

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 1, Lecture 8

1 Nephi

Escape from Doom

Let's review quickly the first book of Nephi. In the first verse we saw the family well loaded with cultural baggage at the time of a major cultural transplant. The key name to Lehi's period for all Western civilization is *Zarathustra*. In the 1920s Professor Werner Jaeger was the first one to point out that the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle are replete with the teachings of Zarathustra, who was another contemporary of Lehi. From the Avesta and Iranian centers, his teachings spread to the East, and already were completely at home in the schools of the West. Incidentally, we read in the *Midrash* (this is the typical legend, of course) that Zarathustra followed the teachings of Abraham. But you all know Nietzsche's famous work *Also Sprach Zarathustra* [*Thus Spake Zarathustra*] and you all know the introductory phrases to *2001*, when Straus does that miraculous thing with a simple C-major chord. Remember how it starts out? Well, that's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* right out of the Book of Mormon.

We saw that Nephi had good parents and a good representative education. His education included not only his own culture and religion (the learning of the Jews) but also the language of the Egyptians, which was the dominant world language in all that area at that time to a far greater degree than people have realized heretofore. Now refer to the Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 1:4, "There came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed." Now that's the alternative offered us throughout the Book of Mormon. Here is a computer printout of all the passages calling for repentance in the Book of Mormon. They go on and on and on; the word *destruction* appears 456 times. That's the theme. As it opens, they will be destroyed, and it ends on that theme. You find it all the way through. *Repent* appears 360 times. They [*repent* and *destruction*] are almost always mentioned in the same breath, as they are here. You have your choice: You can repent, or you can be destroyed.

This is way the Lord deals with his chosen people. Others are not bound by that rigid rule. They go on forever, and this is a surprising thing. We think about Zarathustra, etc. The Iranians (Persians) are just as crazy today as they were in his day. He talked about them, rebuked their stupidity, etc. That's the main theme that Nietzsche took up when he wrote *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. But other nations are still there. The Greeks are still there and just as Greek as ever. It's marvelous to go there; you know you're in Greece all over the place. I was visiting relatives of Jimmy Nakos in Thebes. The old man had just died at the age of a hundred. When they had the funeral, you'd think it would be in the Greek Orthodox Church, but what did they do? They brought beautiful Attic vases and urns and put them on the grave (the old classic motifs). You see them on all the graves in the rural cemeteries. You'll see fewer crosses than beautiful, classic vessels holding food and things like that. But anyway the Greeks are still going, and the Egyptians are still going. They are as Egyptian as they can be; that's why they are such lovable people. They never resort to violence if they can help it, and they get along beautifully with each other. It's the oldest, most stable civilization in the world—thousands of years and the same Egyptians. The Arabs are the same lovable, obnoxious Arabs—the same as they have always been (fighting

each other). With the people of the North it's the same thing (in the sagas). There were the same troubles up there, but they've gotten more civilized than the others. But the point is that those nations were old when Lehi left Jerusalem; they were ancient then.

But Lehi's people and everything on this continent is gone. The promise here is when they are fully ripe in iniquity they will be completely swept from the land; they will be utterly destroyed—swept from off the face of the land. That's the rule for the Promised Land. Of course, this continent and the Western hemisphere are covered with ruins. Nobody has the vaguest idea who was here or anything about them at all; they are gone without a trace. The Mayan people are still there among the Mayan ruins, but there are a lot of guesses about what was Olmec, etc., when you go along the coast there at Hermosa. Nobody knows to this day. When you summarize everything that's known it's ridiculous, and it's all purely speculative. The thing is that the people here disappeared, and they disappeared without a trace, just gone.

If you just go back to the nineteenth century, you get some marvelous things. Boudinot, a Frenchman, wrote a work called *A Star in the West* in 1820. But the descriptions of Indian life at that time in the eastern part of the United States you get from Abraham Wood's diary (he lived among them) and from the Founding Fathers. Actually, Washington was a very good friend of many of the great Indian chiefs. Remember, he worked back in the frontier in his youth. Jefferson and especially Franklin were always speculating about the Hebrew origins of the Indians. They had all sorts of information. In the drawings of Catlin, you see what different people they were, and what a strange culture vanished without a trace. This is the thing that happens here, and let that be a warning to us.

“Does this apply to us?” we ask. Let me read a statement of Joseph Smith here. This is what he said in 1833: “I have been carefully viewing the state of things throughout the Christian land. I have looked with feelings of the most painful anxiety. Upon one hand, I behold the manifest withdrawal of God's spirit and a veil of stupidity.” There's the sentence of doom. It's not wickedness, but you know you're gone when you're stupid. “It was worse than the cry that it was a mistake,” as Talleyrand said. It's a veil of stupidity, and you see it everywhere. (You listen to debates, etc. and say, “Why didn't the dunce think of this? He had a marvelous opening there, and he missed it completely.”) This goes for both sides; everybody is floundering around these days. “A veil of stupidity . . . seems to be drawn over the hearts of the people. On the other hand, I behold the judgments of God sweeping hundreds of thousands of our race, I fear, unprepared down to the shades of death.” This was in 1833, a time when revolution swept all of Europe. That's when Belgium and Holland became independent. Another revolution failed in France. Then it wasn't until 1848 that they had the big one in Germany everywhere. But the 1830s was a time of revolution all over Europe. The Scandinavian countries (Denmark and Sweden) won independence. All sorts of things were happening then. It was a hopeful time, but a murderous time. “I think it is high time for the Christian world to wake out of sleep and cry mightily to that God day and night whose anger we have justly incurred. I step forth into the field to tell you what the Lord is doing and what you must do in these last days.” Now, that's a presumptuous thing to say, but he had something to say.

Now, here's our Book of Mormon story: “Christ proposed to make a covenant with the Jews, but they rejected him and his proposal. The Gentiles received the covenant, but the Gentiles have not continued, but have departed from the faith. They have become high minded and have not feared; therefore, but few of them will be gathered [few were,

actually]. The nations of the Gentiles are hastily preparing, getting ready for the first stage of the part allotted to them when the Lord rebukes the nations. The Lord declared to his servants some eighteen months since that he was then withdrawing his spirit from the earth. The governments of the earth are thrown into confusion and division, and destruction to the eye of the spiritual beholder seems to be written by a finger of an invisible hand in large capitals upon almost everything we behold." *Destruction* is the word again.

But isn't it interesting that we have this love affair with the mandatory explosion that has to end the police series (the daily cop show, car chase, etc.). There has to be lots of violence. With this insatiable appetite for violence we have now, you can't sell a TV program that doesn't have it (this fixation is an ominous thing). "I will proceed to tell you what the Lord requires of all people, high and low, in order that they may escape the judgments of God which are almost ready to burst upon the nations of the earth. Repent of all your sins [there it is; faced with destruction, the answer is to repent]. Not many years away, the United States shall present such a scene of bloodshed [of course, the Civil War was moving in on them] as has not had a parallel in the history of our nations. Pestilence, hail, famine, and earthquake will sweep the wicked of this generation off the face of the land to open and prepare the way for the return of the lost tribes of Israel [so he goes on]. Repent, repent is the voice of God to Zion, and strange as it may appear, yet it is true, mankind will persist in self-justification [just as the Lord told Jeremiah: 'Call on these people to repent. I know they won't repent, but you have to call on them to repent'] until all their iniquity is exposed, their character past redeeming [they will say they've done no wrong no matter what they've done]. Hear the warning voice of God lest Zion fall and the Lord swear in his wrath the inhabitants of Zion shall not enter into his rest. Intemperance, immorality, extravagance, pride, blindness of heart, idolatry, loss of natural affection, love of this world, indifference toward things of eternity are increasing among those Latter-day Saints who profess to believe in the religion of heaven. Who but those can see the awful precipice upon which the world of mankind stands in this generation and can labor in the vineyard of the Lord without feeling a sense of the world's deplorable situation?"

Then this one: "Some may pretend to say that the world in this age is fast increasing in righteousness, and the dark ages of superstition and blindness have passed [he knew this line, you see]. The gloomy cloud has burst, the gospel is shining—carried to the diverse nations of the earth. The idol is destroyed, the temple of images forsaken, etc. But a moment's candid reflection will suffice for every candid man to draw a conclusion in his own mind whether this is the order of heaven or not that we see."

Well, you say that 1833 was a long time ago, etc. Well, I haven't been teaching at BYU very long [43 years], but shortly before I came here, I knew my great-grandfather. I remember him very well. I talked with him, and we were very friendly. He was twenty-two years old when the Prophet was martyred; that hasn't been a long time. The Prophet only lived a few years after he gave this. And yet, there's only been that one generation between ours, and I've seen the whole thing. We talk about the generations of deadly wars. I remember so clearly the day that World War I began. We played soldier all through that. In World War II we went out and played soldier in the same dirty lots. It was in France that time. It was a chilling thing when we went to Mourmelon. After the Holland fiasco at Arnheim, we went back to Mourmelon. We had a short rest there, but it was interrupted by the Bulge, the break-through there. When we settled in Mourmelon, it was in the beginning of December. The area around there has been preserved since World

War I as a tourist attraction. It's a typical battlefield. They've kept all the trenches, all the shell holes, all the barbed wire (rusted), all the dugouts, etc. They were still there. It was raining, and they were full of mud. That's where we had to take our rest area—just as if we were living World War I all over again. Boy, talk about a déjà vu. "This is where I came in," one would say. This is what we used to play out in the back lot in Portland where it rained a lot too. But you see, things move much more rapidly than you think. Don't think that things change slowly; they change extremely rapidly, and are moving very fast right now.

Well, on with it. Here's an interesting article by Bury St. Edmund, a very distinguished university. The Reverend George Pattison wrote this last year in the *Expository Times*, and it's called "A Meditation on the Book of Jeremiah: A Moment in the Void." He says, "We suddenly discover that Jeremiah was written for today." It sounds like today's world so very closely, and he tells us why this is. And, of course, the Book of Mormon at last comes through loud and clear. This is exactly what it has been telling us there (the situation in the time of Lehi when he had to leave). Pattison wrote: "Consciousness at the end is not merely nigh, but is even now upon us—that insight that the foundation of the world order is absolute nihilism." That is no hope for anything future—no hope for any hereafter, that this is all there is. That's what nihilism is. There is no more; this is all there is. Don't expect anything else. As we said before, "Una perpetua nox dermienda" (one perpetual black night awaits us), and that's all. Since this is all there is, we act that way. That is nihilism.

"That remains the truth of our situation today." The Reverend Pattison is quite an eminent scholar, and he has written some interesting things here. There's no reason to go into this at agonizing length, but he says, "Moreover, it remains truth even if the future course of events does not lead to the outbreak of a major nuclear exchange, for the mere possibility of such an event discloses an attitude toward life which is the negation of all reverence. It is the attitude which even now holds sway, whatever happens in the future. We have before us a strange condition, a single complex of historical forces [this is like the beginning of Nephi here, you see] outstanding among which are conflicts between the major industrial and world empires—two world empires facing each other. Such a division of radical negation gnawing out the heart of the social fabric is also to be found in the book of Jeremiah. In this attempt to discover from the book of Jeremiah insights into the contemporary situation, I shall accept the canonical formula book. Jeremiah's time, like our own, was a time of much darkness, marking a crescendo of violence and destruction. The prophet sees this process culminating in an outburst of international madness when he writes the twenty-fifth chapter, "There is a cup filled with mine anger.'"

Incidentally, that expression is used ten times in the Book of Mormon—"the cup is filled with anger." And when that time comes, remember, you can't fill it with anything else. It can't be diluted; there is no point to going on with the show. He [Jeremiah] says, "When they drink from it, they will stagger and go out of their minds because of the war I am sending against them." Everybody is going to act absolutely crazy. This is the cup he is talking about. [Continuing from Pattison:] "The prophecy, in fact, includes a list of all the nations, not just the two, to whom the wine cup is given. It is neither more nor less than a catalog of the whole international community of the prophet's day [which, of course, is what we get from Jeremiah, and we get it from the Book of Mormon too] described in terms of collective drunkenness—without reason, without purpose, without meaning. Whatever ideological gloss they may choose to put on their beliefs, so called, the prophets unmask this nihilism—the statement of not-to-be-averted revelation of the void

at the heart of the national and international community [the emptiness of everything]. What really links Jeremiah to us is the military chutzpah, the outward manifestation of an already chosen nihilistic orientation toward existence.” This is a thing that’s mentioned very often in the Book of Mormon: “Man shall not smite, neither shall he judge. Cursed is he who puts his trust in the arm of flesh.” You are not going to get the answers that way, but they never learn. In Mormon 5:2 there’s a really deep feeling that it is already too late. Mormon prayed fervidly for his people, but he knew it was without hope. He says he had no hope. He prayed for them and did the best he could, but there is a point of no return (*atē*) when you can’t go back. Have we passed that point? Is it too late?

[Continuing from Pattison’s article:] “. . . is now just a matter of unfolding the consequences of this choice. In our own day it seems that too much reflection on our world problem crushes any sense of individual responsibility.” This is an important theme in the Book of Mormon: What can the lone individual do against the system? You find this all through the Book of Mormon (Lehi, Nephi, Ammon, Malachi, the brother of Jared, Moroni, Mormon). They are all one man who doesn’t agree with all the rest. What do you do in that case? That was Lehi to begin with. There is nothing you can do about it, and you have this feeling like Lehi. Remember, he went out and he was worried sick. He worried much about it until he had the revelation. “. . . on account of the magnitude and complexity of the issues raised. Surely, many would say, ‘it is better not to think about it and go on with living since there is nothing we can do about it.’ ”

During the terrible approaching crises in eighteenth-century France, Voltaire said in *Candide*, “It’s a hell of a world.” He showed that it was and said, “You just stay home and cultivate your garden; that’s all you can do.” But Plato had said the same thing, “The best thing you can do,” he said, “is find a place out of the wind where the dust, the newspapers, and the garbage won’t bury you. Just lie in the sun there and try to escape the filthy wind the best you can.” That’s the way Plato ended up his great hopes after he had already coached Dionysius of Syracuse to be the philosopher king. It was a complete flop because Dionysius was spoiled rotten. So this is the world we live in. It’s the same thing here, you see. What are you going to do? He says Jeremiah is unable to show the people the way through. He says, “You’re going to be destroyed anyway,” and that’s true. They’re stuck in Jerusalem. The Book of Mormon gives us another chance. Lehi could get out and start it all over again. They were good for another thousand years, and then the same thing happened again. So he was allowed an unlimited extension. We mentioned that passage in 1 Nephi 7:14. This is Jeremiah speaking, “‘Wherever I speak I have to cry out aloud, violence and destruction. Lord, I am ridiculed and scorned all the time because I proclaim your message.’ ” Remember, when Lehi came out and started to preach after his vision, they mocked him. The same thing happens here to Jeremiah. “‘He’s not trying to help the people; he only wants to hurt them,’ say his accusers. He is not only slandered verbally but suffers physical mistreatment and imprisonment [in the sewer].”

He was helped. Now this is a very interesting thing that comes out quite clear in the Lachish Letters. This man apparently knows nothing about the Lachish Letters. He never mentions them, and he misses some good chances. Incidentally, if we have to read Jeremiah with 1 Nephi, we must also read the first section of the Doctrine and Covenants. This is the message to us. We just read from Joseph Smith’s teachings, but this is the revelation. There are interesting things here, and we all know it. It presents us with the same things, the apocalypse of woe and the apocalypse of bliss. This is divided exactly in the middle. The first eighteen verses are warning and destruction. The second eighteen

verses are nothing but good news. Remember, after Lehi had his vision he rejoiced and was exceedingly glad. He knew everything could be all right now. He felt very happy, went out and tried to cheer the people up, and was kicked out of town.

“And the voice of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days. . . . Wherefore, fear and tremble, O ye people, for what I the Lord have decreed in them shall be fulfilled” (D&C 1:4, 7). And it shall go forth to all, etc. But then the situation, “And the arm of the Lord shall be revealed . . . [we won’t go through the whole thing]. They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall” (D&C 1:14, 16). Remember, Babylon was the city that was moving in at that time. But, of course, this is the city we live in. It’s a very Babylonian civilization we are in today (remember, in Babylon they had skyscrapers).

Now this is the point: “Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity [this is fair enough] which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments (D&C 1:17). . . . And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time. And after having received the record of the Nephites [this is in view of the calamities; knowing the calamities, He gave us a means by which we could receive the knowledge we need as we need it; if we are humble we receive knowledge from time to time], yea, even my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., might have power to translate through the mercy of God, by the power of God, the Book of Mormon” (D&C 1:28–29). Knowing the calamity, I have given you the Book of Mormon. This Book of Mormon is addressed to calamity; we have seen that. “And also those to whom these commandments were given, might have power to lay the foundation of this church [to do something]. . . . Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven; And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received. . . . I the Lord am willing to make these things known unto all flesh; . . . and will that all men shall know [this is a very important statement; you get it in Lehi and in Jeremiah and the earlier prophets] that the day speedily cometh; the hour is not yet [not tomorrow], but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion” (D&C 1:30, 32, 33, 35). War, of course, is the devil’s dominion. Peace is going to be taken from the earth, and we will have wars going on, like now. But it’s going to get worse.

But the next verse is the other side. Notice, it is balanced. You may have noticed if you read through Jeremiah that the bad verses are always balanced by cheerful verses. He is going to love the people and take them back after all. They are going to be received. There is going to be repentance later, but meantime they’ve got to do something. It gives them a reason to hope and a reason to repent. He didn’t say they were too far gone, like Macbeth, “I am in blood stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o’er.” It would be easier for me to just continue the way I am going and cross the river of blood than it would be to return and try to repent. In other words, he says, “I’ve reached the point of no return.” Always we are told in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon, the Lord has deliberately prolonged our life that we have a better chance to repent. As long as you are in the flesh you can always repent. Nobody is safe home as long as he is in this world, and nobody is damned. That doesn’t come until the judgment. You can repent, even with your last breath. It is Ezekiel who tells us that. He

says, If a man who has done righteously all his days and becomes wicked, then he is a wicked man regardless. If a man has done wickedly all his days and decides to repent, then he's a righteous man [paraphrased]. A righteous person is one who is repenting; a wicked person is one who is not repenting. A righteous man is not one who is all good. There is no such person at all. We have all this mixture. And a wicked man is not one who is all bad. We don't have any of either. If you are repenting, it's like being on the stairway. A person at the bottom of the stairs facing up is better off than the person at the top of the stairs facing down, if it's the way of repentance. So this is what we are told. It's never too late, and that's a marvelous thing. But Satan wants to discourage you and say it is too late. Why not go through with it? "I am in blood stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er." In other words, "I might as well go on; a few more murders won't make that much difference."

Question: What can one man do then? Answer: Well, we're going to find out. That's exactly what the Book of Mormon is about. You notice, Lehi was told what to do. He received his visions and directions. He didn't get any support or cooperation from outside from anybody. He had to buck it all himself, but he did. He kept trying to get through. The Lord will always open the way if you keep trying and looking for ways to get through. There is always a crack opening somewhere. Be prepared to take advantage of the little cracks and openings that show up, and the Lord will always provide them. When you face a stone wall, what do you do in that case? Well, he did. Nobody could have been up against a worse situation than Lehi was. (We were going to talk about that from Pattison's article.) But here it is, "And the devil shall have power over his own dominion. And also the Lord shall have power over his Saints [that's the other side], and shall reign in their midst, and shall come down in judgment upon Idumea, or the world. Search these commandments, for they are true and faithful, and the prophecies and promises which are in them shall all be fulfilled" (D&C 1:35-37).

So we have the Church launched with the first section of the Doctrine and Covenants on the same theme that we were talking about. It's significant that this man [Pattison] doesn't know anything about the Lachish Letters, but this is a thing he truly notices: "Jeremiah is helped and nurtured by what we would call a subculture of protest. There are other people thinking the same way, and it has always been this way in Israel. The continuous undercurrent in Israel's life [this is the thing that Lehi picks up on], the culture of protest, was not just the tradition of the occasional great figure but embodied in an actual community able to support and sustain its members." He gives us the example of Jeremiah and Ahikam and Huldah—and the king himself was behind it. "Personal contacts between Huldah and Ahikam and Jeremiah suggest a network, however informal." He says, "Uriah was out of the network; he was apparently a free lance." But now we know he wasn't. He was very much in it, as we learn from the Lachish Letters. He is the connection there. Pattison says, "He has no support group." But he did have a support group. He had a support group at home. There's the case of Shema'yahu's father going up to Jerusalem to plead for him with the king, with a very high military officer to back him up, and things like that. And Jaush was a secret supporter of him. So we get these support groups. Which side are you on? What is going on here? Then he [Jeremiah] says, "Do the sensible thing. If my nation submits to the king of Babylon, build houses, settle down, plant gardens, and eat what you have grown. You might as well take it in stride." This advice, not surprisingly, was construed as treason by the nationalistic leaders. They said, "No, we're going to fight them; we've got to exterminate them." This is a situation that occurs quite often in the Book of Mormon.

“The false prophets represent boundless egotism and the level of imagination of other leaders [they show boundless egotism too for their own wishes]. One day they free their Hebrew slaves [we talked about that before]. They choose an arbitrary, subjective freedom—their idea of freedom in place of attention to the common welfare.”

“Very well, then,” says the Lord in Jeremiah 34:17, “I will give you freedom—freedom to die by war, disease and starvation [paraphrased].”

“False freedom of ego destroys the basic being aware of others.” So much for Pattison’s article. It’s a very helpful one that I’ll put on reserve. Then we have section one of the Doctrine and Covenants. And there’s a very important thing here in the Book of Mormon. Lehi went out. Verses 5–13 in chapter one we didn’t talk about, but they are an authentic ascension text. It wasn’t until 1873 that a German scholar named Martin Haug discovered the phenomenon of the Ascension story. Of course, it’s all over the place, but it’s only in recent years that we have found this great literature of ascension. They are digging up all sorts of Coptic and early Christian documents (mostly in Egypt) dealing with these things. The ascension texts we have all over from the earliest times. They are about a righteous man who is suffering and worried about his people. He prays and is taken up to heaven where he sees God on his throne. He is given an explanation of things, taken down, and ordered to write what he has seen and then go forth and preach. When he goes forth and preaches, the people don’t believe him and he is put to death. This is the pattern that Lehi followed; it’s a perfect ascension text. He was raised up to heaven. There are various varieties of them and some very old ones. There are different things we can’t go into now; I’ve written a long section on them recently. There’s an ascension of Isaiah, there’s an ascension of Paul, there’s an ascension of Job, there’s an ascension of Moses. They are very important and were all discovered in this century—these ascension texts. Now we can add to them the ascension of Lehi because they had identical experiences. They went up and received their commission on high. The ascension of the Rabbi Ishmael is a very important one because he was supposed to have repeated the ascension of Enoch, which is very important. We know that Enoch ascended in our book of Enoch in the Pearl of Great Price. He was a regular “shuttle service.” He came and went between heaven and earth. He really did; that was his mission. In the course of time everybody [that was righteous] was removed during that rescue mission which he was operating.

So this is a typical ascension text. We won’t dwell on it, but this is what gave him heart. When he came back, he knew that he had an explanation. What did he see? Remember, he thought he saw God sitting on his throne. He went out and had a sunstroke. There was light on a rock. He rushed back to Jerusalem, cancelled all calls about his business (he had been going about his business), cast himself on his bed, and passed out. Then he said he thought he saw God sitting on his throne surrounded by a numerous concourse of angels singing hymns of praise. It was a general meeting being held. It was the High Council at the time of the creation of the world. Then he said he saw twelve special men going down, represented by stars, and circulating among the children of men. This was the mission of the Twelve Apostles or the Twelve Tribes. Then he saw the Lord going down, and he was the brightest one of all. What he saw was the plan of salvation being put into operation, showing that this all has meaning—what’s behind this whole thing. It said he saw many, many other things which he couldn’t write. Remember, he was a visionary man. What’s more he had a *scribendi cacoethes*; he was a nut for writing down everything. Lehi said, “I can’t begin to write down all of it.” He kept everything, and so did Nephi. He said, “I’m

writing in the book of my deeds in my days.” He was writing his own account, but he included his father’s story. This part of 1 Nephi should certainly be called the book of Lehi because it is Lehi’s story, not Nephi’s. Nephi gets it from his father’s writings too.

So he came down and got the good news. As I said, that genre of text is a very common one now known to be both Christian and Jewish. We have a beautiful example of it here. It would have been very hard to have plagiarized it. In verses 14 and 15 we have a positive explosion of good news. You are right in the gloom here; things are about as bad as they can possibly be. Then all of a sudden, notice in verses 14 and 15, how it changes. This is all through Jeremiah. They are falsely accused of [perpetuating] a Jeremiad, which is nothing but doom and gloom. That isn’t so at all. You notice there are as many happy verses in Jeremiah as there are gloomy verses. Throughout the Book of Mormon you have that balanced so-called “apocalypse of woe” and “apocalypse of bliss.” Here we get it again. How does the fourteenth verse begin? Does somebody have it?

“When my father had read and seen many great and marvelous things [notice, the writing of the book is very important; he sees the book the way John does], he did exclaim many things unto the Lord; such as . . .” This is typical; you know he is writing in Egyptian now. This is not the way you do it in Hebrew—*mdd* or *rdd*, “such as, the following”; I told him, and then you say, “such as” and then actually quote your speech. This is just an example of other things you might have told him. “Such as” is a typical device here. “. . . such as: Great and marvelous are thy works [he is so joyful he is just bursting with it now; what a change of attitude], O Lord God Almighty!”

Brigham Young said, “I was never so happy in my life as when I looked over my shoulder [they were being driven out of Nauvoo in the dead of winter] and saw the temple on fire. Lord, take it if you want it; it’s yours. We are now free, and we’re going out,” he said. That’s the way Lehi must have felt going out. And I asked my grandfather who walked across the plains, “Grandpa, did you suffer and struggle?”

He said, “It was a picnic all the way; we laughed and hollered. We were really like kids out of school all the way.”

“Well, what kept you going with food, etc.?”

This is a scandal; I shouldn’t tell you this. He said, “Every morning, the captain of the company had every man, woman, and child in the company drink a big cup of hot, steaming Arbuckle’s coffee, black. That carried us through the day.” I told that to my boys once. Shortly after that we were driving down Hobblecreek Canyon, and there was the old Whiting log cabin there. We decided to go down and look at the log cabin, and there part of the wall had been shored up by a very old, very heavy box that had written on it “Arbuckle’s Coffee, St. Louis, Missouri.” I took the board, and I still have it at home. But it was Arbuckle’s coffee that brought them across the plains. Don’t tell anybody that. But the fact is that they were being happy; they were enjoying themselves all the way.

“Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish! [here is the reassurance]. And after this manner was the language of my father [notice how he uses that language here] in the praising of his God; for his soul did rejoice, and his whole heart was filled, because of the things which he

had seen, yea, which the Lord had shown unto him.” He wasn’t just philosophizing or reaching a sensible conclusion. He had actually seen and knew that everything was all right now if he just behaved himself. His whole heart was filled with joy. Notice how that matches verse 5 up here, “Lehi, as he went forth prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people.” He was very sick hearted about it, and then his whole heart was filled because he got his answer. So that’s a wonderful change. (If I ever forget my book again, may my right hand lose its cunning. That’s a safe thing to say because it already has. No good on arpeggios at all anymore.)

Then in the nineteenth verse he suffers the fate of a prophet and is driven out. He goes out and starts to preach to the people, and they won’t listen at all. Jerusalem is already too dangerous. Others would leave later, and he is told in a dream to get out. What happens in chapter two we have in *Lehi in the Desert*. We can just go through it quickly. It goes through all these desert things. For seven or eight years, my classes consisted entirely of Arab Moslems. From all the Arab countries they came to BYU to study because President Harris had started the 4-H program over there. They had to take religion, and the consul didn’t want them to take Christian religion. They took Book of Mormon and loved it; it was their book. They ate it up, except for little Fayek.

This is the way they go. “He departed into the wilderness. And he left his house, and the land of his inheritance [we’ll mention that later; it’s mentioned a number of times, and that’s an important thing], and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things [he was rich], and took nothing with him, save it were his family, and provisions, and tents, and departed into the wilderness.” Just like that. Well, we already had him traveling in the wilderness when he saw this light on a rock as he went forth. Being in the merchant business, he knew what he was doing and he was ready to go. He knew what he would need. They took their tents. (I have some pictures here. This is what made me leave the Book of Mormon. I started going through files and getting at things.)

When I first came here, I started writing *Lehi in the Desert*. The Church had a rather ridiculous film out in which they showed Lehi’s people all going through the desert carrying everything they had on their backs because the book doesn’t mention any animals of burden, you see. One person would be carrying a jar, etc. Now to wander eight years in the wilderness and cross the Rub al Khali, the worst desert in the world, in that condition, you’re not going to get very far with all the little kids walking. Who would carry everything? Everything had to be carried. Lehi was a rich man. He was carrying down all his family and provisions and tents into the wilderness. Here’s a typical chief’s tent (I’ll show you these pictures here). Here’s the tent. Now, you’re not going to fold up a tent like that and carry it on your back. It’s a huge tent, their tribal tent. Over and over again, Nephi says, “And my father dwelt in a tent.”

There are two ways of living in the East. There’s the *bayt al-hajar*, the houses of stone, and the *bayt al-sha‘r*, the houses of black goat’s hair. It’s woven black goat’s hair. There are the two ways. When he says, “My father lived in a tent,” that says everything. That’s their whole life and culture. The Arabs—like my friend Lawand—that live in cities still, during a period of the year, leave the city and go camp outside in tents as their ancestors did. They are proud of that. They love the Bedouin life and stick to it. They don’t like living in the cities, though they live in houses of great elegance in a place like Riyadh, etc.

This picture has changed so much. When I wrote *Lehi in the Desert*, it was the 1940s when [almost] nobody had crossed the desert. In the 1930s there was a race between Captain Burton and Shelby as to which would cross it first and the usual debate. Major Chessman claimed to have reached Riyadh across the desert, and nobody believed him. He described the gardens of Hufuk in such great detail they decided he must have been there after all. Within five years of that my uncle, who was the chief engineer for American-Arabian Oil Company (that's where I got these photographs from the air; they were looking for routes), repeatedly crossed the Rub' al-Khāli in a jeep. And we had a whole contingent of BYU people in Riyadh. Dr. Petty, who is President of the London Temple now, was there for fifteen years. He was our best eye doctor here in Provo, but he went to minister to the royal family there in Riyadh. All of a sudden it became wide open, but this was howling desert. The Rub' al-Khāli is absolutely empty. They said nobody could ever cross it, but it has been repeatedly crossed.

As I said, when I came here I thought that film was ridiculous. I was in the Church Office Building one day, and President Joseph Fielding Smith's door was open. He always left his door wide open; anybody could walk in. So I walked in and said, "The Book of Mormon has people crossing the desert. They must have had animals and beasts of burden. The Book of Mormon doesn't mention that, but that doesn't mean they didn't have them. By implication, they are all over the place." I explained to him, "Look, they would have to carry tents, they would have to have implements, they would have to have supplies to survive for eight years—weapons and all the rest. You don't carry those things in your hands. You have to carry them on beasts of burden. Moreover, when the brethren ran away, they escaped from Laban's police. He said, 'They pursued us but they couldn't overtake us.' Well, they weren't going on foot because we know that the police of Jerusalem had good, fleet-footed Arab horses. They had ways of getting out. And, of course, there would be asses or camels to cross the desert." At this time the camel is the thing. We have a picture here from the desert. Here's a contemporary one right up here. It says "this is a man fleeing, riding a camel and seeking a place of water." This sounds very much like the Book of Mormon, doesn't it—"seeking a place of water." And it says that his name is Joseph, and he is the man who had the picture made. Seeing this, you can imagine Lehi or some of the brethren fleeing from the police or whatever it may be. We have these contemporary pictures.

You notice when they camp a while, they build an altar in the desert. Here's the typical altar they build when they make a camp. This is for a *madbah*, for a particular sacrifice or a particular purpose. It's usually to celebrate a successful return from an expedition or journey. We are told in the Book of Mormon that Nephi and his brethren came back from Jerusalem safe and sound after Sariah had been climbing all over Lehi for letting them go. She was really mad. When they returned the group built an altar and made a sacrifice in thanksgiving because they had gotten home. This is the *madbah* for the return of company, etc. This is one of those typical altars. See, you can use it as an altar. You don't have to work hard on it or anything like that. In fact, with some altars it's against the rules for a chisel to touch the stone. So here's an altar in the desert, and we have these things like this.

I have a whole sheaf of highly classified photographs. That was forty years ago, so they are no longer classified. This is one, and it is interesting because this from the Jabal Marai, just where it turns west to go to Egypt. But the point is that it shows these long stretches of

fertility along here, of *rimth*, the bushes that grow over these underground water channels or aquifers. Sometimes in the photographs you will see them running as far as a hundred miles, and you follow them. In the wilderness Nephi said, “We survived by keeping to the more fertile places of the wilderness.” Well, there are more fertile places of the wilderness, and you stick to them. The Arabs survive by following these places where the underground water produces vegetation. It’s just like the Denibito marsh down there where the Hopis are. There is just enough of a water table to bring vegetation, but all the rest is a howling wilderness. What a desert that is! It’s a desert plus a desert.

We talked about the Rechabites. Here’s a very interesting thing. There are still those who claim to be descendants of the Rechabites. They are a pretty sleazy lot. Those are leather garments they are wearing. They are the garments they [Adam and Eve] wore after the Garden of Eden. You remember, they don’t cultivate the soil, live in houses or anything like that. They are very strict and pious. This photograph was made many years ago. In fact, it says made by Freiherr Baron von Oppenheim whose main business in being there was to spy for the Kaiser. They were going to build a Berlin to Baghdad railroad before World War I. Oppenheim, who was an archaeologist, was really there as a spy, and he provided this photograph. But these Rechabites are hard to find. They are a rare group who live very strictly and very piously. They actually do live on grasshoppers and honey the way John the Baptist did. You can see what a handsome group they are. The time is up now; that’s too bad. I was just about to unfold the map and show you the route they [Lehi’s group] took. We don’t want to dwell on this too long, but this is part of the picture—going into the wilderness, and the hardships we have to face and the choices we have to make. How closely Latter-day Saint history parallels this. They did go into the desert. The Salt Lake Valley was as desolate a place as there was in the world at that time. And it was a nice hot summer when they went in on July 24. That’s not the coolest day in the year, you know. Then they came down into the valley. These remarkable parallels are something to notice, anyway.