If you know me or a little about me, such as that I’m a philosophy professor, you won’t be surprised to learn that I’m going to focus on chapter 2. I recognize that is a problem. Chapter 2 is full of such interesting material that chapter 1 gets overlooked, and there are also interesting things to think about there, such as the implications of the fact that the land to which Lehi was led is covenanted to “all those who should be led out of countries by the hand of the Lord.” In spite of that, I’m going to focus on parts of chapter 2.

2 Nephi 2

Verse 1: Why might Lehi have given his firstborn son in the wilderness the name Jacob? Is there any reason that his wilderness experience might make him particularly attached to that patriarch? Or does Jacob’s name have more to do with something else?

Verse 2: What does it mean to have afflictions consecrated for one’s good? To think about that, we probably have to think about what the word consecrate means. In Webster’s 1828 dictionary (a dictionary that reflects American usage of Joseph Smith’s time), the first definition is the one that comes from the Latin root of the word: “to make or declare something sacred.” If we take that meaning, what does it mean for affliction to be made sacred? How does that occur?
Verse 3: Jacob is blessed that he will be safe and that he will spend his days in the service of God. How often do we think of our service as a blessing? We speak of our service in terms of our callings—which makes a lot of sense—but do we sometimes think of it as a duty rather than a blessing? What is the difference, and what difference does that make?

Notice that Lehi says, “I know that thou art redeemed, because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer.” We sometimes speak as if our obedience brings our redemption. In the New Testament, Paul warns against thinking in those terms. But Paul’s doctrine isn’t only New Testament doctrine. Here we see Lehi attributing redemption to Christ rather than to us. (Joseph Smith said, “That man was not able himself to erect a system, or plan with power sufficient to free him from a destruction which awaited him is evident from the fact that God . . . prepared a sacrifice in the gift of His own Son who should be sent in due time, to prepare a way, or open a door through which man might enter into the Lord’s presence, whence he had been cast out for disobedience” [Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 58]). How do we square what Lehi says here with our usual understanding?

What does it mean to say that the righteousness of the Redeemer redeems us rather than he himself does? What does it mean to say to Jacob, still a young man, that he is redeemed rather than that he will be?

Verse 4: The ideas in this verse move from “you have seen Christ in his glory” to “your experience is the same as that
of those who will know him when he comes to earth” to “the Spirit is the same at every time” to “the way for salvation has been prepared from the beginning and salvation is free.” It is not difficult to see the connection of the first three ideas, but how is the fourth idea connected to the three that precede it?

Why is it important to know that the way is prepared “from the fall”?

What does Lehi mean when he says “salvation is free”? How does that fit with what he says in verse 3?

**Verse 5:** What does Lehi mean when he says that men are instructed sufficiently to know good from evil? Where and when do we receive that instruction? When is the law given to us? Is it given to everyone? If so, what does Lehi mean by *law* here?

What does it mean to be justified? What does justification have to do with justice? Is it relevant that both words have the same root?

Lehi says we are cut off from that which is good by the law—both by the temporal and by the spiritual law. What does it mean to be cut off from the Father by the temporal law? By the spiritual law?

What is Lehi referring to when he says “that which is good”? If he means “the presence of the Father,” why does he not state it that way?

**Verse 6:** This verse begins with “Wherefore . . .” meaning “because.” Redemption comes through the Messiah *because* the law cuts us off. What does that teach? And it comes to
us through him *because* he is full of grace and truth. Presumably the contrast is between Christ and us: as fallen beings, we are not full of grace or truth, but he is. What is grace? What is truth? What does it mean to say that Christ is full of them? What does it mean to say that we are not?

**Verse 7:** What are the ends of the law? *Ends* usually means “purposes.” Does it mean that here? What does “to answer the ends of the law” mean?

Why does Lehi tell us that we must have a broken heart and a contrite spirit to partake in Christ’s redemption? Why doesn’t he mention obedience or ordinances if they are necessary?

**Verse 8:** Jacob is in the wilderness of a new land and presumably has little chance to tell very many others this gospel. So why does Lehi tell Jacob that it is important to make these things known to everyone?

Why does Lehi connect resurrection to redemption?

What does the phrase “merits, and mercy, and grace” mean? Should we understand each of those three terms separately, or should we understand the phrase as a unit?

To think about what is being said here, ask yourself what it means to rely only on the merit of the Messiah. Then ask yourself what it means to rely only on his mercy, and then only on his grace.

**Verse 9:** Why is the Savior said to be the firstfruits? Notice that in the Old Testament, the word is mostly used to describe the first grain or other produce to ripen. How is that description appropriate? Is it related to his title of Firstborn?
What meaning does the phrase “unto God” add to “first-fruits”? Lehi tells us that Christ is the firstfruits inasmuch as, or because, he intercedes. How does his intercession make him the firstfruits?

**Verse 10:** Notice that this verse speaks of the law as something that the Father has given. What does that mean?

Sometimes Latter-day Saints speak of the law as something to which even the Father is subservient. Is that compatible with what Lehi says? (Those wishing to pursue the theology here—rather than the scriptural teachings—may wish to read Brigham Young’s response to Orson Pratt’s teaching of related doctrine in James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1833–1964* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965], 2:233–40, 214–23.)

According to this verse, what are the ends of the law?

**Verse 11:** In the ancient Mediterranean Basin and Near East, many religions understood the world as a continuum: ultimately there is no difference between the lowest insect and the highest god; there is a unity of all-in-all, a state that could be described as “compound in one.” Some religions today hold similar beliefs. Perhaps Lehi has such religions in mind here. If so, why would he think it important to teach Jacob that they are false?

If there must be opposition in all things for there to be good, why are those who oppose God’s law punished?

What does opposition mean, “contrariety” or “difference”? My dictionary says that in the nineteenth century one of the meanings of opposition was “contrast.” Could that be
the meaning here? Does that change our understanding of the verse?

Does it follow from what Lehi says here that there must be evil acts?

**Verse 12:** Why would the world have been created for nothing, without purpose, if there were no opposition? Why would that “destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes, and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God”?

What is God’s wisdom? His purpose? His power, mercy, and justice? Does Lehi mean this phrase to be understood as one thing, or does he mean us to understand each thing separately?

What does *destroy* mean in this case?

The phrase “no purpose in the end of its creation” is odd since *purpose* and *end* seem to mean the same thing in this case. What do you make of that odd phrasing?

**Verse 13:** Look at each step in the chain of this argument. Can you explain why each step is true? For example, why is it that if there is no righteousness, then there is no happiness?

To what does “these things” refer in the phrase “if these things are not there is no God”—to righteousness, happiness, punishment, and misery, or only to the last two?

Variations of the phrase “to act and not to be acted upon” occur in several places in Lehi’s address (verses 14 and 26). If we are affected by something, we are acted upon, so if we have bodies or emotions, we are acted upon. Since Lehi doesn’t deny that we have bodies or emotions, he must
mean something different. What does “acted upon” mean to him? What things act? What things are acted upon?

**Verse 14:** The first part of the verse answers the string of if-then statements in 13: Verse 13 says “if this, then not that,” and so on. Verse 14 says “but that is true.” It follows that the first *this* in verse 13 isn’t true.

**Verses 15–25:** Why is the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden such an important scriptural story, so important that it is repeated for us more often than any other if we attend the temple regularly? If we think in types and shadows, how does their story give us a type for understanding our own lives?

**Verse 17:** Why does Lehi add “according to the things which I have read”? Does this perhaps suggest that he wasn’t familiar with the story of Adam and Eve until he read the brass plates?

What did the devil seek that was “evil before God”? Are there times when we seek something similar? How?

**Verse 18:** Why is the devil called “the father of all lies”? Why use the metaphor of fatherhood? What is the devil’s lie? (Compare what he tells Adam and Eve with Genesis 3:22 and Moses 4:28.)

**Verse 21:** What does it mean that all are lost because of Adam and Eve’s transgression? How does that square with the second article of faith?

**Verse 23:** This verse connects having children directly to the necessity of opposition, with being able to have joy and being able to sin. Can you say explicitly what that connection
is? Why is it that if Adam and Eve could not have had children they could not have known what joy was (because they wouldn’t know misery) and they couldn’t have done any good (because they wouldn’t know sin)?

**Verse 24:** Does verse 14 shed any light on what this verse means by “knoweth all things” (italics added)? Does verse 18 shed any light on what it means to say that God knows all things?

**Verse 25:** Isn’t there a sense in which this is a restatement of verse 23? If so, each might help us understand the other. Does this verse tell us what Adam intended to do in falling or what the Lord intended him to do?

Is the word *Adam* being used here of only Father Adam, or is it being used as it is used in Genesis 1:27, “God created man [adam] in his own image, . . . male and female created he them”?

**Verse 26:** Why does Lehi use the present tense here: “They are redeemed from the fall” (italics added)?

How does redemption make us free? Lehi seems to equate three things: being free, knowing good and evil, and acting for oneself rather than being acted upon. How are those the same? What understanding of free agency does Lehi seem to have here?

**Verse 27:** In this verse Lehi returns to a theme he took up in verses 6–10: the Messiah. Why was the interlude in verses 11–26 necessary?

What does it mean to be free “according to the flesh”? Is that different from being free to act rather than to be acted upon?
Lehi says that “all things are given them which are expedient unto man.” Then he says that we can choose life through Christ or death through the devil. Is that the choice to which “all things . . . which are expedient” refers? What does this verse tell us about moral agency?

Why is the devil miserable? Does the answer to that say anything about verse 25?

**Verse 28:** When Lehi began, he was speaking to Jacob. Now he is speaking to all of his sons (compare verse 30). How would you explain that?

Earlier Lehi referred to Christ as the Redeemer. Now he refers to him as the Mediator (here and in verse 27). Why?

Are “hearken unto his great commandments” and “be faithful unto his words” parallel? Does the word *hearken* suggest anything that *obey* might not?

**Verse 29:** Verse 28 spoke of choosing “eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit.” Here in verse 29 Lehi speaks of choosing “eternal death, according to the will of the flesh.” How would you explain what those two “according to” phrases mean?

Lehi says that the will of the flesh has evil in it. What is that will? (Compare Mosiah 3:16, 19.) How does the will of the flesh give the devil power to take us captive?

**Verse 30:** Lehi says he has “chosen the good part, according to the words of the prophet.” What does he mean by saying that he has chosen the good part? What does “according to the words of the prophet” add to what he says? Is he referring to a specific prophecy or to something else?