Lesson 9
2 Nephi 11–25

Here is an outline of 1 and 2 Nephi that might help your study of these chapters:

* 1 Nephi 1–18: Creation of Lehites
  ** 1 Nephi 19–2 Nephi 5: Fall of Lehites
  ** 2 Nephi 6–30: Undoing of the fall of Lehites (i.e., Atonement)

* Jacob’s words (2 Nephi 6–11) [2 Nephi 7–8 quotes Isaiah 50–51]
  ** Isaiah’s words (2 Nephi 12–24) [a quotation of Isaiah 2–14]

  * Oracle against Judah (2 Nephi 12–14; Isaiah 2–4)
    ** Oracle against Israel (2 Nephi 15; Isaiah 5)
    *** Isaiah’s call to prophesy (2 Nephi 16; Isaiah 6)
  ** Oracle against Assyria, Israel’s destroyer (2 Nephi 17–18; Isaiah 7–12)
    * Oracle against Babylon, Judah’s destroyer (2 Nephi 23–24; Isaiah 13–14)
  * Nephi’s words (2 Nephi 25–30) [note: 2 Nephi 27 is a commentary on Isaiah 29]
2 Nephi 11

Verses 2–3: Nephi tells us he has two reasons for delighting in the words of Isaiah and writing them down: he can liken them to his people, and Isaiah, like Nephi and Jacob, is a witness of Christ, so the three stand together as witnesses of him. What reasons might there be for the words of Isaiah to be given to us? For other reasons, see 1 Nephi 19:23; 2 Nephi 11:2–6, 8; 2 Nephi 25:3.

Verse 4: What does it mean for something to typify another thing? Nephi says that everything typifies Christ. What does that mean? How, for example, does the natural world typify him? How do we go about seeing everything else as typifying Christ?

Verse 5: What covenants is Nephi referring to? The Abrahamic covenant? Covenants with the children of Israel? Covenants with Lehi?

Verses 6–7: Why would there be no God if there were no Christ? If, as Joseph Smith taught, we are coeternal with God, why does our existence depend on the creation?

Verse 8: Why would Nephi want his people to rejoice for all men? Why does he want them to see how these things can be likened not only to the Nephites but to all men? What might such rejoicing and concern indicate? (Compare Enos’s experience in Enos 1:9. What brought about Enos’s concern?)
This begins Nephi’s long quotation from Isaiah, extending from here to the end of chapter 24. As he recorded his brother’s sermon, which included chapters from Isaiah that Nephi asked Jacob to read aloud, Nephi seems to have been inspired to record more of the words of Isaiah. Since these chapters were on the brass plates and the brass plates were available to the Nephites, why did Nephi copy them onto his own plates? There are only slight variations between these chapters as they are recorded here and as we have them in the King James Version of the Bible, so why do you suppose they were recorded for us in the Book of Mormon as well as the Bible? When you find Isaiah’s writings difficult, remember that the Nephites too found Isaiah difficult to understand. This was because Nephi didn’t teach them how to understand the prophesying of the Jews since he was worried that they might pick up some of the Jews’ ways of sinning in the process (2 Nephi 25:1–3). Despite the difficulty of reading Isaiah if we do not understand well how the Hebrews prophesied, we can learn a great deal by reading slowly and trying to connect each verse to the preceding and following verses as well as by paying close attention to the symbols Isaiah uses. If we want to understand how Nephi and Jacob understood Isaiah, we must do three things: First, we need to see how what we read typifies Christ and how God and Christ have revealed themselves in history. Second, we need to understand how Isaiah’s prophecies are about covenants. (See 2 Nephi 9:1.) Finally, we need to pay attention to how Nephi and Jacob interpreted Isaiah in their context.
The study questions for Isaiah 2–6 (The Old Testament Made Harder, lesson 36) may be helpful for these chapters.

Rather than try to cover all of these chapters, I will focus on only parts of two, chapters 19 and 25— that is, one chapter from Isaiah and another chapter in which Nephi talks about studying Isaiah.

2 Nephi 19

Verse 2: Why does the prophet use the past-tense verb form have seen to describe something in the future?

One way to understand this light literally is as the light from the destruction by fire of the Assyrians. On the other hand, the symbolism of light is fairly obvious. What might the relation be between the literal and the symbolic meanings?

Verse 4: In “thou hast broken the yoke of his burden,” to whom does his refer? (“Yoke of his burden” and “staff of his shoulder” may mean the same thing.) It is relatively easy to think of literal meanings for this verse, but what might be some spiritual readings? From what spiritual burden and spiritual oppressor will Israel be saved? What would that have meant to those who heard Isaiah prophesy? To the Nephites? To us?

Verse 6: This is one of the most famous verses in Isaiah (and perhaps one of the most famous verses in scripture, thanks to Handel). As a result, we may be overconfident that we understand fully what it means. Consider a couple of questions: The verse begins with for, or because, so
it must explain something that came in the verses before. What does it explain?

Why does Isaiah focus on Christ as a child?

What does it mean to say that the government will be on the shoulders of the Christ child? What is the alternative? In other words, what would it mean for the government not to be on his shoulders?

Do the names used here have particular significance? (Why, for example, speak of Christ as a child, as the verse does in the beginning, and then use the title of “Father”?)

**Verse 7:** What is an increase of government?

After the phrase “peace there is no end,” it is difficult to understand this verse. Looking at a more modern translation of Isaiah 9:7 may help you make sense of it. Here, for example, is the verse according to the New American Standard Bible:

> There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
> On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
> To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
> From then on and forevermore.
> The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.

What is coming on David’s throne and kingdom? How will that order his kingdom? (Some translators use establish instead of order—and uphold instead of establish.)
How will this coming thing establish (or uphold) David’s throne with judgment and justice?

The sentence “The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this” is ambiguous. It could refer to either the zeal for the Lord or the Lord’s zeal for his people. What understandings are created by each of these possibilities? Does one seem more likely, or are they both useful?

Verses 8–21: Notice that there are three balanced sections within these verses, each ending in the phrase “For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.” (The sections are verses 8–12, 9–17, and 18–21.) Does the repeated ending tell us something about how we are to understand the sections it ends?

These verses are some of the most poetic in scripture; they clearly show Isaiah’s artistic ability. Why does Isaiah write so poetically? Why not present the material in a more straightforward way? Is Isaiah’s use of poetic language essential to his message, or is it just his idiosyncrasy?

2 Nephi 25

Verses 1–3: Because he knows they will not understand, not having been taught to understand this kind of prophecy, Nephi appends his quotation with an explanation.

Verse 3: What does Nephi think is the point of these chapters from Isaiah? Does that differ from our usual way of understanding these chapters? If so, how?

Verse 4: To whom are the prophecies of Isaiah plain? What does that say about the Nephites? What does it say about us?
What would it take to have the spirit of prophecy? Is that limited to particular persons or callings, or is it a gift anyone may have?

**Verse 5:** In verse 4, Nephi said his soul delights in plainness. Here he says his soul delights in Isaiah. Does that mean that Isaiah is plain? (He does say, after all, that the Jews understood Isaiah.)

What would it mean to be “taught after the manner of the things of the Jews”? Has Nephi been so taught? Jacob? Nephi’s people?

**Verse 7:** What does Nephi mean when he speaks of “my plainness”? His plainness compared to what? How does he describe his plainness, and why is that description important?

**Verse 8:** What reason does Nephi give for the writings of Isaiah being of value in the last days? Why does Nephi address particularly those who don’t value Isaiah’s work?

What does he mean when he says he will confine his words to his own people?

**Verses 9–19:** Nephi gives an overview of the scattering, gathering, rescattering, and regathering of Israel, including an account of Christ’s first coming. Is this intended as only a restatement of what he has quoted in Isaiah? If so, why did he quote so many chapters from Isaiah? Or is it something like an outline or interpretive key to the book, something given to help us understand Isaiah better but not to take its place? If that, can you think of specific things you wouldn’t have understood without Nephi’s overview?
Verse 20: How does the reference to the miracle of the bronze serpents on Moses’s staff serve as a testimony that what Nephi has said is true?

Verse 23: What are the two purposes for Nephi’s writing?

How does the Book of Mormon persuade us to believe in Christ? How does it persuade us to be reconciled to God?

What does it mean to be saved by grace? (Compare 2 Nephi 31:19; Mosiah 2:21; and Luke 17:7–10.)

Why does Nephi’s point about being saved by grace follow his statement of his purposes for writing? Why make that point here?

Verse 25: What does it mean that the law of Moses is dead to them? What does it mean that they keep the law though the law is dead to them? Is he teaching the same thing that Paul teaches in various places, such as Romans 3:20–24 (footnote b)?

What does it mean to be alive in Christ?

What does it mean to say that they do what they do “because of the commandment,” especially if the law is dead to them?

Verse 27: Why do their children have to know the deadness of the law in order to have life in Christ? Why must they look forward to that life? It makes sense to say that they must look forward to the coming of Christ, but why do they have to look forward to life in him?

What does Nephi mean when he says that after Christ fulfills the law they will not need to harden their hearts against him? Does that mean they harden their hearts because of the law? If so, how so? If not, why not?
Verses 28–29: In the middle of verse 28, Nephi says that “the right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not.” At the beginning of verse 29, he says the same thing. Why is that repetition necessary?

Verse 29: What does it mean to bow down to Christ? How do we do that in our lives now? What does worship mean here? What does it mean to be “cast out”?

Verse 30: What might this verse say about our own “law”?