

Comments on 1 Nephi 3

The necessity of a written record is emphasized, and the elder sons are contrasted with the younger sons. The Lord is guiding and assisting the younger sons in bringing about His will. The elder sons see everything through worldly eyes and question the practicality of the endeavor they are sent on.

1 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, returned from speaking with the Lord, to the tent of my father. 2 And it came to pass that he spake unto me, saying: Behold I have dreamed a dream, in the which the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brethren shall return to Jerusalem. 3 For behold, Laban hath the record of the Jews and also a genealogy of my forefathers, and they are engraven upon plates of brass. 4 Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brothers should go unto the house of Laban, and seek the records, and bring them down hither into the wilderness. 5 And now, behold thy brothers murmur, saying it is a hard thing which I have required of them; but behold I have not required it of them, but it is a commandment of the Lord. 6 Therefore go, my son, and thou shalt be favored of the Lord, because thou hast not murmured. 7 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them. 8 And it came to pass that when my father had heard these words he was exceedingly glad, for he knew that I had been blessed of the Lord.

v1-8 When Nephi returns from speaking with the Lord, he goes into Lehi's tent (v. 1) and Lehi tells him he has had a dream. In the dream the Lord tells Lehi that the sons need to go back (v. 2) to get some religious records from Laban (v. 3), and so, it is a command from the Lord (v. 4). Lehi relates that Nephi's brothers have complained about his request, but Lehi insists again that it is the Lord who has commanded it and not himself (v. 5). So, Lehi tells Nephi to go and do as the Lord commands, because the others apparently won't (v. 6). Nephi accepts what his father tells him and knows that it can be accomplished if the Lord commands it (v. 7). Lehi is pleased with Nephi's response and perceives that Nephi is spiritually discerning (v. 8).

v2 Why were the sons sent back, not Lehi? Because there were people intent on murdering Lehi, cf. 2:1.

v3 "Laban", Laban must have been a prominent, well-known character in Jerusalem. They know who he is without any additional explanation, and when the sons do return to Jerusalem Lemuel finds him without any problems. Laban's association with

the elders of the Jews (cf. 4:22) and apparent command over military forces (cf. v. 31, 4:31) place him high in the religious-political hierarchy. As Lehi refers to him as "Laban" when speaking to Nephi, and not "a man by the name of Laban" or "the chief of the city named Laban", this suggests Nephi already knows who he is.

"plates of brass", these plates must have been very valuable indeed. Hence their being placed in a treasury and Laman and Lemuel complaining about it being a "hard thing". Their placement in his treasury and not in a synagogue, and the subsequent attempt to purchase them from Laban suggests they are his personal property. The passage in 5:16 indicates the plates were in fact older than Laban himself, and he was simply next in line to possess them and pass them on.

However, if the plates are Laban's personal property then it seems odd they would be kept up to date, even containing some of the contemporary Jeremiah's prophecies. If the elders of the Jews were combined against Jeremiah, and Laban was in league with the elders of the Jews, then it seems unlikely Laban would be favorably disposed towards Jeremiah. Now, we do know the king at that time was Zedekiah, and while he had little political will to stand up to the elders of the Jews, he did have considerable respect for Jeremiah and saved his life on occasion and subsequently protected him from them. So, perhaps Laban had some respect for Zedekiah's opinions, and the relationship between Laban and the elders of the Jews was more out of necessity and convenience than common religious views.

Another possibility is that Zoram, who clearly had considerable access to the plates (cf. 4:20), little respect towards his master Laban (cf. 4:33), considerable interest in religious matters (cf. 4:22, 4:26-27), and had strong religious convictions himself (cf. 4:34-35), kept the records up to date himself by scribing the various letters penned and distributed by Baruch for Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 36:4).

"brass", probably a holdover from the KJV. The KJV translates the Hebrew "[nechoshet](#)" to "brass" when a more accurate translation is "copper", brass being an alloy of copper and zinc.

9 And I, Nephi, and my brethren took our journey in the wilderness, with our tents, to go up to the land of Jerusalem. 10 And it came to pass that when we had gone up to the land of Jerusalem, I and my brethren did consult one with another. 11 And we cast lots—who of us

should go in unto the house of Laban. And it came to pass that the lot fell upon Laman; and Laman went in unto the house of Laban, and he talked with him as he sat in his house. 12 And he desired of Laban the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, which contained the genealogy of my father. 13 And behold, it came to pass that Laban was angry, and thrust him out from his presence; and he would not that he should have the records. Wherefore, he said unto him: Behold thou art a robber, and I will slay thee. 14 But Laman fled out of his presence, and told the things which Laban had done, unto us. And we began to be exceedingly sorrowful, and my brethren were about to return unto my father in the wilderness.

v9-14 Nephi, with his brothers in tow, head to Jerusalem to get the plates (v. 9). Upon arrival they talk about who should go in (v. 10) and ultimately cast lots on who will approach Laban, with the lot falling on Laman. Laman goes in to Laban's house and sits with him and they talk for a while (v. 11). Laman asks to borrow the plates under the guise of them having a common genealogy (v. 12), but Laban suspects he is lying and so accuses him of attempting to steal the plates and threatens to have him killed for it (v. 13). Laman bolts from the scene before any actual harm is done, returns to his brothers and they are all dismayed over the failure and Laban's now negative disposition towards them. So, the rest of them are ready to give up (v. 14).

v10 "I and my brethren did consult one with another", whoever goes in needs an alibi to get the plates. They know from Lehi's vision (cf. v. 3) that Lehi's genealogy is on them. So, the ruse is to approach Laban and ask to borrow the plates because they are interested in the genealogy on them, perhaps acting naive to any additional content or value. They agree upon it, and cast lots on who goes in to try the story.

While they are probably deliberately lying about borrowing the record, they may truly intend just that. They may intend to borrow the record so as to make their own copy and then return it.

15 But behold I said unto them that: As the Lord liveth, and as we live, we will not go down unto our father in the wilderness until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord hath commanded us. 16 Wherefore, let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; therefore let us go down to the land of our father's inheritance, for behold he left gold and silver, and all manner of riches. And all this he hath done because of the commandments of the Lord. 17 For he knew that Jerusalem must be destroyed, because of the wickedness of the people. 18 For behold, they have rejected the words of the prophets. Wherefore, if my father should dwell in the land after he hath been commanded to flee out of the land, behold, he would also perish.

Wherefore, it must needs be that he flee out of the land.

19 And behold, it is wisdom in God that we should obtain these records, that we may preserve unto our children the language of our fathers; 20 And also that we may preserve unto them the words which have been spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets, which have been delivered unto them by the Spirit and power of God, since the world began, even down unto this present time. 21 And it came to pass that after this manner of language did I persuade my brethren, that they might be faithful in keeping the commandments of God.

22 And it came to pass that we went down to the land of our inheritance, and we did gather together our gold, and our silver, and our precious things. 23 And after we had gathered these things together, we went up again unto the house of Laban. 24 And it came to pass that we went in unto Laban, and desired him that he would give unto us the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, for which we would give unto him our gold, and our silver, and all our precious things. 25 And it came to pass that when Laban saw our property, and that it was exceedingly great, he did lust after it, insomuch that he thrust us out, and sent his servants to slay us, that he might obtain our property.

26 And it came to pass that we did flee before the servants of Laban, and we were obliged to leave behind our property, and it fell into the hands of Laban. 27 And it came to pass that we fled into the wilderness, and the servants of Laban did not overtake us, and we hid ourselves in the cavity of a rock.

v15-27 When the others are ready to give up Nephi insists they keep trying, swearing an oath that they will not return unsuccessful (v. 15). Nephi comes up with another plan: purchase the plates from Laban using the abandoned family wealth (v. 16), which was left behind because it really has no value (v. 17-18). What is of real value are the plates because they can preserve the language and prophecies of their fathers and pass them on to their children (v. 19-20). Using this line of reasoning, Nephi persuades them to go along with the plan (v. 21). So, they go back to their original home and gather up all of the abandoned material wealth (v. 22) and take it to Laban (v. 23). They offer to buy the plates with all of the wealth they brought (v. 24), but Laban instead decides to use his position of power to steal all of their wealth and keep the plates as well (v. 25). He sends his servants to kill them and they are forced to leave behind all of the wealth in order to run (v. 26). They successfully evade the servants of Laban and hide outside of Jerusalem in a cave (v. 27).

v22-23 Laban's accusation in v. 13 is Laman is a thief and will not return the record, which is very valuable. Laman is willing to return into Laban's presence despite the accusation and threat because he brings with him evidence that he is not a thief, because he is willing to purchase the plates, or leave

the wealth as a deposit against the return of the plates.

If Laman saw the family wealth as a deposit against the return of the plates, then he wouldn't be upset about the exchange, because he is assuming he will still get the family fortune back in return for the plates. It is not until the family fortune is lost that he realizes that his entire inheritance is lost, and he goes berserk in v. 28.

28 And it came to pass that Laman was angry with me, and also with my father; and also was Lemuel, for he hearkened unto the words of Laman. Wherefore Laman and Lemuel did speak many hard words unto us, their younger brothers, and they did smite us even with a rod. 29 And it came to pass as they smote us with a rod, behold, an angel of the Lord came and stood before them, and he spake unto them, saying: Why do ye smite your younger brother with a rod? Know ye not that the Lord hath chosen him to be a ruler over you, and this because of your iniquities? Behold ye shall go up to Jerusalem again, and the Lord will deliver Laban into your hands. 30 And after the angel had spoken unto us, he departed. 31 And after the angel had departed, Laman and Lemuel again began to murmur, saying: How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands? Behold, he is a mighty man, and he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty; then why not us?

v28-31 Laman gets angry that they have lost all of their wealth and not gotten anything to show for it. He rails on Nephi and Lehi and ends up getting Lemuel riled up as well. They end up so irate they strike both Sam and Nephi with a rod (v. 28). When the physical violence starts, and angel intercedes and stops it by questioning their behavior. He then commands them to return to Jerusalem and the Lord will deliver Laban into their hands (v. 29). With the violence quelled and the command issued, the angel departs (v. 30). After the angel leaves, Laman and Lemuel questions how it is Laban can be delivered into their hands when he can slay fifty men such as them (v. 31).

v28 "smite us even with a rod" the Hebrew term [shebet](#) means any kind of wood implement, either improvised or improved upon, like a staff, club or spear. The use of the term rod/shebet necessarily implies it is a weapon with potentially lethal consequences, cf. Exod. 21:20. This is different from a [staff](#) used as a walking stick, cf. Exod. 21:19.

"angel", this word simply means "messenger" in [Hebrew](#), and it is the context that determines whether the messenger is heavenly or earthly.

The angel immediately stops the violence, and Laman and Lemuel do not question the angel's words until after it departs.

This suggests the angel appeared in glory, as opposed to an angel that appears no different from a human (cf. Judges 6:22). Nephi uses this appearance twice (cf. 4:3, 7:10) successfully as a means of persuading Laman and Lemuel. However, by 16:38 they have rationalized that Nephi somehow deceived their eyes in an effort to promote himself.

v31 Laman and Lemuel are using "[kal v'khomer](#)", a classic Semitic rhetorical form. It follows the pattern:

If X is true of Y, then
how much more true is X of Z?

Naturally, this assumes Z is of greater weight than Y. This type of argument is common in the OT, cf. Deut. 31:27, 1 Sam. 23:3, Esther 9:12, Prov. 11:31, Jer. 12:5, Ezek. 15:5. It is also found in the NT as well, cf. Matt. 6:26, John 7:23, Rom. 5:8-9, Heb. 2:2-3. Additional Book of Mormon examples are 1 Ne. 7:8-12, Mosiah 4:22, Alma 32:18-19, 3Ne. 13:26, 3 Ne. 14:11.

Laman and Lemuel are not arguing the Lord doesn't have the power to slay Laban, they are saying they themselves do not have power to slay Laban. In other words, they do not see the Lord intervening in the situation to help them get the job done. Hence, Nephi's reply in 4:1. Laman and Lemuel are questioning the angel's assertion the Lord will help them.

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