

Book of Lehi

Chapter 4

An Abridgment made by Prophet Mormon

Nephi returns to Jerusalem and slays Laban to obtain the plates of brass. The Lord prepares Zoram to be a scapegoat for the sons of Lehi—they are, therefore, able to return to Jerusalem and bring Ishmael and his family with them into the wilderness.

And it came to pass that when the sons of Lehi returned again outside the walls that surrounded Jerusalem, they were sore afraid. And Laman and Lemuel once again doubted the promise of the angel of the Lord when it was promised that Laban and the plates of brass would be delivered unto them.

2 But Nephi did not doubt the words of the angel and rebuked his brothers, saying: How can ye deny the power of the Lord when it hath been demonstrated to you time and time again? Yea, ye have seen an angel, and the angel hath rebuked you and caused your frames to shake before him? How can ye continually deny the power of God when it hath been made known unto you in such great and marvelous ways? Why should ye suffer that I, your younger brother, rule over you because of your lack of faith and your iniquities?

3 Know ye not that the Lord can command his angels and they will come to our aid, if it so be that we demonstrate our faith and our worthiness in keeping his commandments? Ye know that this is true; and ye also know that an angel hath spoken it unto you; therefore, how can ye doubt?

4 And Nephi spake many words of encouragement unto his older brothers. Nevertheless, they were still afraid and would not go into Jerusalem again.

5 And Nephi became angry with his brothers; yea, even a righteous indignation came over him and he stood forth and rebuked his brothers being wrought upon by the Holy Spirit.

6 And it came to pass that Nephi went forth to Jerusalem at night; and his brother, Sam, also wanted to go with Nephi unto Jerusalem. For behold, Sam did truly love his brother and wanted to protect him from any harm that might befall him.

7 But Nephi did not desire that Sam should accompany him into the city at night. And Nephi told Sam that he should stay with his elder brothers, Laman and Lemuel, and ensure that they did not go into the city and alert the Jews that he was going again unto the house of Laban. This Nephi did because his older brothers had threatened to confess to the Jews that their father was foolish, and also because of their desire to once again be part of the people at Jerusalem.

8 And Sam heeded the words of Nephi and stayed outside the walls of Jerusalem with his older brothers, Laman and Lemuel.

9 And it came to pass that Nephi went forth unto the house of Laban, and he found Laban drunk with wine outside his house.

10 And the Spirit commanded Nephi to kill Laban and dress in his clothes that he might gain entrance into the house of Laban, in disguise, without the guards of Laban knowing that it was not their master.

11 And Nephi fought the promptings of the Spirit, for he had never so much as harmed another person, or another living creature, without just cause at any time in his life. And Nephi doubted the promptings that the Spirit of the Lord gave unto him.

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12 But after continual promptings from the Spirit, and after his own reflections on the treatment that he and his brothers had received at the hand of Laban, and also remembering the threats of Laban towards his father, Nephi realized that the Lord had delivered Laban into his hands, and that it would be better that Laban perish than for the commandment of the Lord to go unfulfilled.

13 And Nephi also knew that the Jews would wake up the morning of the next day and find Laban slain. And the Jews would know that the sons of Lehi had killed Laban, for they had visited Laban the previous day and had requested the plates of brass from him.

14 And the Jews would know that it was the sons of Lehi who had done this unto Laban, because the plates of brass would be gone and Laban would be found dead. And because of this, Nephi did again doubt the Spirit, and he began to shrink from the commandment that he had been given.

15 And it came to pass that the Spirit of the Lord once again came unto Nephi and told him to slay Laban and keep the commandments of God, or his family would not prosper and that they would be destroyed in the wilderness. And the Spirit told Nephi that the Lord had prepared away whereby the sons of Lehi would not be blamed by the Jews for the death of Laban, or for stealing the plates of brass.

16 And Nephi believed the words of the Spirit, he having had many such manifestations in his youth and many presently, therefore he could feel the sanctification of the Spirit of that which he was about to do.

17 And Nephi took the sword of Laban and smote off his head with his own sword.

18 And it came to pass that Nephi put on the clothes of Laban and went into the house of Laban. And the guards of Laban were also drunken with wine and knew not that Nephi was not their master returning home, because Nephi was dressed in the clothes and in the robes of Laban.

19 And it came to pass that Nephi entered the inner chambers of the house of Laban and commanded the servant of Laban to take up the plates and carry them forth outside the walls of the city to his brethren.

20 And Nephi spoke in the voice of Laban. And the servant of Laban thought that Nephi was speaking of the brethren of the church, among whom Laban had been with that night.

21 And it came to pass that the servant of Laban followed Nephi out of the city of Jerusalem, and Nephi led the servant to where his older brothers were hiding.

22 And when Laman and Lemuel and Sam saw Nephi, who was clothed in the robes of Laban, coming with the servant of Laban, they were afraid and fled from before them.

23 But Nephi took off the headdress of Laban and called to his brethren.

24 And when the servant of Laban saw that Nephi was not his master, he also attempted to flee. But Nephi grabbed hold of the servant of Laban and held him tight and would not allow him to flee from before him. And the servant of Laban began to call out loud for help that others inside the city walls might hear his cries.

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25 And Nephi drew the sword of Laban and told the servant of Laban that he would slay him if he did not give unto them the plates and return with them to the tent of their father in the wilderness.

26 And Nephi pleaded with the servant of Laban that they would not harm him, and that he would no longer be a servant to any man as long as he abided with them in the wilderness.

27 And the Spirit of the Lord came over the servant of Laban. And his name was Zoram. And Zoram fell at the feet of Nephi and covenanted with him that he would be his servant from that time forth, if he would spare his life.

28 And Nephi lifted Zoram up and embraced him and said unto him: My brother, knowest thou not that thou art my brother and that we are all children of the same God? Knowest thou not that the same creator who gave me power to slay your master and obtain these plates hath spared thy life and hath from this day forth set thee free? Thou shalt be my brother and my friend.

29 And Zoram believed Nephi and was wrought upon by the Spirit of God so exceedingly that he wept on the shoulder of Nephi and promised to obey all the commandments of God from that time forth.

30 And it was in this way that the Lord prepared a means whereby the sons of Lehi would not be blamed for the murder of Laban, or for stealing the plates of brass, as the people of Jerusalem would believe.

31 For behold, the next morning the Jews did find the body of Laban; and they did also discover that the plates of brass were missing and had been taken from his house. Nevertheless, they knew also that Zoram was missing from among them. And it came to pass that the Jews believed that Zoram had stolen the plates of brass from Laban after he had killed his master. And the Jews attributed no blame to Lehi or to his sons.

32 And it came to pass that the sons of Lehi did return to the tent of their father in the wilderness.

33 And after they had returned to their father in the wilderness, their mother Sariah did rejoice exceedingly. And this she did because of the anguish that she was caused by the commandment of the Lord in sending her sons back to the city of Jerusalem to obtain the plates of brass from Laban.

34 For Sariah had complained considerably to her husband Lehi, saying: I know that thou art a man of God, and that thou hast served the Lord all the days of thy life. And I know that thou believest that we have been led out of the land of our inheritance because of thy dreams and thy visions. Yea, I know that the things which thou speaketh about the church at Jerusalem are true, for I have felt these things many times during my own life.

35 And I also know that the people of Jerusalem did seek thy life, and that thy life would have been in their hands if we had not fled into the wilderness.

36 Nevertheless, how canst thou say that the Lord hath commanded thee to send our sons to their deaths? And my daughters do suffer day and night because of the loss of their brothers, and also because of their hunger and their thirst which we have suffered these many days in the wilderness.

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37 Knowest thou not that I am even at this time ripe with child and that I will deliver this child in the wilderness? And my daughters; what shall they do when they are grown and have no man to choose from to be a husband? Shall they be single and barren all the days of their lives and perish in the wilderness?

38 And Sira, one of the daughters of Lehi, rebuked her mother and embraced her father Lehi, who also was depressed in spirit because of the things that were required of his sons by the Lord.

39 And Sira spoke consoling words unto her father and rebuked her mother for the things that she had said. For behold, Sira was greatly blessed by the Spirit of the Lord and understood many things which she kept secret and unto herself because of her respect for her father and his authority in the priesthood. For Sira truly understood many of the mysteries and things of God.

40 And Sira brought great joy and refreshment unto her father, and he embraced her and rebuked his wife Sariah for her lack of faith and doubts.

41 And it came to pass that when the sons of Lehi returned to the tent of their father, their mother and sisters did rejoice exceedingly. And Sariah did humble herself before the Lord, and also before her husband; and she begged forgiveness for her doubts and offered thanks and sacrifice unto the Lord for the safe return of her sons.

42 And now I, Mormon, having been wrought upon by the Spirit, include in my abridgment an explanation of the importance of the plates of brass that Nephi and his brethren obtained from Laban.

43 Behold, it is not the intent or purpose of the Lord to destroy any man to accomplish his purposes. And after Nephi had taken the life of Laban, he was promised by the Spirit of the Lord that the blood of Laban would not be required at his hand. Also, that no man shall shed the blood of another from that time forth, except it shall be in the defense of his life, or the life of his family.

44 Behold, the Spirit hath shown unto me the destruction of Jerusalem and the carrying away of the people into foreign lands. And had the plates of brass been allowed to remain in the possession of Laban, they would have been destroyed.

45 And also, the plates of brass are a record of the Jews, and also a record of the laws of Moses that were established among the Jews for the sake of righteousness, and for the guidance of the church that was established among the children of Israel. And they also contain many of the prophecies and the words of the great prophets who preached unto the Jews. And these things were necessary that Lehi might teach his children the things that were taught to the children of Israel so that they could be more correctly taught in the ways of the Lord.

46 And Jerusalem was destroyed, thus fulfilling the word of the Lord as was prophesied by the mouth of his holy prophets.

47 And when Jerusalem was destroyed, many of the pure records and the scriptures of the Jews were also destroyed. Nevertheless, because the plates of brass were preserved by the hand of the Lord by way of the sons of Lehi, a more perfect record of the words of the prophets and also of the commandments of God were preserved for future generations.

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48 And thus doth the Lord preserve the words that he giveth unto the children of men in all dispensations of time. And one day shall all the books which have been written by the commandment of the Lord be opened, and all the children of men shall see that the Lord hath been just and merciful unto his children by giving unto them, in every generation, his words and his commandments by way of scripture, and also by the mouths of his holy prophets.

49 And in this way he shall judge all men according to the same laws and the same commandments that they received from Him in their own dispensation of time. And if these commandments were not preserved from one generation to the next, then the children of the future generations would have cause for contention when they stand before the Lord to be judged of their works in the flesh. For the children could claim innocence from the strict commandments of God that were given unto their fathers but not given unto them. And in this way doth the Lord turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, that they may all be judged by the same laws and by the same commandments.

50 For behold, the Lord judges all of his children according to the same laws, which are the eternal laws decreed from before the foundation of the world as the only laws of salvation whereby the children of men shall be saved in the kingdom of God.

51 And this is the importance and significance of the plates of brass that Nephi obtained from Laban.

52 And it was the wisdom of the Lord in the placement of Zoram as the servant of Laban, and also the way in which Zoram was used to procure the plates of brass without the blame being put upon the sons of Lehi by the Jews at Jerusalem.

53 For behold, the Lord commanded Lehi to once again send his sons to Jerusalem to convince Ishmael and his family to join them in the wilderness. And had the sons of Lehi returned unto the land of Jerusalem they would have been bound and brought before the judge of the land to be tried for the murder of Laban. But the Jews were convinced of the guilt of Zoram, because he had the keys to the vaults of Laban and was the only one who could obtain the plates. And in this way the Lord prepared a way that the sons of Lehi could once again return to Jerusalem.

54 And it came to pass that the sons of Lehi returned again unto Jerusalem to the house of Ishmael. But Zoram did not return with them again to Jerusalem and remained hidden in the tent of Lehi in the wilderness.

55 And it came to pass that the sons of Lehi persuaded Ishmael to leave the land of Jerusalem and join them in the wilderness. And Ishmael had also been affected by the words that were spoken by Zenos and Zenock. And he also knew of the wickedness and hypocrisy of the leaders of the church. And because of these things Ishmael had left the priesthood and was cast out of the church, and also his family was cast out with him.

56 And it came to pass that Ishmael and his family journeyed with the sons of Lehi down into the wilderness. And the family of Ishmael consisted of Ishmael, his wife, his two sons, and his five daughters. And this was again the wisdom and providence of the Lord in preparing a way whereby the family of Lehi would have spouses and families in the Promised Land. For behold, the sons of Lehi were four, and with Zoram, there were five men who had no spouse. And the daughters of Lehi were two, and there were two sons of Ishmael who did not have spouses. And in this way the Lord assured the posterity of Lehi and Ishmael in the land of promise.

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57 And it came to pass that the sons and some of the daughters of Ishmael began to complain against their father for his foolishness in leaving Jerusalem and the comfort of their home and their riches. For behold, Ishmael was also a very rich man, yea his riches were even greater than those of Lehi.

58 And these children of Ishmael begin to stir up the elder brothers of Nephi, even Laman and Lemuel, to harden their hearts and desire once again to return to the land of their inheritance. And the two daughters of Ishmael, who had been chosen by Laman and Lemuel to be their wives, stirred up the brothers of Nephi, even so much that they rebelled again against the commandments of God and would not return to the wilderness unto the tent of their father.

59 And Nephi was exceedingly sorrowful for the continued rebellion of his brethren and stood forth and rebuked them for their rebellion. And the sons of Ishmael who were not present when an angel of the Lord rebuked Laman and Lemuel, stood before Nephi and derided him for desiring to be their leader. And these sons of Ishmael did inspire Laman and Lemuel to stand against their brother saying:

60 How is it that God would choose your younger brother to rule over us? How can ye be convinced that your younger brother is blessed and called by God to be your head, and also our head? Ye are the elder brothers and have the right of leadership according to the customs and traditions of our fathers, which we know to be just and true.

61 And in this way were the sons of Ishmael and also two of his daughters swayed to harden the hearts of Laman and Lemuel to the point that they took Nephi and bound him with cords and were wont to leave him to be devoured by the beasts of the wilderness.

62 And it came to pass that the power of the Spirit of the Lord was with Nephi and he broke the bands that held him prisoner before his brethren. And Nephi stood forth and began to rebuke his brethren again for their doubts and their rebellion.

63 And Laman and Lemuel became even more hardened against Nephi and were desirous to murder him in the wilderness. And as they put forth their hands to take Nephi and put him to death, Rachael, one of the daughters of Ishmael, and also her mother, Habasha, pleaded with Laman and Lemuel that they would spare the life of Nephi. But Laman and Lemuel were past feeling and put forth their hands against Nephi.

64 And it came to pass that one of the sons of Ishmael, being of great strength, even of a strength greater than that of many men, began to have compassion on Nephi, and also compassion on his mother who he loved with all of his heart. And also Ishmael, being bent over with great age, did plead with his son to help Nephi. And this son of Ishmael, and his name was Barhanas, did take a hold on the brothers of Nephi, and with his exceedingly great strength, restrained Laman and Lemuel from murdering their brother.

65 And Barhanas became grieved because of his own wickedness and the hurt that he brought upon his mother and also upon his father. And the Spirit of the Lord was with Barhanas and he began to rebuke Laman and Lemuel, and also his other brother. And he knelt before Nephi and begged for his forgiveness and also for the forgiveness of the Lord. And seeing this enormous man kneeling before their brother, Laman and Lemuel knelt down before Nephi and also begged for his forgiveness. And thus, we can see the influence that other men have over Laman and Lemuel, who of themselves possess no strength in righteousness.

66 And it came to pass that the sons of Lehi did continue their journey with the family of Ishmael down into the wilderness until they came to the tent of their father.