

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 1, Lecture 11
1 Nephi 4–7
Scripture and Family

There are just two short passages I want to read from that *Serekh Scroll* we discussed before. These are some that are particularly jarring to both Christians and Jews. They show why the scrolls have been neglected and how much they mean for us. This is the *Serekh Scroll*, the first one. It's from the eighth plate. They are rolled up and have pages like a book, but they are put together side by side. You never read a scroll like this as they do in the movies and on the stage. You never do it that way; you have to roll it this way. It's twenty-three feet long, so you have to keep rolling it and unrolling it.

This one [the *Serekh Scroll*] says, “And in the council of the church there shall be twelve men in charge. And there shall be three priests [at the head of everything] who shall be perfect in all things that have been revealed from the Torah [the law] and in doing righteously and in judgment, loving mercy and being humble in their ways—each man walking with his neighbor—to be firm in the faith while they are upon this earth, with a strong sense and resolve and with a contrite spirit.” That sounds familiar: a presidency of three, the council of twelve, and the qualifications. They have to be perfect in just about everything. Along with that, they have to be humble, not pull rank or anything like that, and walk with a contrite spirit. Then it quotes here where they come out. It says, “When those times will come in Israel to establish a new order of things, they shall go forth from the midst of the company of men of iniquity [*iwel* is iniquity, apostasy, going the wrong way; they shall go forth out of the midst of the wicked] to go out into the desert [the *midbār* of the desert is not complete desert; it is always the area between the desert and the sown, where you go out; you can graze cattle there; you can't farm there, but neither would you starve there if you are careful] and to prepare there a way for the Lord [and they write Jehovah in code here] even as it has been written by the Prophet Isaiah in 40:13, ‘In the wilderness make straight his paths. Prepare a highway in the wilderness for our God.’ That is according to the teaching of the scriptures. When they are there, they shall observe all the laws that have been given by Moses from the beginning and all the commandments which have been given from time to time, from dispensation to dispensation in the church as it has been revealed to the *nēbî'im be-ruah qedôshô*, by the Holy Ghost.”

It's very interesting; they often refer to the Holy Ghost. I've had some Israeli students in the class, and they really sat up when they heard that, “Does it say that?” [they said]. Yes, it says “Holy Ghost” all right; that's what we have here. Then this ordinance that is in the supplement to the *Serekh Scroll* (found at the same time). In this one about the order of the church, there is just one section we want to read, “And this shall be the order of all the community (*yaḥad*) of Israel in the last days when they shall organize themselves into a church in order to walk according to all the ordinances of the sons of Zadok [Melchizedek, the righteous].” Then there's the description of the sacrament at the end here. “And when they are met for the table of the church [the *shulḥan ha-yaḥad*, the sacrament or special

meal] or to partake of the new wine [*tîrōsh*], and the table is all properly set and everything in order, and the wine has been properly mixed for drinking, no one shall put forth his hand [it's the syntax here] upon the bread or reach it out to drink the wine until the priest has first blessed it. He must bless it before all. He blesses the bread and then he blesses the new wine. Then he reaches forth his hand and puts it on the bread. He's going to pass it, or he partakes of it first. Then it isn't just describing part of the ritual, but it says hereafter: "Hereafter, the Messiah of Israel shall reach forth his hand upon the bread. After he has blessed all the community of the church, the sacrament shall be passed to each man according to his office in the church. And this is the order of the church for all the meetings of the quorums whenever ten men shall come together."

Whenever as many as ten come they must have the sacrament is the point, and it must be done in this way. The bread and the wine should be blessed because after comes the Messiah. Well, of course, that's why we have the sacrament. This has no resemblance at all to the eucharists of the Christian churches, etc., or anything the Jews do. St. Basil, one of the eight great doctors of the church, wrote (and Origen said the same), "We know that they baptized, but nothing in the scripture tells us how they baptized. We know they married, but we have no examples of what a marriage ceremony should be. We have none of these rituals handed down. We know they had the sacrament, but we don't know how it was administered. There is nothing said about that. The last supper is one thing, but how do you do it in the church?" So here we have the way it should be done in the community. Of course, it's the way we do it. Why? Because the Messiah will be with them. In Matthew 14 and Mark 26, after the Lord has had the sacrament he says, "I will not partake of this wine again with you until I partake of it anew in my Father's kingdom" (then we'll have it again). Every time he appears after his resurrection, he orders bread and wine to be brought and has the meal with them, as he does with the Nephites in 3 Nephi. He administers the sacrament to them; he blesses it personally. If the Messiah of Israel does that, why do we do it? One purpose: "That they do always remember Him." Why? "That they may have His Spirit to be with them." Right now. This represents the presence of the Messiah—the time when he shall come. When he was with us before he had this meal. When he shall be with us hereafter, he will have this meal. We are remembering both of them right now. We are looking forward to him. "That they always have His Spirit to be with them and they always remember him." So this is what the sacrament is. You can imagine how this has upset both the Christians and the Jews. They say, "Well, we don't have anything like this. What's going on here?"

Well, now we have to move along, and there is plenty here. So let's turn to the Book of Mormon. (If you haven't got your Book of Mormon, you might as well go home. It's a nice day; for heaven's sake, go out. There's no point in coming to class without your Book of Mormon.) In chapter four they are going back to Jerusalem again. Notice, it talks about Laban and his city patrol of fifty and his tens of thousands in the field because he was high commander—exactly the same position that Jaush held in the Lachish Letters. You notice that Nephi is a very powerful speaker and a terrific persuader. What a salesman he would be! There are a number of speeches by him here, and he is great in the *suasoria*. He is very strong in the protreptic type of oratory, which is urging somebody to do something. He has a line of reason that builds up to a climax and then just forces you into it.

He said, Back to Jerusalem, phooey [paraphrased]. They've had a bad enough time. They were chased out the first time and didn't get anywhere; now they have to go back.

“Therefore let us go up; let us be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither” (1 Nephi 4:2). They would accept that tradition, you see. Then he argues in a line, “Ye know that this is true; and ye also know that an angel hath spoken unto you; wherefore can ye doubt?” Well, now wait a minute. They saw an angel and they can doubt? “Wherefore can ye doubt?” Why weren’t they completely overwhelmed by the angel? Why didn’t that convince them for the rest of their lives? This is an interesting phenomenon. Brigham Young said, “Pray that you will not see an angel, because everyone who has seen an angel has apostatized from the Church.” Nearly all of them did. “Wherefore can ye doubt?” When the angel is gone, you are still there. That’s the point. You are still yourself; you haven’t changed your character. You may see ten angels, but that doesn’t make any difference. There was the glory of Moses on the children of Israel, but as soon as he left them they immediately were up to their old shenanigans—the golden calf and all the rest of it. Do these things leave a permanent imprint? A person goes back to his normal life, and in this life the earth has a very strong hold on us. Nothing is more powerful than gravitation—the weakest form in the universe.

Mel Cook was an explosives expert at the University of Utah. He invented the explosion. He said, “If the entire earth was made of TNT and it all blew up, what do you think would happen? Here’s the weakest force in the universe, the force of gravity. It would only expand less than three percent. It wouldn’t go “boom” like they do in “Star Wars,” etc., when the planet explodes in all directions. That doesn’t happen. The force of gravity is so powerful, that it would only swell up three percent. That’s if the whole thing was solid TNT. And it holds us too. As Faust says, “After all that you have experienced, all your spooks, etc., the earth has you again and it holds you very hard.” This is what happens to all of us here. So if you see angels occasionally, don’t let it turn your head. What kind of a display really changes your character? It’s inside and it’s invisible. It’s some experience you have that hits you all of a sudden.

Well, he goes on here. He says, You know the angel spoke to you. Why can you doubt that? [paraphrased]. “Let us go up; the Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 4:3). Here is already a very interesting anticipation of Laban’s fate. He’s going to destroy Laban (the Lord will). It’s Nephi’s subconscious speaking here, I suppose, but you see what an argument he has. Then this fifth verse is interesting too. In an old *Saints Herald* where Emma Smith was being interviewed after the death of the Prophet, she said when they got to this passage (Joseph Smith was translating with the seer stones), he looked up with surprise and said, “Emma, did Jerusalem have walls?” He didn’t even know the city had walls. He didn’t know anything about what he was writing here. Yes, Jerusalem had walls.

Nephi goes on. He was led by the spirit. This passage reassures anybody. “And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do” (1 Nephi 4:6). This is a very popular passage in the Book of Mormon because inside of all of us there comes that time when you are led by the Spirit not knowing what you should do. Yet you are willing to be led. What does your own judgment have to do with it? You don’t know the situation. They don’t know the situation in Jerusalem. What are they going to do? Well, he finds Laban drunk, etc. Then it takes thirteen steps for him to rationalize with himself. He doesn’t do it; it’s the Spirit. But he is so reluctant to kill Laban. I told you the story about the two Arabs, where little Fayek Salim said, “There’s something wrong with this story.” It’s always criticized: “This is such a bloody thing that should never have happened. This shouldn’t have been put in here,” [people say]. But this is the way Arabs do things.

After the class Fayek and [another student] were really quite worried. They said, “Why did he wait so long to cut off his head? That was not according to Arab custom or behavior. It was his chance.” But he had waited a long time. He had a real struggle here, you’ll notice. “The hilt thereof was of pure gold, . . . and the blade thereof was of the most precious steel” (1 Nephi 4:9). Steel is always precious. They had plenty of steel in Lehi’s day, but it was very precious—Cordova steel and Damascus steel. A sword was worth thousands of dollars they were so valuable. It could cut through an anvil it was such marvelous stuff. Seven hundred years older than this is the purest steel blade of Tutankhamen with a pure gold handle. The blade is pure steel, and that’s what he said here—a very precious and very valuable weapon.

Here’s Laban dead drunk in the street, a disgusting figure. But you are hardly going to attack a sleeping man. As we are told in the ballad of Clerk Saunders, “For shame to slay a sleeping man.” We don’t do that sort of thing. He didn’t want to do that either, but he was “constrained by the Spirit.” He had the impulse to kill Laban. “But I said in my heart: Never at any time have I shed the blood of man.” That’s the first thing. He wouldn’t do it because that’s the first rule: “For the Lord . . . neither doth he will that man should shed blood, but in all things hath forbidden it, from the beginning of man,” as we read in Ether 8:19. So he shrunk and wouldn’t do it. That means he was sick at his stomach. He wasn’t going to do it at all. “And the Spirit said unto me again: Behold [notice the next reason] the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands” (this is your chance). Like other high military officials in our time, Nazi criminals, etc., Laban was a murderer. Nephi knew he was a murderer and a lawless man because he had robbed them. He was a thief. He made them a promise. When they went to deal, he chased them out, tried to kill them, and took all they left with him. That was the end of the deal. That’s the sort of a person he was dealing with, so he thought of that as a pretty good reason. Then there’s another reason: “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 [another argument]; and he also had taken away our property” (1 Nephi 4:11).

Well, it’s about time. No, he still won’t do it. Then verse 12: “And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me again [after all this holding back]: Slay him, for the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands [then another argument]; 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.” (You’ve got to get that record.) “And now, when I, Nephi, had heard these words, I remembered the words of the Lord which he spake unto me in the wilderness, saying that: Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments [So it’s the commandments. This is a special order, you see. This isn’t just an impulse and a chance. He wouldn’t be justified in doing this on his own, but now he gets a special order], they shall prosper in the land of promise [another argument]. Yea, and I also thought that 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 [he wouldn’t get them otherwise]. And again, I knew that the Lord had delivered Laban into my hands for this cause [it had a definite purpose; this has taken thirteen steps to convince him that he had better go ahead with it]—that I might obtain the records according to his commandments. Therefore I did obey the voice of the Spirit.” Well, he was a skilled hunter, as you know, with a bow. When he was in the mountains there, he was pretty good. But after an agony of debate, he finally did it. Then he put on Laban’s garments and girded on his armor.

Then an interesting thing happened in the treasury. As they were carrying the engravings out, he met the servant of Laban. Here you get a typical glimpse into the Lachish Letters, don't you? 1 Nephi 4:22, "And he spake unto me concerning the elders of the Jews, he knowing that his master, Laban, had been out by night among them." Holding night sessions with the elders has a great sense of danger and tension here. He was wearing his ceremonial armor. It was a crisis. "And I spake unto him as if it had been Laban. And I also spake unto him that I should carry the engravings, which were upon the plates of brass, to my elder brethren, who were without the walls. . . . And he, supposing that I spake of the brethren of the church . . ." (When I said "the brethren," he thought I meant "the elders" and that they were outside and wanted to get the plates out of the city.) This is an interesting situation, you see. As they went along, the servant babbled to him. "And he spake unto me many times concerning the elders of the Jews, as I went forth unto my brethren, who were without the walls." The servant kept up a steady stream of talk and filled him in about the elders and what was going on in town, etc. He was a very conscientious secretary. When Nephi and Laban's servant appeared in the dark, they [Laman and Lemuel] ran for their lives. They thought it was Laban. He called after them and said, "It's only me."

Then Laban's servant was terrified. Nephi grabbed him, held his mouth, and persuaded him to come with them. He was large and powerful. Here we get a bit of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were happening at that time. We have scrolls from this earlier time along the Dead Sea now in the Cave of Letters, etc. Verse 33: "And I spake unto him, even with an oath that he need not fear." Remember, Zoram was the servant of a man who was not very easy to get along with; you can be sure of that. You know what type of a man Laban was by now. There are the best little character sketches in the Book of Mormon. Zoram, I am sure, was very glad to do this. His name is very interesting (it's a Canaanite name) being a servant and probably not an Israelite. Throughout the Book of Mormon, the Zoramites always retain a special ethnic identity. They are always Zoramites and always by themselves. Zoram is of another blood (Ishmael is probably related; he comes later) and he would be a free man. That's why he would go into the desert. "He should be a free man like unto us if he would go down in the wilderness with us." That's the only way you can do it. They've gone forth into the wilderness, as we just read. When the time comes, the Sons of the Covenant shall leave the world of the wicked and go out into the desert to prepare His way. This is the idea, you see.

Question: What does Zoram mean? Answer: It means "a strong, refreshing rain." It's not a Hebrew word; it's Aramaic.

Question: If they were outside the city taking records out, would that indicate that clear back it was a regular thing in times of crisis to take them out? Answer: No, they were trying to make a break for it. We know they had been stowing the records. They had places to stow the official records. Look at that *Copper Scroll*. Remember, these were the temple treasures, the official treasures of the nation. So they were already hiding these things up well ahead of time. This was another crisis. Things looked bad here, so this could have been going on. It blew over for eleven years and then it got really serious. They [Laman and Lemuel] thought it wouldn't be destroyed; nobody destroyed Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar didn't destroy it in 597 B.C. He wanted to save it as everybody else did. Once you have conquered it, it's to your advantage to leave it there. It was only because he was hopping mad when Zedekiah, whom he had put on the throne, rebelled against him. (Notice *Zedekiah* is similar to *Zadok* here.) He wasn't going to tolerate that so he destroyed the city, put all of Zedekiah's family to death, and blinded him.

Verse 34: “Surely the Lord hath commanded us to do this thing; and shall we not be diligent in keeping the commandments of the Lord?” If you are going to keep the commandments of the Lord and be diligent, you have to do what they were doing. You have to come out of the midst of the wicked. Remember the passages we read last time: “They have come to plan a temple, a true temple, for Aaron and for Israel until the Messiah of Israel shall come.” They are preparing His way in the wilderness. “Shall we not be diligent in keeping the commandments of the Lord? Therefore, if thou wilt go down into the wilderness to my father thou shalt have place with us.” That means being accepted as a member of the society. When you are fleeing from the enemy (and this comes later in the dreams of Nephi) and you go to a great sheikh’s tent, you go in and kneel and put the Kaf (hem) of his garment on your shoulder (a figure we find very clear in the Book of Mormon), and you say, “*Ana dakhîluka*, I am your suppliant.” He is obliged then to say, “Have a place; have a family; have a share in our tent.” You are taken in. *Ahl* is a *family* and *ôhel* is a *tent*. *Marhaba* is a *wide place*. People move over so you have a place to sit down, and then you are a member. Nephi says the same thing in verse 34: “Therefore, if thou wilt go down into the wilderness to my father thou shalt have place [*murhab*] with us.”

“Zoram did take courage at the words which I spake [they sounded good to him]. Now Zoram was the name of the servant; and he promised that he would go down into the wilderness unto our father. Yea, and he also made an oath unto us [he enters the covenant] that he would tarry with us from that time forth.” After that they didn’t worry about him; they knew he wouldn’t break his oath. “When Zoram had made an oath unto us, our fears did cease concerning him.” He joined the community. The community was raided, and they were outlaws. The king and especially Laban had been out to get them. They chased them out, it says here. Verse 36: “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 [the police were after them], lest they should pursue us and destroy us.” So Zoram couldn’t go back and report. That would never do. That’s what happened in the case of the prophet Uriah going down into Egypt. Someone reported, and they went after him and caught up with him.

Question: [Not audible] Answer: That’s what the city was—all Jews. It was a Jewish society. You had to be a Jew, like in Israel today. It’s purely political. After Solomon there were the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. This was the kingdom of Judah. That’s called the Judean Desert. [Jerusalem] is the Judean city, and David is king of Judah. It’s a national designation. It has nothing to do with religion actually. Judah was the fourth son of Jacob. They were divided into tribes, and his tribe settled there and had the city. The other tribes were around there. Lehi didn’t belong to that tribe. He belonged to the tribe of Manasseh. He was descended from Joseph, as we find out later.

Here’s another interesting touch in the next chapter. Remember, none of the people wanted to go. Nobody was on fire about this journey. Laman and Lemuel, of course, were flat against it. Nephi had to have a special revelation (Lehi had had plenty of them), and he had to persuade Sam to go. Now we see that Mama [Sariah] was against it from the beginning too. She didn’t like it at all. She was filled with joy when they returned because [1 Nephi 5:2] “she had supposed that we had perished in the wilderness; and she also had complained against my father.” Sariah is the worried Jewish mama here. She really tore into him. She complained, just like the boys did, that he was “a visionary man,” a *piqqeah*.

(How can you trust in your crazy visions? Now what?) Verse 2: “Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness.” You can hear her going on and on. She gave him a bad time until they finally came back again. Then there was great relief because they had come back. Then there was joy. “And after this manner of language had my mother complained against my father.” She really worked on him. Nobody liked this trip. And his patient rejoinder is so typical: “I know that I am a visionary man” he says. “But behold [the tense is important here], I have obtained a land of promise.” He already had it, you see. The promise is a promise. All things are present once you have made the transition—once you have accepted it. “I know that the Lord will deliver my sons out of the hands of Laban, and bring them down again unto us in the wilderness [don’t worry, it’s all right]. And after this manner of language did my father, Lehi, comfort my mother, Sariah” until they came back, and then, verse 7: “Behold their joy was full, and my mother was comforted. And she spake, saying: Now I know of a surety [she had doubted all along] that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness [until then she had been scolding him all along]; . . . and after this manner of language did she speak.” He brings us into the family with these things going on.

Then they rejoiced and offered their *mizbeah*. And notice what was in the plates. It was the *Tanach* he brought back. It wasn’t just the plates of Moses. *T* is for *Torah*: that’s the five books of Moses. *N* is for *Nēbî’îm*, the prophets. And *K* is for the *Ketubim*, which are the literary works (like the Psalms) and the histories. They call the entire Old Testament the *Tanach*, and that’s exactly what was in the bronze plates, as we read here. Notice verse 11: “And he beheld that they did contain the five books of Moses.” Verse 12: “And also a record of the Jews from the beginning [their complete history is there too], even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah.” The inhabitants of Judah were Jews. Verse 13: “And also the prophecies of the holy prophets.” So it contained the prophecies of the holy prophets, a record of the Jews from the beginning right down to Zedekiah at the time they left, and the five books of Moses. It was the *Tanakh*. So the Nephites had the complete Bible. And also they had their genealogy, and Lehi found out that he was a descendant of Joseph. Why didn’t he, who was an important rich man, have it? Well, these documents were very rare, and they were secret. He wouldn’t have been able to get them. Laban was also a descendant of Joseph in a direct line. That’s probably why they were in his house. But only one person at a time could receive these genealogical records; that was the direct descendant. In this case it happened to be Laban. Verse 17: “And now when my father saw all these things, he was filled with the Spirit, and began to prophesy concerning his seed—That these plates of brass should go forth unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people who were of his seed.”

This is an amazing thing. At that time the Old Testament was not in the possession of Jews. You couldn’t have it because it was a secret book. The circulation was very limited. The law was read publicly once a year, but only by the *soferîm*, the scribes and Pharisees. That’s why they were so jealous of their rights. The *soferîm* were the ones who started interpreting the law in Babylon where they didn’t have a temple. They got a proprietary claim. They called themselves the rabbis, which means “the great ones.” It’s their own title. The Talmud is full of the most outrageous boasting. You’ve never heard men who built themselves up as they did. They were absolutely insufferable, just like the scribes and Pharisees (a *soferîm* is a “scribe”) of the New Testament that the Lord had to face up to. But you didn’t have a copy of the Bible in those days, and what’s more, nobody but Judah

could have it at all. It wasn't until the third century that Ptolemy had the seventy Jews come down. He was the king of Egypt and direct successor of Alexander the Great. He was a great and competent ruler, and he was collecting the greatest library in the world. We talked about Cyrus of Lydia and all the tyrants. They tried to build up their prestige by collecting big libraries. The bigger the library the better; it was better culture. As a rival to libraries in the North, Ptolemy wanted to have the largest library in the world. He thought he had every book on religion, but he was told, "There's one book you don't have, and that's the book of the Jews. So he ordered the seventy Jews to be brought back to Alexandria. He shut each one up in a special cubbyhole by himself and gave him a copy of the Old Testament to translate. Then he compared the translations. Of course, the story is that they were all word-for-word and letter-for-letter. We still have the Septuagint. That's why it's called the Septuagint: it was a translation by seventy Jews. By comparing them he knew that they were right. What's more, the Septuagint is far older than any Hebrew text we have. The oldest Hebrew text we have is the *Ben Asher Codex* from the ninth century A.D. We have the Greek text of the Old Testament from the third century B.C. We have that and we compare it.

It's a very interesting thing. Remember, in Cave One was a complete copy of Isaiah, a thousand years older than any other Hebrew copy of Isaiah known. I could have brought it because I have a bound copy. There are three thousand different readings of it, but they are mostly trivial readings, showing how marvelously well these scriptures have been handed down. But where there are differences, the Dead Sea Scrolls (the old, old ones) usually follow the Septuagint. And there are long passages from Isaiah in the Book of Mormon. Where they differ from our King James Bible, they follow the Septuagint, too. They follow the older text, so we have it here. But remember, nobody outside of Israel ever thought about the Old Testament. Ptolemy didn't even know about it, though he was a very learned man. He didn't know about it until a Jew in his court told him about it. So he got these seventy men and had it translated. But until then it was known only in Judah and only to a very select group of scribes who jealously guarded it. So when it [the Book of Mormon] says a thing like this: "That these plates of brass should go forth unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people" (1 Nephi 5:18), it is very shocking news. The copies were made in Alexandria. That's where we get our Septuagint. It spread throughout the whole world from there, and all the world has the Bible now. Nobody ever dreamed that this local, national record would become the world record. Verse 19: "Wherefore, he said that these plates of brass should never perish; neither should they be dimmed any more by time. And he prophesied many things concerning his seed." Notice, this doesn't refer to the Book of Mormon; this refers to the brass plates. They are still bright. They have come down to us, and we still have them to this day. He said the records were "of great worth unto us." Why did they need them on the trip? Verse 21: "... that we could preserve the commandments of the Lord unto our children" (the commandments in the prophets, in the writings, and in the book of Moses).

Then he tells us he is going to give us an abbreviated account. "Wherefore, the things which are pleasing unto the world I do not write, but the things which are pleasing unto God and unto those who are not of the world" (1 Nephi 6:5). That's important. The Book of Mormon is not to be peddled for entertainment or TV fare. It's not meant to be diverting. Mark Twain said, "It's simply chloroform in print." Most people can't even get through it; they think it's the dullest book in the world. We know it's anything but that, but it isn't written as a best seller. It isn't written for the sake of the story or the thrills, though people are trying to build it up for that to make a quick buck. Today it goes on

everywhere. When you pick up the Book of Mormon, you shift your mind into another gear especially. It's not to relax; you have to make it a working force and really get going.

Here they still have to take another trip back to Jerusalem. It was to get wives—"that his sons should take daughters [of Ishmael] to wife" (1 Nephi 7:1). They went straight to the house of Ishmael; they knew where they were going. Verse 2: "And my brethren, should again return unto the land of Jerusalem, and bring down Ishmael and his family into the wilderness." Notice the name "Ishmael." Remember, the great rival of Isaac was Ishmael. Ishmael claims the covenant. The Arabs [mostly Moslems] are from Ishmael. They claim that it was not Isaac who became the true heir of the covenant, but it was Ishmael. So there is always this fierce rivalry between the two peoples—not between them [Isaac and Ishmael]. They both buried Abraham together. I mentioned that at a meeting once when we had a lot of Arabs in the school—how Ishmael and Isaac were reconciled and were good friends. That hit some of the Arabs so hard that one of those boys went functionally blind. He just went wild. "Don't tell us that Ishmael ever, ever made a concession to Isaac—a Jew! Absolutely not!" And he went crazy. As I said, he went functionally blind for two weeks and decided to drop the course. That wasn't the course though; it was a talk I gave. The consul in Salt Lake City complained and said, "So many of those boys are having nervous breakdowns." They recognized the Book of Mormon was their book, and what could they do about it? You go home and it means trouble; that's not nice. Those Arabs don't mess around, and they were good ones. This is what you have. Ishmael was a good Arab. Anyone with the name of "Ishmael" you can be sure is Arab.

Lehi himself is of Manasseh. The rule among these people is that you must marry your *bint amm*, paternal uncle. Every girl must marry the brother of her father. It's very likely that Lehi and Ishmael were brothers because they were both of the tribe of Manasseh. Manasseh was the desert tribe. They lived way east of the Jordan out in the desert—Manasseh and Joseph. Manasseh was the wild one. Verse 4: "We went up unto the house of Ishmael, and we did gain favor in the sight of Ishmael, insomuch that we did speak unto him the words of the Lord." He listened because he was a righteous man. "And it came to pass that the Lord did soften the heart of Ishmael [that was necessary again; that's the way the Lord gets things done in the Book of Mormon: he always has to end up softening somebody's heart or nothing would move, and it's the same thing in our society] and also his household, insomuch that they took their journey with us down into the wilderness to the tent of our father."

Notice that they are not only willing but they are able to do it right then. They don't have to stay six weeks and get ready—settle their affairs, etc. Ishmael was ready to go. They went up to Ishmael's house; he was a desert man. Lehi himself was a merchant. When he was traveling in the desert on his trip, he saw the light on the rock. Then he staggered back home. But they make no fuss about the trip. We talk about the elaborate preparations of Nephi and that sort of thing. These people know how to get around, and certainly Ishmael did. He didn't hesitate apparently. This would be out of the question, of course, if the family were a settled family and not used to travel or anything like that, but they had that tradition.

Question: It seems strange that they were required to marry their brother's children.
Answer: This was a strict rule among the Arabs who preserved the old archaic customs. It was a very strict rule among the desert Arabs, but not anymore. It could have been then. That was a long time ago. Remember, this is a peculiar family here. These are not full-blooded Israelites. They have all this Egyptian blood in them and everything else. They

were descendants of Joseph through Asenath, the daughter of the high priest of Heliopolis in Egypt. She was the mother of Ephraim and Manasseh. They were descendants of Manasseh. We boast that we are descendants of Ephraim. These people got around; that's the idea. This is one thing we don't realize. We used to think that in old times people didn't get around at all—never looked over the hill. In some societies that's true. People either don't get around at all, or once you start moving you might as well keep going. Once you start in your yacht out to Catalina and you have enough supplies, you might as well go on to Hawaii. Why not? You have that impulse. I've had friends that did that. As long as you are going, what difference does it make? Two days, five days. Once you start it is hard to stop, actually. So people have been circulating an awfully long way for a very long time. There are these marvelous things being discovered now about the navigation in the South Seas, from islands such as Tonga.

So they were willing and able, but the two sons of Ishmael changed their minds. "Two of the daughters of Ishmael, and the two sons of Ishmael and their families, did rebel against us." The daughters set it going; they did not want to leave town. The two sons of Ishmael sympathized with them. They put their heads together and decided, "No more, no more." Then Nephi had a chance to display his rhetorical skill again. He was going to persuade them to stay with the group. Notice the line of argument he used: "They were desirous to return unto the land of Jerusalem." Notice, the lands of their inheritance were not in the city of Jerusalem but far down where they went to get their property for Laban. The "land of Jerusalem" is a term that was used anciently. When it says, "Jesus will be born in the land of Jerusalem," people make fun and say, "He was born in Bethlehem." Well, Bethlehem is in the land of Jerusalem. It was anciently referred to as that. Bethlehem is a suburb. It's just six miles south of Jerusalem, an easy walk.

This sounds like Nephi is a prude at the beginning, but he isn't. These were very serious circumstances. Verse 8: "I spake unto them, saying, yea, even unto Laman and unto Lemuel: Behold [now he starts one of his lectures] ye are mine elder brethren [recognizes them with courtesy], and how is it that ye are so hard in your hearts, and so blind in your minds, that ye have need that I, your younger brother [you should be ashamed of yourselves; I'm not assuming anything; I shouldn't be doing this], should speak unto you, yea, and set an example for you?" Is this tactless? No, this is no ordinary situation. First argument, *exhortatio*: "How is it that ye have forgotten that ye have seen an angel of the Lord?" Second argument: "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 [you just escaped Laban, and there was not one chance in a million of getting away with that], 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? . . . [he is going on with his arguments]. And if it so be that we are faithful to him, we shall obtain the land of promise [these are the positive arguments]; and ye shall know at some future period that the word of the Lord shall be fulfilled concerning the destruction of Jerusalem [you don't want to go back there]. . . . For behold, the Spirit of the Lord ceaseth soon to strive with them; for behold, they have rejected the prophets, and Jeremiah [he knew what was going on in the city; here's our Lachish business] have they cast into prison. And they have sought to take away the life of my father, insomuch that they have driven him out of the land." (Now what sort of a chance have we got there?)

Then he said to them very tactfully after these arguments: All right, if you want to go back, you are perfectly welcome. I have no power over you; I'm your younger brother [paraphrased]. Verse 15: "And now, if ye have choice, go up to the land [go ahead], and

remember the words which I speak unto you, that if ye go ye will also perish.” (Go ahead, and welcome.) They thought about that again. They became furious, tied him up, and left him behind to be devoured by the beasts. This is another common practice in the desert. You won’t kill a person; that’s murder. But if you tie him up and just leave him there, you don’t have to worry. Let the animals carry it out. That’s a custom you read about in the Arab poets, etc. The Lord gave him strength and he burst his bands. Prayer plus effort did it. He prayed with all his might and strained with all his might. Verse 18: “And it came to pass that when I had said these words, behold, the bands were loosed from off my hands and feet, and I stood before my brethren, and I spake unto them again.” He didn’t consider this a miracle; he said nothing about it being miraculous. He just said that he prayed and he strained, and his bands were loosed. “And it came to pass that they were angry with me again” (They weren’t overpowered at all).

Then the daughters pleaded with them. The mother and one of the daughters pleaded with them. This is a thing that no Arab under any circumstance can resist. If a mother or daughter from another tribe pleads, you are under obligation—even if it is your worst enemy. It’s the chivalric oath. The rules of chivalry in the Middle Ages were adopted during the Crusades and taken back [to Europe] in the time of Edward I. They were taken from the Arabs. Of course, all the chivalry in the Crusades was shown on the side of the Arabs. Saladin, the greatest, noblest knight of them all, was so kind to Richard I who slaughtered everybody else. When Richard was sick he sent him his favorite physician. He sent him some sherbet and recipes and things like that. No westerner would ever do that for him. That was Saladin. So the daughters pleaded and softened their hearts.

Incidentally, if you want the greatest travel book ever written (it’s called that, and I think rightly so), it’s the two volumes of Charles Doughty called *Travels in Arabia Deserta*. This is the great classic that was written at the end of the nineteenth century. You can get it in paperback. This describes minutely all the customs. He went out and lived among them all those years and suffered greatly—but what an eye, what an observer! There are others, of course. The later ones are by Captain Bertram Thomas, Harry Philby, and others.

Then they bowed down before him. They might well have given in after being mad and binding him up a little while before. But bowing down before him? When you’ve done a serious wrong to someone, the only way to apologize is to bow down to them. That’s another custom. Bowing down was an act of apology and not of submission. They were not bowing down in submission at all. They were still the older brothers, but they apologized for the wrong they had done. They reversed it, and they pleaded with him that he would forgive them. You ask, “Is this plausible?” Well, this happens all the time; it’s classic. Verse 21: “And I did exhort them that they would pray unto the Lord their God for forgiveness.” And then they went back to the tent of their father and offered sacrifice. Notice, every time they come back they offer the sacrifice of the return. After a successful journey, or expedition, or project, you offer a special *mizbeah*.

Notice the beginning of the next chapter: “We had gathered together all manner of seeds of every kind, both of grain of every kind, and also of the seeds of fruit of every kind.” Does that mean a vegetarian diet? Were they going to live on seeds? No, they were intending to settle somewhere. They were going to plant these and farm and establish a community. When they were told to cross the ocean, they were all just completely bowled over. But here, obviously, they were going to settle and make another community in the desert. There have been many, many of those. “Make straight his path in the wilderness”

waiting for the coming of the Lord. Then again there is a very significant statement showing the levels of revelation you can have. Verse 2: “Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision.” What’s the difference between a dream and a vision? Well, you just have to know for yourself from the nature of the dream. This was a classic dream of dreams. Anti-Mormons have written saying, “Well, Joseph Smith, Sr., had a dream like this. Once he dreamed he was in the woods, and there were a lot of stumps there.” But this is the most common of dreams.

How does Dante start? “*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita, mi ritrovai per una selva oscura*. In the midst of the journey of my life, I suddenly found myself in a dark forest. It occurred to me that I had lost my way.” And *Piers Plowman*, the twelfth-century English epic goes on and on. But then he comes to the parting of the ways, and he must decide the way. He’s lost and has to have a guide to guide him on his way. That’s the story of *Everyman* and all sorts of stories. It’s the story of Zosimus, a third-century mystic writer. He gets lost and has to be guided. And John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. He’s lost, remember. He is in the “swamp of despair.” He has taken the castle, etc. He always has to be guided. So the idea of a person who is lost in this life is not unusual. Incidentally, Dante is met by a guide and who is the guide? It’s Virgil, isn’t it? Well, Virgil himself writes about the two ways. There is the ivory gate and the gate of horn. The horn is a bad dream, and the other is a good dream. It’s this idea of finding yourself lost. That’s what we are in this world; we are lost. It’s a very common dream. These people are out in the desert under very dangerous circumstances. We’ve described Lehi’s dreams elsewhere. We don’t have to go into them here.

He sees a man dressed in a white robe “and he came and stood before me.” This is a person who is going to be his guide. *Paralempstor* is a classical word for the person who guides you through the ordinances of the temple. It is a man dressed in a white robe. He found himself in “a dark and dreary waste—*per una selva oscura*—in a dark forest,” as Dante says. Then he came to a large and spacious field that opened out. That’s the *maydan* which plays a very important part in mythology and dreams. The *maydan* is a field of contest, an athletic field. Wherever you hold a chivalric contest, a fight or a display, that’s a *maydan*. This is frankly a parable, an allegory. He says it is. Verse 10: “I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy. . . . The fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen. . . . It was desirable above all other fruit.” By that was a river of water. This is the Egyptian question, and you ask how literal is this. If you are in the desert what do you need to keep from perishing? You need food, of course. What will give it to you? Only a tree. You will die of thirst or hunger. You must have water and food. The tree will only grow where there is water. I have a picture of one in the desert. (It’s hard to believe that these pictures were once so top secret that I would have had to go to the *calaboose* if I told where they came from.) This is right along Lehi’s way—right along the Arabah here. And here’s a spring that comes down at the foot.

Here’s a typical picture of a street in Jerusalem. It would be easy to bump somebody off in that street and get away with it, wouldn’t it? Lots of the streets of old Jerusalem are just like that, as some of you know. But anyway, the tree is joined by a river of water. Well, the first Psalm begins that way: The righteous man shall be as a tree planted by a pool of water [the tree needs the water] which brings forth fruit and its leaves fall not off [paraphrased] (Psalms 1:3). He would know the first Psalm; he’d know that by sight. So it’s a figure to dream about; everybody would dream about it, naturally. That’s what we have here. He dreams about that because that’s your life. Your life is saved if you have

found the water and the fruit. You are not going to find the fruit if there is not water by it.

Well, I have a picture here from the Dura-Europos Synagogue, the oldest Jewish building known in the world. It was discovered a few years ago and excavated at Dura-Europos on the Tigris, well into Asia there. It's a third-century synagogue, the oldest one known. Here is the tree of life, and it's bearing all sorts of fruit. Under it are Isaac [he probably means Jacob] and the twelve tribes of Israel. Here is Joseph blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, or Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau. Here are the Twelve. Here is the Orphic figure who is playing music of beautiful harmony. The tree is full of animals. There are birds and animals. All creatures are being fed on the fruit of the tree. This is the tree of life, and it is right over the main shrine (this is where the Shrine of the Torah was) of this very ancient synagogue—the oldest Jewish church we know of. Right over it is this tree of life with all the symbolism that is brought out by Nephi here. He is going to say that all creatures are fed on it. There's a picture of this in *Since Cumorah*. But the tree of life was a central thing. Nobody knew anything about this until about 1940 when the Dura-Europos was discovered. It told us all sorts of things about the Jews we didn't know before. But notice what an important position they give to the tree of life. Here are the twelve sons of Israel surrounding Jacob, or Israel. Then we come to the rod of iron. We will take it up at the tree next time.