

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 1, Lecture 14

1 Nephi 15–16

The Liahona and Murmurings in the Wilderness

We are on the fifteenth chapter. We have to move fast, but there are still some things that are important to know from 1 Nephi. We start out with the last place to look if we want to find information. It starts out, “I returned to the tent of my father.” He found his brethren disputing, and it wasn’t the first time in history. They wanted an answer to the question, but they never bothered to look. “They did not look unto the Lord as they ought,” he says in the third verse. Have you asked for it? Don’t expect blessings from the Lord unless you ask. So he says here, “They did not look unto the Lord as they ought.”

Verse 4: “I, Nephi, was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts, and also, because of the things which I had seen, and knew they must unavoidably come to pass . . . [he had seen certain things that must happen; notice that word *unavoidably* is a hard one, isn’t it? Isn’t it supposed to be all conditioned?] because of the great wickedness of the children of men.” Why unavoidably? Well, you know the unavoidable play is determined by the actors, as we said before. A man’s character is his fate. In the old comedy of Menander, and then taken over by Plautus and Terence, the whole plot was always determined by the actors. I mean if you have a rich old miser who has a beautiful daughter and an impoverished young man who is wooing her and a clever servant, you know exactly what is going to happen. All the characters were standard; they all wore standard colored wigs so people would know which one they were. The rascally servant wore a red wig, the daughter naturally was a blond, the old man was naturally bald, and the young man’s hair was black and curly. Of course, he had a friend. Shakespeare used that plot. Everybody uses that plot. But the point is that the play is unavoidably predictable once you set the characters up, and that’s so with all sorts of things.

The “ship of fools” is another famous theme. You put several characters together on a ship—or there’s the lifeboat theme. You know what’s going to happen if you put one type of guy and another guy alone in a lifeboat. There’s going to be real trouble with certain types, depending on the types. Or you put a number of different animals in a cage, and how they react depends on the type of animals they are. You could predict their reactions pretty well.

So he says here that these things must unavoidably happen. What is the situation he saw? Well, he says it was “because of the great wickedness of the children of men.” So this is “man who is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.” And he is worried sick about it. Notice, he says in verse 5, “I was overcome because of my afflictions.” It was just too much; they kept pouring it on. You notice, they blame him for everything. Again, it’s interesting that they have a character on which they can do that, and they take it out on him. That’s the theme of “Boots,” a theme that runs through all the old Norse literature and is very predominant there. Sir George Dasent wrote a book on it and collected the stories of Boots. Boots is a Cinderella story with the two sisters (like Laman and Lemuel, you see) taking it out on Cinderella because of hidden jealousy motives. But there was no reason to be jealous about Cinderella. Boots is, of course, the third son and the youngest.

He's called Boots because he has to clean everybody's shoes. He's made the butt of everything, and he has to wait on the other two. Of course, it turns out that he is the prince in the end and he triumphs. This is the Boots motif because he cleans the boots.

This is bound to happen. Then they used this excuse. They [Laman and Lemuel] said to him, "Behold, we cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken concerning the natural branches of the olive-tree, and also concerning the Gentiles." "And I said unto them: Have ye inquired of the Lord?" They said they hadn't tried because it wouldn't work if they did. So that's a self-fulfilling prophecy. It's like the old woman who prays for the hill to be removed from behind her house; she doesn't like it there. In the morning she gets up, looks out of the window, and says, "Hah, I knew it wouldn't move anyway." Well, that's her faith.

But don't make such a prize too cheap. He said to them, You don't just ask the Lord (paraphrased). Notice in verse 11 the things you have to do. First, don't harden your hearts (as they had). Make up your minds. Second, "ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, [then] surely these things shall be made known unto you." That's a routine very few people are willing to go through. Remember, in D&C 9:7-8 where the Lord tells Oliver Cowdery, You thought all you'd have to do was ask. No, you have to get the best answer you can yourself. Work it out in your own mind first to get the best solution you can. Do the best job you can on your own and then ask me [the Lord] if it is all right. If it's not all right, you will blank out on that subject; you will have a numbness of spirit. I'll let you know whether it is right or not [paraphrased]. So you have to do the work, and then you check with him. This is a nice way to do it. "Let him ask of God." You see how the gospel started out with Joseph Smith reading in James. "If any of you lack wisdom [what do you do?], let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering [doubting]." Well, that's something else if you are going to ask that way. I won't play then if I have to believe it already. St. Augustine wouldn't do that, you see. He starts out his *Confessions* by saying, "If I ask God whether he lives, then I assume that he does. Then I'm cheating; I shouldn't do that."

We have to hurry on here. Then they talk about the plasticity of the olive tree. That's referred to a great deal later on, so we will skip the olive tree right now and the things it does and the things it stands for. We'll go to the process that's working among the Gentiles. Verse 18: "Wherefore, our father hath not spoken of our seed alone, but also of all the house of Israel, pointing to the covenant which should be fulfilled in the latter days [those are the temple ordinances made now, and] the restoration of the Jews in the latter days. . . . Isaiah, who spake concerning the restoration of the Jews, or of the house of Israel; and after they were restored they should no more be confounded." (That means mixed up.) Then the brothers were pacified. Then they start asking about the tree. Verse 17 is very important. He wants the Gentiles to be in on it too. "What our father meaneth [is] that it will not come to pass until after they are scattered by the Gentiles; and he meaneth that it shall come by way of the Gentiles, that the Lord may show his power unto the Gentiles." The Lord is going to show his power to the Gentiles, too; they have to be in on the act. They are important to the theme. Nobody gets left out.

Then we come to the tree [verse 21], and it's explained briefly. You know what it is. The tree is the objective. It's the fruit, the light that saves you, the tree of life. And the iron rod is the means by which you get to it. You cling to that consistently. Hang on, keep walking, and don't let go. That's good. The river, which turns out to be filthy water, is the

alternative. If you don't make the effort to go to the tree, the water will catch you. If you don't hang to the iron rod, you'll get lost in the filthy water and swept away, as so many people were in those days. And there's the awful gulf between those on either side. That's the penalty if you don't make the effort. You'll end up on one side or the other. The penalty for making no effort at all, of course, is to be on the other side. That awful gulf is a real thing. You see, we don't compromise here. In this life nobody is on one side of the gulf or the other; nobody is safe home. You can always sin; everybody can. Nephi is going to make that very clear later on. On the other hand, nobody is completely damned because it's never too late to repent as long as you are in the flesh. So we are all in between now and making our choices one way or the other. The worst thing you can do is to assume that you have arrived on one side and your enemy is on the other side—that you're the "good guy" and he's the "bad guy." The whole Book of Mormon is to keep us in this "in-between state" where we are now. We are sort of balanced there. We find it harrowing and difficult. That's the whole thing; we are supposed to be enjoying the excitement of it.

Then we are told in verse 30 that a division is necessary. In verse 28 he talks about the "awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God." It's between them, and that's the awful hell, etc. Verse 31: "And they said unto me: Doth this thing mean the torment of the body [this isn't just allegorical or spiritual; this thing is physical as well; you suffer physically in these things; you work mentally, but you also go through physical anguish and pain] in the days of probation [that's now], or doth it mean the final state of the soul after the death of the temporal body?" He says it means both, in the next verse. It represents both temporal and spiritual. There is no spiritual law that isn't temporal, and vice versa, "even the works which were done by the temporal body [right now] in their days of probation." These are the days when we are envied of the angels because we can choose between the one and the other. Their state is fixed for a time to come at least.

Then there is a final state when they are "brought to stand before God, to be judged of their works." If they are filthy, they will be filthy still. You can't just say, "I'm born again and that takes care of that." Verse 34: "There cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God; wherefore there must needs be a place of filthiness prepared for that which is filthy." So there are places for this and a final place to dwell. The wicked are rejected; that's it. Well, whether they have their chances or not, let's go on to the next verse where he continues to preach.

They say to Nephi, "Thou hast declared unto us hard things, more than we are able to [understand] bear." We don't like to admit this. Why should the struggle of life be so hard? Well, why should it not be hard when so much depends on it? The interesting thing we find out from Nephi very soon is that all preaching is to yourself. You are preaching to nobody but yourself. If I preach, I preach only to myself. You can see how that is here. Others may pick it up, as far as that goes. That's like teaching the point; that's all you do. You can't *teach* a person; that's not a transitive verb. You might *hit* a person or *see* a person, but you can't *teach* a person. What do you do when you teach a person? Well, the word for *teach* is *touch*, *tactile*, *didactic*. That's when you point to something. *Teach* is the same word as *touch*. It just means point the finger. All I can do is point. You look and then you see for yourself. I don't go directly from one person to another that way. So the teacher is just *didactic*. He teaches and points so others may pick it up. Nephi goes on preaching too, and later on he tells us in 2 Nephi that it's just himself he has been talking to all along anyway.

Verse 2: “I knew that I had spoken hard things against the wicked . . . [and that] the guilty taketh the truth to be hard.” If you were righteous, he says, you wouldn’t murmur; you would face the truth [paraphrased]. We hear a lot of this stuff today, don’t we. “They did humble themselves before the Lord; insomuch that I had joy and great hopes of them, that they would walk in the paths of righteousness.” They [the hopes] were to be dashed all right. So they went back to the tent in the settlement in the valley of Lemuel. The family had been living there a long time now. They got married there. Nephi took one of the daughters of Ishmael, and they all intermarried with the Arab family. Zoram married the eldest daughter of Ishmael. That shows you he was more advanced in age than some of the others. Then finally the time came to move. They had been there a long time, and the Lord ordered them to move. That night he got the commandment. The orders came through “that on the morrow he should take his journey into the wilderness.”

Now it is the *sirah*, as the Arabs say. I should have brought it along. The best parallel to Lehi in the wilderness is the *Sirat Beni Hilāl*. The *Beni Hilāl* were a tribe way back in pre-Islamic times who wandered clear from Central Asia way over to Morocco looking for a place to settle. They went by night so people wouldn’t see them, and they couldn’t build fires. They were constantly hiding, and they were suffering greatly for lack of food. It was the same as Lehi’s company. Remember, he tells us, “We didn’t build fires.” The Lord said, “I’ll be your light by night.” So [Nephi] said, “We didn’t cook our food; we ate raw food.” The *Beni Hilāl* tells you all those things. The title is *Sirat Beni Hilāl*. That means “the setting forth on the journey—the pulling up of stakes and getting going” because they were always going. In the books bearing the name of Abraham, the title is always *Lekh Lekha*. It means, “Get up and get going.” So Abraham is the one who gets up and gets going. He is always moving from place to place. He never settles; he never has a land of his own. He was the first Hebrew, which means “a person from the beyond, an uprooted person, a wandering person” as we are told in the book of Deuteronomy.

So they marry their wives, and he is ordered to move. Then he finds the Liahona in front of his tent. In 1961 I had an article in the *Ensign* [*The Improvement Era*] on this sort of thing. There are a lot of sources on this, but this new book had just come out. This writing of Professor Fahd really helps out here. Just a few notes from this to sum up here. A good deal is said about the Liahona in the Book of Mormon. We are not going to give it all here—just this summary.¹ First, the Liahona was a gift from God, and the manner of its delivery caused great astonishment. It was just found in front of his tent the next morning. Second, it was neither mechanical nor self-operating. It was not a mechanism but worked solely by the power of God and solely according to their faith. It wasn’t magic; a magic thing would work by itself. Third, it only worked in response to faith, diligence, and the heed of those who followed it. Fourth, there was something ordinary and familiar about it. It was called “the small means by which God worked.” It was not a mysterious, untouchable object. They called it “but a temporal thing.” It was so ordinary that there was a constant tendency of Lehi’s family simply to ignore it. They wouldn’t pay attention to it, whether it worked or not. According to Alma, their needless, years-long wanderings in the desert were because of the fact that they ignored it most of the time. Fifth, the working parts of the device were two spindles or pointers in a globe. On these, special writings would appear from time to time clarifying and amplifying the message of the pointers. (Remember, Lehi was terrified when he saw the writing on them that told him about these things.) The specific purpose of the traversing indicators was to point the

way they should go. The pointers were mounted in a brass sphere whose marvelous workmanship excited their wonder and admiration because instructions sometimes appeared on this ball too. The device was referred to descriptively as “a ball” functioning as an indicator, and in both senses it is called “a compass.” On occasion, it saved Lehi’s people from perishing by land and sea. We are told, “If they would but look on it, they might live.” And it was preserved for a wise purpose long after it had ceased to function; it was a museum piece. It had been prepared specifically to guide Lehi’s party to the Promised Land. It was a “type and a shadow,” he tells us, of man’s relationship to God during this earthly passage. We won’t go into Alma’s description here.

We will turn to Fahd’s new study of *belomancy*.² *Belos* is to throw anything—a ball etc. *Belomancy* is to divine or tell fortunes by throwing rods, sticks, jackstraws, or things like that. *Belomancy* is the practice of divination by shooting, tossing, shaking, or otherwise manipulating rods, darts, pointers, or other sticks—all originally derived from arrows. Over [thirty] years ago I wrote a long piece on “The Arrow, the Hunter, and the State,” in which I discussed the technique of arrow divination in the early time. It was read by every major anthropologist in the country, and they all approved it before it was published. It was a good article that came out in *Western Political Quarterly* way back in 1951; that was quite a while ago.³ Now Fahd has unearthed this evidence. He begins by pointing out that arrows used in divination were called *qidh* or *zalam*. *Zalam* is a common one. It’s a very interesting, ancient word which he practically discovered. The Arabs don’t put a *u* after the *q*. This arrow was called *qidh* or *zalam*. They didn’t have heads or feathers on them; they had been removed. They were just spindles, shafts, or pointers. Lane’s dictionary, which has many volumes, goes into the usual spiel about what a *zalam* (*azlām*) is. It means “divining.”

Quoting from Lane: “Arrows by means of which Arabs in the Time of Ignorance [that is before Islam] sought to know what was allotted to them: they were arrows upon which the Arabs in Time of Ignorance wrote ‘Command’ and ‘Prohibition’ [one of them said ‘go,’ and the other one said ‘start’] or upon some of which was written ‘My Lord hath commanded me’; and upon some ‘My Lord hath forbidden me’; or they were three arrows [he’s quoting from various Arabic writers here]; upon one of which was written, ‘My Lord hath commanded me’; [etc.] And the third was blank; and they put them in a receptacle, and took forth an arrow; and if the arrow upon which was ‘Command’ came forth, he went to accomplish the purpose; but if that upon which was ‘Prohibition’ came forth, he refrained; and if the blank came forth, they shuffled a second time. . . . [That was the joker, you see.] The *azlām* were arrows that belonged to the Kureysh.” It’s very interesting that in the Pearl of Great Price one of the figures representing the four tribes, under the couch there (the four quarters of the earth shown in Facsimile No. 2, Figure 6), represents the tribe of Kureysh. The Kureysh tribe was in existence at a very early time. It’s the oldest tribe, the tribe of Mohammed. [The arrows] belonged especially to the Kureysh “upon which were written, ‘He hath commanded,’ and ‘He hath forbidden,’ and ‘Do thou’ and ‘Do thou not’; they had been well shaped and made even, and placed in the Kaabeh [the holy shrine of Meccah] . . . and when a man desired to go on a journey, or marry, he came to the minister and said, ‘Take thou forth for me a *zalam*; and thereupon he would take it forth and look at it. . . . There were seven of the arrows thus called with the minister of Kaabeh, having marks upon them, and used for this purpose.”

Sometimes the man used two such arrows which he put into a sword case. When he desired to seek knowledge of what was allotted to him, he took forth one of them. But why arrows? Because, as we have shown elsewhere, the shooting of arrows is a universal form of divination, “as is evident in the prayers that the legendary heroes of the steppe—Finnish, Norse, Russian, Kazakh, Turkish, and Yakut—address to their three enchanted arrows.” When you shoot the arrow, you breathe a prayer on it; the Indians still do. It’s a miraculous thing. It will seek out what you want and show you the way to go. They use it in divination just as much as they do in hunting to show what you are supposed to do. That’s a very old background because the arrow possesses an uncanny power. It can kill at a distance and can give you a claim to the thing you shot at, if it has your marks on it.

The consultation of the arrows by one about to marry was the regular Jewish practice, too. The parties concerned would throw rods in the air, “reading their message by the manner of their fall; this, Gaster observes, is ‘tantamount’ to the shooting of arrows.” Other substitutes for shooting were shaking or drawing from a bag or quiver, “balancing on the finger, or spinning on a pivot.” Like this—which way does it point? Then we go into the New World version of this here: “the antetype . . . possibly of all the Indian dice games” is one in which the “arrows or darts are tossed . . . or shot . . . at an arrow tossed or shot to the ground so that they fall one across the other.” Say, that still survives in that dangerous game of long arrow, or something, where you throw the arrows and they are supposed to land in a ring. That’s supposed to be the old form of divinations, a murderous practice. Well, the Babylonians had the same thing, etc.

Then we go on [quoting from Dr. Nibley’s article]: All this shaking and tossing and shooting emphasizes the divinatory office of arrows as *pointers*, but along with that they also conveyed their message . . . by the *writing* that was on them. Fahd notes that “on arrows words were inscribed determining the object of the cleromantic consultation.” Whenever divination arrows are described, they are invariably found to have writing on them, like the Zuñi “word-painted arrows of destiny.” The arrow is used a great deal by the Indians with their painting on them and their symbols. They tell fortunes by them, of course. The Arabic proverb for “know thyself” is *abšir wašma qidħika*, “Look at the mark upon your divination arrow.” A *wasm* is a mark you put on your camel. When they were made, they had their marks. It was a brand you put on your camel. It was a mark you put on your arrow so when you shot something, you could claim the thing that was shot because there was your mark. So it says, “Examine the mark on thy arrow.”

The other word in the proverb was *qidħ*, defined by Lane as one of “two arrows used in *sortilege*.” The *qidħ* is one of two arrows. The original, natural number of arrows used in divination seems to have been two. Even when the “magic three” were used, the third was usually a dud, a blank to which no lot was assigned except shake them again, try another fate. It’s the other two that do the work. There’s the Persian king with his *baresma*. The Jews draw the three boxwood lots to choose the scapegoat. But the Talmud says there were only two lots, and they were of boxwood or gold.

The reason for the two basic staves is apparent from their normal designation as “Command” and “Prohibition.” To this the priests at some shrines added a third arrow called the “Expectative”—“Wait and see!” (Let’s do it again). But the original arrangement was of *two* arrows designated advisability or inadvisability of a journey; they

were designated as “the *usfur* [Go ahead!] and the *ubqî* [Stay where you are!].” Our word *safari* comes from that; *usfur* means “proceed on the journey,” and the other, *ubqî*, means “stay put where you are.”

So you see from [Edward William] Lane it’s clear that the regular consultation of the arrows was [done] by those who were faced with travel problems. All the others were secondary. The patron of the caravans of the Hejaz from time immemorial was the archer god Abdal, “the lord of omens,” in his capacity as master of the arrows of divination. The inscriptions on the arrows themselves give top priority to travel: typical examples from various systems, which employ from two all the way to ten arrows, are “Go slow!” [drag your feet], “Speed up!” (*sāri*), “Water!” [that’s what you want; it just says *water* on it], “Stay where you are!” “Get moving!” or “You are in the clear.”

So it would be an obtuse reader who didn’t have spelled out for him the resemblance between the ancient arrow divination and the Liahona: two “spindles or pointers” bearing written instructions provide superhuman guidance for the travel in the desert. What more could you want? What is the relationship between them? I don’t know that we need to go into that at all, but we are dealing with a familiar thing here. On this the Book of Mormon is remarkably specific. Both Nephi and Alma go out of their way to insist that the Liahona did not work itself. It was not a magic thing, but worked only by the power of God. He used it to steer his ships, and he called it a *compass*. Well, it goes on and on. Incidentally, you can find that article in *The Improvement Era* for February 1961, page 87. But it’s an interesting thing that here we have Joseph Smith inventing the divination arrows of the Liahona.

And many people have dealt with the word *Liahona*. We had a teacher from Hebrew University here for a few years; in fact he bought a house in Provo. He was so fond of it he wanted to come and visit often. His name was Shunary. He never joined the Church, but the first thing that fascinated him was this name *Liahona*. He traced it back to the queen bee, the leader of bees swarming in the desert. When bees swarm, that’s *Liahona*. I took it from a different one.

Then this is an interesting thing too in the very next verse: “We did take seed of every kind.” Then it says they took their journey in “nearly a south-southeast direction [from that time forth] and we did pitch our tents again; and we did call the name of the place Shazer.” That’s an interesting one. We’ve got to put that one down, don’t we? *Shajar* is a clump of trees; it’s pronounced *shazer*, of course. It’s a group of trees in the desert. Well, naturally, the place they would park next would be where there were some trees, some water, etc. So they camped in a place call *Shazer*, “the trees” (lots going cheap). Here they went, as we said before. Joseph Smith said, “When they turned nearly straight east, it was at the nineteenth parallel.” Here’s the nineteenth. Of course, this would take them out to the Qara Mountains where you find trees. This is the standard shipbuilding place from ancient times in Arabia because they could find a special type of trees for ships—very good and very big. I have this book by the Hiltons here on that. So they came to Bountiful and they turned here.

I want to point this out here (this is Mecca near the coast, and this is Medina) because something happened along here. They were going in these mountains, and the mountains are considerable all the way. This is Saba down here. They cut clear of this because this was a rich kingdom at that time. We showed those skyscrapers. They knew about the

skyscrapers; they were down here. This is where Jasum and Shibam and all the great skyscraper cities were, down here in the Hadhramaut. So we have them going on. We may refer to this later.

Verse 14: “And we did go forth again in the wilderness, following the same direction, keeping in the most fertile parts of the wilderness, which were in the borders near the Red Sea.” We had those pictures of the underground rivers that flow along there and make more fertile parts of the wilderness, where you get the *rimth*. I don’t have one of those now. We can’t linger on the antiquities, but I think they give a very good backup to the lessons that follow. You could say, “The preaching was just Joseph Smith preaching, and an angel had nothing to do with it.” But when you get a record as full and as vivid as this, there’s something going on. Verse 16: “And we did follow the directions of the ball, which led us in the more fertile parts of the wilderness [near the Red Sea].”

His bow was made of fine steel, and he said, “I did break my bow.” In Palestine from time immemorial they only used composite bows. That’s why they considered it a miracle when Nephi made his bow. The composite bow has a handle of ivory or wood, and then it goes back like that. Well, in the drawings you see that it goes clear forward like this. Then you have to turn it way back to get plenty of draw on it. But it goes back like this when it is drawn like that (beautiful bow). And the metal parts were of bronze which doesn’t spring like steel, but steel is the best. Just in recent years it has been discovered that steel is as early known as anything at all—for obvious reasons. Steel is a mixture of iron and carbon. If you are using coal or wood or anything else and you have to get an awfully high temperature, you are going to get carbon mixed in with it. It won’t make inferior iron; sometimes it will make good steel. But anyway, we know they had it. We have those pictures of King Tut’s beautiful steel dagger from seven hundred years before. But they had steel bows, and they only used composite bows, which were metal. This part was bone, ivory, or wood. It wasn’t so demanding, you see. You could replace parts, etc. But he broke his steel bow, and that was bad. That meant that the family was going to starve because everybody depended on it.

Now Saxton Pope in his classical work called *Hunting with the Bow and Arrow* says the average bow is worth a hundred thousand shots. After that it loses its spring and you can’t use it anymore. Lehi [Nephi], who seemed to be a very capable fellow, must have been using his bow for years. It says that their bows had lost their springs, and that would happen. Notice in verse 21: “. . . the loss of my bow, and their bows having lost their springs.” As a result of this, they are very hungry. He returned without food and they suffered much. Now what happened? Now who is righteous? Who has a perfect faith? This is the nadir in their travels, you see. Verse 20: “And also my father began to murmur against the Lord his God [Lehi himself]; yea, and they were all exceedingly sorrowful, even that they did murmur against the Lord.” They were all murmuring against the Lord—not just Laman and Lemuel, but Lehi himself. We’ve got to watch these things. Verse 23: “And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did make out of wood a bow, and out of a straight stick, an arrow; wherefore, I did arm myself with a bow and an arrow.” Then he asked the Liahona where he should go to find game, and he found it in the right place.

The reason I pointed out Medina there is that along the coast here there was a German baron called Julius Euting who wrote a classic work, and he hunted everywhere. The only place in Arabia where you can find very good hunting is in the mountains along here, especially Mount Jasum and Mount Azd. Well, this is very important because they are the

only places in Arabia where you can find nabî wood which is wood for bows. It makes excellent bows, but it is exceedingly rare. It's only found in the mountains right along here. This is where they would have been at that time, keeping in the mountains near the Red Sea. They came here and [their bows] lost their springs and all that. We don't know exactly where they were, but around the same area where you find the bow wood at Mount Jassum and Mount Azd, you also find very rich game—oryxes, mountain goats, everything you can imagine at the tops of the mountains. Of course, those creatures live up high. They don't live down in the desert, though the other day a Rocky Mountain sheep was seen in the hills just north of Mesquite of all places. I don't know whether it had gotten lost or not. So there was a place where he went to hunt. He says here that he made a bow out of wood, and out of a straight stick, an arrow. So he got the right wood and he got the arrow. That's where he would have had to get it. Then he asked where he should go to obtain it [the game]. Then his father looked on the ball and "he did fear and tremble exceedingly" because there was a new writing on them which was plain to read. So he went up into the top of the mountain—which is where you find this type of game, enough to feed the family—"according to the directions which were given upon the ball. . . . I did slay wild beasts, insomuch that I did obtain food for our families." How great was their joy when he stumbled into camp bearing this stuff, and "they did humble themselves before the Lord."

From that time they traveled nearly the same course. They kept that almost due east, slightly south, course. This is the way they did it. They would pitch their tents and tarry for a space of time. That's why it took them eight years. It was strenuous going, so they would tarry and rest. Verse 34: "Ishmael died, and was buried in the place which was called Nahom." The Arabic word *naḥama* means *to mourn*, so a place called *Nahom* would be the best place to bury him, wouldn't it?⁴ Then "the daughters of Ishmael did mourn exceedingly." And this is a characteristic of the Jews as well. (I left home the book I was going to read, for which I suppose you can be grateful.) But I assure you that it tells you in that book that whenever a person died among the ancient Arabs it was the daughters, and only the daughters, that had the privilege of mourning. Later on they hired professional male mourners, but in the early times that was unthinkable. It was the mothers and the daughters, but specifically the daughters, who mourned for the dead—both at the burial and at the funeral.

Then from mourning they went to murmuring. "You were to blame for all this" is what the daughters came around to. But you notice "that the daughters of Ishmael [following their Ishmael custom] did mourn exceedingly, because of the loss of their father." And, as I said, that reminded them of other things, and they murmured against Lehi for bringing this whole thing on them. "And thus they did murmur against my father, and also against me," he says in verse 36. They have it in for him too now. Laman and Lemuel are familiar with the practice of desert communities; everybody was. What we have in verses 36, 37, and 38 would come right out of the Dead Sea Scrolls, wouldn't it? This is the sort of thing they were doing. But we know from the Naḥal Ḥever, the caves there, that they were going back from very early times. Long before this fall of Jerusalem, people were fleeing to the caves and establishing communities in the wilderness to make straight His ways. After all, doesn't Isaiah say that? We will go into the wilderness, prepare a highway for the Lord, make straight his ways, etc.? That's what they were doing. This is what the people at Qumran said they were doing. And Nephi said in 1 Nephi 19:23, I read Isaiah to my people to compare them with us "that it might be for our profit and learning." I compared all the things in Isaiah with our own situation [paraphrased]. So this is one of those

recurrent scenarios. They are familiar with this going out in the desert to prepare when things are bad at Jerusalem.

Then they say, “Behold, let us slay our father, and also our brother Nephi [they are going pretty far], who has taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren.” That’s what they couldn’t stand. The law of seniority is very strict among the Jews, and to give a firstborn second place to another was a grave offence. You might almost say that they were legally within their rights. I know some family cases that are very pointed on that. Laman and Lemuel say in verse 38, “He tells us these things, and he worketh many things by his cunning arts, that he may deceive our eyes, thinking, perhaps, that he may lead us away into some strange wilderness [some unoccupied patch of the desert to settle down and make their community where he can be the leader is the idea]; and after he has led us away, he has thought to make himself a king and a ruler over us, that he may do with us according to his will and pleasure. And after this manner did my brother Laman stir up their hearts to anger.” Now Laman leads it because he is the oldest and he felt that he should be the leader. He felt it all along. He is mortally offended by giving the job, not just to Lemuel, but at the time to the youngest son of all, Nephi, that he should be the leader.

So he [Laman] thinks it’s just like one of these where they go out into the desert and establish a community. You have “the Teacher of Righteousness,” and then there is “the Star” in the Dead Sea Scrolls. There’s also “the Teacher of the Lie” who leads another community, a wrong one. So these communities are always centered around a particularly strong leader. In the Book of Mormon you have Alma’s community and Ammon’s community, etc., around a particularly strong person.

Verse 39: “The voice of the Lord came and did speak many words unto them, and did chasten them exceedingly [well, how? It was through Lehi or Nephi] and after they were chastened by the voice of the Lord they did turn away their anger, and did repent of their sins.” What would make them do that? Well, it is obvious what happened. Nephi revealed their plot; he deflated Laman. Laman was the leader, and he was trying to stir them up. When he was exposed in what he was up to (even patricide and that sort of thing), then he had gone too far. Then he was definitely deflated. It was a very shameful thing which he proposed, when they thought it over. So they “did repent of their sins, insomuch that the Lord did bless us again with food, that we did not perish.”

Then we come to a very interesting statement here [at the beginning of chapter 17]: Again, they went nearly eastward and waded through much affliction. That “nearly eastward” meant the Rub^c al-Khāli, the worst desert in the world. It’s worse than the Sahara, as a matter of fact. There are some good spots in the Sahara, but the Rub^c al-Khāli has nothing. You can believe that they waded through much affliction going through there. Verse 2: “We did live upon raw meat in the wilderness.” They had to preserve it. It was dried, raw meat—the game he got in the mountains probably that they kept with them. But their women were strong, and they still had children. This is a noted phenomenon among Bedouin women. They do all the work. They pitch the tents, they make the fires, they do the cooking, they do everything. They are amazingly strong.

Here’s a reflection that is very important in the third verse. Nephi uses this teaching on a number of occasions, and he says here: “And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means

whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them; wherefore, he did provide means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness.” We once had to memorize that passage where Nephi says, I will go and do what the Lord commandeth because he doesn’t command if you can’t do it [paraphrased]. But here it says if the Lord has given you commandments and you make the effort, he will be responsible and provide the means. So we can’t get out of things like the Word or Wisdom, or tithing, or even the Law of Consecration by saying, “Well, it’s not very workable now, so we’ll put it off for a while. It might work then. We’ll defer it to a later time.” The Lord says, “I will make it possible to do that thing if you will make a real effort.” We haven’t made a real effort on so many things.

Question: The term “sojourn in the wilderness,” is that any kind of unusual wording?

Answer: *Séjourner* means to spend a day or two in a place. The words they used are *bāta*, *yabītu*; it’s a very interesting word too. It’s our word *bide*. So many of those words are the same as we have in English, but they don’t have them in any Germanic or Indo-European language. The Egyptians have them, we have them, the Hebrews have them—words like *bide*. Our word is *booth*; you *abide* in a *booth*. A booth is something you put up just to stay in for the night; it’s a temporary house thrown together because you *bide* there. In “Abide with Me, Tis Eventide,” you ask him to abide. It means just a temporary stay; it’s a *mansio*.

Question: Does that make sense to you in this context that they are *sojourning* in the wilderness?

Answer: Well, wherever you are not staying forever, you are sojourning. If you ever intend to move on, it’s just a sojourn. We are just sojourning here, as far as that goes. It means to stay for a while but not permanently. That’s something else. I hope we don’t have to sojourn in the celestial kingdom, but I’m glad we just have to sojourn here.

Notice [in verse 3]: “He did provide the means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness.” I know people who have used so much clever and sophisticated math on their tithing as if the Lord couldn’t provide the means if they just went ahead and paid it. And here’s a key statement in the verse 4: “And we did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even eight years in the wilderness. And we did come to the land which we called Bountiful.” I showed these pictures before of the Qara Mountains. Here are some pictures of the woods in the distance. They are nice and flourishing where you don’t expect them. When Captain Bertram Thomas came out and discovered them from the desert side as recently as 1930, it completely bowled him over. Nobody expected anything like that would be there. All of a sudden there it is. We have some phenomena here like that. You come upon a thing that you never expected, like Havasu down in the Grand Canyon. Years ago there was nothing there. It was an Indian place, no camps or anything there. But when you came upon that, it was just staggering. It’s the same sort of thing here. Well, anyway there was the land Bountiful and the wild honey. “And we beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum, which, being interpreted, is many waters.” There’s a very important Egyptian writing that was read in all the temples every morning in which that name *Irreantum* was used for *the sea*. It’s a very interesting name, but we won’t go into it.

And they stayed in Bountiful for many days. They didn't know they were going to sail; they thought they had reached a happy land. Now, this was a place where they could really have a community. They could really get something going here—eight years away from anybody else. Nephi could really take over if that was his idea. Then came the thunderbolt: “The Lord spake unto me, saying: Thou shalt construct a ship.” What? *me* construct a ship? he says [paraphrased]. He didn't know anything about ships. Then he asked: “Whither shall I go that I may find ore to molten, that I may make tools to construct the ship after the manner which thou hast shown unto me?” There was no time to experiment; he went straight ahead with it. The Lord told him where he could find the ore because he couldn't waste time exploring. Then he made a bellows; he knew about that. Remember, how the boys admire the fine workmanship on the handle of Laban's sword. They are connoisseurs of precious things. They had precious things of gold, bronze, etc. (the Brass Plates). They were struck by the beautiful workmanship on that brass ball etc. As a rich merchant in the Orient, the one thing you would understand is the value of precious metals and good workmanship. They recognized it. You can't work with metals without a bellows, and he would certainly know about that and how to make it. They did it very well. Verse 12: “For the Lord had not hitherto suffered that we should make much fire, as we journeyed in the wilderness.” That was because it would give away their position. Remember, they were always moving. Until they got to the Rub^c al-Khāli, they were always moving through occupied territory and they were always trespassing. That's why the Arabs are always raiding and always at war. They are always killing each other, and they always have to have the *ghazw*. Our wordy *raze* comes from that. It's your sacred obligation to raid and plunder the camp of anybody whom naturally you consider is trespassing on your land, which they can show by tribal records was really their land a long time back. So this goes on forever. So you don't build much fire. This is made very clear by Doughty and other writers on the subject. Whenever you are traveling in any dubious territory, either by day or night, don't make fire because the Lord said, “I will be your light in the wilderness; and I will prepare the way before you, if it so be that ye shall keep my commandments” (verse 13). So you don't give yourself away by the smoke or by the light.

Time is up, but there is a book by the Hiltons [*In Search of Lehi's Trail*]. It tells us here what happened. In order to trace Lehi's trail, the challenge was given to Dr. Lynn Hilton and his wife Hope by the *Ensign* magazine. They asked him to do this, and they financed the tour. But they didn't have to because he opened a pump company in Cairo to sell mostly pumps to the Arabs over there. This was an excuse to get him into the country because it is all forbidden if you are not a Moslem. You can't go into Oman; that's all closed country. But as the head of a pump-selling outfit, which was in considerable demand among the Arabs and Sheiks, he could get himself into these lands and take this trip in search of Lehi's trail. He went to all that trouble just so he could trace Lehi's trail.⁵ We'll have to go now, but anyway he says here that he was asked to do that. “They traveled extensively in the Middle East and have a business interest there [that's the pump company]. We asked them to follow the steps of Lehi from Jerusalem to the land called Bountiful, if you can discover where it might have been.” Their adventures were published in [the *Ensign*] in 1976, beginning in October. They went and traveled, and they had some marvelous experiences. They followed right down along the coast and finally got to the place where they build boats. It's interesting that they build them now the way they have always built them. After all, we have very accurate pictures of boats, both Asiatic boats and Nile boats. For example, a famous ivory knife handle from the First Dynasty of Egypt shows a battle between those boats very vividly, and how they were made. Some

were made without using any nails at all by lashing them together with hemp, which you can get from those trees, incidentally. The other was made by metal. But, remember, he [Nephi] had a forge, and he had metals. He could have used nails and bolts to hold his ship together. But it was a new kind, and the men were very much impressed when they saw it because there is nothing that impresses a person like a well-made boat. We'll have to discuss that later, and we'll have to go faster than this too, won't we, before we get to the heavy stuff?

1. Taken from Brother Nibley's book *Since Cumorah*, CWHN 7 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 253–55.
2. Ibid., 255–59.
3. Reprinted in Hugh W. Nibley, *The Ancient State*, CWHN 10 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 1–32.
4. Cf. Warren and Michaela Aston, "The Place Which Was Called Nahom: The Validation of an Ancient Reference to Southern Arabia," FARMS paper, 1991.
5. Cf. Warren and Michaela Aston, "And We Called the Place Bountiful: The End of Lehi's Arabian Journey," FARMS paper, 1991.