and that they need to work on the ship.

1 NEPHI 18: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LAND

18:1 ***work timbers of curious workmanship***. The word 'curious' has several meanings. The one likely intended here (as well as with the Liahona in 16:10) is 'wrought with care and art; elegant; neat; finished.'

18:3 ***the Lord showed unto me great things***. Like us today, Nephi went to his own 'temple' on a regular basis to talk to the Lord, and continued to learn more and more.

18:7 ***Jacob and...Joseph***. This is the first mention of Sariah bearing two more sons during their eight year journey. This gives us an indication of her age at Bountiful—probably mid-40s at most.

18:9-22 THE BINDING OF NEPHI AND THE STORM

18:9-10 ***make themselves merry...dance...sing***. What's so bad about that? It's not that dancing or singing is evil, but the kind of dancing and singing we do. See the Institute Manual, p. 40.

18:23-25 ARRIVAL IN THE PROMISED LAND

Where the group arrived is an interesting discussion, with many theories put forth. I favor the Mesoamerican proposal and will thus follow that throughout our study. But the issue is not settled and new information could lead us all in a different direction.

18:24 ***plant seeds***. These are seeds they have carried for a long time—from Jerusalem, the valley of Lemuel, and perhaps Bountiful. This shows great faith and patience, as they didn't use them along the way, even when their need was great.

18:25 The many animals listed are interesting. Some of them are never mentioned again. One, horses, is most intriguing because it was long held that there were no horses on this continent before the Spaniards. Yet archaeological evidence in both North and South America have confirmed their existence before Cortez. Nephi's mention of them here but no subsequent mention after 3 Nephi matches those finds.

SOURCES

Book of Mormon Reference Companion, Dennis L. Largey, ed.

Book of Mormon Student Manual, Religion 121-122, LDS Church Institute Manual (2009)

Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet.

Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon, Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds.

From Jerusalem to Zarahemla, S. Kent Brown.

Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem, John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely, eds.

Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World, Davis Bitton, ed.

Rediscovering the Book of Mormon, John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds.

“The Design of the Liahona and the Purpose of the Second Spindle,” by Robert Bunker, at <http://mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=3&num=2&id=59>.

Several articles have appeared over the years about the journey through Arabia, but this one issue summarizes the research nicely: *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 15:2 (2006), at <http://mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=15&num=2>. See the pdf version on the right for pictures.