

Readers' Discussion Questions

Out of Jerusalem: Of Goodly Parents, Volume One

Author's Note: Some may not “agree” with fictionalizing scriptural accounts. My intention in writing this series was not to replace the Book of Mormon in any form. Book of Mormon scholars have spent their lives studying and writing about the fascinating hints found in scripture narrative. Only a select few have read and appreciated their insights. Through this fiction medium, I have been privileged to bring decades of insight to the general public. Each time I've read the opening chapters of First Nephi, questions relentlessly tug at my mind. What about the women? This series places Nephi as the main character, but right behind him are the marvelous women who made the journey truly possible.

1. Scholars estimate that Nephi was about sixteen when he had his first vision. What other experiences in our church give us the ability to accept such a young man as a prophet?
2. Did you sympathize with Laman and Lemuel to some extent?
3. Do you think the epigraphs (scriptural headings at the beginning of each chapter) contributed or detracted from the story?
4. There are a myriad of characterizations taking place: Isaabel is very close to her father, but not her mother. When she gets to know Sariah—Sariah seems to fill a void that her own mother never provided. Is this something we can relate to in our own lives?
5. Nephi does one key thing that his older brothers, Laman and Lemuel, never did. He prayed to know if what his father was teaching was true. From that stemmed an amazing vision and a wealth of knowledge that would carry him through many difficult times. Why do you think the Lord chose the youngest son to carry the mantle of a prophet?
6. Sariah must have second-guessed herself in how she raised her sons and how they turned out. How can we relate to the challenges of parenthood that she must have faced?
7. Lehi and Ishmael and their families had to leave behind their homes and conveniences in order to take the journey commanded by the Lord. What things in your lives have you had to give up to follow the Lord?
8. Do you feel you subtly learned more about the culture and traditions of 600 B.C. without being bombarded with cumbersome details?
9. Did you read the chapter notes at the end of the book, and if so, did you find them interesting and to the point?

Readers' Discussion Questions

Out of Jerusalem: A Light in the Wilderness, Volume Two

Author's Note: This second volume covers only thirteen verses (1 Nephi 16:33 to 17:6) of the Book of Mormon. During this time, the family spent eight years in the wilderness traveling from the Camp of the Broken Bow to the land of Bountiful. This journey was typically a four-month trek. As you can imagine, research time was equal to writing time for this novel. Using the in-depth studies of several Book of Mormon scholars and early explorers of Arabia, I was challenged to formulate a believable scenario. Yet, even with all of the reading and analyzing, the most difficult portion of the book was writing about the death of Ishmael. The grief his wife must have suffered still breaks my heart.

1. How can we relate the grieving of Ishmael's daughters to the way the pioneers had to bury their kin on the plains?
2. As a play on words, we know that the Lord declared that he would be Lehi's light in the wilderness. How can we let the Lord be the light in our "wilderness" so to speak?
3. Sariah and the women must have suffered terribly. As mothers, we would rather go without than see a child suffer. How true it must have been for Sariah. Yet, the Lord came through time and time again. Where in our lives has the Lord come through for us?
4. Giving birth in the wilderness must have been quite difficult. But the women were made strong by the hand of the Lord. What areas in our lives can we be made stronger by His hand?
5. Compare the differences of the romances between Isaabel and Nephi, and Raamah and Elisheba.

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Out of Jerusalem: Towards the Promised Land, Volume Three

Author's Note: When I first discovered that scholars estimated that it took Nephi two or three years to build his ship, I knew there had to be a complete volume to cover this time period. Add to that the nine months or so it would have taken Nephi's party to cross the ocean to Mesoamerica, *Towards the Promised Land* took on a life of its own. I call this portion of the series "the forgotten one." Before my research, I hadn't considered what a grand event it must have been to procure all the supplies necessary to build such a seaworthy vessel. Nor did I understand the immense undertaking of a journey that lasted months and months. Many times the family was completely and utterly at the Lord's mercy—including when Laman and Lemuel rebelled upon the ship; and the family found themselves front and center to harsh elements.

1. Do you relate to some of the family members when they felt angry that Nephi wanted to leave the land of Bountiful?
2. What parts of our culture are similar to the resistance that Lehi showed to his daughter marrying someone from another tribe/religion?

3. There are glimpses of hope for Laman throughout the Book of Mormon text. Probably one of the last ones is when he tells Nephi that he did a fine job on the ship. Why do you think that Laman, or Lemuel, never gained a strong testimony even though they saw angels and heard the voice of the Lord more than once?
4. The journey on the ship must have been one of the most difficult parts of the journey—living in such close quarters, and becoming short on food and water. How did the wilderness prepare them for enduring the sea voyage?
5. Even though the family reaches the Promised Land in this volume, we know their trials are far from over. Compare this to things in your life—For example, does a temple marriage guarantee happiness? Do several children make the perfect family? Or do we have to continue to work no matter what blessings are given to us?

Readers' Discussion Questions

Out of Jerusalem: Land of Inheritance, Volume Four

Author's Note: I put off writing this final volume as long as possible. Finally, on July 17, 2006, I began. I knew I'd have to write about the death of not only one of the greatest prophets, but the first one mentioned in the Book of Mormon. As Nephi called his mother and father, "goodly parents," I too, felt as if I had been taught by Lehi and Sariah. The strength and faithfulness of Lehi is beyond any descriptive words found in my language. The disheartening portion of the story comes not only upon the finality of a great man's death, but what some of his children do with the aftermath. Instead of coming together in their grief and following their father's final wishes, they tear each other apart. Nephi is literally commanded by the Lord to take his family and flee into the wilderness—echoing a similar commandment given to Lehi many years earlier in the city of Jerusalem. At this point, the family has been living, traveling, and working together for at least twelve years. As you can imagine, cousins are best friends. Sisters-in-law are closer than sisters. Sariah and Ishmael's wife have been through starvation, birthing grandchildren, unspeakable trials, and sharing in the death of each of their husbands. Nevertheless, once I started writing, the story poured out quicker than I could have ever imagined.

1. We know that the death of Lehi is slow and gradual—since he's able to bestow patriarchal blessings upon his family members. We might say, he put his house in order before his passing. Yet, he was consistent throughout his life in teaching his children. What are some things that might help us maintain that type of motivation?
2. Without the authoritative presence of Lehi, the relationship between Laman and Nephi falls apart. In this case, the Lord deems it best that the brothers live and raise their families separately. Are there times in our lives that we find we have to be separate in order to continue in righteousness?
3. Jacob becomes a key character in this volume. Why do you think the Lord chose Nephi's brother, and not Nephi's son, to continue the role as a prophet?
4. Marriages are often divided by religion, wealth, and poor choices. How does this relate

to the situation between Raamah and Elisheba?

5. Sam is the strong, silent type. He is never the leader, but always faithful. Many of us will never be the “leaders” in our communities or churches. Yet, we are an important support network. How can we emulate Sam’s steady example?

6. In the ancient cultures, women were “seen but not heard” and sometimes not even seen. Nonetheless, I tried to portray the women as being integral not only in their work load, but in their contribution to the community affairs. With our freedoms, how can we reach out and make differences that our ancestors couldn’t?

7. Anger is a stifling prison. Laman and Lemuel never forgave, or forgot, that they were “wronged” in leaving Jerusalem. What are the ramifications of their hard hearts throughout the future generations of Lamanite and Nephites?