

CHAPTER 8

2 Nephi 4–8

Introduction

Near the end of his life, Lehi blessed his children with the promise that if they kept the commandments they would prosper, but if they were disobedient they would be cut off from the presence of the Lord (see 2 Nephi 4:4). The Lord gave this same promise to Nephi early in his ministry, when He promised Nephi that if he kept the commandments of God he would prosper and “be led to a land of promise; . . . which is choice above all other lands” (1 Nephi 2:20). In addition, the Lord said that if Nephi’s brothers rebelled against him, they would be “cut off from the presence of the Lord” (1 Nephi 2:21). This promise was fulfilled when Nephi’s people departed from the rebellious followers of Laman and Lemuel.

All of us must choose between good and evil. The importance of making good choices is reflected in 2 Nephi 4–8: (1) when Lehi blessed his grandchildren, (2) in Nephi’s reflections and expressions in his heartfelt psalm, (3) during the division of the Nephites and Lamanites, and (4) in Jacob’s teachings about the scattering and gathering of Israel.

Commentary

2 Nephi 4:3–11. Lehi Blessed His Family

- To the end of his life, Lehi taught his children the gospel. In our day the Lord’s servants continue to emphasize parents’ responsibility to teach their children. The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles declared, “We warn that individuals . . . who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102; see also D&C 68:25–29).

Like Lehi, most Latter-day Saint parents take this responsibility very seriously. Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained how our focus on the importance of families should impact our parenting: “Our family-centered perspective should make Latter-day Saints strive to be the best parents in the world. It should give us enormous respect for our children, who truly are our spiritual siblings, and it should cause us to devote whatever time is necessary

to strengthen our families. Indeed, nothing is more critically connected to happiness—both our own and that of our children—than how well we love and support one another within the family” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2005, 44; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 42).

2 NEPHI 4:5

What important principle of parenting is taught here? How can this principle give courage and faith to parents?

2 Nephi 4:7–10. Laman’s and Lemuel’s Children

- God has fulfilled and continues to fulfill Lehi’s promise of mercy to Laman’s and Lemuel’s children. There are several cases in the Book of Mormon where Lehi’s promise to the children of Laman and Lemuel were fulfilled (see Alma 17–26; Helaman 5–6; 13–15). In the latter days God has continued to fulfill Lehi’s promise of mercy to Laman and Lemuel’s children. President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency explained:



“Our faithful effort to offer to our family the testimony we have of the truth will be multiplied in power and extended in time.

“We have all seen evidence of that in families we have known. I saw it in South America as I looked into the faces of missionaries. Hundreds of them passed by me, shaking my hand and looking deeply into my eyes. I

was nearly overwhelmed with the confirmation that these children of Father Lehi and of Sariah were there in the Lord's service because our Heavenly Father honors His promises to families. To nearly his last breath, Lehi taught and testified and tried to bless his children. Terrible tragedy came among his descendants when they rejected his testimony, the testimonies of other prophets, and of the scriptures. But in the eyes and faces of those missionaries I felt confirmation that God has kept His promises to reach out to Lehi's covenant children and that He will reach out to ours" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1996, 88; or *Ensign*, May 1996, 64).

2 Nephi 4:15–16. "My Soul Delighteth in the Scriptures"

- Sister Cheryl C. Lant, Primary general president, discussed how 2 Nephi 4:15 reveals three ways we can effectively read the scriptures: First, delighting in the scriptures; second, pondering the scriptures; and third, writing the scriptures into our lives:

"This scripture teaches us how to read the Book of Mormon. It mentions three important ideas.

"First, 'My soul delighteth.' I love this phrase! I have thought about hungering and thirsting after knowledge as I read the scriptures, but delighting in them is something else. I find that what I take away from the scriptures is determined by what I bring. Each time I read them, I am, in a sense, bringing a new person with new eyes to the experience. Where I am in my life, the experiences I am having, and my attitude all affect how much I will gain. I love the scriptures. I treasure the truths I find as I read them. Joy fills my heart as I receive encouragement, direction, comfort, strength, and answers to my needs. Life looks brighter, and the way opens before me. I am reassured of my Heavenly Father's love and concern for me every time I read. Surely this is a delight to me. As one little boy in a Sunbeam class put it, 'I feel happy about the scriptures!'

"Second, 'My heart pondereth them.' How I love to carry the scriptures with me in my heart! The spirit of what I have read rests there to bring me peace and comfort. The knowledge I have gained gives me

guidance and direction. I have the confidence born out of obedience. . . .

"[Third] I, of course, do not write scriptures as did Nephi, but when I read the scriptures and live the principles I learn, those scriptures become written in my life. They govern my actions and are written there for my children to see and follow. I can build a legacy, a tradition of righteous living, based on the principles I learn in the scriptures" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2005, 78–79; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 76–77).

2 Nephi 4:15–35. The Psalm of Nephi

- A psalm is "an inspired poem or hymn" (Guide to the Scriptures, "Psalm"). Even those who do not have an understanding of ancient Hebrew poetry can recognize and relate with the heartfelt pleadings of Nephi's psalm in 2 Nephi 4. Psalms are to be read aloud. Try reading Nephi's psalm aloud to sense the spirit with which it was written.

2 Nephi 4:17–18. Overcoming Our Sins and Weaknesses

- Throughout the Book of Mormon we note Nephi's righteousness, his faithfulness in tribulation, and his dedication to God, but still he exclaimed, "O wretched man that I am! . . . I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me" (2 Nephi 4:17–18). The Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44) taught that "the nearer man approaches perfection, the clearer are his views, and the greater his enjoyments, till he has overcome the evils of his life and lost every desire for sin" (*History of the Church*, 2:8). Perhaps Nephi felt burdened by what we might consider trivial weaknesses to the point where they caused him sorrow, and he sought to be free from any vestige of sin.

Nephi's heartfelt plea for the Lord to help him overcome his weaknesses helps us understand how to conquer our own weaknesses. Personal experience teaches us of our need to do likewise. Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles reminded us why we are commanded to repent and admonished us to take advantage of the Lord's redeeming power:

“Why have our Father and His Son commanded us to repent? Because they love us. They know all of us will violate eternal laws. Whether they be small or large, justice requires that every broken law be satisfied to retain the promise of joy in this life and the privilege of returning to Father in Heaven. If not satisfied, in the Day of Judgment justice will cause that we be cast out of the presence of God to be under the control of Satan. [See 2 Nephi 9:8–10; 2:5.]

“It is our Master and His redeeming act that make it possible for us to avoid such condemnation. It is done through faith in Jesus Christ, obedience to His commandments, and enduring in righteousness to the end.

“Are you taking full advantage of the redeeming power of repentance in your life so that you can have greater peace and joy? Feelings of turmoil and despondency often signal a need for repentance. Also, the lack of the spiritual direction you seek in your life could result from broken laws. If needed, full repentance will put your life together. It will solve all of the complex spiritual pains that come from transgression. But in this life it cannot remedy some of the physical consequences that can occur from serious sin. Be wise, and consistently live well within the boundaries of righteousness defined by the Lord” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 31–32; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 25).

- Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that, regardless of a person’s susceptibility or tendency, we have an obligation to exercise our agency to overcome our personal weaknesses:

“Perhaps these persons, as the saying goes, were ‘born that way.’ But what does that mean? Does it mean that persons with susceptibilities or strong tendencies have no choice, no free agency in these matters? Our doctrine teaches us otherwise. Regardless of a person’s susceptibility or tendency, his will is unfettered. His free agency is unqualified. It is his freedom that is impaired. . . . We are all responsible for the exercise of our free agency.

“. . . Most of us are born with thorns in the flesh, some more visible, some more serious than others. We all seem to have susceptibilities to one disorder or

another, but whatever our susceptibilities, we have the will and the power to control our thoughts and our actions. This must be so. God has said that he holds us accountable for what we do and what we think, so our thoughts and actions must be controllable by our agency. Once we have reached the age or condition of accountability, the claim ‘I was born that way’ does not excuse actions or thoughts that fail to conform to the commandments of God. We need to learn how to live so that a weakness that is mortal will not prevent us from achieving the goal that is eternal.

“God has promised that he will consecrate our afflictions for our gain (see 2 Nephi 2:2). The efforts we expend in overcoming any inherited weakness build a spiritual strength that will serve us throughout eternity. Thus, when Paul prayed thrice that his ‘thorn in the flesh’ would depart from him, the Lord replied, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ [2 Corinthians 12:9]” (“Free Agency and Freedom,” in Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., ed., *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure* [1989], 13–14).

2 NEPHI 4:28–35

What did Nephi do to overcome his weaknesses and sins? What in Nephi’s example could you use in overcoming personal weaknesses?

2 Nephi 5:5–9. Separate Ourselves from Wickedness

- There are times when it is necessary to physically flee from evil, such as with Nephi and his followers. Notice that it was “those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God” who went with Nephi (2 Nephi 5:6). In like manner, today those who hearken to the warnings and revelations of modern prophets are the ones who are spiritually following them. We may not always be able, however, to physically move ourselves away from wickedness. Elder Richard G. Scott shared how we can protect ourselves:

“God has provided a way to live in this world and not be contaminated by the degrading pressures evil

agents spread throughout it. You can live a virtuous, productive, righteous life by following the plan of protection created by your Father in Heaven: His plan of happiness. It is contained in the scriptures and in the inspired declarations of His prophets. . . .

“Avoid worldly wickedness. Know that God is in control. In time, Satan will completely fail and be punished for his perverse evil. God has a specific plan for your life. He will reveal parts of that plan to you as you look for it with faith and consistent obedience. His Son has made you free—not from the consequences of your acts, but free to make choices. God’s eternal purpose is for you to be successful in this mortal life. No matter how wicked the world becomes, you can earn that blessing. Seek and be attentive to the personal guidance given to you through the Holy Spirit. Continue to be worthy to receive it. Reach out to others who stumble and are perplexed, not certain of what path to follow” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 103–4, 106; or *Ensign*, May 2004, 100, 102).

2 Nephi 5:11, 13. “We Did Prosper Exceedingly”

- In 2 Nephi 5:11, 13 Nephi told of his people’s success in raising their flocks, herds, and crops. Often we associate prosperity with tangible blessings, such as wealth or the material things of the world. President



Heber J. Grant (1856–1945) taught about what true prosperity is: “When I say prosperity I am not thinking of it in terms of dollars and cents alone. . . . What I count as real prosperity . . . is the growth in a knowledge of God, and in a testimony,

and in the power to live the gospel and to inspire our families to do the same. That is prosperity of the truest kind” (*Gospel Standards*, comp. G. Homer Durham [1941], 58; also cited by James E. Faust, in Conference Report, Oct. 1998, 74; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 59).

- Speaking about how paying tithing brings true prosperity, President James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the First Presidency quoted from an experience shared by Sister Yaeko Seki:

“My family and I were spending a day at the Japan Alps National Park. . . . I was pregnant with our fourth child and was feeling rather tired, so I lay down under the trees. . . . I began thinking about our financial problems. My heart became overwhelmed, and I burst into tears. ‘Lord, we are full-tithe payers. We have sacrificed so much. When will the windows of heaven open unto us and our burdens be lightened?’

“I prayed with all my heart. Then I turned to watch my husband and children playing and laughing together. . . . Suddenly, the Spirit testified to me that my blessings were abundant and that my family was the greatest blessing Heavenly Father could give me” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1998, 74; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 59).

2 Nephi 5:10–18, 26–27. “After the Manner of Happiness”

- The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that there is a path that leads to happiness: “Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God” (*History of the Church*, 134–35).

- President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) taught similarly about happiness: “The Lord wants us to be happy. Nephi said a great thing: ‘And . . . we lived after the manner of happiness.’ (2 Ne. 5:27.) What a wonderful thing. I want my children to be happy. I want them to do well. I want them to live well and live rightly, properly; and, in the same way, except that my Father in Heaven’s love reaches beyond any power of love that I have. I think He wants His sons and daughters to be happy. Happiness comes of righteousness. ‘Wickedness never was happiness.’ (Alma 41:10.) Sin never was happiness. Selfishness never was happiness. Greed never was happiness. Happiness lies in living the principles of the gospel of



Jesus Christ” (“Fast-Paced Schedule for the Prophet,” *Church News*, Apr. 20, 1996, 3).

2 Nephi 5:20–25. The Lamanites Were Cursed

- Verses 20–25 in 2 Nephi 5 answer at least four questions about the curse that came to the Lamanites:

1. What was the curse?

The curse is clearly defined in verse 20 as being “cut off from the presence of the Lord.”

2. What caused the curse?

According to verse 21, the cause of the curse came “because of their iniquity” and “hardened . . . hearts.” Since the days of Adam’s Fall, wickedness has resulted in being cut off from the presence of the Lord (see 1 Nephi 2:21; 2 Nephi 4:4; 9:6; Alma 9:13; Ether 10:11).

3. What was the mark or sign set upon the Lamanites?

It is also explained in verse 21 that so “they might not be enticing unto my people [the Nephites] the Lord did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them [the Lamanites].” It would appear that this was done to limit the spreading of more wickedness. Later Alma suggested this same motive when he explained that “the skins of the Lamanites were dark . . . that thereby the Lord God might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions” (Alma 3:6, 8). Throughout scripture we find warnings of the Lord not to marry unbelievers (see Deuteronomy 7:2–3; 2 Corinthians 6:14); the result of doing so was often that the righteous were turned away from the Lord (see Deuteronomy 7:4; 1 Kings 11:4; D&C 74:5).

Some people have mistakenly thought that the dark skin placed upon the Lamanites was the curse. President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) explained that the dark skin was not the curse:

“The dark skin was placed upon the Lamanites so that they could be distinguished from the Nephites and to keep the two peoples from mixing. The dark skin was the sign of the curse [not the curse itself]. The curse was the withdrawal of the Spirit of the Lord. . . .

“The dark skin of those who have come into the Church is no longer to be considered a sign of the curse. . . . These converts are delightful and have the Spirit of the Lord” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. [1957–66], 3:122–23).

4. What was the result of the curse?

Finally in verse 24 we learn that the result of the curse—being cut off from the presence of the Lord—is that they “become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety.”

One great blessing is that the curse is only valid as long as people are wicked. If they repent, the “curse of God [will] no more follow them” (Alma 23:18). There are many examples of righteous Lamanites who repented and enjoyed the Spirit of the Lord; one of them even became a prophet (see Helaman 13:5).

2 Nephi 6:1–3. Jacob Taught with Authority

- Jacob taught with power and authority from God. He was “called of God, and ordained after the manner of his holy order” (received the holy priesthood) and “consecrated” (or set apart) by his brother Nephi (2 Nephi 6:2; see also 2 Nephi 5:26). In addition, Jacob employed three important elements of effective teaching, as explained by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “For *I have exhorted you with all diligence; and I have taught you the words of my father; and I have spoken unto you concerning all things which are written*, from the creation of the world’ [2 Nephi 6:3; italics added]. That is the formula by which the gospel has always been taught, a process used to this day—personal testimony, the teachings of the living prophets, and the written record of the scriptures” (*Christ and the New Covenant* [1997], 65).

- President Joseph Fielding Smith explained what “order” of the priesthood the Nephites exercised: “The Nephites were descendants of Joseph. Lehi discovered this when reading the brass plates. . . . Therefore there were no Levites who accompanied Lehi to the Western Hemisphere. Under these conditions the Nephites officiated by virtue of the Melchizedek Priesthood from the days of Lehi to the days of the appearance of our Savior among them” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 1:124).

2 Nephi 6:4–18. Jacob Recounted Jewish History

- Jacob quoted from Isaiah to teach “concerning things which are, and which are to come” (2 Nephi 6:4). He applied Isaiah’s teachings to his people because they were part of the house of Israel (see v. 5). These are some of the same verses that Nephi applied to

the descendants of Lehi in the latter days (compare vv. 6–7; 1 Nephi 21:22–23). These applications of the same prophecy to different situations are examples of “likening the scriptures” under the influence of the Spirit (see 1 Nephi 19:23[📖]; 2 Nephi 11:8).

2 Nephi 6:6–11. The Scattering and Gathering of Israel

- For more information on the scattering of Israel, refer to “Brief History of the Scattering of Israel” in the appendix (p. 415). For more information on the gathering of Israel, refer to “The Gathering of Israel” in the appendix (p. 416).

2 NEPHI 6:11–12

What are the promises made to both ancient Israel and the latter-day Gentiles? What conditions must be met for them to be fulfilled?

2 Nephi 7:10–11. Walking in the Light of Their Own Fire

- Isaiah asked if any who fear and obey the Lord walk in darkness. The answer, of course, is “no.” He then stated that those who “walk in the light of [their own] fire and in the sparks which [they] have kindled . . . shall lie down in sorrow” (2 Nephi 7:11). Many people in our day trust themselves or other people above the Lord; they rely on the arm of their own flesh and follow their own light rather than trusting in God (see D&C 1:19–20; 133:70–74).

- The Savior is the Light of the World. It is unwise for us to attempt to replace His light with light that we have created (see 3 Nephi 18:24). President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) warned against those who falsely teach, using their own light when preaching “false doctrines disguised as truths of the gospel.” He said they are “the proud and self-vaunting ones, who read by the lamps of their own conceit; who interpret by rules of their own contriving; who have become a law unto themselves, and so pose as the sole judges of their own doings” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], 373).

2 Nephi 8. Latter-day Gathering

- Isaiah’s prophecies quoted in 2 Nephi 8 speak of the latter-day gathering of Israel. The Lord promised to “comfort Zion” and “make her wilderness like Eden” (v. 3). He admonished them, “Fear ye not the reproach of men” (v. 7). He promised that “the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion” (v. 11). He would cover them “in the shadow of [His] hand” (v. 16). The early Saints found comfort in this as well as other prophecies of Isaiah.

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) explained that our forefathers were participating in the fulfillment of these prophecies of Isaiah concerning the gathering of Israel:

“Our forefathers . . . were strong and courageous in the Lord, knowing that He was their defense, their refuge, their salvation. Strengthened by this faith, they relied on their cherished independence, their frugality, and honest toil. And history records that even the climate was tempered for their sakes, and their humble untiring efforts made ‘the desert to blossom as the rose.’

“Their faith was renewed by two of Isaiah’s remarkable prophecies concerning the last days—the days in which they knew they were living. In the first of these Isaiah announces: ‘The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.’ (Isaiah 35:1.) And again: ‘For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.’ (Isaiah 51:3.)



“And while their natural eyes saw only their log cabins and immediate surroundings, they envisioned the day when the words of Micah would be fulfilled: ‘But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains. . . .’ (Micah 4:1–2.)

“We have witnessed the fulfillment of these remarkable prophecies” (*This Nation Shall Endure* [1977], 42).

- Concerning the gathering of the Jews to the land of Israel, Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that a spiritual gathering precedes the physical gathering: “Judah will gather to old Jerusalem in due course; of this, there is no doubt. But this gathering will consist of accepting Christ, joining the Church, and receiving anew the Abrahamic covenant as it is administered in holy places. The present assembling of people of Jewish ancestry into the Palestinian nation of Israel is not the scriptural gathering of Israel or of Judah. It may be prelude thereto, and some of the people so assembled may in due course be gathered into the true church and kingdom of God on earth, and they may then assist in building the temple that is destined to grace Jerusalem’s soil. But a political gathering is not a spiritual gathering, and the Lord’s kingdom is not of this world” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* [1985], 519–20; see also pp. 511, 564–65).

Points to Ponder

- In 2 Nephi 5:5–8 the Lord warned Nephi to “flee into the wilderness.” Are there aspects of your life that mirror Nephi’s situation? Are there influences from friends, entertainment, work, school, or media that merit consideration of moving away from them?
- In 2 Nephi 8:3–16 are listed many blessings that are offered to members of the house of Israel as they “gather.” Which of these blessings have you experienced? Which of them could you still seek? What would you need to do to receive them?

Suggested Assignments

- As you read 2 Nephi 4:15–35, look for what Nephi did to overcome his weaknesses. Try to identify specific principles that Nephi applied or believed would help him overcome his weaknesses. Write your thoughts and feelings about the truths that you identify; listen to the feelings of the Spirit. You may want to write concerning any commitments that the Spirit may prompt you to make as you read.
- President Gordon B. Hinckley has counseled: “Keep balance in your lives. Beware of obsession. Beware of narrowness. Let your interests range over many good fields while working with growing strength in the field of your own profession” (“Four Imperatives for Religious Educators” [address to Church Educational System religious educators, Sept. 15, 1978], 3; see LDS.org under gospel library/additional addresses/CES addresses). Read 2 Nephi 5:10–18, 26–27 and identify principles that you could learn about or learn to live that would help you make a greater contribution in the world.