

## 4. Into the Wilderness

1 Nephi 2:1–7:22

“And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands. And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.” (1 Nephi 2:20-21)

## “I’ll Go Where You Want Me to Go”

(Hymn 270; see 1 Nephi 3:7: “I will go and do the things . . .”)

It may not be on the mountain height  
Or over the stormy sea,  
It may not be at the battle's front  
My Lord will have need of me.  
But if, by a still, small voice he calls  
To paths that I do not know  
I'll answer, dear Lord, with my hand in thine:  
I'll go where you want me to go.

### Chorus

I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,  
Over mountain or plain or sea;  
I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord;  
I'll be what you want me to be.

Perhaps today there are loving words  
Which Jesus would have me speak;  
There may be now in the paths of sin  
Some wand'rer whom I should seek.  
O Savior, if thou wilt be my guide,  
Tho dark and rugged the way,  
My voice shall echo the message sweet:  
I'll say what you want me to say.

There's surely somewhere a lowly place  
In earth's harvest fields so wide  
Where I may labor through life's short day  
For Jesus, the Crucified.  
So trusting my all to thy tender care,  
And knowing thou lovest me,  
I'll do thy will with a heart sincere:  
I'll be what you want me to be.

## Exegetical Questions on 1 Nephi 2:1–7:22

### ■ Historical

- Roughly 600 B.C., a prosperous citizen of Jerusalem, recently called as a prophet, led his family into the wilderness to save them from the city's coming destruction
- Various experiences taught the family to rely more fully upon the Lord
- Some thirty years later, c. 570 B.C., Nephi recorded these events, understanding better the implications of each experience and the results of his brothers' pattern of disobedience

### ■ Literary

- This is the second section in the sixfold division of 1 Nephi, occupying the "B" position and balanced by B', a further account of traveling in the wilderness (16:1–18:25)
- Consists of primarily of **abridged historical narrative**, but **dramatic episodes**, **speeches**, and **editorial reflections** are added for impact
- Whereas the family's overall travel in 1 Nephi is away from Jerusalem towards the promised land, in this section there is considerable back-and-forth between the city and the wilderness camp until lessons are learned and commands are fulfilled
- **Wilderness** imagery is prominent
  - **Leaving the world** (2:4, 15)
  - **Assuming Exodus imagery** (4:2, 5:15)

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## Exegetical Questions on 1 Nephi 2:1–7:22

### ■ Theological

- **Blessings for obedience** (2:3, 4:18, 5:20)
- **Blessings for Faith** (2:19)
  - **Gaining testimonies**: Nephi (2:16), Sam (2:17), Sarah (5:2, 7–8)
- **Effects of "Murmuring"** (2:11–12, 4:4)
  - Leads to violence (3:28, 7:16)
- **Trusting the spirit** (4:6, 18)
- Covenants → **The "Lehi Covenant"**
  - Blessings and cursings (per the Deuteronomic covenant, 2:20, 4:14)
  - Land (5:5, 7:13)
  - Posterity (7:1)
- Deliverance (1:20b, 3:31, 4:3, 4:11, 5:5, 5:8)

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## Into the Wilderness (1 Nephi 2:1–7:22)

### Back-and-forth from Jerusalem to the Deseret!

- **Lehi Takes His Family into the Wilderness** (2:1–24, **abridged historical narrative**)
  - Note that Nephi (like Mormon later) *abridges* his father's records, and even his own, for the Small Plates
  - The Small Plates therefore have a *summary* and *selective* account of the events that occurred, focusing just on those that illustrate Nephi's purposes
    - "I, Nephi, will show unto you that *the tender mercies* of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, *because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.*" (1 Nephi 1:20b)
- **The Brothers Return for the Brass Plates** (3:1–4:38, **abridged narrative with dramatic episodes**)
- **Lehi's Family Reunited** (5:1–20; **abridged narrative with speeches and quotations**)
- **Nephi's Intents for the Record** (6:1–6; Nephi's **second editorial digression** for his readers explaining his record keeping practices)
  - Note where these digressions about "writing on plates" tend to occur, emphasizing that what is right before or right after was worth recording
- **Ishmael's Family Joins the Expedition** (7:1–22; **abridged narrative with speeches and quotations**)

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## Flight from Jerusalem (2:1–7)

### Lehi Takes His Family into the Wilderness

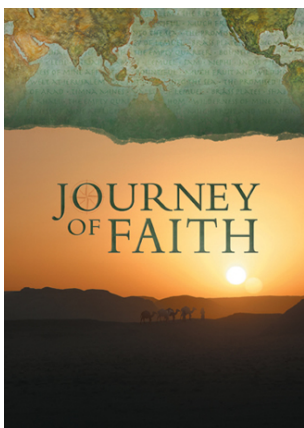
- Warned by the spirit in a dream, Lehi leads his family "into the wilderness" and traveled "in the borders near the Red Sea"
  - *Going into the wilderness and encamping by a body of water recalls the Exodus*
- Lehi leaves his house, his lands, his possessions—**sacrifices of obedience** (2:4)
- Comes to a valley (named for Lemuel) with a *wadi* (probably a seasonal stream but perhaps a regular flow; named for Laman)
- Lehi offers **sacrifices of thanksgiving**—what was his priesthood authority?
  - Under the Mosaic system, only Levites held the Aaronic priesthood, but prophets such as Samuel had offered sacrifices (suggests that Lehi held the Melchizedek priesthood)

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## Supplement: Timna Mines and Valley of Lemuel



- “Journey of Faith,” an interesting DVD put together by a number of BYU scholars and associates
- Seeks to associate Near Eastern history, linguistics, geology, and even botany with the journey of Lehi chronicled in 1 Nephi
- Two short episodes today
  - Timna Mines: a site on Lehi and Nephi’s probably route might suggest something about Nephi’s interest in metallurgy
  - Valley of Lemuel: sites described in our text such as this have possible geographic correlations

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## Laman and Lemuel’s Murmurings (2:8–15)

### Lehi Takes His Family into the Wilderness

- Lehi’s comparison of them and the river and valley in the wilderness (2:9–10)
- “. . . he spake because of the **stiffneckedness** of Laman and Lemuel; for behold they did murmur in many things against their father” (2:11)
  - Murmuring arises from not knowing God’s will
- Lehi rebukes them with the spirit; the account is compressed
  - We do not know what he said, only the result
- “And my father dwelt in a tent.” (2:15; cf. 2:4)
  - Symbolizes Lehi’s willingness to forsake worldly wealth, etc.
  - Compare with the Rechabites of Jeremiah 35, who rejected urban living and returned to traditional Hebrew nomadism to be more faithful to YHWH (Jehovah)

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## Nephi's Faithfulness and Blessing (2:16–24)

### Lehi Takes His Family into the Wilderness

- **Nephi Seeks a Witness**
  - "... having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father." (2:16)
    - No indication what Nephi's spiritual experiences or state had been before this experience
  - **The gift of having faith**, cf. D&C 46:13
- **Response of Sam**
  - "And I spake unto Sam, making known unto him the things which the Lord had manifested unto me by his Holy Spirit. And it came to pass that he believed in my words." (2:17)
  - **The gift of having faith in the testimony of others**, cf. 46:14
- **Nephi's Blessing**
  - "... *Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart. And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise*" (2:19–20)
    - Covenant language; Cf. Deuteronomic, "Lehi" covenants
  - Converse—cursings—await Laman and Lemuel
    - Opposite of covenant blessings is **"being cut off from the presence of the Lord"** (2:21)

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## The Brothers Return for the Brass Plates (3:1–4:38)

- **Commandment to Retrieve the Brass Plates Revealed (3:1–5)**
  - "... I have not required it of them but it is a commandment of the Lord" (3:5)
- **Nephi's willingness (3:6–8)**
  - "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them." (3:7)
- **First attempt with Laban (3:9–14)**
  - Laman's **"diplomacy"**
- **Second attempt (3:14–31)**
  - Nephi's idea of **"trading"** the family's possessions for the plates fails
  - "Why smite your younger brother with a rod?" (3:29)
    - **How did seeing an angel change Laman and Lemuel? How did it not?**
- **Nephi's successful attempt (4:1–29)**
  - "And I was led **by the Spirit**, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do." (4:6)

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## The Slaying of Laban (4:7–19)

### The Brothers Return for the Brass Plates

- The Problem of the Slaying of Laban
  - Millet and McConkie *DCBM*, 43-44: “Whatever God requires is right . . .” (see Joseph Smith quote, packet, 57)
  - But why did Lehi not get the plates before they left, why could Nephi not take them while Laban was in a drunken stupor?
- Scriptural Justification
  - “Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief . . . Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise . . . they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save they should have the law. And I also knew that the law was engraven upon the plates of brass.” (4:13-16)
    - An editorial comment (almost a justification), this interrupts the narrative and is a later observation)

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## Slaying Laban: Some Other Thoughts

- “And the Spirit said unto me again: Behold the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands. Yea, and I also knew that he had sought to take away mine own life; yea, and he would not hearken unto the commandments of the Lord; and he also had taken away our property.” (4:11)
- “. . . I smote off his head with his own sword.” (4:18)
  - Suggests that Laban was the victim of his own actions and choices?
- See also “When Is It Better for One Man to Perish?” (Welch and Welch, chart 115)
  - Judgment recognized by leader of Israel (here Jehovah)
  - Person guilty of offense against leader of Israel
  - Person “named by God for death” (convicted and sentenced)
  - Those surrendering or executing judgment are themselves innocent
  - Those executing face destruction if they do not act
- The Law of Retaliation (D&C 98:23-32; see packet, 58)
  - Justified after “three threats” (although this does not apply neatly hear)

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## Zoram Joins the Expedition (4:30–38)

### The Brothers Return for the Brass Plates

- “Now we were desirous that he should tarry with us for this cause, that the Jews might not know concerning our flight into the wilderness, lest they should pursue us and destroy us.” (4:36)
- “And I spake unto him, even with an oath, that he need not fear; that he should be a free man like unto us if he would go down in the wilderness with us.” (4:33)
  - Covenants and oaths: “as the Lord liveth, and as I live . . .” (4:32)
  - An example of an ancient “horizontal” covenant
    - Vertical covenants made by God with people **individually** or **collectively**; he always keeps his part of the agreement
    - Horizontal agreements or promises between people
  - **Even “outsiders” can become part of the chosen, delivered group**
  - **We can make covenants and live spiritually**, or **refuse and perish spiritually**

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## Lehi’s Family Reunited (5:1–20)

- Sariah’s Murmuring and Return to Faith (5:1–8)
  - “Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them.” (5:8, a quoted **testimony**)
  - **The mission for the Brass Plates strengthened testimonies—Nephi’s, Sariah’s, the entire family’s**
- Rejoicing and Sacrifices of Thanksgiving (5:9)
- The Contents of the Brass Plates (5:10–22, *next slide*)

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## The Contents of the Brass Plates (5:10–20)

See Welch and Welch, chart 14

- **Five Books of Moses** (5:11)
  - The Law necessary to keep the covenant
- **Historical record of Jews to Zedekiah** (3:12)
- **Words of the prophets** (3:13, 20)
  - Joseph in Egypt, Isaiah, some of Jeremiah
  - Zenos, Zenock, Neum—prophets unknown to our OT
    - Lehi and Laban's families seem to have originated in the northern Kingdom of Israel
    - When it fell, their ancestors may have fled to Jerusalem with their records, then added what the Jews had
- **Genealogy of Lehi's fathers** (3:3, 12; 5:14; also Alma 10:3)
  - Lehi descendant of Joseph, tribe of Manasseh

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## Ishmael's Family Joins the Expedition

(7:1–22)

- Finding Favor with Ishmael (7:1–5)
  - Contrast with getting the plates
    - Why was it so easy? What did they say or do?
  - "Ishmael was of the line of Ephraim, and his sons married into Lehi's family, and Lehi's sons married Ishmael's daughters." (Erastus Snow, *JD* 23.184)
- Rebellion in the Wilderness (7:6–22)
  - Nephi Exhorts His Brothers (7:6–15)
    - "Yea, and how is it that ye have forgotten **what great things the Lord hath done for us**, in delivering us out of the hands of Laban, and also that we should obtain the record? Yea, and how is it that ye have forgotten that **the Lord is able to do all things according to his will**, for the children of men, if it so be that they exercise faith in him? Wherefore, let us be faithful to him."
      - Seem preachy? This is a **sermon** (a discourse intended to convince and change behavior) or **admonition** by Nephi to his brothers
      - Note Title Page purposes (**great things** and **Jesus, the Lord, is the Eternal God**)
  - Nephi Bound, Delivered, and Reconciled (7:16–22)

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## Nephi's Deliverance (7:17–18)

- The Lord enables Nephi to burst his bands
  - “But it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, according to my faith which is in thee, wilt thou deliver me from the hands of my brethren; yea, even give me strength that I may burst these bands with which I am bound. And it came to pass that when I had said these words, behold, the bands were loosed from off my hands and feet . . .” (7:17–18a)
  - See Elder David A. Bednar, “In the Strength of the Lord” (*BYU Speeches*, October 2001)
    - **The “strengthening and enabling power of the Atonement,”** one of the ways that the grace of Christ helps deliver us is by giving us strength to do what must be done
  - This and other examples of deliverance in 1 Nephi point to **the ultimate deliverance afforded by the Atonement**
- Nephi's antagonists are still intent on killing him, despite this miraculous display
  - Reconciliation achieved through the intervention of family members

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## Lehi's Journey and the Exodus

(see Brown, packet 79ff; Welch and Welch, chart 94)

- God called Moses and Joshua to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land
  - Lehi called out of Jerusalem and to a new promised land
  - Fire present at the calling of Moses and Lehi
- Moses received instructions from God on Mt. Sinai
  - Nephi received instructions on a high mountain (1 Ne 11-14)
- 40 years of wandering and suffering in the wilderness
  - Lehi's family wandered and suffered afflictions in the wilderness
- Moses led the Israelites across the Red Sea
  - Lehi's family crossed “great waters”
- Israelites reveled in front of the Golden Calf
  - Nephi's brothers reveled on the boat
- Israelites rebelled frequently
  - Laman and Lemuel frequently rebelled against Nephi
- **Ultimately all such “wilderness journeys” are types of our own journey through life**
- **Deliverance is a type of the liberating power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ**

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