

## Laman and Lemuel, Nephi, and Belief

First Nephi Chapter 2 provides an interesting study in contrasts about belief. First, Laman and Lemuel:

And when my father saw that the waters of the river emptied into the fountain of the Red Sea, he spake unto Laman, saying: O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness! And he also spake unto Lemuel: O that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord!

Now this he spake because of the stiffneckedness of Laman and Lemuel; for behold they did murmur in many things against their father, because he was a visionary man, and had led them out of the land of Jerusalem, to leave the land of their inheritance, and their gold, and their silver, and their precious things, to perish in the wilderness. And this they said he had done because of the foolish imaginations of his heart. And thus Laman and Lemuel, being the eldest, did murmur against their father. And they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them.<sup>1</sup>

The last sentence is very interesting. Nephi ascribes their unbelief to lack of understanding of the things of God. Later events<sup>2</sup> would imply that Laman and Lemuel were familiar with the history of the Lord's dealings with the Jews. The problem wasn't lack of knowledge, but lack of understanding. They knew the facts, but were unable to put them in their proper context.

Now, Nephi's attitude toward belief:

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers.

Nephi identifies two factors – first, he desired to know the things of God; second, God answered his prayers by softening his heart. I

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1 1 Nephi 2:9-12 In the scriptures I carried on my mission I labeled this passage "The first hint of trouble."

2 1 Nephi 4:2,3; 17:23-29

suppose to some extent I would like to concentrate on the first – his desire to understand.

Laman and Lemuel were ultimately cursed for their unwillingness to desire the things of God, and Nephi's blessing came from his desire to know God. I know there is much else that went on in their lives, but this issue of desire seems so crucial to me. Because of the atonement of Christ we can be freed from sin – in many cases, our actions. But we can only receive that freedom if we desire it. If we desire to follow Christ, then the actions will come. Without the desire, it doesn't much matter what we do.

Nephi on the one hand and Laman and Lemuel on the other serve as the great symbol of the division between good and evil in the Book of Mormon. As we contemplate good and evil in our own lives, let us not forget our own role in determining which course we take.